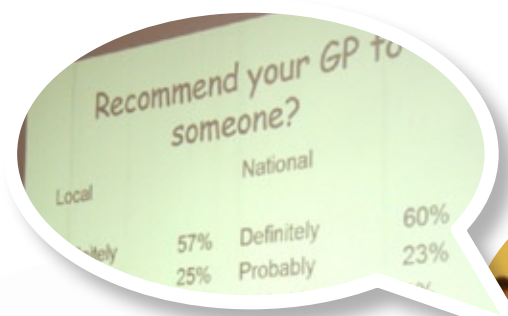




Annual Report 2009/2010

For the period from April 2009 to March 2010





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St Helens LINK is hosted by St Helens Council for Voluntary Service.
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A word from the Board...

It has been an eventful year. Training took a large part of the first few months and involved various representative groups within our diverse community.

Outreach into the community at various shows and events resulted in us forming the three Task groups, which were Hygiene, Attitudes of staff in GP practices and Access to Better Quality Information. This work is still progressing and reports will soon be available on the LINKs' website or from the support team.

Members represented LINKs on various committees and networked with other LINKs in the North West, but also with regulators like the Care Quality Commission, commissioning staff, health & social care service providers and elected members of the Council. This working with different partners helped LINK members to form a balanced view of areas of concern for future work.

Achievements and outcomes



The LINK... has made people's voices heard

The LINK, just by being created, has made people's voices heard on a number of issues e.g. made sure that service providers and commissioners understood that people are fearful of complaining about health and care services in case they received poor care or none at all. A 5000 postcard campaign across local outlets had also enabled people to have their say for free on the three task group areas.

One of the outcomes LINK is measured on is to show that LINK members' views are considered in planning health & care services. This year whilst working in partnership with three local Council Overview & Scrutiny Committees to look at proposed changes to burns treatment services, LINK members campaigned and challenged the proposed recipients of the future services regarding the potential loss of experienced staff and how the changed services would negatively affect local people.

As a result of this pressure and local Save Our Burns Units campaigns, the proposals to transfer treatment outside of Merseyside, for the most serious burns cases, has been put on hold.

Training outcomes

Board members and others have accessed training as part of an induction programme to enable them to be more skilled at communicating with and understanding their communities.

The improvement made in Knowledge Skills and Confidence was between 30 – 40% for the training in Deaf Awareness, Equal Opportunities and Transgender Awareness.

All other courses undertaken also showed an improvement of between 20-40% in knowledge, skills and confidence

Board members went through a self-assessment process to see what they felt their skills were already and to identify any areas of training that they needed for the future. Training programmes were then compiled to address those needs identified.

Induction training – some broad topics were available for Board members to access this year:

- Cultural & Religious Awareness
- Transgender awareness
- Migrant communities
- Deaf Awareness
- Equal Opportunities
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

Additional training has been available to LINK members during the year:

- Learning Disability awareness – both from St. Helens People's Choice and Moving on With Life and Learning
- Business Case panel – an informal training session, led by a Halton LINK member and NHS Halton & St. Helens Primary Care Trust
- Enter & View training (see page 8)

Our communities & LINK Activities

Structure of the LINK

We keep it simple and we hope this helps to ensure people from the wider community, not just the LINK membership, can raise issues easily.

The Board has a membership of ten places with the ability to co-opt up to three additional members in order to fulfil a specific function or ensure a certain section of the community is represented.

The task groups (three priority areas were chosen during this year) are sub groups of the Board and are made up of Board members and other individuals that may wish to be involved. The LINK support team of three staff supports the Board and the task groups with administration and seeking out opportunities for the LINK to bring forward the views of local people on health and adult social care services.

We involve the public in LINK's work in different ways, including:

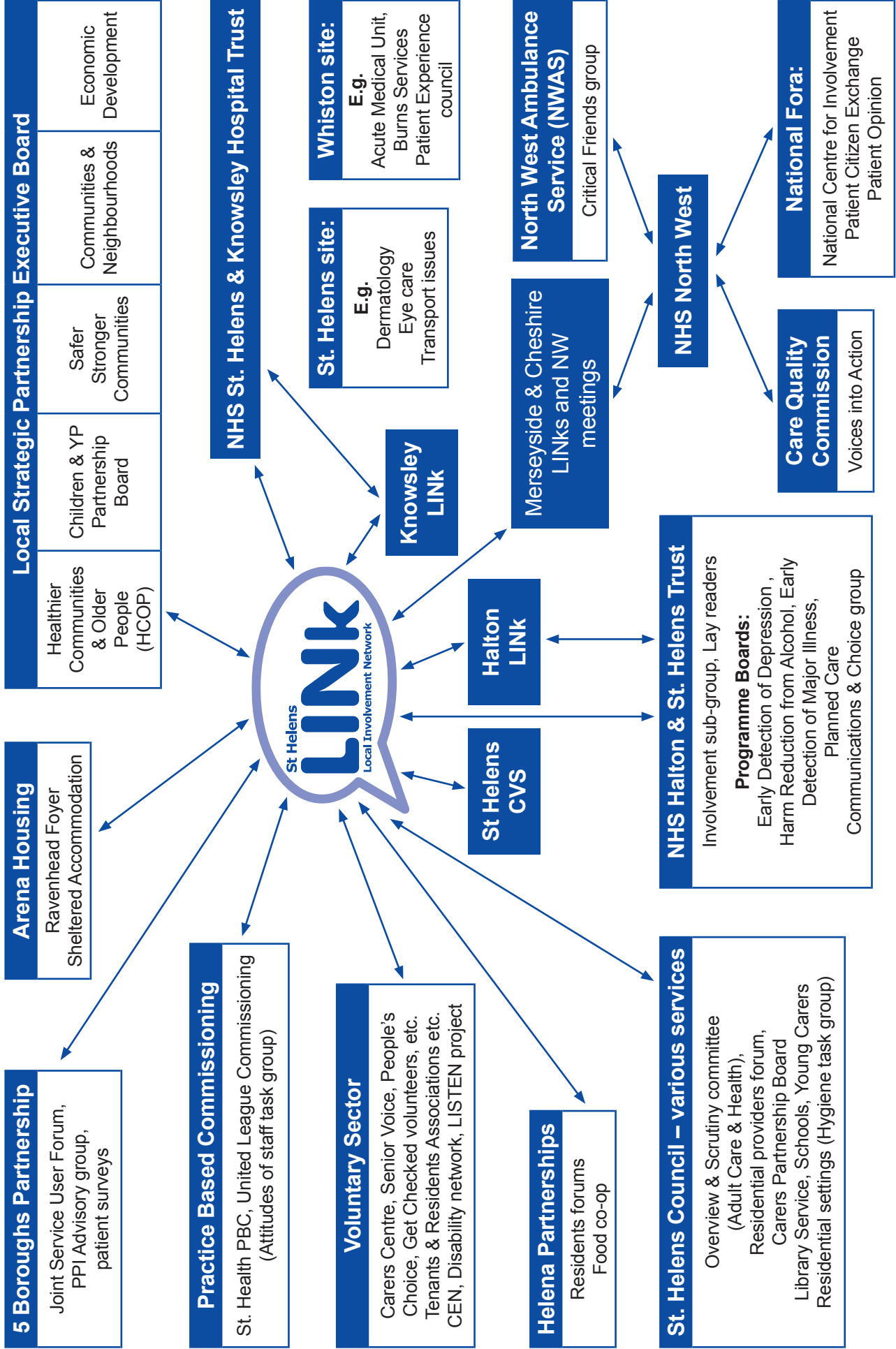
- drop-in events every 2 months, alongside the LISTEN project,
- focus groups on specific topics,
- information stands at prominent locations,
- surveys of the 'person on the street'
- fun-days and community festivals,
- outreach visits to groups, etc.
- newsletter every 3 months
- LINK website updated weekly

Monthly postal mail-outs and regular e-bulletins are also a regular way for the support team to keep the wider membership informed of relevant issues and opportunities for example events and training. The team also ensure LINK information is regularly promoted in various in-house magazines and intranet websites for staff across the local health and social care service providers.

A postcard campaign has also been a good way to get people's views anonymously, which has directed the work of the three tasks groups, especially by helping the LINK to decide which GP practices they should visit to observe attitudes of staff. 5000 postcards (see right) have been distributed across the borough in various locations and this will continue to be a method of communication for the future.



The following diagram shows the partners and various organisations that the LINK works with to feed in people's views about services and where we aim to improve involvement and engagement.



St. Helens LINK activities

The first awareness event for St Helens LINK took place in April 2009 and was attended by over 100 people. A third of the people who completed an equal opportunities monitoring form for the event had a disability.

Alongside finding out about LINK, becoming a LINK member and learning about other ways to feedback about health and social care services, everyone had the opportunity to answer two questions:

- 1) Why do people not feel able to have a say now about services?
- 2) How can LINK involve the whole community?

The main findings were:

- People were fearful of saying what they felt about the services in case they faced discrimination or the quality of their care suffered
- People felt their views weren't listened to or they didn't get feedback on any changes to services as a result
- People didn't know how to give comments and the processes for doing so should be more informal
- In terms of involving the whole community, outreach and getting to where people actually were (such as supermarkets and churches) would play an important role in raising LINK's profile.
- It was important to try to work with younger people, who often felt excluded.

Elections for the Board were held in May 2009 – 8 members were elected and another member to represent BME communities was co-opted shortly afterwards.

Our tenth Board member joined in January 2010.

Members of the St. Helens LINK Board

Roman Babij (St. Helens Mental Health Service Users to December 2009)

Harry Blackman

Jonathan Griffith

Margaret Leys

Bernie Lightfoot (Coalition for Disabled People)

Samuel Omar (BME Representative)

John Perry

Brenda Smith

Claire Wildman

Patricia Robinson

Additional task group members (task groups include members above):

Joan Young, Beryl Ford, Patricia Hill.

Enter & View training

The powers of LINKs' include the ability to 'enter and view' health and social care premises, usually by pre-arrangement but possibly without advance warning if thought necessary.

The LINK Board agreed that no visits should be carried out unless they were relevant to the work plan of LINK and as stated in guidance, members of the LINK would need to be authorised representatives before doing so.

Therefore no Enter & View visits were conducted during the period of this annual report, some visits did occur during May and June 2010.

Names of authorised representatives (authorised to Enter & View health or care premises on behalf of St. Helens LINK):

Harry Blackman

Jonathan Griffiths

Margaret Leys

Bernie Lightfoot

Away Day – February 2010

The LINK board had identified a number of areas they felt they needed further skills in, including learning about local structures and negotiation. An away day was arranged to invite partners to give an overview of their organisation

Members of the Board learnt about local partnerships structures & the areas of the LINK outcomes that they needed to make their priority. There was also some significant work done to agree the scope of the task groups and partners were invited to help secure information and to assist the LINK to complete certain jobs e.g. enter & view visits looking at hygiene.

Task groups – progress so far

As a result of the consultation with members of the public and various networks, the LINK Board prioritised three areas of health & social care services that the LINK should look at.

These were:

- **Attitudes of staff** – specifically GP practices
- **Hygiene** – care homes and Whiston hospital
- **Access to better quality Information**

Attitudes of staff – the work includes asking staff their views and mystery shopping visits to practices that the postcards returned have suggested we visit. From the staff survey, some practice staff say patients have the attitude problem. However, from postcards - most receptionists treat people well, some surgeries that you thought were bad are really trying to improve. If you don't understand why something is the way it is, ask the question and then if you're not satisfied - complain or change your GP!

Hygiene – enter & view visits to care homes were agreed with the Infection Control team. Initial surveys show that concerns about Whiston hospital cleanliness remain, although some people's views are based on experiences from 3 or 4 years ago. The hospital's infection control record is currently very good. Surveying people's views at the hospital are also planned.

Access to information – health & care services say information is available in different formats but this didn't match up with what the public say actually happens. Organisations that provide information are important, because people don't know what is available or what their rights are? This group has been crucial in helping the postcard campaign get to all parts of the community.

What's the impact?

Having the LINK in St. Helens has provided a platform for various services to consult a wider public than they might have previously on changes to a range of health and care services:

- Aids and equipment needs
- Audiology services
- Centre for Independent Living
- Chest pain
- Depression – early detection
- Diabetes
- End of life care service review
- Equality impact assessment of health services
- Foot care
- Long-term neurological conditions
- Musculo-Skeletal survey
- NHS constitution
- Ophthalmology pilot
- Obesity (scrutiny task group)
- Psychological therapies (documents at lay readers panel)
- Swine Flu
- Whiston hospital Acute Medical Unit and Patient Experience Council

Consulting and informing the community

Events held throughout the year have enabled services to talk to the public and the public to give their views back; here are just a few examples:

St. Helens Festival July 2009 (and events over the summer) – where one third of people told us that attitude of staff, specifically in GP practices was a priority.

Big Care Debate Sept 2009: 30 people attended, 20 being LINK members and the other ten from the wider public – to find out about & discuss Government's consultation on how to pay for care for an increasing older population.

Beat the Blues January 2010: 40 people came to enjoy music, learn 'how to sing' in a workshop, but also gave their views on the three LINK priority areas and the NHS constitution as well as viewing the marketplace of health & care services available, getting a free health check, etc.

Website – reports from members and local/national consultations are available for anyone to view, recent areas of interest include (followed by the number of people accessing the document):

- Charging for residential care (104)
- Choosing your GP (70)
- Merseyside's Transport plan (48)

LINK brings people together

At a LINK Board meeting, support workers for homeless people met with North West Ambulance Services, making both sides more aware of each other's difficulties in doing their jobs. Various other services have also met with the Board to disseminate information and ask for the LINK's opinion on service re-design.

Two members have also learnt about brokerage – and can now signpost people for help to get the best out of any individual budget they have control over. Another member has done a report on User-Led Organisations, which is how the St. Helens Centre for Independent Living will be managed.

LINK has also been able to signpost at least 15 individuals towards complaints processes around health & care services and supported some with their complaints or helped to communicate where people were not fully aware of what was available to them.

Membership of the LINK

Total numbers at 31.3.09	32
Total numbers at 31.3.10	137
Total numbers at 31.3.10 of which have a social care interest	20 members (stated interest in sheltered accommodation, learning disabilities, care/ carers)

Total number of members which represent the ethnicity & diversity of the St. Helens population e.g.	
Age	9 groups and several individuals
Gender	3 women's groups 1 Transgender group
Ethnicity/Race	1 BME organisation
Disability	2 organisations regarding Learning Disabilities; 11 members (mixture) representing physical and sensory disabilities 9 members (mixture) representing mental health issues
Sexual Orientation	1 Lesbian Gay Bisexual group
Number of active members involvement in management Boards, sub-groups or otherwise representing LINK	22
Total number of participants who have been involved but not become members	Estimated 600

Financial matters: 2009-2010 income & expenditure

The LINK and the LINK host monies are reported in one figure, as there has been no separate expenditure by the LINK.

Amount allocated to the local authority by Dept. of Health	£132,000 (stated in Dec 2007)
Funding received by the host from the local authority	(Income total): £137,072 (includes Year 1 underspend due to delayed start of LINK)
Amount of funding available to the LINK from the host (2009-10)	£137,072
Amount of funding carried over from the previous year (2008-9)	£ 47,150
Other income	nil
Budget for 2009-10*	£111, 977
Total spend by host organisation (and LINK)	(Expenditure): £115, 542
Of which:	£ 71, 859 – staff costs £ 34, 067 – office costs £ 9, 616 – LINK activities
Balance remaining at LINK*	£21,530 (underspend 2009-10) + year 1 underspend £47,150 = £68, 680

*(Includes 6 months of operating costs of LINK, due to delayed start of LINK by 6 months)

[N.B. operating costs for LINK support team included in figure remaining for final six months of contract April 2011-Sep 2011].

Key issues for the coming year

Training of LINK members will continue, so that the legacy in 2011 will be members that are able to negotiate for better services.

The Board & other members of LINK will be able to take advantage of free training in the 'Skilling Up for Stronger Voices' modules produced by NAVCA – the National Association for Voluntary & Community Associations.

This includes skills in learning about local democracy, partnership working, negotiation and how to be a better representative.

Proving the LINK's impact

Members can give their views on various services, but it can be difficult to distinguish the unique input from the LINK, when services have to evidence a number of views have been taken into consideration.

The LINK support team has used a number of ways to record where LINK members input has changed things for the better, these include:

- Perceptions – people are asked whether they feel health & social care services treat them with respect and this will be regularly monitored to see how it changes as the LINK continues. At this point, the proportion of respondent that feel respected by services is 58% (this was at 42% in January 2010)
- Changes to services – documents about services showing the changes made as a result of LINK's input, levels of involvement in partnerships and the self-worth of LINK representatives will all be monitored to show improvements to services.
- Task group recommendations and before and after measures e.g. the level of complaints at GP practices will be monitored to see if LINK is making people more aware, and less fearful, of having a say about the quality of services.

New task group areas – Transport, Dignity in Care

These two areas have regularly come up during the year as areas of concern to the wider public of St. Helens who have raised these issues with Board members.

Both areas also scored highly in the prioritisation of issues LINK should consider in summer 2009 and so will form the next task group areas and engage more members of the wider LINK in its activities.

Your way to have a say!

There are lots of ways you can tell us your views about health and social care services. Remember they are YOUR services – if you don't improve them, who will?

Please visit www.linksthelens.org.uk

Or pick up a postcard from your library, community centre, GP practice, pharmacy, optician, secondary school... and return to us Freepost!

Or come to a LINK drop-in, pop into CVS or find us at your local hospital or town centre.



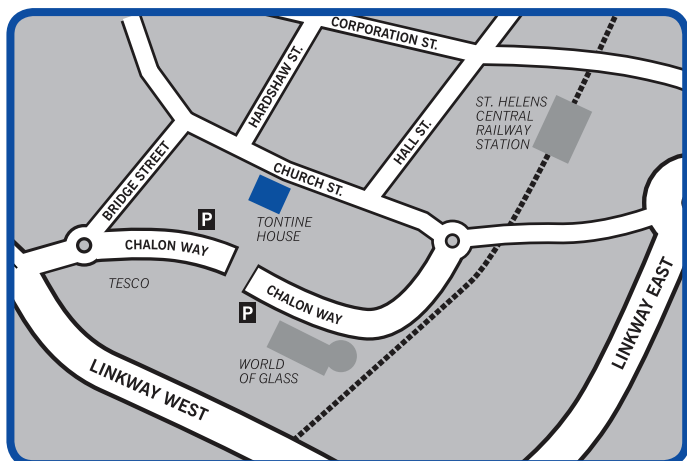
Contact us!

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