

To: **Corporate Policy & Overview Committee - 27 March 2008**

By: **Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Public Health**

Subject: **Local Involvement Network – an update**

The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress made in establishing a Local Involvement Network for Kent.

1. Background

- 1.1. Members of the Committee received a comprehensive report at their meeting of the 8th November 2007 setting out the background and forward plans for establishing a Local Involvement Network (LiNk) for Kent.
- 1.2. There are essentially two key roles for the County Council in meeting its obligations relating to the establishment of a LiNk for Kent:
 - (i) To stimulate wide public interest in LiNks and to encourage debate as to what would make an effective LiNk for Kent
 - (ii) To appoint a Host Organisation to set-up and support the creation of a LiNk for Kent.

This report updates Members on the current position in satisfying these obligations.

2. National Developments

- 2.1. The Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act finally received Royal Assent at the end of October 2007. The Act stipulates that a national system of LiNks will be established by the 1 April 2008 to coincide with the abolition of Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIFs). This is a very challenging deadline and the Government has acknowledged the need to provide guidance on transitional arrangements if they are required. This guidance reached local authorities on the 5th March.
- 2.2. The Department of Health (DoH) has stated that contracts with potential Host Organisations cannot be signed and finalised until the regulations relating to governance and transitional arrangements come into force.
- 2.3. The letting of the contract to appoint a Host Organisation to set-up and support a LiNk for Kent will constitute a 'Key Decision' for the County Council and this has been logged in the Council's Forward Plan.

2.4. There is a growing body of information and guidance on LINKs, principally produced by the DoH. This includes a very helpful monthly newsletter a copy of the latest issue will be available at the meeting of this Committee. For those Members wanting to access any of the documentation there is an easy-to-use website

<http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/index.cfm?Content=142>

2.5. The National Centre for Involvement (NCI) has been asked by the DoH to provide further advice, guidance and support. This, it has been promised, will be provided in a variety of ways and we look forward to their support.

2.6. Members of the Committee are also reminded that the consultation period on the draft regulations on LINKs closed on 21 December 2007. The Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee submitted a response to the DoH and a separate response went from the County Council.

3. Funding

3.1. The DoH announced that it would be making £84m available nationally over three years, to support the new system of LINKs and the amount given to each authority was announced on the 6th December.

The amount of funding the DoH will be contributing to the County Council's so-called Area Based Grant – a non-ringfenced general grant – in recognition of the funding pressures related to LINKs in Kent is as follows:

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£492,000	c. £493,000	c. £495,000

3.2. The funding is intended to cover:

- Local Authority contract management costs
- Host Organisation support function costs e.g. staff, office costs, contract monitoring and evaluation.
- LINK expenditure budget – e.g. communications, meetings, training, reimbursement of LINK member expenses and specific pieces of work.

3.3. In accordance with DoH guidance, it is anticipated that KCC will retain approximately 10% of the funding, in order to cover the costs of managing the contract of the Host Organisation. The issue of where the contract management will sit within KCC is currently under consideration.

3.4. Although Kent received one of the largest allocations nationally, we feel that delivering the ambitions that will be set for the LINK for Kent will be very challenging on this budget given the geographic scale of the County.

3.5. The Host Organisation will be accountable to Kent County Council – its contract manager – for the support costs. The LINK will be accountable to the public to demonstrate effective spend of its budget. In addition, through the performance management system, the Host will also be accountable to LINK participants.

4. Procurement of the Host Organisation for the LINK for Kent

4.1. Given the high profile nature of this project, and the compelling need for ultimate transparency of the procurement process, ongoing advice is being provided by the Strategic Procurement Unit of the County Council as well as the Director of Law and Governance.

Their advice is that, due to the size of the contract, it is necessary to follow European Unions rules and to advertise in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). The advert was published in the on the 15th December 2007, inviting organisations to express an interest in tendering to become the Host Organisation for the LINK for Kent. The advert was also simultaneously available via the South East Business Portal. Interested parties had until the 21st January 2008 formally to submit their expression of interest in response to the advert. A sufficient number of responses have been received to ensure a healthy competition.

4.2. Organisations who have expressed an interest were sent the full tender documentation including a detailed service specification. The deadline for the return of their full bid proposal is the 8th April. There will then be a formal selection process from which a successful organisation will be appointed. In drafting the service specification the DoH guidance was used as a base but it also draws heavily on the feedback and comments received to date on what the expectations are on what a LINK for Kent will be like.

4.3. The current intention is that the appointment of a Host Organisation will be made by the end of June 2008. However, this will prove a difficult deadline to meet given the need to satisfy EU procurement rules as well as being satisfied that the tender evaluation criteria and process are fit for purpose. Once appointed, there will be the need to agree a contract between the Host Organisation and the County Council before the Host can start work in earnest in setting up the LINKs for Kent.

5. Communication and Engagement

5.1. Clearly, it is vital to ensure that as many organisations, groups and individuals as possible are aware of the changes that the creation of a Kent LINK will bring. It is as important that the views of as many people as possible are used to shape a LINK that is effective and appropriate for Kent. It is equally important that the LINK is seen to represent the many disparate needs of the residents of the County and is not perceived as a organisation centred solely on Maidstone. Finally, we must not lose the knowledge and experience of existing groups.

5.2. Given the timescales and the budget available (the DoH allocated only £10,000) there has still been an extensive process of communication and engagement although we also recognise that ideally more could have been done. Key actions taken so far has included creating a dedicated LINKs area on the KCC website, commissioning a survey through the Kent Residents Panel, writing and distributing articles through existing newsletters, issuing press releases, writing and circulating a regular newsletter and the more traditional face-to-face methods of organised or attending existing meetings, for example with PPI Forums, District Councils, and County Councillors.

A copy of the Communications and Engagement Strategy, which contains further details of work undertaken, is available on request.

5.3. Some of the recurring issues that have been raised include:

- Concerns that Kent will only have one LINK and how that will respond to differing circumstances within the County
- A desire that existing good practice will be lost in the new arrangements
- How best to reach the so-called 'hard to reach' groups

5.4. The summary findings of these consultations, meetings and surveys will be passed on to the Host Organisation (when appointed) so they can be used in assisting the Kent LINK to set up. This Committee may also be interested in receiving a copy of this work.

5.5. A major conference for individuals, carer and user groups and members of key networks and organisations was organised on the 30 January. The conference was hosted by the PPI Forums and run by an external facilitator in order to keep the formation of the LINK independent from KCC.

5.6. From that conference a group of organisations and individuals have agreed to look at forming a working group to begin the process of formulating the governance, nature and shape of the future LINK.

6. Other Local Authority Areas

6.1. As at 30 January 2008, of the 150 local authorities who are appointing a Host Organisation for the LINK in their area, 95 had advertised.

6.2. There was a South East regional LINKs meeting on 11 January 2008, at which representatives from local authority areas discussed their present progress. Members at the meeting felt it may be beneficial for LINKs to liaise with adjacent LINKs to ensure cross border efficiencies are achieved. It was also noted that the Host Organisations could make good use of each other, by sharing best practice, and doubling up on things such as training, in order to achieve economies of scale.

Issues that are currently causing some consideration across the South East region include possible transitional arrangements, and the difficulties in being truly inclusive and representative. The latter issue is of particular relevance in Kent, due to the size of the county.

At this regional meeting it became clear that Kent, in common with other areas are now starting to think through how the Host Organisation is supported in setting up each respective LINK. In particular, what may be required in terms of involvement of individuals and existing carer, user and voluntary groups. Other areas have existing forums and Kent will need to decide how best to manage this process.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Members of the Committee are invited to note this report, to consider, and to comment on progress made.

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Background Documents

Report to Corporate policy & Overview Committee 8th November 2007

The Department of Health guidance documents regarding LINKs:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_077266

- *Local Involvement Networks Explained - Easy Read*
- *Getting ready for LINKs -Planning your Local Involvement Network*
- *Getting ready for LINKs - Contracting a Host Organisation for your Local Involvement Network*

The Department of Health/ National Centre for Excellence bulletins regarding LINKs

<http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/index.cfm?Content=142>

