



a LOCAL INVOLVEMENT NETWORK

Community Engagement Strategy

Contents:

- Introduction
- Meaning of Community Engagement
- Getting Medway people involved
- Medway LINK participants
- Engaging with the community of Medway
- Meeting / communicating with people
- The paper way
- Through partnerships
- Virtual
- Programme of activity for the period to 31 March 2009
- How will it demonstrate that the strategy has been effective?
- Annex A: Principles of engagement
- Annex B: Levels of Involvement

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Version 02/08 Page 1 of 12

Introduction

A Local Involvement Network (LINK) has been set up in every area of England to help people influence or change the way their local NHS and social care services are delivered. LINKs are part of a wider strategy to strengthen communities and to improve social cohesion; in other words, to put the power back in the hands of individuals and local communities. In essence this means more and meaningful community engagement.

Meaning of Community Engagement

What community engagement is	What community engagement is not
A process of direct involvement with groups and individuals in the community	A quango or committee to make decisions on the community's behalf.
A process of involving people in decisions that affect their lives	Just about consulting with people
How to communicate with, involve and understand communities	
Creating real opportunities for people to become involved in improving the quality of their life	
Involving people in developing and delivering services	
Giving people the skills required and the confidence and capacity to act on their own account	

Getting Medway people involved

It is not sufficient to pass legislation and tell individuals that they can influence decisions. In the past those that have put themselves forward in a true act of public spiritedness have often been overwhelmed. They have been faced with committees, bureaucracy and impenetrable language and sometimes unfairly cast in the role of the "usual suspects", which is to undervalue their true worth.

The Medway LINK, following best principles of community engagement as set out in Annex A to this paper, will set up an involvement framework that provides opportunities for everyone to get involved.

Every person and community group can join the LINK (potentially in excess of 250,000 people in Medway) and participate at whatever level they feel comfortable – the “dip in and dip out” principle!

We all have an interest in our health and social care services at some time in our lives. On occasion we may have more of an interest or more time on our hands than at others. The table in Annex B indicates the various levels of involvement participants can choose. There is no right or wrong place to be on this table, although the LINK’s ultimate ambition would be to get more people, with appropriate accountabilities in place, able to directly influence decisions.

Medway LINK participants

When people ask what the Medway LINK is – it is quite simple! It is those individuals, community groups or voluntary organisations who join as “participants”.

LINK participants will be able to:

- Be kept informed about health and social care in Medway
- Access the Medway LINK website discussion forums
- Post topics and reply to topics on Medway LINK online discussion forums
- Participate in any of the Medway LINK website surveys
- Request a survey be done by the Host organisation
- Request work be undertaken by the Medway LINK
- Participate in consultations
- Attend / participate in LINK events, particularly the annual meeting where policies and procedures, the LINK annual report and work programme will be agreed
- Access training material
- Vote on work to be carried out by the LINK
- Apply for visiting rights
- Apply to become a LINK representative on an external organisation
- Apply to become a member of the LINK Moderating Panel
- An organisation could facilitate a discussion.

When a participant joins the LINK they will be asked how much or how little they want to get involved and which areas of health or social care interests them. For those with a particular interest in Medway’s health or social care services they are notionally placed within a LINK interest group, as follows:

- Ambulance services, eg emergency and patient transport services
- General health and wellbeing, eg public health, diet and nutrition, health education, etc
- Hospital services, eg general and specialist
- Primary health care, eg community hospitals, GPs, dentists, opticians, etc
- Social care in the community, eg day care, home help, child minding, etc
- Social care in residential settings, eg care homes with or without nursing
- Specific conditions, eg cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, strokes, etc
- Service user groups, eg black and minority ethnic, carers, children and young people, older people, etc.

These groups are intentionally general and within them it is anticipated there will be sub groups and, on joining, further enquiries will be made. For example, within the hospital group individuals or groups may have an interest in A&E services or a particular branch of medicine, such as cardiology.

The Medway LINK undertakes to support LINK participant groups by providing:

- ***Information in a timely fashion appropriate to that interest area, such as policy developments, news, opportunities for engagement, etc***
- ***Opportunities to engage in consultations over changes in services / service developments in their interest area or near to where they live***
- ***Opportunities to take part in monitoring activities – eg for possible selection as mystery shopping / visiting as part of LINK project***
- ***Providing a conduit for the views of the group to be conveyed to commissioners / providers of health and social care services, as appropriate and feeding back responses accordingly***
- ***Opportunities to hold to account authorised LINK Visitors and LINK representatives on outside organisations.***

Engaging with the community of Medway

How will the LINK ensure that everyone in Medway will have an opportunity to become a LINK participant? It is important that the Medway LINK is made up of a diverse range of people from across the area. To do this it will:

- Ensure the LINK is accessible to all regardless of disability, ethnicity, language and any other barriers that may exist for people participating in events and activities
- Provide support and identify and overcome barriers to involvement and participation
- Involvement – identify and involve those who already have an interest in health and social care
- Develop the skills of staff and volunteers to ensure they are able to work effectively when engaging with people, organisations and the wider community
- Plan activities, events, meetings and ensure wide-spread publicity
- Identify the best approach to engaging with specific communities, research and plan accordingly to ensure effectiveness
- Work with others to ensure partners are involved from the start, ensure good, clear communication, attend events, meetings and networking opportunities
- Feedback to participants and the wider community the results or outcomes. This will help raise the LINK's profile but also encourage others to participate if they can see it works and the benefits of joining the LINK.

It will engage with communities at a time and location which suits personal need, by offering a wide range of opportunities to get involved which are flexible:

Meeting / communicating with people

- Where they live, work, shop, rest and play
- Community events – rolling programme in East, Mid and West Medway
- Local Access Points – places in the community where LINK information and opportunities to participate will be made available
- Focus Groups held around the area so that all participants have an opportunity to contribute
- Surveys – made available to all and not just those who can access to online facilities
- Work with statutory and community and voluntary sector partners – develop good links for effective communications / flow of information, etc.

The paper way

- Newsletters / Bulletins / Briefings
- Surveys
- Press releases – PR
- Leaflets / posters
- Media, including advertising where appropriate
- Direct mail.

Through partnerships

- Strategic alliances – working with partner organisations – public, private and voluntary sector partners – to disseminate shared messages and LINK information and opportunities to get involved
- Use of existing Citizen Juries / Panels
- Youth Forums
- Focus Groups
- Other pre-existing forums.

Virtual

- The Medway LINK website
 - To disseminate information
 - To facilitate consultations
 - To enable discussion on important issues of the days affecting Medway's health and social care services
 - To enable online surveys
 - To enable online opinion polls
 - Podcasts
 - Video sharing websites – use of LINK promotional video
- Emails - utilising KMN database
- SMS Texting
- Telephoning
- TV/Radio.

Programme of activity for the period to 31 March 2009

There is an overlap between communication / publicity and community engagement and the following programme of activity is proposed to enable this community engagement strategy to be realised:

Activity	
Roadshows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hempstead Valley • Pentagon • Bluewater
Video / audio visual material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of LINK promotional video for use in connection with the above and at other such events
Community engagement events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isle of Grain / Hoo Peninsula / Strood • Chatham / Rochester • Gillingham / Rainham
Newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINK Quarterly • LA publications
Local access points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At five locations throughout the area
Exhibiting at partner / other events / premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medway Show • Libraries • LA sites • NHS sites • Voluntary / community organisation meetings / Annual General Meetings
LINKs bulletins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-monthly
Personal visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To under-represented groups

Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion blogs • Opinion polls
Mobile Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texting
Poster / leaflet / advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper media • Local bus companies • Libraries • Supermarkets • Practitioner surgeries • Other health and social care outlets
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When needed and when issues arise
Partnership working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking opportunities • Attend partner organisations' meetings
Media coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases of forthcoming events • Media coverage of events undertaken • Success stories – photo opportunities
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online • Email • Postal • Telephone

How will it demonstrate that the strategy has been effective?

It will be for others to judge whether the LINK concept has been successful in getting more people involved and making services more responsive to their needs. The following simple measures will be used by the LINK to evaluate its own performance:

- More people involved
 - 300 by end March 2009
 - 750 by end March 2010
 - 1500 by end March 2011
- That the increased numbers involved reflect demography of Medway –the LINK will have a diversity monitoring tool to measure this
- People listened to and their contribution acknowledged
- Feedback given.

Principles of engagement

The following principles will be adopted to ensure Medway LINK engagement activities are brought together into one overarching strategy for the area and, as a result, are aiming to coordinate better how it engages with the community based on the following principles:

Coordination

- All sections of the community should have equal opportunities to get involved
- Community engagement should be carried out to the highest standard by using recognised techniques and by sharing best practice
- The process is transparent and open
- All communities should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- All communities deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- Medway LINK strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations and be lead from grass roots initiatives.

This community engagement strategy recognises the diversity of the communities, the importance of community capacity building and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for service users to participate at whatever level they wish in order to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

Access and Inclusion

- Ensure that it takes into account particular needs and overcome any difficulties participants may have to enable them to participate
- Involve communities that are usually excluded
- Ensure that there is equal access to consultation exercises, and that participation meets the needs of all communities
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations.

Clarity of Purpose

- Only use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions in health and social care services and in the promotion of the LINK and in the recruitment of LINK participants

- Be open and honest about the aims of community engagement activity and what it hopes to achieve
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily
- Have a transparent processes to feedback on community engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and why, feedback how the information will be used.

Confidentiality

- Ensure awareness of confidentiality issues in community engagement activities, with particular regard to the Freedom of Information Act (Confidentiality issues will be adhered to, within the constraints of legislation).

Integrity

- Ensure that community engagement activities are voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time
- Ensure that participants can be involved at any level that suits their personal needs
- Ensure that information obtained from community engagement activities is honestly interpreted
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times
- Respect the rights of participants to decide how much to reveal about themselves
- Give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment.

Transparency

- Ensure that those most directly affected by health and social care policies and decisions are aware of opportunities to take part in consultations and can influence such decisions
- Engage with key stakeholders, partners and representative groups in advance of specific community engagement activities – to provide advance warning and to seek views on the most effective means of publicity.

Levels of Involvement

Inform	Consult		Involve		Devolve
Information - giving	Market Research		Participation / deciding together	Partnership / acting together	Supporting independent community initiatives
Newsletters and leaflets					
Community engagement events / exhibitions					
	Mystery shopping Monitoring visits				
	Self completion questionnaires				
	Telephone interviews In-depth interviews				
	Face to face interviews				
	Email / web surveys				
	Opinion polls				
		Comments Suggestion boxes			
		Public meetings			
		User panels			
		Focus Groups			
		Reference Groups			
		Consulting representative groups			
			Round table with commissioners / services provides		
			Participating in the design/development of a service		
			Participating in the planning / commissioning of future services		
					Supporting a group to provide a service

Note: **Mystery shoppers** pose as normal service users and perform specific tasks such as assessing how they are treated, asking questions, registering complaints or behaving in a certain way – and then provide detailed reports back to those charged with the task of purchasing or delivery such services, with a view to assessing the quality of the service provided.