



LINK into Local HealthWatch Newsletter

Introduction

This is the first Local HealthWatch Newsletter. The purpose of this Newsletter is to keep readers up to date with current affairs relating to the transition of current LINK functions into Local HealthWatch. It is important in this first issue to cover some background information, hence it is longer than future Newsletters will be!

If you have any questions, queries or concerns about any of the information contained in this Newsletter, please contact:

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Background

The Health and Social Care Bill, currently completing the final Committee Stage in the House of Commons, has introduced significant changes for the health service. One of these affects how people can influence decisions made about our local health and social care services. The Health and Social Care Bill proposes that Local HealthWatch organisations will be established in October 2012. They will continue the functions currently provided by Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), which will cease to exist.

From October 2012, subject to Parliamentary approval, Local HealthWatch will also assume responsibility for signposting to health and social care services. This is one of a range of services currently provided by the NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT) Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS).

In April 2013, local authorities will take on the responsibility for commissioning NHS complaints advocacy services, which can either be from Local HealthWatch or a third party provider. If a third party is commissioned by the local authority, Local HealthWatch

will signpost patients and members of the public to the relevant service. The Department of Health's Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) currently performs this function.

Under current proposals, HealthWatch England will be set up as an independent arm of the Care Quality Commission, with a specific remit to represent people, at a national level, using health and social care services.

The proposal is to make HealthWatch England part of the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This builds on their existing use of patient experience information to regulate care. HealthWatch England will use evidence from Local HealthWatches around the country and from carrying out its own work to identify concerns and poorly performing services. It will then be able to recommend to the CQC that they investigate those services.

Get involved nationally

The Department of Health has set up a number of groups to help advise on how the new Local HealthWatch will work, what it might look like and how local people will be able to get involved.

A number of existing LINK participants across the country, including Kent, are involved in these national groups.

Get involved online

A HealthWatch online community has been created by the CQC to assist in the development of HealthWatch. There will be live interactive forums, polls and documents for review, as well as a library of updated information on the online community. This community will feed into the development of HealthWatch and the joint Department of Health and CQC Programme Board and its Advisory Group.

You can sign up to the online community by email: healthwatch@nunwood.com

The vision of Local HealthWatch

A Local HealthWatch in Kent *'local consumer voice for health and social care'*

1. Influencing

Help shape the planning of health and social care services

2. Signposting

Help people access and make choices about care

3. Advocacy

Advocacy for individuals making complaints about healthcare

A Local HealthWatch will:

- Have stronger powers to shape and hold to account local health and social care services
- Support individuals through:
 - information and signposting
 - advocacy for NHS complaints
- Be funded via local authorities
- Be accountable to the local authority for operating effectively and providing value for money.

Local News

The Kent LINK along, with 74 other LINKs nationally, applied for Pathfinder Status in May 2011. We are pleased to announce that Kent's application was successful. This involved the Kent LINK, Kent & Medway Networks (KMN) and Kent County Council (KCC) working in partnership to develop a model fit for the Kent community. The primary aim of this Pathfinder is to integrate patient views into the decision making at GP practice and consortia level. More details of how this will impact will follow. If you would like to get involved, please contact Rich using the information on page 1.

Kent and Medway LINKs working together

Representatives of Kent and Medway LINKs have met to discuss how working together would benefit both LINKs, especially in the transition to Local HealthWatch. It is very early days and the methods for sharing knowledge and ways of working together are being developed but it is likely to be through setting up a LINK Transition Group (Project Group) within each LINK. A representative of each will liaise across those Groups. This will be done collectively as part of a (possibly virtual) Kent and Medway Strategic Transition Group. The aims of that liaison would be to (but not an exhaustive list):

- Share ideas and best practice
- Learn from any issues that arise along the path of transition
- Help identify common activities and common goals, target audiences for example
- Share knowledge gained, for example from national bodies, local authorities.

Kent Local HealthWatch Development Group

This group consists of representatives from:

- The Kent LINK (Governors)
- The Kent LINK Host KMN (Kent and Medway Networks)
- KCC (Kent County Council)
- NHS Cluster Primary Care Trust.

The Kent Local HealthWatch Development Group has met twice already (15 July and 15 August 2011). The main purpose of these initial meetings was to agree the Group's terms of reference, set the scene, develop an appropriate media policy and to ensure that all involved have a common understanding of what the intentions are for a Local HealthWatch.

Representatives at the meetings also discussed and agreed to take part in the 'Readiness Programme', a KCC and Department of Health (DH) jointly funded programme of support, from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), to help in the development of Kent's Local HealthWatch. A total of 10 days will be provided by CfPS for the whole programme that will provide for focus groups, workshops, small groups and a series of tools being developed etc. The workshops will include the involvement of as wide a range of local people as possible, including the Kent LINK and KMN representation, to seek their views on what the Kent Local HealthWatch should look like. The report from this Programme is expected by the end of September, so

..... Watch this space

Kent LINK Transition Group

In June 2011, the Kent LINK held its third Annual Meeting and provided an update on the news that the Kent LINK will be replaced, in time, by Local HealthWatch. Many present at the meeting were keen to know more and how to get involved in how the LINK will get ready for the new Local HealthWatch.

Involving people is a fundamental principle of the Kent LINK so LINK Governors were very pleased with such keen interest being shown. As a result, the LINK invited local participants to express their interest in the transition into Local HealthWatch and participate in a new LINK group - the Kent LINK Transition Group. This invitation was well received and so far 21 people, from across the whole of Kent, have contacted the LINK to say they want to get involved. Their first opportunity for this was a workshop held on 15 August 2011. The half day workshop was planned with a segment of the agenda delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny as part of the Readiness Programme. The workshop also covered:

- The news so far
- Public representation
- What needs to happen in Kent
- How to move forward
- How to get involved with the Readiness Programme.

A report of this event, including the ideas from LINK participants on Local HealthWatch in Kent, will be published by Friday, 2 September 2011. This report will also include a further invitation to get involved in this exciting project - possibly the last time that ordinary citizens may be able to influence how they can and should be involved in local services. With the help of the Kent LINK, more involvement may be through, for example, Patient Participation Groups, Locality Groups and the LINK Transition Group.

If you would like to receive this report and / or get involved, please contact Rich Beckwith (contact details on the front page).

+++ Stop Press: 3 August 2011 +++

PRESS RELEASE from NALM (National Association of LINKs Members)
about the Government's lack of funding for the Local HealthWatch Pathfinders

Secretary of State forgets his "nothing about me without me" mantra

Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health will today announce the details of 75 LINKs (Local Involvement Networks), the local health and social care watchdogs, awarded Pathfinder status by the Department of Health to support their development to become HealthWatch organisations. LINKs are set to 'evolve' into HealthWatch in October 2012 with greatly expanded duties. But whilst millions are being given by the government for the organisational development of Pathfinder Clinical Commissioning Groups (£7million in London alone), Andrew Lansley has plans to give **absolutely nothing** to Pathfinder LINKs.

NALM finds it incomprehensible that that whilst money has been found to be used by the DH for LINK Pathfinder evaluation, networking and shared learning with LINKs, that no money will be given to the LINKs individually to run their leading edge Pathfinder work.

NALM's recent report 'Evolution or Abolition' showed that LINKs have suffered an average 24% budget cut and some cuts as great as 70%.

Malcolm Alexander, Chair of NALM said: "LINKs are run by volunteers and have a major role in monitoring the quality and safety of NHS and social care services from a user's and patient's viewpoint. To expect them to run successful Pathfinders with no additional money is frankly insulting to the excellent and committed volunteers across the country who strive to make LINKs a success. The launch of HealthWatch Pathfinders today is a hollow event. LINKs have a vital role in monitoring services, and we expect the Secretary of State to value their great contribution by funding the development of Pathfinders. We call on Andrew Lansley to show that the government values LINKs and is committed to HealthWatch by producing funding that will enable them to development into powerful community organisations."

Malcolm Alexander
Chair

+++ Stop Press: 15 August 2011 +++

DH reissues withdrawn HealthWatch consultation

The Department of Health has reissued a consultation on funding for Local HealthWatch. Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), which will be replaced by HealthWatch from October 2012, cost an average of £100,000 a year to run. The new consultation makes clear £20,000 is the minimum additional funding local authorities will get, on top of the £27m they get to run LINKs, in order to pay for extra duties HealthWatch will have around signposting and influencing local health policy and commissioning. Most of the extra £23m a year will come from Primary Care Trust Patient Advice and Liaison Services.

The consultation will run until Monday, 24 October 2011. For more information contact Rich Beckwith or look for the link to the consultation on www.thekentlink.co.uk