

# Visiting Health & Social Care Services - Policy of the Plymouth LINK



## Introduction

Local involvement networks (LINKs) give local people a stronger voice helping to improve health and social care services. For LINKs to do their job effectively, there will be times when it is useful to see services at work to validate information given to the LINK. Government legislation has given the LINKs the ability to visit services to observe and assess how they work

The Plymouth LINK can visit health and social care services provided and commissioned by:

- NHS Plymouth
- Plymouth Hospitals Trust
- Plymouth City Council

Visiting services is a responsibility and one that will not be undertaken lightly. To support LINKs to understand this responsibility and make sure there is a consistent approach to visits, a national 'Code of Conduct' has been produced to guide LINKs on when, why, how and by whom visits should be carried out. The Plymouth LINK has adopted this Code of Conduct.

## Members of the Visiting Team

- Plymouth LINK will advertise the opportunity to become a member of the Visiting Team to its network.
- Interested members will go through:-
  - ◇ An enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) check.
  - ◇ Training on the Code of Conduct, equality and diversity, Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA).
  - ◇ Authorisation by the Chair (or Vice Chair) of the Stewardship Group.
  - ◇ Coaching in techniques to talk to staff and service users to record information/report on the visit.

- Interested members will also be asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest, for example, any connections to Health and Social Care that might influence a visit, or mean that they could not be unbiased.
- The Plymouth LINK aims for members of the Visiting team to work in pairs or more, they will not visit alone. There are lone working guidelines and safety measures for any volunteers involved in LINK activities without staff present.
- Members of the Visiting team will be matched to visits depending on their experience, knowledge and taking into account any potential conflicts of interest.
- It will be agreed in advance which aspects of the service the Visiting team will be looking at and what (if any) questions will be asked and to whom.

### **Choosing to visit a service**

The Plymouth LINK decides on its work plan based on the issues identified by local people. A decision-making process is used to help the Stewardship Group to identify the priorities for the LINK and the areas it will work on. Visits will be considered as part of work on a particular issue or service and will be agreed by the Stewardship Group or focus group considering that area of work. Visits will most often follow research into an issue or service to provide the LINK with the opportunity to check out information it has received and help it to see how a service works.

Although most visits will be arranged in advance, it is possible in exceptional circumstances, for the LINK to visit without prior agreement.

The Plymouth LINK is aware that services can receive visits and Inspections from other groups (for example regulators such as the Care Quality Commission). To avoid duplicating work and reducing the impact on service providers of such visits, the Plymouth LINK will liaise with these groups (and the leads for NHS Plymouth and Plymouth Hospital Trust) when co-ordinating a visit or arrange to carry out a joint visit if needed.

### **Talking to services**

The Plymouth LINK wants to work in partnership with services to support them to make improvements based on public needs. We recognise that visits may not always be seen positively by services and we aim to liaise closely with service providers to understand their services and communicate with

them about any planned visits, background information and the remit of the visits. There may be occasions where this is not appropriate.

The Plymouth LINK will also liaise with the manager and staff of services to make sure that contact with service users and carers is appropriate and does not compromise the treatment or privacy of anyone involved.

To help local Health and Social Care services to understand the remit of the LINK and the potential for the LINK to visit in the future, the Plymouth LINK will contact services to introduce the LINK and provide a copy of the Code of Conduct and other relevant guidelines.

### **Reporting on visits**

The Host Team will support members of the Visiting Team to prepare a report of their visit based on their findings. Plymouth LINK aims to have a draft report within 10 working days of the visit (where possible). The report will be agreed by the Chair (or Vice Chair) of the Stewardship Group and the manager of the Host team and will be sent to the service provider within 20 working days of the visit. The service provider has the opportunity to raise any concerns or issues with the report (within a further 10 working days) that will then be considered by the Visiting team, Stewardship Group and the Host. The final report, including any agreed changes from the service provider and any recommendations from the Plymouth LINK, will be produced and sent to the service provider commissioner, regulators, Overview and Scrutiny and others (as appropriate).

This policy should be read in combination with the NHS Centre for Involvement 'Code of Conduct' relating to visits to enter and view services.