

## **“A STRONGER LOCAL VOICE”**

**Report By: Director of Adult and Community Services**

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

1. To consider a response to the Department of Health (DoH) document, ‘A Stronger Local Voice - A Framework for Creating a Stronger Local Voice in the Development of Health and Social Care Services’.

### **Financial implications**

2. The DoH is making funds available to community groups to help them develop their local LINK (Local Involvement Network). Money will also be allocated to the Council for consultation with local organisations to identify the most appropriate arrangements for hosting the LINKs. The amount of funds being made available is unknown at this time.

### **Background**

3. There is currently a Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPIF) for every NHS trust and primary care trust. In Herefordshire, there are therefore separate PPIFs for the PCT and the Hospitals Trust. There is also the Regional Ambulance Trust. These groups have a range of functions including the monitoring and review of the health service.
4. The DoH plan to replace PPIF's with LINKs which will cover coterminous areas with every local authority with social services responsibilities – rather than be associated with specific organisations. For Herefordshire, this means that the 2 existing PPIF's will be replaced by one new LINK.
5. The DoH state that LINKs will ‘build on the role of patient forums by creating a strengthened system of user involvement, and promote public accountability in health and social care through open and transparent communication with commissioners and providers’, all of which will help achieve the Government's commitment to:
  1. Develop a health and social care system planned around the needs of individual people and those of the wider community;
  2. Create health and social care services that are, regardless of who provides them, user-centred, responsive, flexible, open to challenge, accountable to communities and constantly open to improvement; and
  3. Develop decision-making to the local level. Some 80% of the NHS budget is now devolved to PCT's, meaning that priorities are decided locally.

## Response from Health Scrutiny Committee

6. The DoH has asked for responses to their document, 'A Stronger Local Voice' and has provided a series of questions to help shape these responses. This section therefore lays out the five DoH questions and draft responses for the Committee's consideration. (Copies of the full document have previously been circulated to Members of the Committee.)
7. Question 1: (a) What arrangements can we put in place to make sure that there is a smooth transition to the new system? (b) How can we build on existing activity in the voluntary and community sector?

*Draft response:* (a) The legislation to establish the new LINKs must be in place before any moves to 'disband' the PPIF's are made. The role, remit and scope of the LINKs must be clearly laid out well in advance of the forums being established. (b) As a first step, there should be an audit of 'existing activity in the voluntary and community sector'. Once this activity has been mapped, a judgement can be reached on how best to build upon it, as well as the most effective methodologies to employ.

8. Question 2: What do you think should be included in a basic model contract to assist local authorities tendering for a host organisation to run a LINK?

*Draft response:* i) The need for an individual to guide / train / steer the LINK with regard to national policy / direction, etc. ii) The requirement for LINK members to have experience / knowledge of involvement / consultation practices. iii) The need for clear 'terms and conditions' for LINK members. iv) The requirement for clear reference to work practices that reflect current policies on equality / diversity. v) The requirement for LINK members to undertake regular review, training and development. vi) The requirement for easy access to legal advice. vii) Details of the financial resources being made available to local authorities to establish and maintain the LINKs.

9. Question 3: How can we best attract members and make people aware of the opportunities to be members of LINKs?

*Draft response:* i) Ensure that the role and remit of the LINK is clear. ii) Ensure that the role and remit (and level of commitment) of individual LINK members is clear. iii) Promote the potential power to effect actual changes. iv) Use existing networks to raise awareness of opportunities. v) Ensure that the timetable allows a sufficiently long period for awareness raising to take place effectively. vi) Ensure that the awareness raising materials are relevant to rural areas (such as Herefordshire) and not biased towards large urban areas. vii) Consider some form of 'rewards or recognition scheme as an incentive.

10. Question 4: What governance arrangements do you think a LINK should have to make sure it is managed effectively?

*Draft response:* There must be a clear line of responsibility / accountability to an independent organisation for the LINK and for the individual members of the LINK. (This could be the Strategic Health Authority or the new merged Health and Social Care Regulators body).

11. *Question 5: What is the best way for commissioners to respond to the community on what they have done differently as a result of the views they have heard? For example, should it be part of the proposed PCT prospectus?*

*Draft response:* Yes, it should be part of the prospectus, but the reports should be more frequent. Other forms of communication should also be used including the local media and the voluntary sector. Information should also be relayed to the LINK and to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## Next Steps

12. The document 'A Stronger Local Voice' clearly states out that the local authorities are the 'host organisations' for the LINKs. It states that, as host organisation, the local authority will:
- i. Develop the LINK;
  - ii. Recruit members to the LINK;
  - iii. Establish good communication arrangements; and
  - iv. Support the development and management of a governance structure.
13. The DoH document also makes reference to the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC's). OSC's will be 'encouraged to focus their attention on the work of commissioners, but there is no intention to limit their role'. The rationale provided for OSC's particular focus on the commissioning role is that they are best placed to ask commissioners about:
- i. How they involve local people in the decisions that they have made and how they have decided local priorities;
  - ii. What evidence that have to support the decisions; and
  - iii. The actions they are proposing to take to address failings, concerns and gaps in service.
14. It is suggested that OSC reviews will have the most impact if they focus on the decision-making activities of PCT's and local authorities, in particular scrutinising how well they have met the requirements of the revised duties to involve, consult and respond. It is further suggested that the best way for the OSC's to access the widest range of views and experiences will be for them to have strong relationships with their LINK.
15. There is much for the Scrutiny Committee to consider in this DoH report. It is therefore proposed that a further report is prepared for a future meeting of the Committee once the relevant legislation has been passed, and there is more detail available upon which to base proposals for Herefordshire's way forward in this matter.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- THAT (a) the proposed response to the DoH's document, 'A Stronger Local Voice' as set out above be approved;
- and
- (b) a further report be presented to a future meeting once the related legislation has been passed.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 'A Stronger Local Voice: A framework for creating a stronger local voice in the development of health and social care services' – Department of Health (July 2006)