

Gateway Reference: 7337

*From the Minister of State
The Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP*



*Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS*

Tel - 020 7210 3000

9th November 2006

To all Local Authority Chief Executives with social service responsibilities

I am writing to let you have more information about our plans for improving service user and public engagement in health and social care. In particular I wish to let you know more about the development of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) and the partnership we want to form with local authorities in establishing them at local level.

Local government has an absolutely vital role in delivering improved health and well-being, and you will be aware of the on-going debate taking place in government about the role of service users, local communities, and local authorities, in shaping the delivery of public services.

We are committed as a Government to empowering citizens to give them more confidence and more opportunities to influence public services in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them, and in ways that will make a real difference to services. If we are to create a truly people-led health and social care service, centred around the needs of both individuals and communities, it is essential that services are responsive to what the people using them want and need and are accountable to service users and local communities.

We want to create a system where more people are empowered to be active partners in their health and social care rather than passive recipients.

A stronger local voice published in July sets out the government's plans to achieve these aims. As part of these plans, local authorities with social service responsibilities will have a statutory duty to make arrangements for the establishment of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs). These LINKs will bring together local people and organisations and will provide flexible ways for communities to engage with health and social care organisations to help shape services and priorities in ways that best suit the communities and the people in them. They will gather the views and experience of the people within their area on all the health and social care services they use, building on existing community networks and the work of patient and public involvement (PPI) forums.

Funding for LINKs will be provided from central government to all relevant authorities, which will, perhaps jointly where that seems appropriate, contract with local organisations such as voluntary and community groups or social enterprises to identify the most appropriate arrangements for hosting and providing support to the LINKs. Given the skill requirements of support organisations, it is likely that they will chiefly be drawn from local non-profit organisations with skills in community development and networking.

The proposed legislation to create this duty will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

The consultation on our plans following the publication of *A stronger local voice* has now come to an end, and we are currently considering the responses we have received and plan to publish a Government response document shortly. This will also include further details on how a LINK could work.

We are working with the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH), which supports the current system of PPI forums, to establish seven 'early adopter' sites around the country. These sites are located in County Durham, Doncaster, Manchester, Hertfordshire, Kensington & Chelsea, Medway and Dorset.

I am keen that you are kept up to date with our plans for LINKs and able to learn from the experience of the early adopter sites. We would therefore like you to nominate a named person from within your organisation to lead on the procurement of LINKs. This person should not be drawn from the team that commissions social care services but should be drawn from the separate procurement team within the authority so as not to create a potential conflict of interest. We will then communicate directly with this nominated person to disseminate information such as the tender specification we are currently developing, share best practice and learning from the early adopters sites, as well as inviting them to events and meetings where appropriate. There will also be other opportunities for local authorities to get involved and we will be communicating with you about these in due course.

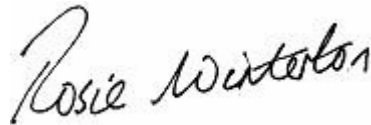
I would be grateful if you could forward the details of the named contact within your authority for the attention of Florella Baker in the Department of Health, 692D Skipton House, 80 London Road, London, SE1 6LH.

Lessons from 'early adopters' and plans to develop the LINK in your area will, I am sure, be of great interest to your health overview and scrutiny committee. OSCs and LINKs will need to work closely together and I hope you will involve the lead officer for overview and scrutiny in discussions about how your local LINK will be developed. We have asked the Centre for Public Scrutiny, through its Health Scrutiny Support Programme, to ensure that health OSCs are updated about the development of LINKs.

I will write again in due course, with how much you shall each receive once allocations have been confirmed.

An event to provide an introduction to LINKs is being held on Wednesday 13 December at the London Paddington Hilton Hotel. This event will be an opportunity to hear about how we intend LINKs to work and ask any questions and is primarily for local authorities, NHS, current PPI forum members and those interested parties in the voluntary sector and will involve speakers from the Department of Health, CPPIH and the Healthcare Commission – see draft agenda attached. If you are interested in attending, or nominating a member of your organisation, please contact Leslie Forsyth, Director of Operations at CPPIH on 0121 222 4547. This event is the first in a series and places will be available on a first come, first served basis

I look forward to working with you in ensuring successful public involvement to create improved services for local people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosie Winterton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ROSIE WINTERTON

Draft agenda

**Getting ready for LINKs
Wednesday 13th December
London Paddington Hilton Hotel
146 Praed Street
London W2 1EE**

10:30 – 11:00	Registration/coffee
11:00 – 11:15	Opening introduction
11:15 – 11:45	The Rt. Hon. Rosie Winterton MP, Minister of State for Health
11:45 – 13:00	Workshops: Service User & Public Involvement – Obstacles & Opportunities
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 14:30	Feedback from workshops
14:30 – 15:15	Panel Q&A
15:15 – 15:30	Closing remarks