

**LINK Steering Group**  
**Thursday 24 July 2008 at 10.00 am**  
**Blaydon Room, Civic Centre, Gateshead**

**Present**

Kay Parker  
Vicky Parsons  
Alastair White  
Graeme Lyall  
Gev Pringle  
David Wallace  
Ian Mason  
Andi Parker

**In attendance**

Marge Greatbatch - GVOC (minute taker)

Harold Stookes **agreed** to take the Chair.

**1. Apologies** – Alison McCellan, Annie Murphy, Caroline Airs, Bill Llewelyn, Janice Todd, Dorothy Henley.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting/ Matters arising:** The minutes were **agreed** as an accurate record.

The LINK October event would be discussed in detail at the Promotional group meeting.

**3. LINK staffing & Budget statement:** GVOC's Director, Gev Pringle, gave an update on the current situation regarding recruitment for the LINK Administrator post and the LINK Co-ordinator post. Due to circumstances beyond his control, the Director has been forced to issue redundancy notices to two members of GVOC staff. He explained that under employment law, he is obliged to offer these staff members any suitable positions that become available.

Both of the staff members involved are known to many of the LINK members. Kim Newton, a friendly, competent administrator, has actually been doing this job for the LINK whilst the recruitment process was underway and Julie Mains, a Project Co-ordinator was formerly involved with the PPI forums as a Support Worker. Julie has worked at GVOC for almost 5 years and has proved herself to be dedicated, caring and popular colleague.

**Action**

The Director went on to point out that as soon as he had become aware of this situation he had consulted with various members individually and alerted the Operational Group who encouraged him to bring it to the Steering Group. He apologised for the way this had come about but stressed that Julie and Kim were ideal candidates for the posts on offer and he had no hesitation in recommending the endorsement of their appointments by the members.

The Chair asked for comments and a discussion ensued on the relationship between the Host (GVOC) and the Network. One member mentioned unease about being 'forced' to accept the appointments but added that this was in connection with the independence of the Network and not the two workers whom he knows and accepted would be an asset. The Chair pointed out that the independence of the LINK was not threatened. He reiterated that employment law must be adhered to by all employers not just GVOC.

The Chair asked the members if they endorsed the appointments – this was **agreed**.

Members then asked about the applications received in connection with the administrator post. The Director pointed out that all enquirers would be informed that the post had been filled.

**Budget Statement:** The Chair invited the Director to explain the figures. He began by stating that GVOC are in talks with the Council as to how to best utilise the projected surplus.

Other points discussed included; the start date for the Project Co-ordinator and volunteers expenses. Andi Parker pointed out that as soon as the expenses policy has been agreed the Council would expect the Network to pay expenses. This may be an issue for discussion on the use of the surplus. There was further discussion on the payment of expenses. All requests for staff training and events would be considered and authorised by the Steering Group.

The Chair asked for acceptance of the budget - **Agreed**

**A member** asked for a breakdown of the management & finance section of the budget. The Director would make sure this was available for a future meeting. He also reminded the members that they could expect quarterly budget updates and could request an update at any point during the year.

GP/YM

**4. Action Plan:** The Chair asked the Director to brief members. The Plan includes tasks for all of the Network groups and the Director went through the document answering questions as he progressed. Annie Murphy would update on the Host/LINK relationship when she returns from holiday. The Director then gave more information on key performance indicators for the Host, which will be formulated in agreement with the council and then presented to this group for comment. GVOC want all processes to be completely open on all levels.

Andi Parker announced that she would be pulling out of these meetings soon to concentrate on the monitoring process.

The Chair asked that the performance indicator document be added to the agenda in August for further discussion.

**5.LINK Policies – Draft Code of Conduct:** The Chair asked for the adoption of the policy. This was **proposed by D Wallace** and **seconded by A White**.

**Travel & Subsistence:** After a short discussion the policy was **adopted**.

Members then went on to discuss the administration of expenses. The Council have covered this expense so far as a gesture of goodwill to help get the LINK underway. However, now that the policy has been formally adopted, payments should be the responsibility of the Network. The Chair asked that it be **noted** that from 25<sup>th</sup> July 2008 the Network would be responsible for all expense claims.

**Registration Forms:** Updated registration forms for both groups and individuals were **accepted**.

**6. Darzi Report – The way forward:** The Chair briefed the members on this and asked for further comment. Other documents will follow on the recommendations contained in the report and the LINK could and should respond when necessary, for the benefit of the Gateshead community.

Members discussed the appalling health statistics in the North East and the apparent poor performance of health services in the region. Members thought the LINK could be instrumental in improving those statistics.

11.15 am Ian Mason left the room

**7. PCT Consultation:** The Chair asked members for any responses to be handed in. They would be sent back en masse for more of an impact.

GVOC  
Agenda  
August

KN to set  
up petty  
cash  
system

Members then discussed in detail; the polyclinic initiative and GP's hours and services, and the accessibility of those services. This would be discussed further when staff are in place.

**8. NHS Constitution:** This document was distributed and the members were advised to read it when they could. This will be discussed at the Operational Group as well. Responses to the document will be required within about 8 weeks.

**9. Any other business - LINK on GVOC website:** This is now live although the Director pointed out that eventually it was expected that the LINK would have its own website.

A member mentioned the Council's Gateshead ICT department who were offering free website design. This information could be useful for the future. Colin Bell at GVOC is knowledgeable in this field also.

The Chair commented that web pages should be monitored regularly and updated frequently. Members would be consulted further on this issue.

GVOC's Director read out a letter requesting a telephone interview to discuss 'Outsourcing in the NHS' as part of patient & public accountability. There followed a discussion on which of the members might have suitable knowledge on the subject. It was suggested that Christine Squires or Dorothy Henley might want to respond to this.

**GVOC**

Andi Parker distributed a draft, NHS, LINKs' Code of Conduct and the recent NHS bulletin. She went on to comment on NALM (National Association of LINK Members). This is a self-appointed group of ex-PPI forum members who have requested several detailed reports under the Freedom of Information Act in quite an aggressive manner. The reports requested include; the names and contact details of contractors in the Health Trusts and how local authority money was spent last year in certain areas of the borough.

There was a detailed discussion on this topic. Several of the members had attended a meeting of NALM some months ago not knowing anything about the Association who introduced themselves as the Regional LINK. Gateshead LINK was promptly declared members of NALM. The Chair expressed concern over this matter and members **agreed** that no one member of the LINK had the authority to represent the whole Gateshead LINK.

**GP**

There was further discussion on responding to requests for such detailed

information and the Chair recommended caution when dealing with 'self-appointed' groups. The Director offered to find out more information from GVOC staff who attended the meeting at the Copthorne Hotel when NALM were present.

**GP/AM  
draft  
letters**

Andi added that NALM were not recognised by the Department of Health and suggested that Gateshead LINK distance itself in this early stage of development. It was suggested that letters be written to NALM and to the PCT disassociating Gateshead LINK with NALM. The Director would ask Annie Murphy to draft letters for discussion when she returns from holiday.

**10. Time & date of next meeting:** Confirmed as Thursday 21 August 2008 10.00 am – 12.00 noon, Bridges Room, Civic Centre, Gateshead.