

HILLINGDON LINK: 3RD PROGRESS REPORT

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Papers with report	Appendix A – LINK Information Appendix B – Groundwork Thames Valley Update Appendix C – Hillingdon LINK Annual Report 2010-2011

INFORMATION

Executive Summary

The contract to host Hillingdon's Local Involvement Network (LINK) is with Groundwork Thames Valley and is under a Service Level Agreement to the end of March 2012. We had envisaged this would be last contract with Groundwork as the Government was proposing that a new HealthWatch would be developed from March 2012, however that start date has now been put back until October 2012.

The LINK has moved to new office accommodation and is building on this 'shop-front' presence in Uxbridge to improve accessibility. The number staff hours available to the LINK has increased substantially and better value for money is now being secured.

Membership of the LINK continues to expand and shows that Hillingdon performs well compared to with other authorities in this regard. The LINK is now represented on a broad range of health and social care boards and committees and has developed good working relationships with neighbouring LINKs in order to progress sub regional and regional issues.

Introduction

The External Services Scrutiny Committee has considered the operation of Hillingdon's LINK on a number of previous occasions. On 16 June 2010, the Committee reviewed the progress of the LINK after its second year of operation. This is the third report on the progress of LINK to the Committee.

Background

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007 placed a statutory duty on each Local Authority with a Social Services responsibility to ensure that a LINK was established in its area from 1 April 2008. LINKs replaced the former system of Patient and Public Involvement Forums which ended as of 31 March 2008.

LINKs are community-based networks of organisations and individuals committed to widening the influence of users of health and social care services in the service planning, development and improvement process. They are intended to build on the work of former Patient and Public Involvement Forums, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and a range of engagement activities co-ordinated by the NHS and social care organisations. LINKs provide an opportunity to focus on the whole patient journey and covers all health and social care services at a local level. Further information about LINKs including their governance, the powers of LINKs and the role of the host organisation can be found in Appendix A.

PART 1 – MEMBERS, PUBLIC AND PRESS

To strengthen the collective voice of patients and carers in the system at both local and national level, LINKs will evolve to become Local HealthWatch. HealthWatch England will be set up as the independent consumer champion within the Care Quality Commission at national level.

This proposal is outlined in the Department of Health's HealthWatch Transition Plan, dated 29 March 2011. More recent information from the Department of Health proposes that, subject to the passage of the legislation, Local HealthWatch organisations will begin in October 2012, with their NHS complaints advocacy responsibilities coming on stream in April 2013.

Groundwork Thames Valley

Groundwork Thames Valley took over as host for Hillingdon Link on 1 January 2010. A LINK Manager is now employed by Groundwork on a fixed term contract.

Groundwork is a local social enterprise and longstanding partner of the Council with a strong record of successful delivery of community based projects. The organisation was approached to provide the host function under a Service Level Agreement. Since taking over this role, feedback from the LINK and other partners is that the host service has improved considerably.

Groundwork has expressed that it is very pleased to be associated with such a successful LINK - especially supporting LB Hillingdon. Groundwork has also agreed to host the LINK for a further year (until March 2012) and this may extend further subject to the move to a HealthWatch.

Cost of the SLA

The Council is providing funding of £120k for LINKs during 2011/12.

Staffing

Having moved the contract to Groundwork, 3 members of staff are now employed full-time (99 hours per week) within the Borough and there is additional capacity for specialist staff to be temporarily employed to undertake specific activities or projects for the LINK.

Office Accommodation

LINK officers were relocated to an office in the Mall Pavilions on a 3 year lease providing improved access to LINKs in a central shopping location. During the last year, a new, user-friendly website has been designed and published, and there has been an increase in the staffing hours of the support team.

LINK Membership

At 31 March 2011, there were 771 members of the Hillingdon LINK entered on the new database including 125 affiliated organisations within Hillingdon. Hillingdon's LINK membership compares favourably with other boroughs: Westminster reports a membership in the region of 400; and Kent, with 5 times the population of Hillingdon, reports a membership of about 950 (figures from 2010).

LINK Achievements in 2010/11

- Through the staff and volunteer members, LINK has continued to work towards last year's vision to 'develop patient and public involvement in Hillingdon.....ensuring all sections of the community have a chance to voice their views'.
- In conjunction with the host organisation, a programme of public engagement events and regular meetings across the Borough have encouraged local people to express their views on the services received, as well as responding to important consultations.
- Community surveys have taken place with Muslim and Somali communities to gauge views on health and social care services to inform future service development.
- As well as continued work with focus groups and White Paper workshops, the LINK has been invited to provide representatives to a number of boards and committees, which has empowered members to continue with the ethos of the LINK in driving change from within.
- Consultations have been progressed throughout the year, and subjects such as Blue Badges, GP Choice, Autism Strategy and Transparency in Outcomes (adult social care) have been explored through various forms of contact with the residents of Hillingdon, across many minority communities.
- Pages 25-36 of the LINK annual report (attached at Appendix C) outline the project work that has been set out and completed in 2010/11. These projects include: the development of the Mental Health Forum; improvement in hospital discharge process; establishing a LINK carer's group intended to use carers' experience to improve services throughout the Borough; as well as quarterly meetings with CQC (Care Quality Commission) to name but a few. A comprehensive list can be found in the annual report: <http://hillingtonlink.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/Annual-Report-1-April-2010-31-March-2011-Final.pdf>

HealthWatch

To strengthen the collective voice of patients and carers in the system at both a local and national level, LINKs will evolve to become Local HealthWatch, and HealthWatch England will be set up as the independent consumer champion within the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Key Issues

LINKs were established through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007. LINKs are responsible for both health and social care, wherever funded by public money. Their main powers and responsibilities are:

1. to influence commissioning;
2. to monitor services by entering and viewing;
3. to make recommendations;
4. to request and receive information; and
5. to gather the views and experiences of their community about their local services.

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) will evolve to become Local HealthWatch.

Local HealthWatch will have additional responsibilities for NHS complaints advocacy and for signposting information. The Health and Social Care Bill also states that Local HealthWatch organisations will be 'bodies corporate' and will be able to hire their own staff.

Planning and transitional arrangements to move to a new Local HealthWatch will be progressed in Hillingdon in light of recent announcements about the timetable to establish HealthWatch. Consideration will also be given to ensure representation of local people and strong governance arrangements for the new HealthWatch in Hillingdon.

SUGGESTED SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

Members review the evidence presented to them and, following further questioning of the witnesses, decide whether to take any further action.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

None.

Governance

The legislation requires that the:

- Local authority commissions a 'host organisation'
- Host cannot be local authority or NHS body
- Local authority is accountable for delivering 'arrangements' to secure LINKs

This arrangement results in a tripartite arrangement between the Council, host organisation and LINK.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The legislation creates a formal relationship between the LINK and Overview and Scrutiny function:

- LINK has a power of referral on health and social care to OSC
- Duty on OSC to respond, decide and take into account information provided
- Receipt of Annual Report including transparent budget information
- Replicates Patients Forum relationship

The detail of this relationship is now documented in a protocol agreed by ESSC on 23rd September 2009.

The Role of LINKs

LINKs cover any health or social care service that is funded by the taxpayer, except those that apply to children. The main roles of LINKs are to:

- Promote & support local involvement in commissioning, provision and scrutiny of health and social care ('Care services')
- Obtain and feed in views to those who carry out or manage these functions
- Make reports and recommendations on care service improvement

Powers of LINKs

The legislation provides legal powers to enable the LINKs to:

- make reports and recommendations and get a reply within a set period of time (20 working days proposed);
- ask for information and get a reply within a set period of time (Freedom of Information Act requirements will apply);
- go into some types of health and social care premises to see what they do (independent sector provided services excluded);
- refer issues to the local overview and scrutiny committee and get a response (20 working days proposed).

Role of the Host Organisation

The role of the host organisation is to:

- help and support the LINK in its activities;
- manage the budget for the LINK;
- report back to the Council on expenditure, activity and achievements of both the host organisation and the LINK;
- provide advice and support to the LINK, including the setting up of governance arrangements and the resolution of disputes;
- ensure that the LINK enables representatives from all the different communities to have their say and get involved.
- assist with access to relevant information from the Department of Health, the NHS, the Council, voluntary sector organisations, etc;
- enable the LINK to set a local agenda driven by the priorities and interests of local communities.