

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Harrow LINK will give everyone in the community, from individuals to voluntary and community organisations, the opportunity to say what they think about local health and social care services and experiences. The LINK is a way of telling the people who commission, provide and manage local services what is and isn't working, as well as suggesting ideas which could improve services.

The LINK will provide flexible ways for local people to be involved, it will support and strengthen existing networks and involvement mechanisms and help build relationships with the statutory organisations that commission and provide services.

This Policy will set out the basic components required to achieve effective and appropriate communication both internally within the LINK and the Host, and externally between the LINK and the public, service providers and all stakeholders and also the Host, the public and all stakeholders.

1. COMMUNICATION POLICY OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 To communicate the purpose of the LINK as widely and effectively as possible
- 1.2 To use the most appropriate methods and media to achieve this
- 1.3 To develop methodologies for engaging and involving people and organisations
- 1.4 To increase the quantity and quality of Participation
- 1.5 To build positive relationships with commissioners, providers and scrutinisers of local health and social care services
- 1.6 To ensure flow of information to aid planning and decision-making

2. COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

- 2.1 The Executive Committee with the support of the Host will take overall lead and responsibility for implementing and monitoring the policy through its Communications and Governance Task Group.
- 2.2 Communication will be achieved through a variety of methods and media, within the LINK's resource, commensurate with the information or message concerned and the intended audience or recipient.
 - 2.2.1 **In person**
Through outreach and engagement activities, at meetings and events this is best for ensuring clear understanding. The purpose and strategies of the LINK can be more effectively explained.
 - 2.2.2 **Existing Channels**
Local voluntary and community groups, networks, newsletters, GP surgeries, Libraries. The format used should be appropriate to the setting.

2.2.3 **Printed Matter**

Posters, leaflets, flyers, reports, banners, advertising boards, invitation letters and agendas produced in accessible formats and published and displayed in a timely fashion.

2.2.4 **The press, radio and other media**

The LINK Media lead will have overall responsibility with support of the Host to make use of opportunities to communicate widely and effectively and to respond to issues through editorials, letters and articles.

2.2.5 **Information and communication technology**

The Internet is probably the most effective and cheapest form of communication and can communicate all LINK information, activities and policies. The host will provide and maintain a LINK web site with facilities for information exchange for all LINK participants and the public. However it must be remembered that not all have access to the Internet and hard copy should always be available on request and communicated as such.

2.2.5.1 Email should be used whenever possible. It is a quick and effective means of disseminating and requesting information and responses and asking and answering questions.

2.2.5.2 The host will provide an E-Bulletin at least monthly to effectively disseminate relevant information on a regular basis, and can inform and signpost recipients to other sources.

3 PRINCIPLES

The following best practice will underpin the communications of the Harrow LINK.

3.1 **Openness**

All information should be communicated in an open and honest fashion. In the light of the Freedom of Information Act, all information should be open to access by any member of the public except where it would contravene data protection.

3.2 **Relevance**

Information should be clearly relevant to the audience to which it is delivered. The needs of the audience should be put first in all communications activity and information should be tailored to ensure that it is relevant to different audiences. If the recipient is expected to act on the information they have received this should be made clear to them.

3.3 **Simplicity**

Simple, straightforward language should be used in all written and verbal communication. The use of jargon and "management speak" should be avoided. Messages should be carefully thought out and constructed so that the point is clear. Any actions expected of the recipient should also be clear. Messages should not be overly long or complicated and all communication should be consistently of a high quality.

3.4 **Clarity**
All communication should be clear in its aims. Message senders need to tell their audience in direct terms the status of the information they are communicating.

3.5 **Planned and timely**
Information should be prioritised and planned so as to avoid overload, duplication of messages or long periods of non-communication. Communication with the public should be at the heart of all planning within the LINK. To this end, the Executive Committee should ensure that they consider the most effective ways to communicate their decisions and information needs.

3.6 **Two-way communication**
All communication should ensure that there are as many opportunities for listening and receiving questions as there are for sending messages out. In this way communication will be positively encouraged and the public will feel that they can influence the work and progress of the LINK.

4. OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

4.1 The LINK will utilise community development activities in order to engage with, and facilitate the involvement of, individuals and organisations especially those who are seldom heard. That is to say people who do not have a voice in the planning and decision making of local health and social care services, who are excluded from local democracy and the usual consultation opportunities.

4.2 The LINK will gather information from all groups with which it succeeds in engaging and take into account their views, needs and issues and if necessary make representation to the relevant statutory body. The LINK will use this information to inform its Workplan. The LINK may decide that it needs more information or clarity so it could undertake a survey or a consultation exercise.

4.3 Communication with diverse groups and individuals will have to be carefully managed to ensure that any information given is in accessible formats, that meetings are held in appropriate locations and that feedback is given. Contact will often take place over a period of time to ensure that effective relationships are built and that the involvement of the community in the work of the LINK is developed. This will lead to a diversity of Participation and involvement in the LINK and its activities.

4.4 Appropriate communication is the key to effective engagement and ensuring that the LINK represents the views of all citizens in its work to improve local health and social care services.

5. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

5.1 The Executive Committee and the Host undertake to ensure that internal communication is appropriate and effective.

- 5.2 The Executive Committee has the responsibility for receiving intelligence from the LINK Participants and through other channels, of establishing a Workplan and ensuring that this is communicated effectively throughout the Network.
- 5.3 The Executive Committee should ensure through the Host that all information regarding meetings and activities is communicated in a timely and effective manner.
- 5.4 The Executive Committee takes on board that its Members will have different preferred methods of receiving information and their availability to attend meetings and respond to communications will vary according to their personal and professional responsibilities.
- 5.5 The Executive Committee Members have a responsibility to read and where appropriate to respond to communications from other Members and the Host.
- 5.6 Participants who are involved in LINK Workplan activity have a responsibility to ensure that they read and respond to communications from other Members and the Host.
- 5.7 The Host must ensure that it's communication methods are appropriate and timely and meet the needs and wishes of the Participants.
- 5.8 The Host must maintain the website, post relevant information and articles and ensure that the Members' section is updated.
- 5.9 The Host will ensure that the office and ICT equipment is kept in an operational condition.
- 5.10 The Host will ensure that all emails and telephone messages are responded to within 48 hours and where this is not possible, (for example at weekends or on Bank Holidays) as soon as possible thereafter.

6. MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

- 6.1 The Communications policy of the Harrow LINK will need ongoing monitoring and evaluation to identify what is working (and not working) and to develop and improve the strategy.
- 6.2 Success in communication will be measured through a variety of means including:
 - Returned reply slips
 - Logging phone calls and messages to the Host office
 - Logging email enquiries
 - Website hits
 - Monitoring press exposure
 - Attendance at Meetings
 - Attendance at and feedback from events
 - Numbers of Participants (and the growth)
 - Satisfaction surveys
 - Quantity and quality of intelligence leading to LINK Workplan items.