

LINK

(Local Involvement Network)

WHAT IS A LINK?

Ever wanted to speak up about a health or social care service in your area but not known how? It might have been to offer an opinion on how things could be improved or talk about an experience—good or bad. Well, now you have the opportunity.

A LINK or Local Involvement Network is a network of local people and groups. It listens to what people have to say about health and social care services in the local area, and tells councils and the NHS what it has found. Dorset LINK has been up and running since April 1st 2008 and this report details the work carried out from April 2009 to the end of March 2010.

THE STEWARDSHIP GROUP

The Stewardship Group has been working with the Host organisation (Help and Care) to monitor aspects of the LINK governance, look at the feedback received from local people and decide which projects to take forward on to the work programme.

The eight people on the group are all from vastly different backgrounds and from all corners of the county. They have been involved in various networks and activities throughout the year, from attending local groups and forums, to sitting on NHS Dorset committees to talking with Dorset County Hospital on transport issues.

It would be very difficult for eight people to be representative of the entire population of Dorset (all of whom can be involved in LINKs) so there is a Decision Making Process that takes into account the feedback from local



Dorset LINK Stewardship Group Members

people and has a robust methodology for prioritising which issues the LINK works on. The Stewards are Mrs. Pat Hedges, Mr. Linley Venters, Mr. Michel Hooper-Immins, Mr. Gavin Maxwell, Mr. Paul Tomlinson, Mrs. Gabrielle Henstridge, Mr. John Smith and Mrs. Davina Smith (no relation). However Mrs. Pat Hedges and Mr. Michel Hooper-Immins have both recently resigned from the group and we wish to thank them for their work and input over the past year. All details of the Decision Making Process can be found on the website.

From the Host, Annie Dimmick (full-time) and Sarah Peters (part-time) have the role of Development Officers, supporting the Dorset LINK in all its work.

During the year the Stewardship Group met on a monthly basis with occasional guest speakers attending including various Directors of Commissioning for NHS Dorset, NHS Dorset Equality & Diversity Advisor, Dorset County Hospital Foundation Trust (DCHFT) Chief Executive, Dorset County Council Service User Involvement Co-ordinator, the Chair of the Dorset GP Professional Executive Committee and Patient & Public Involvement Leads for both NHS Dorset and DCHFT). Many thanks to all guest speakers for their time and input.

ENTER AND VIEW TEAMS

LINKs have the power to “Enter & View” wherever NHS or social care services (with certain exemptions) are provided. This means viewing services from the patient and public perspective and is based, again, on feedback received from local people. In September 2009 training was provided to volunteers who expressed an interest in this piece of work. They were provided with protocols and background information on how to carry out successful Enter & View reviews. This team will need to be Criminal Records Bureau checked at Advance level and these checks are currently being undertaken.

RAISING AWARENESS and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the year work has been ongoing to raise the awareness of LINKs in the local community. Information has been distributed in the form of leaflets and comment cards, through local community radio stations, in adverts and articles in community magazines and newspapers,



through third party organizations such as Age Concern and POPP (Partnership for Older Peoples Project) and Community Partnerships to name a few and through attendance by Stewardship Group members and Development Officers at events and meetings. Dorset LINK would like to thank all those groups and networks that helped to spread the word. All this activity means more feedback has been received and more people have “signed up” to the LINK. Dorset currently has just under 700 registered participants on the database some of whom are organizations, some individuals. When people “sign up” they receive regular updates and newsletters and have the opportunity to get involved at whatever level

suits them. This could be from ringing up to express a view about something to getting involved in a “Task & Finish” group working on a particular topic. There is absolutely no commitment; it’s a personal choice on how much involvement someone makes. Here are just a few examples of the engagement work Dorset LINK has done over the past year:

- Attendance at Dorset Age Partnership meetings across the county
- LINK stand at a Dignity, Privacy & Respect event
- Attendance at POPP (Partnership for Older People’s Project) promotional events
- Briefing on LINKs for the new Dorset County Council Direct Access Team
- LINK stand at the Dorset Bone Fair
- LINK stand at the Communities to Health Showcase
- LINK stand and presentation to the East Dorset Residents Association Conference
- Attendance and presentations at Community Lunches in Weymouth & Portland, Sturminster Newton, Dorchester and Ferndown
- LINK stand at the Community Information Day in Beaminster
- Attendance at Dorset Stroke Network events
- LINK stand at Purbeck School Fun Day

Some of the groups and organizations we met with include:

- Dorset Community Action
- Dorset Youth Association
- Dorset Volunteers Bureau
- Age Concern
- Alzheimer's Society
- Dorset Learning Disability Partnership
- POPP (Partnership for Older People's Project)
- Dorset Advocacy
- Dorset People First
- Dorset Association of Town & Parish Councils
- Portland Carers
- St John's Ambulance
- Sherborne Area Health Forum
- Experts by Experience
- Dorset Age Partnership
- DOTS Disability
- WRVS
- Turbary Residents Association
- GP Practice Managers Collaborative



WORKING WITH COMMISSIONERS & PROVIDERS

Dorset LINK has continued to build strong working relationships with local service providers and commissioners to ensure that the foundation for effective partnership working is laid. NHS Dorset (the Primary Care Trust) set up a Health Network across Dorset to gather feedback on primary care services and the LINK worked (and continues to do so) closely with them to encourage their membership to register with the LINK, to share information and pool resources where appropriate. Some of the Network Members will be working with the LINK this coming summer on the "Roadshow" (more of that follows).

NHS Dorset and Dorset County Council are both very keen to develop their own community engagement work and are more than willing to engage with the LINK where necessary. Dorset LINK has a regular slot on the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee's agenda and the LINK receives regular invitations to attend scrutiny related reviews and to input to scrutiny work where appropriate. This past year has seen LINK getting involved with issues arising on Swanage Minor Injuries Unit and proposed changes involving James Day House Care Home in Swanage. The biggest piece of work Dorset LINK did with the Committee was the Dementia Services review (again, more on that to follow). Other areas where LINK has had some involvement and input to the work of NHS Dorset and Dorset County Council was at local and county level Equality & Diversity Forums, input to a "How to Engage" manual developed by West Dorset District Council for their staff and help setting up engagement work for the new "Darzi" centre or walk-in clinic in Weymouth. The LINK also helped sponsor a Weymouth & Portland Health Network Information Day.

ACTIVITIES

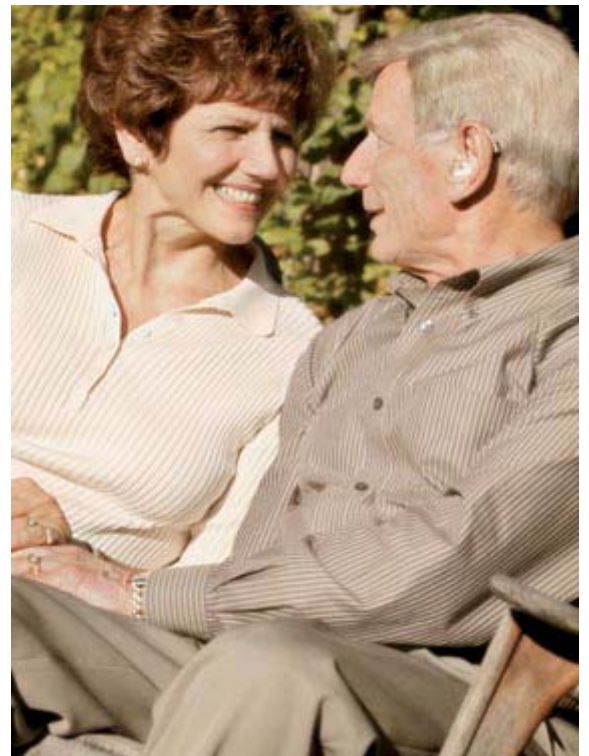
All well as gathering feedback, raising awareness and engaging with local people Dorset LINK was involved in researching issues, signposting people (for example to local PALS – Patient Advice and Liaison Services), mapping “what’s going on” across the county in terms of health and social care issues and focusing on a small number of projects as follows:

Hospital car transport at Dorset County Hospital (DCHFT). One of the Stewardship Members became heavily involved in “unpicking” the issues around the car transport scheme at the hospital. He worked with a number of representatives from DCHFT, Dorset County Council, interested local groups and the consultant (non medical) brought in by the hospital to develop a Transport Policy. This was a complicated issue and his work ensured local people had a chance to get involved and have a say.

Towards the beginning of 2009 Dorset LINK heard from a local lady with a visual impairment who had a good idea to make the experience of being in hospital for people with visual impairment easier. This idea was simply to have a sign or notice at the bedside (with patient consent) which made it clear to staff (from cleaners to consultants) that the patient had visual impairment and not to move personal items or approach the bedside without a quiet announcement. Dorset LINK put the idea to NHS Dorset and two Matrons in the west of the county have taken on board the suggestion.

Dementia Services Review. This was a major piece of work for the LINK in partnership with the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee. The Committee and Dorset LINK have developed a strong partnership working protocol over the last few years so when the Committee agreed to undertake a piece of work on dementia services it was considered an ideal opportunity to test out how the Committee and the LINK could work together, with LINK taking the responsibility to engage with local people to feed their views and experiences into the review process. The focus of the overall review was to establish what life is like in Dorset (shire Dorset outside of Poole and Bournemouth) for older people with dementia, their carers and family.

The key lines of enquiry concentrated on service planning, commissioning, funding and provision, service quality in hospital and in residential and community settings. Access to services, support and information and awareness of nutritional needs and how these are being met were also a key area of enquiry. The research and evidence gathering work undertaken by the Committee covered all these areas with the community engagement work undertaken by the LINK focusing on access to services, support and information and nutritional needs areas. The evidence collected by the LINK served as a reality check against which other evidence could be judged.



We developed a Community Engagement Strategy and had three months to get out and about talking to people who had been diagnosed with dementia, their carers, and relatives. The full report will not be available until the autumn of 2010 due to the Health Scrutiny Committee schedule and process but the LINK managed to engage with 99 people across Dorset.

The general trends coming from the work appear to suggest that not enough basic information is given to people upon diagnosis, respite care is a big issue with many carers at the end of their tether, very few people had been made aware of the importance of nutrition for people with dementia and access to information, advice and support could be better. The Committee will be making a set of recommendations in the report and it is hoped that the evidence gathered from local people will make a big difference to how those recommendations are taken forward. Dorset LINK wishes to thank all those people, groups and organization who helped with the work and disseminated questionnaires to their service users and networks. One of the reasons for undertaking this piece of work was to test the concept of LINKs being a "network of networks" and we proved that, with some effort, this approach can work.

A full report of the engagement work, including scope, methodology, learning points and so on is available from the Host upon request.

Through this work Dorset LINK came across a pamphlet called "If Only I'd Known That" which was written by a carer for carers detailing useful information, advice and contacts. A print run had been funded by POPP in partnership with St John's Ambulance but copies had run out. During the course of talking with carers we learnt just how useful this little document was and had made a difference to a number of people, therefore Dorset LINK agreed to fund a further print run of 5000 copies, to be designed and disseminated again by St John's Ambulance.

The Dorset LINK "Have a Say Fund".

The LINK agreed to put aside £10,000 of its funds (under spend from previous year) into a "Have a Say Fund". This fund was to encourage local groups and networks to gather feedback from their "members" on health and social care issues and input that feedback to the LINK to inform the work programme. This also helps the "network of networks" concept to develop. A set of criteria for applicants to bid for funds from £100 to £500 was developed and widely advertised. 15 expressions of interest were received with 7 of those going on to be successful. This work has only recently started with those 7 applicants about to embark on their projects. Feedback will come in during the year and we hope to run an event in the autumn of 2010 for commissioners and service providers to listen to what has been achieved and show how they will take on board the issues and suggestions raised. The projects include work on mental health, with young people, with carers, with a local community radio station, with learning disabled, with free and low cost counseling and working with people interested in care as a career. We look forward to working with all the projects over the next year. We are also hoping to run another Fund in the autumn drawing on the learning experience of this first one.



THE BUDGET

The Department of Health provided each LINK with a set amount of money for the years 2008 to 2011. For Dorset, for the year April 2009 to March 2010 this equated to £171,120 once Dorset County Council contract management costs had been deducted. Here's how the budget was spent:

HOST COSTS	Actual £	Budget £	Variance £
Organisation – staffing, management, training, supervision	93,256	102,054	8,798
Overheads – office premises, running costs	8,499	11,970	3,471
Communications – marketing, PR, website, IT and communications	12,189	42,000	29,811
Host under spend brought forward from 2008/09	0	16,200	16,200
TOTAL HOST COST	113,944	172,224	58,280

LINK COSTS

LINK group – expenses, training, meetings, research & development	4,701	27,521	22,820
TOTAL LINK COST	4,701	27,521	22,820

TOTAL COSTS 2009/10	118,645	199,745	81,100
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GRANT RECEIVED FROM LOCAL AUTHORITY FOR PERIOD 01/04/09 TO 31/03/10	171,120
UNDER SPEND BROUGHT FORWARD FROM 2008/09	28,625
TOTAL	199,745
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH GRANT TO LOCAL AUTHORITY 01/04/09 TO 31/03/10	184,000

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY RESULTS

During the year, the LINK carried out a survey of the individual people it is in touch with. The majority of people who replied identified themselves as White British (94%) and 100% had English as their first language. The LINK will make more efforts in the coming year to reach black and minority ethnic groups.

42% of people were over 65 and none were under 25. The LINK recognises that it needs to reach out to and engage more with younger people.

28% of people identified themselves as having a disability, 46% as having long-term health problems and 26% as carers.

FUTURE WORK PLANS

The coming year is very exciting for Dorset LINK with the following projects on the plan so far:

- Working with the Have a Say Fund projects and taking forward the feedback received
- Working with the Health Scrutiny Committee again on a piece of work looking at developing new scrutiny tools. The project will centre around cardiovascular disease with the aim of "equality and diversity are core elements in considering cardiovascular disease and the influences upon it. Alongside wider determinants such as socio-economic deprivation, the review will seek to highlight whether ethnicity or other cultural factors give a pre-existing health inequality another dimension". The LINK will be undertaking some engagement work in two areas of the county.
- Running a pilot "community engagement roadshow". A group of interested volunteers has come together to plan and manage a roadshow where we can get out and about across Dorset to talk to people and listen to what they have to say about health and social care. We will be going to at least one market town in each of the six districts and we will have a presence on the high street with information leaflets, surveys on various topics, interactive displays and lots of giveaways. We hope to engage with lots of people from all ages and backgrounds and gather some useful information to inform the work of the LINK over the coming months. At the time this report goes to print final dates and locations have yet to be confirmed but please do check out the website or give us a ring if you want to find out where we will be and when!"



- We also hope to do some work on dentistry access and will be developing some questionnaires/surveys.
- Other areas of interest to be developed include looking at "inappropriate" discharge from hospital and working with the local Chinese and Polish communities to ascertain their concerns and issues with health and social care services and looking at pharmacy services given that NHS Dorset is undertaking a Pharmaceutical Needs Analysis.



Your voice on local health and social care

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We're on the Web
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**For more information about LINKs, why they were
set up and so on,
you can check out the following
website www.dh.gov.uk
or contact Help & Care**