



Happy Birthday to the Kent LINK

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What has a baby born on 3 December 2008 got in common with the Kent LINK?

Well, both are now one year old. The baby, now a toddler, will be bigger in height and weight and may be crawling or taking its first steps and maybe saying the odd word but that is where the similarities end.

The Kent LINK was launched on 3 December 2008 and it too has grown. It now has a total of 814 LINK participants registered, 126 of those are organisations. The biggest difference is that the LINK is up on its feet and running, not just crawling or even walking - it is running with confidence. It has also expressed itself in more than just the odd word.

When Kent County Council (KCC) contracted the host organisation Kent & Medway Networks (KMN) back in July last year, it was made clear that the focus should be to establish a robust, sound and sustainable LINK structure. This was also the message from the Transitional Board where representatives of the previous Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forums and other individuals discussed how they felt the LINK should look.

This was a challenge for KMN and for those volunteers who took on the role of LINK Governors. Many people, especially those involved in the PPI Forums, felt that the LINK should pick up from where the PPI Forums left off. However, whilst PPI Forums did some very good work on behalf of local people we had to bear in mind the Government's intentions in abolishing PPI Forums and creating LINKs.

It was, and still is, important to remember what the LINK's role is. It's key purposes are:

To encourage and support more people to become involved in shaping local care services, from helping to decide what services should be commissioned to influencing how they are run

Tell those who commission, run and scrutinise local care services what local people have recommended to help improve services

To seek community views and experiences of local care services, provide the community with a way to review local care services and the ability to hold providers and commissioners to account

With this in mind and KCC's objectives, it was important for KMN and the new Governors to create LINK policies around equality and diversity, community engagement and communications and publicity that would show that decisions and activities carried out within the LINK were appropriate and transparent. Public funds are being used for the LINK and, quite rightly, local people expect the LINK to get results. The LINK must be as fully inclusive as possible and it needs an organisation that can provide evidence that it is well run and has systems in place to manage problems that arise.

Lastly, but just as important, the LINK needs to maintain its independence from the Local Authority and the NHS and social care services both locally and nationally.

So, what has been achieved in the LINK's first year? Please continue reading to find out more.

Your LINK for improving health and social care

