

Frequently Asked Questions about the Coventry Local Involvement Network

Section 1 - general

1.1 What is the Coventry LINK?

The Coventry Local Involvement Network (LINK) is the name given to the new independent network of local people, voluntary groups, and community groups working to give Coventry people a stronger say about their health and social care services. Like all the other LINKs throughout England, it was established by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to give everyone a greater say in their health and social care provision.

1.2 What is the purpose of the LINK?

All LINKs are networks for community engagement. Therefore, the purpose of the LINK is to bring together all the various groups, organisations, and people with an interest in health and social care within Coventry, and provide them with a stronger voice with which to make their needs, concerns, and praise known to the care commissioners within the city.

1.3 There are plenty of other organisations like the LINK already, why should I get involved?

Coventry LINK has not been established to replace the work of other similar groups and organisations. Rather, the purpose of the LINK is to bring all these existing groups, networks, and channels of communication together so that it is easier and more effective for those that wish to have a say in health and social care provision to do so. What is different about the LINK, however, is that it is a legal entity, established by Parliament, with key powers, and funding. The LINK is also independent of any other organisation.

1.4 Where does the LINK get its funding from?

The LINK gets its funding from Central Government. The funding is given to Coventry City Council who in turn passes it to the LINK host organisation.

1.5 What is the LINK host organisation?

Each LINK has a host organisation that is contracted to provide support to the LINK. This support includes:

- Promotion of the LINK and its work;
- Identifying, engaging with, and maintaining good relationship with local communities;
- Holding and maintaining accounts for the LINK's budget.

Each host organisation is accountable to the local authority in whose boundaries the LINK operate. The host organisation is also accountable to the LINK. For the Coventry LINK the host organisation is Voluntary Action Coventry.

Section 2 – structure, setup, & powers

2.1 What powers does the LINK have?

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gave all LINKs the following powers:

- The right to request information from health and social care commissioners and expect to receive it within a specific amount of time;
- The right to carry out visits to NHS and some social care services in an appropriate and safe manner to see if services are meeting the needs of local people;
- The right to make recommendations for change and expect a response to these;
- The right to refer issues to local council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees if it seems service providers are not taking action.

All LINKs are also given the opportunity to provide feedback on local health and social care provisions to the Care Quality Commission, the independent regulator of NHS and social care services throughout England.

2.2 What is the structure of the LINK?

The LINK does not have a set structure. Rather, The Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007 specified that each LINK should be adaptable to the needs of its members and of those groups and individuals that wish to take part in its work. The Coventry LINK believes in this principle of openness and is currently consulting on what structure best suits the needs of those living in Coventry. The LINK does, however, have a Steering Group. The purpose of the Steering Group is to ensure the LINK remains open and inclusive, and that the work it does accurately reflects the needs of those living within Coventry. The Steering Group does not control the LINK but instead works to keep the LINK productive and adhering to its values.

2.3 What are the LINK's values?

The LINK is currently consulting on what values it should uphold, however, all LINK members agree to abide by the Nolan Principles of Public Life. These are:

Respect – for all and their opinions;

Openness – in work, membership, and attitude towards difference;

Accountability – for decision, action, and conduct;

Honesty – in actions, transactions, and opinions;

Selfless – working for the good of all, not just self-gain;

Objectivity – making decision based on fact and merit, not emotion and half-truth;

Integrity – in thought, partnerships, and protection of these values;

Leadership – working together as one, providing example to all;

Equality – listening to all, not just one voice;

Diversity – being accessible to all, no matter what the barrier.

Section 3 – work of the LINK

3.1 What sort of work will the LINK take on?

The LINK has the power to investigate all NHS and social care services that are accessible to adults living in Coventry, and all NHS services that are available to children within the city. All these services fall into the following categories:

Hospital Services – those services that are based within an NHS acute Trust. This includes Maternity, Accident and Emergency, and diagnostic services.

Community Services – those services that are commissioned by NHS Coventry. This includes GPs, dentists, and pharmacies.

Mental Health Services – those services that are commissioned by the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust. This includes substance misuse services, Community Mental Health Teams, and learning disabilities services.

Social Care – those services that are commissioned by Coventry City Council for adults. This includes provision for carers, physical and sensory impairment provision, and care of the elderly.

The LINK can also investigate ambulatory services, such as patient transport, as well as how all these services work together.

3.2 How will the LINK work?

The purpose of the LINK is to give everyone within Coventry a greater say in how their health and social care is provided. To this end, the LINK will work using the following steps:

1. **Listening** – the LINK will actively engage and listen to as many of the different communities with Coventry as it can.
2. **Identifying** – From what it hears, the LINK will identify the key issues that are affecting those living within Coventry
3. **Investigating** – the LINK will investigate the issues it has identified as priorities, seeking out causes for the issues raised, and potential solutions.
4. **Reporting** – the LINK will report its findings to the appropriate service commissioner as well as to all those that have been involved in its work, including those that initially raised the issue.
5. **Acting** – The LINK will ensure that its report and recommendations are accepted and treated with proper respect, taking necessary steps if need be to ensure this.

3.3 What is the difference between an issue and a complaint?

A complaint relates to a specific incident at a specific time, usually regarding the treatment of a specific individual. An issue relates to a wider problem, something that affects many different people and often occurs more than once. For example, if a patient is not happy with a specific treatment he or she has received, that is a *complaint*. If research revealed that Coventry had a far higher teenage pregnancy rate than any other city, this would be an *issue*. The LINK does not have the power to investigate individual complaints. All complaints should be referred to the appropriate service commissioner.

3.4 How will the LINK decide upon which issues to investigate?

The LINK is currently consulting on how it will decide this. Three possible methods of choosing what issues to investigate are as follows:

Size – Issues are selected according to how many people they affect.

Severity – Issues are selected according to how much of an impact they are having on a particular communities health.

Voting – The LINK looks at all the issues it has been presented with and its members vote on which should be investigated first.

Sections 4 – involvement

4.1 How can I be involved with the LINK?

There are three main ways people and groups can be involved with the LINK:

Participant – A participant is a person or group that assists the LINK by expressing his or her view on health and social care within Coventry. This could be in the form of taking part in surveys, recounting service use experiences, or simply commenting on a project the LINK is working on.

Member – A member is a person or group that has agreed to join the LINK through the process of completing one simple form. All LINK members agree to abide by the LINK's values, its Terms of Reference, and agree to honour its Code of Conduct policy. Members of the LINK have a direct say in what issues the LINK should investigate and may volunteer to assist the working groups that look into those issues. Members do not have to attend meetings if they do not wish and are regularly kept up-to-date on the work of the LINK.

Steering Group – In order to join the steering group, a person must first be elected to it by the LINK or co-opted by agreement of the other steering group members. The steering group meet monthly and are responsible for ensuring the LINK is open, accountable, and is doing what it is supposed to be doing. Members of the Steering Group may also be asked to attend the committees of other organisations, such as the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as a voice for the whole LINK. Being a member of the steering group requires a commitment of approximately 2 ½ days a month.

4.2 Where and when does the LINK meet?

The LINK is a network of many different groups and individuals, and therefore does not have regular meetings when all its members come together. The LINK is currently consulting on the best way to ensure all its members are kept updated on what is happening regarding the LINK's work. Working groups, those that are directly investigating issues selected by the LINK, will meet as regularly as they need to, and this information will be passed on to the whole LINK. The Steering Group will meet one a month at a venue accessible to all. Details of these meeting can be found on the website.

4.3 How can I find out more about the Coventry LINK?

The Coventry LINK has a website:

www.coventrylink.org.uk

The postal address for the LINK is:

Coventry LINK,
Voluntary Action Coventry,
6th Floor,
Coventry Point,
Market Way,
Coventry,
CV1 1EA.

The telephone number is:

024 7622 0381

The Host Organisation is as follows:

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There is also a national website for all the LINKs throughout England. That website is: www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks