

**Gateshead LINK  
Operational Task Group**

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2008  
10am – 12 noon  
Blaydon Room**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome and apologies**

**Present:**

Dorothy Henley  
Dave Wallace  
Harold Stookes (Chair)  
Gev Pringle  
Alistair White  
Ian Mason  
Lyn Boyle  
Kim Newton (Minute taker)

**Apologies:**

Caroline Airs  
Annie Murphy  
Alison McClellan  
Kay Parker  
Bill Llewellyn  
Andi Parker

The group thanked Lyn Boyle for attending on behalf of Gateshead Council.

Dorothy Henley was nominated and accepted as Chair.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

Gev updated the group on the redeployment situation of the agreed LINK workers, and the following was noted:

Julie Mains will commence employment for the LINK on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008.

Kim Newton will work 2 days (Thursday and Friday) for the LINK commencing 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008, she will commence full time employment with the LINK on 1<sup>st</sup> October.  
Gev informed the group if LINK work needed to be actioned there could be some flexibility with the workers.

Clarity was sought on Annie Murphy's position after the workers were in post. It was noted that Annie would be Project Manager of both the Community Network and the LINK project and her role would be at a more strategic level.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

### **3. Discipline and Complaints Policy (continued)**

The document was circulated to the group with the agreed amendments from the previous meeting completed. The changes were accepted with 2 minor amendments.

The Group continued to work through the rest of the document and it was agreed Gev and Kim would process the draft document for ratification at the Steering Group on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2008.

(See Below)

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**Gateshead LINK  
DRAFT  
Policy and Procedure for  
Received Complaints about LINK Volunteers**

1. The Gateshead LINK is committed to ensuring the highest standards of conduct and performance in all aspects of its work. This applies to all LINK Volunteer(s), including members of the Steering Group and Task Groups. (Herein afterwards referred to as LINK Volunteer(s))

Where LINK Volunteer(s) do not meet agreed standards, it is essential to ensure that fair and appropriate action is taken.

Anyone may make a complaint about a Gateshead LINK Volunteer(s).

2. This policy aims to:

- Demonstrate the recognition of the Gateshead LINK that a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that a member of the community or LINK Volunteer wishes to have addressed. It is also an opportunity to improve the service.
- Ensure all complaints are treated positively, courteously and equally.
- Ensure all complaints and any action taken is recorded and the complainant informed of any progress.

### **3. PROCESSES AND DECISIONS**

#### **3(i) Initiating the Complaints Procedure**

- The Complaints Procedure may be initiated by a written or verbal complaint to Gateshead LINK staff.

#### **4. Stage 1 – Informal Action**

- It is intended that most issues can be resolved informally through communication, mediation and training, as appropriate. Therefore, whenever possible and with due regard to the seriousness of the issue, the LINK Project Coordinator will attempt to resolve the matter informally.
- This will take the form of a discussion with the objective of helping the LINK Volunteer(s) to reach an appropriate Standard of Conduct, or resolving the particular issue which led to the problem arising. Following the discussion the LINK Project Coordinator will write to those involved summarising the action taken.
- If a breach of a Standard of Conduct involves possible criminal activity informing the police should be considered.

#### **5. Stage 2 – Investigation**

- If an issue cannot be resolved informally, or is considered by the LINK Project Coordinator to be too serious to be handled informally, the next stage is a formal investigation.

- LINK officers, Chair and Deputy Chair of the LINK will send a letter to the LINK Volunteer(s) and the complainant explaining that a formal investigation will be carried out and the reasons given
- The target is to conclude the investigation in 30 working days.

## **6. Suspension**

- If the Standards of Conduct matter is considered by the Chair and Deputy Chair to be serious enough to affect the LINK Volunteer(s)' ability to properly carry out their role, or in cases where the Gateshead LINK name could be brought into disrepute, LINK Volunteer(s) (who continue to be active) may be suspended for the duration of the investigation
- The Chair will write to the LINK Volunteer(s) and complainant as appropriate, explaining that the Volunteer(s) will be suspended for the period of the Standards of Conduct procedure and will not be entitled to attend meetings or carry out the duties of a LINK Volunteer while suspended.
- The suspension itself is a neutral act and does not imply that the LINK Volunteer(s) has behaved inappropriately.

## **7. Outcome of Investigation**

- If the outcome of the investigation is that there is no Standards of Conduct case to answer, this should be communicated in writing by the Chair to the LINK Volunteer(s) and where possible face-to-face. The suspension will cease upon receipt of the letter. The complainant will be informed as appropriate.
- If the outcome is that there is a Standards of Conduct case to be considered a Standards of Conduct meeting will be held and any suspension will continue. The LINK Volunteer(s) will be informed accordingly.

## **8. Stage 3 – Standards of Conduct Meeting**

- A Standards of Conduct meeting will be held at an appropriate location convenient to the LINK Volunteer(s) and if possible within 30 working days of the conclusion of the investigation. The Chair and Deputy Chair will agree the appropriate panel members.
- The letter inviting the LINK Volunteer(s) to attend the meeting will explain the format, those attending and the right to representation.
- The LINK Volunteer(s) will be informed of the nature of the Standards of Conduct matter and the detail of the case outlined.
- At the meeting the LINK Volunteer(s) will be asked to give an explanation in response to the allegation.
- LINK Volunteers are entitled to be accompanied by a friend, colleague or independent advocate, not acting in a legal capacity.
- If a LINK Volunteer fails to attend without reasonable cause the Standards of Conduct meeting will be held in their absence and the proceedings will be recorded.
- In the event that the panel's decision is not unanimous the Panel Chair will have the casting vote.

## **9. Outcome of the Standards of Conduct Meeting**

There are three possible outcomes to a Standards of Conduct meeting -

### **9(i) Issue not upheld:**

This should be communicated in writing to the LINK Volunteer(s) and the complainant, as appropriate. The suspension will cease upon the receipt of the letter.

## **9(ii) Issue upheld:**

Written notice will be offered by the Panel Chair and will state –

- details of the misconduct that has resulted in the warning
- details of the necessary action (which could optionally include a period of suspension for re-training) to improve the situation and any period of review decided upon
- that any further breach of conduct may result in a further Standard of Conduct interview and removal from Gateshead LINK.

The complainant will be informed as appropriate.

## **10. End of LINK participation:**

- The LINK Volunteer(s) will be provided with written confirmation from the Panel Chair, stating the reasons for and date on which participation will end.
- The letter should state the date of the meeting, the outcome and the right to appeal. Whenever possible the LINK Volunteer(s) should be informed of the Panel's decision in a face-to-face meeting.
- The complainant will be informed as appropriate.
- **Outcomes should be communicated in 5 working days.**

## **11. Stage 4 - Appeal**

- A LINK Volunteer(s) has a right to appeal against any Standards of Conduct decision. Appeals should be lodged within 14 days of receipt of the outcome of the Standards of Conduct meeting.
- The Appeal Panel will be appointed by the Chair and Deputy Chair. The panel will decide whether to conduct another hearing, or whether to review papers. Appeal hearings will take place as soon as is reasonably practicable. The appeal

outcomes will be to uphold the decision of the Standards of Conduct panel, to alter the outcome, or to fully re-instate the LINK Volunteer(s).

- The decision of the appeal will be communicated in writing by the Panel Chair. The decision of the appeal will be final.
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#### **4. Declaration of Interest Form**

The following model documents were circulated for discussion:

- Declaration of Interests
- Register of Interests
- Guidance on Declaration of interests

A lengthy discussion took place and it was decided develop simpler easier to read version. Gev agreed to produce this for the group.

#### **5. Any other business**

None

#### **6. Date and time of next meeting**

**28<sup>th</sup> August 2008, 10.00a.m - 12.00noon, Bridges Room**