

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why should I join the Bracknell Forest LINK?

The Bracknell Local Involvement Network (LINK) is the new way for people to talk directly to the commissioners and providers of health and social care services in Bracknell Forest about what they want and to get their questions answered about current issues. If you want to find out about health and social care locally and have your say in decisions about these local services, then the Bracknell Forest LINK is for you. Individuals and organisations can all be participants of the Bracknell Forest LINK. The more it becomes a "network of networks", the more strength it will have in the Bracknell Forest community and the stronger its voice will become on your behalf.

### Who makes up a LINK?

LINKs are slightly different in each area, but are likely to be made up of:

- Existing user-led organisations, community and voluntary organisations, carers groups and those who already campaign on behalf of people who use health and social care services
- People from different parts of the community including groups which, in the past, have been 'hard to reach'
- People who want to get involved in different ways, either by giving their time to help lead a LINK or by regularly contributing their views.

### What is the role of a LINK?

The role of a LINK is to:

- Encourage and support more people to get involved in shaping local health and care services; from helping to decide what services should be commissioned, to influencing the way they are run
- Activity canvas every section of the community for their views and experiences of local health and care services
- Provide the community with a mechanism for monitoring and reviewing local health and care services and the ability to hold them to account
- Tell those who commission, run and scrutinise local health and care services, what local people have recommended to help improve local services.

### What powers do LINKs have?

- Legislation provides LINKs with powers to help carry out their role and places duties on the NHS and the Local Authority to provide information and access to premises:
- LINK authorised representatives can enter specific premises to review and report on the quality of the services provided
- LINKs can ask commissioners and providers for information about services and expect a response

- LINKs can make recommendations to the local NHS and Local Authority and expect a response
- LINKs can refer matters to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees for Health or Social Services for action.

### **Who is the Bracknell Forest LINK accountable to?**

First and foremost, LINKs are accountable to their local population. They are independent of Central Government, Local Government and the NHS and their funding is channeled through independent Host organisations. Because LINKs are publicly funded they also need to report annually to the Secretary of State.

Local people and groups need to have confidence that LINKs understand local health and social care needs and have developed a credible work programme based on local priorities. They should be open and honest and work in ways that are free from bias. All of the LINK procedures, including how the Bracknell Forest LINK makes decisions. The initial Board or Executive of the Bracknell Forest LINK is referred to as the "Steering Group". The Steering Group is accountable to the wider LINK and the LINK is accountable to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

### **Is the Bracknell Forest LINK a voluntary body?**

No, all LINKs are created by a law passed by Parliament - the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 - which sets out their legal duties and powers. In addition, the Government has issued Regulations and Directions describing the detail of LINK activities which have the force of law and must be complied with. This gives a LINK considerable authority to work directly with the NHS and Local Authority on behalf of the local community. However, most of the LINK participants give their time voluntarily.

### **Are LINKs like the Patient and Public Involvement Forums just renamed?**

No, LINKs are distinctly different:

- The LINK remit includes health and social care services
- LINK participants will comprise both individuals and organisations
- The Bracknell Forest LINK will be a network and not a series of committee meetings
- The Bracknell Forest LINK will engage widely with people right across Bracknell Forest to make sure that everyone can have their say, especially those who are not normally heard.

The legislation creating LINKs also abolished Patient Forums across England on 31st March 2008.

### **What is the role of the Host organisation?**

Bracknell Forest Borough Council has appointed Help and Care as their "Host" organisation. The role of the "Host" is to facilitate and support the development of the Bracknell Forest LINK. It will also work in partnership with the LINK, helping it to carry

out its policies and plans. The Host will be subject to scrutiny by the Local Authority to whom the LINK Host reports regularly. Once the LINK has an appointed Steering Group, it will enable the wider LINK to make decisions about its work programme and budget, with the continuing advice and support of the LINK Host.

### **What local services will LINKs cover?**

The Bracknell Forest LINK remit covers all publicly funded health and social care services within Bracknell Forest. There are some exceptions such as children's social care which is covered by separate arrangements through OFSTED. It does not matter who provides the service; as long as the users of the service are publicly funded, it falls within the remit of LINK.

### **Should I join the LINK as an individual or on behalf of an organisation that I belong to?**

You can join the Bracknell Forest LINK as an individual or a group. To register log on to [www.makesachange.org.uk](http://www.makesachange.org.uk)

### **Can local commissioners and providers be LINK members?**

No, the NHS, Bracknell Forest Borough Council or any of the CVS in Bracknell Forest, as organisations, cannot be participants of the LINK. Individuals who work for these organisations can be participants if they register as individuals using their home address, but they cannot be appointed to the Steering Group.

### **I don't live in Bracknell Forest; can I still be a member of the Bracknell Forest LINK?**

As an individual, if you don't live in Bracknell Forest but you are registered with a Bracknell Forest GP practice and use its services then you can still be a participant of Bracknell Forest LINK.

### **Can I belong to more than one LINK?**

Yes, each LINK is free to establish its own registration criteria.

### **Will LINKs in adjoining areas and across the South East cooperate with each other?**

Collaboration across the South East will be essential. The Bracknell Forest LINK will seek cooperative arrangements with surrounding LINKs such as Wokingham and Slough and neighboring counties. This will reflect the pattern of service use by Bracknell Forest residents.

**If I have a concern or complaint about my doctor/dentist or an issue with my Council Flat, how can LINKs help?**

LINKs do not handle complaints because there are other bodies already doing that. LINKs can point people in the right direction to obtain help with concerns and complaints.

**What will LINK do with any suggestions I make on health and social care issues in Bracknell Forest?**

It is the role of LINK to seek out the views of the public, service users, patients and carers about particular issues in health and social care and then to represent those views to the commissioners and providers of those services - usually the NHS and the local Council. The LINK will have clear and open processes to show how views are gathered in particular issues, what views were expressed, how they were put forward, and what was said and done about them as a result.

**Can I ask the Host for the telephone number of a LINK Member in my area?**

No, the Host is required to hold and use all personal information in line with the Data Protection Act. This means that they cannot give out personal information without first getting permission from that person to do so. The LINK can be contacted through the Host organisation.

**More questions from you...**

If you have more questions about the Bracknell Forest LINK that you want answered, Please send them to the Berkshire LINK office and we will do our best to find the answer.

Berkshire LINKs

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