
Date: 3 September 2008

LEEDS PEOPLE GET MORE SAY IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

A new Leeds Local Involvement Network (LINK) is to give Leeds people a louder voice in shaping health and social care services in their city.

National charity, Shaw Trust, has signed a contract with Leeds City Council, to set up and support the LINK as an independent watchdog, monitoring the quality of health and care services received by people in Leeds. It is funded by the government's Department of Health.

Once up and running, the LINK will:

- Investigate matters of concern in the sphere of health and social care;
- Seek information from service providers and make reports and recommendations on the response;
- Have powers to enter a range of sites, including hospitals, clinics, care homes and day services and view the services they provide;
- Carry out spot checks to see if services are working well;
- Use its powers to hold services to account and bring about improvement;
- Refer issues to Leeds City Council's Scrutiny Boards.

The LINK will be open both to individuals and to interested Voluntary, Community and Faith groups.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

LINKs are being established throughout the country and replace the former Patient and Public Involvement Forums, which were closed down by the Government in March this year.

Between April and the formal establishment of the LINK, a group of local users of health and care services has been working with the Council and the Leeds NHS to deal with issues which could not wait, and to plan for the LINK.

Joy Fisher of the Leeds Service Users and Carers Alliance chairs the group. She said:

“We are delighted that the process of procuring a host organisation is complete and we look forward to working with the Shaw Trust to ensure that the voices of patients and users of social care services are heard and taken proper account of. The new organisation will be fully independent, both of the council and the health service in Leeds.

Councillor Peter Harrand, Leeds City Council’s executive board member for adult health and social care, said:

“This is an important new development in promoting people’s participation in making services work effectively. In a city of the size and diversity of Leeds, it is important that we extend opportunities for people to become involved in monitoring the quality of their care as widely as possible.

“I am especially hoping that the LINK will give a voice to some of our most vulnerable people, who often lack the opportunity or the confidence to tell us what they think.”

Now the contract has been awarded, Shaw Trust will set up a local contact centre and advertise for people and groups to be part of the LINK. Patients, service users and carers will be encouraged to bring their vast experience so that the LINK can monitor and improve care services in the city.

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Lesley Knapton, Service Development Manager at Shaw Trust, said:

“We are delighted that Leeds City Council has chosen our organisation to support the new LINK. Shaw Trust is all about enabling and empowering people to have a voice and be heard – we do it every day with our clients in many parts of the country.”

Notes to editors

Shaw Trust is a national charity that provides training and work opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market due to disability, ill health or other social circumstances. It is the largest voluntary sector provider of employment services for disabled people in the UK.

Shaw Trust supported over 40 Patient and Public Involvement Forums across England and will also be the host for a number of the new LINKs.

Individuals, groups and organisations interested in signing up to the LINK can visit <http://www.communityvoicesonline.org> or, to find out more, email dinah.shaw@shaw-trust.org.uk

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