

Kent LINK Project Management – 22 January 2009 Discussion Document

While the LINK continues to develop its approach on governance, there is an overriding need to ensure that it adopts a positive 'why not' approach. The fact that a process is not in place or not fully developed should not lead to the LINK turning away requests for assistance or support.

1. Background – projects and project management

1.1 In any organisation, a distinction can be drawn between process and projects.

1.2 Process tends to be about tasks such as communications, field work and financial monitoring, characterised by routine and repetition.

1.3 Projects, in contrast, are characterised by a specific aim, limited by cost, time and resources, comprise a set of tasks with defined starts and finishes, and usually involve a team of people.

1.4 The existence of the Pyramids suggests that the concept of project management has existed for thousands of years. However, contemporary approaches are derived from mid 20th century US industrial methodology, developed to address common causes of failure to deliver, such as:

- Lack of a valid business case to justify the project
- Objectives not properly defined and agreed
- Lack of communication and stakeholder involvement
- Outcomes and/or benefits not properly defined in measurable terms
- Lack of quality control
- Poor estimation of time, cost and resources
- Inadequate definition and acceptance of roles
- Insufficient planning and coordination of resources.

1.5 It follows that project management is to ensure, so far as possible, that a project is delivered on time, within budget and to the desired quality and / or performance.

1.6 Delivery of a project is usually seen in three phases: preparation, execution and closure. There is also a defined relationship which puts distance between those responsible for commissioning the project and those delivering it.

2. Developing an approach for Kent LINK

2.1 In the context of Kent LINK and based on the issues already identified by participants, the outcome of a project is most likely to be used to:

- influence part or whole of the NHS , Social Services or other relevant body
- change the way in which the LINK operates

2.2 The LINK has adopted a Decision Making and Priority setting process, which it is assumed, will act as a filter for projects. It is suggested that approval criteria should ensure that a LINK project will:

- be justified in relation to an approved LINK activity
- have defined objective(s)
- a list of steps to achieve them
- a clearly stated start and finish date
- involve a number of people, depending upon size and complexity
- an indication of cost and resources
- an indication of the major risks which might hinder or prevent completion
- be concluded by a final report, which includes full details of the outcome.

3. Managing a Kent LINK project – the issues

3.1 As indicated, approaches on project management, training and IT applications are founded in industry and commerce. The language of project management is littered with esoteric terminology - business case, initiation documents, stage reviews, product descriptions, critical path analysis, program evaluation review technique, network diagrams, Gantt charts, risk analysis, and many more.

3.2 This should not create a problem where, for example, the LINK engages a professional public opinion consultancy to conduct a survey. It would be fair to assume that the host and contractor would be familiar with the concept of project management.

3.3 It is likely, however, that the majority of people or community based organisations who engage with the LINK about local issues will be volunteers. The development of an effective approach in that setting requires a dialogue with those volunteers, and a relatively informal and supportive approach.

3.4 There may be a third level where the scope, complexity or cost of a project or the availability of management skills, place it somewhere between these two extremes.

3.5 There is another issue: Who commissions a project and who delivers it? In a business setting, it is common for a project to be commissioned at board level, with project management as an operational responsibility. In the case of the LINK, it may well be the case that those who request assistance with a project will be delivering it themselves. In that situation it may be necessary to create a surrogate commissioner who is able to provide support and an objective assessment of progress.

3.6 Finally there is the need to ensure that projects pay regard to equality issues, irrespective of whether or not there is a direct relationship to the project.

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