



Local Involvement Network (LINK) Host Commissioning in London: Local Authority, Host and Voluntary Sector Experiences

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for:
London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC)

Prepared by:
Simon Tanner
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Executive Summary

- This report is based upon the results of surveys with 91 per cent (30) of all London local authorities, 61 per cent (20) of London Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS), and 61 per cent (20) of the appointed Local Involvement Network (LINK) Host organisations in London. Overall, the report features data on 75 per cent of all the LINK Host appointments made in England up to December 2008.

Local Authority Perspectives

- Our results confirm that all 33 London Boroughs have now appointed a full term LINK Host organisation;
- 47 per cent of authorities had appointed an interim Host, in only two boroughs where this occurred did the interim Host assume full term Host responsibilities;
- Voluntary or third sector organisations have been appointed as LINK Hosts in 27 (82 per cent) of the 33 London boroughs;
- Private sector LINK Hosts have been appointed in six London boroughs;
- 27 per cent of London boroughs have appointed their local CVS or equivalent voluntary and community sector (VCS) network as their LINK Host¹;
- Organisations with head offices outside the borough of appointment operate LINK Host activities in 36 per cent of London boroughs (12 in total);
- Only three London boroughs operate Community Empowerment Network (CEN) and LINK Host activities as part of the same contract;
- No LINK Hosts have been jointly procured, although Enfield, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest conducted a collaborative tender exercise, they selected separate LINK Hosts. In all 19 boroughs (58 per cent) share the same six LINK Hosts;
- 33 different models of LINK Host commissioning have been used across London;
- Comparison with national figures shows that London local authorities have contracted LINK Hosts to a total value of over £11.5 million at a per head of population cost of £1.99, whilst outside the Greater London area 69 LINK Host

¹ Croydon Voluntary Action's appointment as Host remains subject to contract.

contracts have been let to a total value in excess of £32.9 million at a per head cost of £1.35 over three years;

- The overall value of contracted funding for LINK Host activities in London is almost 1.5 times higher than contracts outside Greater London though at an individual local authority level contracted spend in London ranges from a low of £1.25 per head up to a high of £3.01 per head;
- Across England and London 64 per cent of all LINK Host contracts have been awarded to local CVS or VCS organisations or one of four other organisations;
- 26 per cent of LINK Host opportunities are contracted with local CVS or equivalent VCS organisation;
- 15 per cent of contracts have been awarded to the Shaw Trust, nine per cent to the Carers Federation, eight per cent to Help and Care, and six per cent to the Health Advocacy Partnership (HAP) UK Ltd;
- Needs analysis work as part of the LINK Host commissioning process has involved the greatest share of stakeholders, but current patients were the least likely to be involved in LINK Host commissioning;
- Primary Care Trust (PCT) representatives were involved by a majority of local authorities in all phases of the commissioning process. Nine out of ten of all local authorities said that their needs analysis work had involved PCT representatives, 87 per cent involved PCT representatives in the development of the specification, almost two thirds (57 per cent) had a PCT representative on the tender panel, and over two thirds (67 per cent) involved a PCT representative in the final Host selection;
- A majority of London local authorities used the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) process to advertise their LINK Host opportunity, whilst 80 per cent published it on their authority website and 73 per cent publicised it through local VCS networks and through the local and national press and supply2gov website;
- 67 per cent of local authorities in London used a two stage commissioning process with 33 per cent reporting higher than expected levels of information requests, and 20 per cent more than expected tenders received, though 53 per cent report receiving less tenders than expected;
- In one stage authorities, in London 112 requests were made for the invitation to tender (ITT) leading to 44 tenders being submitted. 43 per cent of these tenders were submitted by VCS organisations and 50 per cent of VCS tenders were successful;
- In two stage process authorities, 188 requests for the pre-qualification questionnaire were received leading to 93 being returned and 96 organisations

being invited to submit a tenders. 67 final tenders were submitted with 37 per cent being submitted by VCS organisations with 45 per cent of these tenders being successful;

- Most local authority respondents do not know if existing LINK Host funding is greater or less than previous Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) funding;
- London local authorities identify that they employ 17 full time and 27.5 part time staff to manage and administer LINK Host contracts. One fifth of London local authorities say that they do not use LINK Host funding for their own management costs, whilst in others between 1.9 and 17.1 per cent of total contract funding is used for LINK Host management and administration activities equating to a total cost of just under £725,000 for three years;
- London local authorities generally believe that the VCS was involved a lot in the LINK Host commissioning and that the overall process went well, 72 per cent thought the VCS was well represented amongst received tenders;
- 70 per cent of London local authorities have established service quality measures and 86 per cent of those authorities are satisfied with the measures established.

LINK Host Perspectives

- 85 per cent of appointed LINK Host organisations define themselves as VCS or third sector organisations, with 40 per cent being CVS;
- 80 per cent of all LINK Hosts have charitable status and 45 per cent operate regionally, 50 per cent operate sub-regionally, and 40 per cent operate nationally;
- 30 per cent of London LINK Host organisations currently deliver health and social care services and 80 per cent have been previously involved in PPI activities before, most commonly in Community Empowerment Networks (CENs), PPI Forums, and Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs);
- Only a minority of LINK Hosts were previously involved in Community Health Council (CHC) or the Commission for Public and Patient Involvement in Health (CPPIH) activities;
- Only three Host organisations in London (covering 11 London boroughs) have bid outside Greater London for other LINK Host contracts;
- All LINK Host appointees in London are delivering their activities from a base within the borough of appointment;
- Currently, LINK Host organisations use a total of 91 staff to deliver their activities, 32 who are full time, 17 part time, and 42 who are volunteers;

- In the future this expected to rise to 115 staff with an additional 8 full time staff and 16 extra volunteers;
- 55 per cent of current LINK Hosts do not use any part time staff to deliver their activities, whilst 80 per cent do not utilise any volunteers;
- For 35 per cent of LINK Hosts governance structures are still under development, though elections for members are a common theme of emerging models;
- LINK Hosts say they have been involved little in needs analysis, priority setting or specification development work as part of the commissioning of the LINK Host in their local area;
- LINK Host organisations are generally positive about the commissioning process, 70 per cent thought it was appropriate and 75 per cent did not think it discriminated against voluntary or third sector organisations.

CVS Perspectives

- 30 per cent of responding CVS had been selected as the LINK Host organisation for their local area;
- At least 15 CVS bids to be LINK Host in London local authorities were made with 60 per cent being successful;
- Six CVS did not submit any bids for LINK Host contracts in London;
- 40 per cent of the 13 CVS not appointed as LINK Hosts for their areas are unsatisfied with the eventual choice of LINK Host in their area, this rises to 57 per cent amongst CVS who bid unsuccessfully;
- CVS respondents are less likely than local authorities to believe that the CVS/VCS was involved a lot in the needs analysis, priority setting and specification development for the LINK Host commissioning;
- CVS experiences of LINK Host commissioning are less positive than other survey respondents such that 50 per cent of CVS respondents think that the LINK Host specification was tailored to local needs compared with 73 per cent of local authorities;
- 45 per cent of CVS think the commissioning process for the LINK Host contract was appropriate compared to 70 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts;
- 40 per cent of CVS thought the LINK Host commissioning process did discriminate against the VCS and third sector compared with 15 per cent of

appointed LINK Host organisations, whilst 72 per cent of local authorities thought the VCS was well represented in tenders received;

- 15 per cent of London CVS said their LINK Host commissioning experience was better than previous commissioning experiences compared to 40 per cent of appointed LINK Host organisations;
- 35 per cent of London CVS thought the LINK Host commissioning was well handled by their local authority compared with 80 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts.

Recommendations

1. That a follow up study of existing LINK Host arrangements in London be considered that includes more detailed case study work to identify some of the key issues that underpin the problems experienced by CVS and VCS organisations highlighted by this report;
2. That LVSC seek to work with each LINK Host appointee to facilitate networking with the local VCS in those areas and to support the training and development needs in those organisations;
3. That the potential added value of a pan London VCS infrastructure organisation dealing specifically with health and social care issues be investigated by LVSC. This organisation could act as a single point of contact for the VCS and policy makers to facilitate improved information sharing, consultation, feedback and networking to underpin the work of London LINK Hosts, but also the increased responsibilities of PCTs and Health Authorities to consult and engage with their local communities.

Introduction

This report provides details of the findings from research work conducted across the 33 London Boroughs into the commissioning and establishment of Local Involvement Network (LINK) Host organisations.

The establishment of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) is a key plank in Government attempts to improve accountability of public services, as well as a key approach to engage the wider public in shaping public service delivery in their local areas.

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in the delivery of health and social care services has a long history with the first formal structures – Community Health Councils (CHCs) – dating from the mid 1970s. CHCs were replaced in 2003 by a range of organisations that included Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs), Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS), the Independent Complaints and Advocacy Service (ICAS) and Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIFs)².

LINKs were created to replace the Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) forums by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. LINKs are a specific mechanism to create networks across local authority areas with social service responsibilities to provide wider opportunities for user involvement in the planning and delivery of health and social care services in those areas (Taylor et al. 2007)³.

The Department of Health identifies that for LINKs :

"their primary role is to enable local individuals and groups to actively influence local care services, from planning and commissioning to delivery." (p.4, DoH 2007).

Furthermore there are a number of key features of LINKs outlined in the guidance material (DoH 2007) identifying that LINKs will:

- Have members and participants who are volunteers;
- Be established as 'inclusive' to enable widespread involvement from all sections of local communities especially those from 'difficult to involve' or 'seldom heard' groups;
- Aim to bring diverse groups together as well as representing other networks in the local area.

² More detail on the history of PPI activity can be found in the Health Select Committee (2007) 'Patient and Public Involvement in the NHS' Volume 1 of the Third Report of the 2007-07 Session, House of Commons, London.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmhealth/278/278i.pdf>

³ Taylor, J. Tritter, J. and Dimov, M. (2007) 'Local Involvement Networks: Learning from the Early Adopter Programme' NHS Centre for Involvement, Coventry. Available to download at: <http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/docs/EAPS%20final%20report.pdf>

A key component of the delivery of these networks is the appointment of an organisation to oversee the development of the LINK in a local area. These 'LINK Hosts' are expected to enable, support, and facilitate the activities of the LINK to:

- Encourage and support more people to help shape local care services including the commissioning of services and the way they are run;
- Actively canvass local communities for views and experiences of local care services;
- Act as a key mechanism for the monitoring, review, and the holding to account of local services;
- Act as a communication route for local people to tell commissioners, reviewers, and scrutinisers of local services how services might be improved (National Centre for Involvement 2008)⁴.

In particular the guidance material on LINKs and LINK Hosts highlights the importance of the independence of these agencies and organisations from any government organisations to facilitate all elements of local communities in expressing their views about health and social care services in their locality⁵.

Host organisations were to have been procured by each local authority in time for the 1st April 2008 deadline, or transitional arrangements were to have been put in place to run to 30th September 2008. However, a further change to the LINK regulations was required to give some local authorities across England more time to appoint LINK Host organisations. The new regulations meant that Local Authorities now have until the 31st December 2008 to commission and appoint a LINK Host for their area⁶.

⁴ National Centre for Involvement (2008) 'Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) Guide No.5 - Procuring a Host' NHS Centre for Involvement, Coventry. Available to download at: <http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/docs/Guide%205%20-%20Procuring%20a%20Host%20to%20support%20LINKs.pdf>

⁵ NHS Centre for Involvement 'What LINKs mean for health and social care commissioners and managers' NHS Centre for Involvement, London. Available at: <http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/docs/Guide%202%20-%20What%20LINKs%20mean%20for%20Health%20and%20Social%20Care%20Commissioners%20and%20Managers.pdf>

⁶ See http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi_20081877_en_1 for details of the amendments to the legislation.

Research Questions and Methodology

London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) has already conducted some initial research into the involvement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the activities of Host organisations or procurement of them. An interim report in June 2008⁷ highlighted a 'mixed picture' of recruitment and procurement of Host organisations across the 33 London Boroughs with 16 having appointed organisations (some in an interim or transitional capacity) of which 14, appointed a VCS organisation.

Research Questions

The original work conducted by LVSC had the following primary aims:

- To identify how many local VCS organisations were commissioned as Host organisations in London;
- To investigate the procurement process in each borough;
- To identify good practice in involving the VCS in the procurement process;
- To inform future VCS research needs in relation to LINKs.

These primary aims still hold for this work and our work collated information to answer the aims above and the following research questions across all 33 London Boroughs to:

1. Identify whether a Host organisation has been commissioned;
2. Identify the nature and type of the appointed organisation;
3. Assess how the procurement process was conducted;
4. Identify what budget is available for the LINK, and how much is utilised by the local authority for management and administration of the contract;
5. Collate the number of organisations that applied to be the Host, and what proportion of these were VCS, not-for-profit, or private;
6. Assess how tender specifications were developed and the range of organisations involved;
7. Identify the proportion of appointed Host organisations that deliver health and social care services themselves;
8. Collate details of previous patient involvement practice and process activity;
9. Collate details of governance arrangements for each LINK;

⁷ LVSC (2008) 'Local Involvement Networks in London: Commissioning a host organisation – Interim Report' LVSC, London. Available to download at: <http://www.lvsc.org.uk/files/98895/FileName/LocalInvolvementNetworksinLondonhostsinterimreport.pdf>

10. Collate details of LINK staffing arrangements at appointed Host organisations;
11. Identify if any other local authority funded Community Empowerment Networks or VCS health and social care forums exist in each borough;
12. Collate overviews of the relationship between local VCS organisations and appointed LINK Host organisations;
13. Identify Community Health Council funding prior to abolition;
14. Collation of the measurement mechanisms for the support quality of each appointed Host organisation.

Five interlinked elements of data collection were used to address these questions with the survey elements being conducted to ensure that we received views on the LINK Host commissioning activity in each London Borough. It was hoped that this would be covered by each of the three surveys – telephone surveys with LINK Host and Local Authorities, and an online survey with CVSs in those areas, but in reality it was not possible to get responses across all three surveys for each area. Response details will be highlighted later.

Methodology

Overall the five interlinked data collection elements involved:

1. **Desk based analysis** – This secondary analysis work involved the following elements:
 - a. **Analysis of contract award notices** for Host organisation appointment on the government procurement website, Supply2.gov. This unique dataset provided opportunity to review and analyse the hosting decisions made in 73 other local authority areas in England⁸ covering 80 LINK Host contracts. This analysis provides particular added value to this study by providing comparative information on funding decisions and Host arrangements in other parts of England.
 - b. **Literature review** of National Centre for Involvement, LVSC, and other Government documentation including guidance documents, and research and evaluation studies on LINKs and LINK development.

This highlighted key elements for data analysis frameworks as well as ensuring our questionnaires conducted a rigorous assessment of the Host organisation procurement process in each borough.

2. **Telephone interviews with appointed Host organisations** – Contact was attempted with each of the Host organisations appointed across the 33 London Boroughs using contact lists supplied on the NHS Centre for Involvement Website. Telephone interviews lasting up to 25 minutes were conducted with respondents being questioned on their experiences of the procurement processes, details of their

⁸ Though this number also includes 3 areas where joint commissioning of LINK Host was undertaken.

own organisation, progress of Host work thus far, measures of support quality, and any perspectives on potential improvements or enhancements to the procurement process that they believe might be beneficial. In each case an appointment was booked with a respondent and a copy of the questionnaire to be covered was emailed to the respondent. This allowed them to prepare some of the information we were asking about in the survey – most notably budget figures.

In cases where the LINK Host contact details were not available to us we sourced these via the local authority interviews;

3. **Telephone interviews with local authority leads for Host procurement and appointment** – we conducted telephone interviews with the main local authority lead for Host procurement and appointment in each of the 33 London Boroughs. These 20 minute interviews focussed upon how the procurement was organised and handled, budgetary considerations, numbers of applications received, measures of support quality, comments on the experiences, and highlighted enhancements or improvements to commissioning practice that might be made. Contact details were sourced via the NHS Centre for Involvement website. Respondents were telephoned to book appointments and were emailed copies of the questionnaire to allow preparation of some of the requested information prior to interview – most notably budget figures and numbers of tender responses received. A series of questions at the beginning of the questionnaire were included to make sure we were speaking with individuals who were fully aware or directly involved in the LINK Host commissioning.
4. **Online survey with CVS leads on LINKs** – we conducted a short online survey with the key CVS leads on LINKs using online research tool, Survey Monkey. CVS contact details were supplied by LVSC from existing mailing lists of CVS contacts across each of the 33 London Boroughs, but we also publicised the survey in the Third Sector Alliance (3SA) Bulletin (October 08), and other LVSC information bulletins.

We questioned respondents on experiences of the specification and procurement process, involvement in appointment activity, comments on Host organisation since appointment, and sought to capture views on any good or best practice.

To facilitate responses we offered an incentive to online CVS survey respondents of two £50 prizes for CVS resources for completed surveys. The CVS survey findings offer further perspectives on the telephone interviews particularly perspectives on the wider, local level experiences of the Host procurement process in each London Borough;

5. **Workshop discussion groups** were held at a CVS regional meeting and at a Community Empowerment event organised by LVSC. The purpose of this work was twofold. Firstly we introduced the session with interim findings from the research providing an opportunity to check interpretations of the findings against local and regional experiences and respond to any particular issues this might raise to ensure we have interpreted our findings in an appropriate way.

Secondly, the session was used as a discussion group of emerging issues from the findings. This focussed upon identifying key areas for lobbying work by LVSC to improve procurement and commissioning practice, but also highlighted further areas

for enhancement at a local level including more proactive engagement in future LINK activities by local organisations.

This report outlines the combined findings from these research elements.

Response levels have been good across most of the main survey elements meaning that we can be confident that the results reported illustrate the full London picture on LINK Host commissioning. We have achieved the following response rates:

- Telephone Survey with Host Organisations – 20 responses (61 per cent response rate);
- Telephone Survey with Local Authorities – 30 responses (91 per cent);
- CVS Online Survey – 20 responses (61 per cent).

However, despite the high level of response there are some concerns about the overall response provided by Host Organisations in particular. This arose because interviews were agreed with 25 out of 33 Host organisations, but 5 subsequently cancelled interview appointments and then refused to participate in the survey at all. This is concerning given the specific remit of the LINK Hosts to facilitate engagement with their local communities, particularly the case for two boroughs (Hounslow and Hillingdon) where no response at all was received despite up to 10 telephone messages being left and 2 emails being sent to invite survey response. Our information requests were focussed upon information which was in the public domain and also concerned the use of substantial amounts of public money.

Despite this, the original intentions of the methodology were fulfilled as we achieved at least one response about the LINK Host Commissioning activity from each of the 33 London Boroughs as **Table 1** illustrates.

Table 1: Survey Response by Respondent by Borough

Borough	Local Authority	Host	CVS
Barking and Dagenham	✓	✓	✗
Barnet	✓	✗	✓
Bexley	✓	✓	✓
Brent	✓	✗	✗
Bromley	✓	✗	✗
Camden	✓	✓	✗
City of London	✓	✓	✓ ⁹
Croydon	✗	✗ ¹⁰	✓
Ealing	✓	✗	✓
Enfield	✗	✗	✓
Greenwich	✓	✓	✗
Hackney	✓	✗	✗
Hammersmith and Fulham	✓	✗	✓
Haringey	✓	✗	✗
Harrow	✓	✓	✓
Havering	✓	✗	✗
Hillingdon	✓	✗	✗
Hounslow	✓	✗	✓
Islington	✓	✓	✓
Kensington and Chelsea	✓	✗	✓
Kingston upon Thames	✗	✓	✓
Lambeth	✓	✓	✓
Lewisham	✓	✓	✓
Merton	✓	✓	✓
Newham	✓	✓	✓
Redbridge	✓	✓	✓
Richmond upon Thames	✓	✓	✓
Southwark	✓	✓	✓
Sutton	✓	✓	✓
Tower Hamlets	✓	✓	✗
Waltham Forest	✓	✓	✗
Wandsworth	✓	✓	✗
Westminster	✓	✓	✓

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Survey 2008

⁹ Jointly covered with Westminster by response from Voluntary Action Westminster.¹⁰ The appointment of Croydon Voluntary Action as Host (subject to contract) took place outside the survey period for this work.

Local Authority Patterns of LINK Host Commissioning

Overall London Picture

Our research shows that the 33 London Boroughs have all now appointed LINK Host organisations, though there are at least three boroughs where LINK Host organisations will not begin delivery until 1st January 2009.

Our findings also show that:

- 47 per cent of authorities appointed an interim or transitional LINK Host;
- A fifth of local authorities to appoint an interim Host appointed themselves, whilst 80 per cent appointed another organisation;
- In the 10 boroughs where another organisation was appointed as interim LINK Host only two boroughs – Bexley and Westminster – retained that organisation as the full time LINK Host suggesting that interim arrangements did not necessarily give that organisation an advantage in becoming the full time Host.

Tables 2a and 2b show the details of appointed full time LINK Host organisations across the 33 London Boroughs. **Table 2a** shows the pattern against boroughs in alphabetical order, whilst **Table 2b** shows patterns by the organisations appointed.

These tables show that:

- Voluntary or third sector organisations have been appointed as the LINK Host in 27 boroughs (82 per cent of all London Boroughs);
- Private sector organisations have been appointed as the LINK Host in 6 boroughs (18 per cent)

Analysis in terms of the head office location of appointed LINK Host organisations shows some interesting patterns:

- The local CVS or local VCS network has been appointed in 9 boroughs (27 per cent of all London Boroughs) – City of London, Croydon¹¹ Islington, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond, Sutton, Waltham Forest, and Westminster¹²;
- In 13 boroughs (39 per cent) organisations with headquarters based outside the borough have been appointed as the LINK Host organisation. This means that a minority of boroughs have appointed organisations that do not have a headquarter office function within the borough of appointment – though these LINK Hosts have all indicated that they operate their Host activities from offices located in the borough of Host operation;

¹¹ Croydon Voluntary Action's appointment as Host remains subject to contract.

¹² Note that the City of London and Westminster share the same CVS appointee – Voluntary Action Westminster.

Across the 30 responses from local authorities we are able to highlight the following patterns of LINK Host commissioning:

- LINK Host arrangements in three London Boroughs also include Community Empowerment Network (CEN) responsibilities – Merton, Newham and Sutton. Although three respondents did not know if their Host arrangements included responsibilities for the CEN;
- No boroughs have jointly procured a LINK Host. Although, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, and Waltham Forest conducted a joint invitation to tender exercise they appointed their LINK Host organisations separately. Although, the City of London and Westminster share the same LINK Host these arrangements were not made jointly;
- This is despite the fact that 19 boroughs (58 per cent) share one of six organisations as LINK Hosts – Voluntary Action Westminster, HAP UK, the Shaw Trust, Hestia, Parkwood Healthcare, and Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA).

This pattern of appointment behaviour across London illustrates the sheer complexity of the commissioning exercise completed around LINK Hosts. Effectively 33 different commissioning relationships have been established across each of the London Boroughs. Whilst acknowledging that this allows particular local circumstances to be reflected in these arrangements, there seems to have been a missed opportunity to achieve some economies of scale in some elements of the commissioning of LINK Hosts undertaken in London.

Indeed, this bears out a particular concern expressed in the Health Select Committee report in 2006-07 on Patient and Public Involvement that highlighted concerns about limits to potential economies of scale arising from the appointment of LINK Host organisations in its recommendations¹³.

Consequently it may have been possible for elements of the commissioning process – for instance the management of expressions of interest (EOI) and pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) (where used) – to have been managed collaboratively across neighbouring boroughs or sub-regions, though shortlisting and completion of the final stages of commissioning (invitation to tender, review and appointment) should remain the responsibility of the local authority in question. This would allow resources to be targeted most specifically at the local commissioning of LINK Host, whilst also ensuring that local organisations who can only legally work in one borough are not disadvantaged, and potential tender organisations have a streamlined mechanism by which they can make themselves known to commissioners.

The London Development Agency (LDA) operates just such a mechanism for many of its own contracts where the EOI process and PQQ has been automated allowing many potential organisations to express an interest in work, but the final commissioning decisions remain in the hands of the department heads responsible for the work in question. By using a similar system in future – perhaps through CompeteFor¹⁴ resources

¹³ See paragraph 168 in the Health Select Committee (2007) 'Patient and Public Involvement in the NHS' Volume 1 of the Third Report of the 2007-07 Session, House of Commons, London.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmhealth/278/278i.pdf>

¹⁴ For more information see:

<https://www.competefor.com/london2012business/nru/home.html;jsessionid=FB6C63FAF684FCC195CD9DC68711CF0C.server1>

utilised for commissioning in each local authority might have been reduced allowing further funds to be available for LINK Host activities in boroughs.

Table 2a: LINK Host Organisations by London Borough, November 2008

Borough	Appointed Host Organisation
Barking and Dagenham	Centre for Independent, Integrated, Inclusive Living Consortium
Barnet	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Bexley	Shaw Trust
Brent	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Bromley	Shaw Trust
Camden	Shaw Trust
City of London	(CVS) Voluntary Action Westminster
Croydon	(CVS) Croydon Voluntary Action ¹⁵
Ealing	Hestia Housing and Support
Enfield	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Greenwich	Parkwood Healthcare
Hackney	Social Action for Health
Hammersmith and Fulham	Hestia Housing and Support
Haringey	Shaw Trust
Harrow	Parkwood Healthcare
Havering	Shaw Trust
Hillingdon	The Health Advocacy Partnership (HAP) UK Ltd
Hounslow	The Health Advocacy Partnership (HAP) UK Ltd
Islington	(CVS) Islington Voluntary Action Council
Kensington and Chelsea	Hestia Housing and Support
Kingston upon Thames	Kingston CAB
Lambeth	Age Concern Lambeth
Lewisham	Parkwood Healthcare
Merton	(CVS) Merton VSC
Newham	Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum
Redbridge	(CVS) Redbridge CVS
Richmond upon Thames	(CVS) Richmond CVS
Southwark	Cambridge House
Sutton	(CVS) Sutton Centre for the Voluntary Sector
Tower Hamlets	Urban Inclusion
Waltham Forest	(CVS) Voluntary Action Waltham Forest
Wandsworth	Wandsworth Care Alliance
Westminster	(CVS) Voluntary Action Westminster

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Survey 2008

¹⁵ Croydon Voluntary Action's appointment as Host remains subject to contract.

Table 2b: London Borough by Appointed LINK Host , November 2008

Borough	Appointed Host Organisation
Croydon	(CVS) Croydon Voluntary Action ¹⁶
Islington	(CVS) Islington Voluntary Action Council
Merton	(CVS) Merton VSC
Redbridge	(CVS) Redbridge CVS
Richmond upon Thames	(CVS) Richmond CVS
Sutton	(CVS) Sutton Centre for the Voluntary Sector
Waltham Forest	(CVS) Voluntary Action Waltham Forest
City of London	(CVS) Voluntary Action Westminster
Westminster	(CVS) Voluntary Action Westminster
Lambeth	Age Concern Lambeth
Newham	Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum
Southwark	Cambridge House
Barking and Dagenham	Centre for Independent, Integrated, Inclusive Living Consortium
Barnet	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Brent	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Enfield	Community Investors Development Agency (CIDA)
Ealing	Hestia Housing and Support
Hammersmith and Fulham	Hestia Housing and Support
Kensington and Chelsea	Hestia Housing and Support
Kingston upon Thames	Kingston CAB
Greenwich	Parkwood Healthcare
Harrow	Parkwood Healthcare
Lewisham	Parkwood Healthcare
Bexley	Shaw Trust
Bromley	Shaw Trust
Camden	Shaw Trust
Haringey	Shaw Trust
Havering	Shaw Trust
Hackney	Social Action for Health
Hillingdon	The Health Advocacy Partnership (HAP) UK Ltd
Hounslow	The Health Advocacy Partnership (HAP) UK Ltd
Tower Hamlets	Urban Inclusion
Wandsworth	Wandsworth Care Alliance

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Survey 2008

¹⁶ Croydon Voluntary Action's appointment as Host remains subject to contract.

A National Comparison

Our analysis of other LINK Host commissioning activity across England shows a similarly complex pattern. We were able to identify¹⁷ the details of 73 appointments of LINK Host organisations outside London covering 80 local authority areas¹⁸. This means that in this report we are able to draw on information on the LINK Host appointments of 113 local authority areas or 75 per cent of all the LINK Host appointments made by local authorities in England.

Table 3 shows a comparison of the pattern of funding and total populations affected by the LINK Host appointments our analysis has been able to identify.

This shows that:

- Across the 27 local authorities in London able to supply full contract value information for their LINK Host arrangements this totals over £11.5 million providing support to over 5.7 million people at a per head cost of £1.98;
- Across 69 local authorities supplying contract value information in the rest of England, contracts to the value of over £32.9 million have been let covering 24.2 million people with a per head cost of £1.35;
- However contract spend per head varies widely across each London borough with a range per head from £1.25 to £3.01;
- The overall value of contracted funding per head for LINK Host activities in London local authorities is almost 1.5 times higher than the contracts established in other authority areas outside the Greater London area.

¹⁷ Some commissioning exercises were conducted outside of the requirements of the EU OJEU requirements and are therefore not always recorded by the contract award notices monitored by Supply2gov or sell2Wales. The budget for this research did not cover seeking additional information for local authorities outside London who did not publicise their LINK Host contracting in this way.

¹⁸ There were three areas – covering 9 local authorities - in our analysis where joint or collaborative commissioning of the LINK Host between groups of local authorities appears to have taken place – Bracknell, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham; Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole; and North Yorkshire and York.

Table 3: Population and Funding London and England Authorities, 2008

	London	Other England Authorities	Total London + Other England
Total Contracted Value ¹⁹	£11,500,758	£32,906,862	£44,407,620
Total Population ²⁰	5,787,200	24,297,700	30,084,900
Average Contracted Cost per Head	£1.99	£1.35	£1.48

Source: Population Figures taken from 2007 mid-year population estimates NOMIS, Crown Copyright. Funding figures from LVSC Local Authority survey findings and sell2Wales Contract Award Notices for LINK Host Activities.

The actual appointment patterns of LINK Hosts across all 113 local authorities in England to have confirmed their LINK Host arrangements show clearly the dominance of some organisations. Our analysis shows that across England, of the 113 local authority areas where we have information about the confirmed appointment of a full term LINK Host organisation²¹:

- 106 LINK Host appointments are covered – 33 in London;
- 64 per cent of all LINK Host contracts in these areas have been awarded to the local CVS or VCS representative body, or one of four other organisations;
- 27 LINK Host appointees (26 per cent) are CVS or VCS equivalent organisations – eight in London;
- 16 LINK Host contracts (15 per cent) have been awarded to the Shaw Trust²² – six in London;
- 9 LINK Host contracts (nine per cent) have been awarded to the Carers Federation²³ – none in London;

¹⁹ Total of those boroughs able to supply total contract values – 25 Host arrangements in London and 69 in other England authorities.

²⁰ In those boroughs able to supply full information on total contract value.

²¹ The National Centre for Involvement maintains a list of LINK Host appointments across England but this is only updated on a monthly basis and the latest version does not include much of the detail on LINK Host appointees in London. We therefore decided to include only confirmed LINK Host appointees in our analysis.

²² 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's head office is in Chippenham, Wiltshire. It is a provider of work-related services, many of which are run under contract with Jobcentre Plus, though it also works with local authorities, Learning and Skills Councils, charitable trusts, the European Union, and the Community Fund. See for more details <http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/>.

²³ The Carers Federation was established in 1992 as a small local charity to support people living in Nottingham and the surrounding area, with its head office in Nottingham. The organisation now works across the East Midlands, the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. It provides support for carers, runs programmes for public and patient involvement, and helps support people with mental health issues, those needing counselling support, and those affected by another person's drug misuse. They also provide ICAS (the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service) for people who want to make a complaint about their NHS treatment or care. The Carers Federation lists 12 areas on its website where it has been appointed as the LINK Host, these can be viewed at <http://www.carersfederation.co.uk/what-we-do/links/>.

- 8 LINK Host contracts (eight per cent) have been awarded to Help and Care²⁴ – none in London;
- 6 LINK Host contracts (six per cent) have been awarded to the Health Advocacy Partnership Ltd²⁵ – three in London.

These patterns do show the sheer complexity of the commissioning activity that the LINK Host arrangements around England have entailed illustrating that there may have been opportunities for more joint working across authorities to administer commissioning of these activities. However this variety of approach is mirrored in patterns concerning the preparation for commissioning as well as the commissioning process itself.

Preparation for LINK Host Commissioning in London

Table 4 shows how the LINK Host commissioning activity in London has involved different stakeholder groups in its activities.

This shows that:

- Local authority staff were most commonly involved in all LINK Host commissioning stages, whilst current patients were least involved;
- Needs analysis work involved the greatest share of stakeholders, whilst final Host selection was almost always exclusively dominated by Local Authority staff, understandably as these were the main contracting bodies;
- Primary Care Trust (PCT) representatives were involved by a majority of local authorities in all phases of the commissioning process. Nine out of ten of all local authorities said that their needs analysis work had involved PCT representatives, 87 per cent involved PCT representatives in the development of the specification, almost two thirds (57 per cent) had a PCT representative on the tender panel, and over two thirds (67 per cent) involved a PCT representative in the final Host selection;
- Current patients are involved in the selection of a LINK Host in only a minority of cases;
- VCS representation is inconsistent across all phases of the commissioning process. Whilst seemingly heavily involved in the earliest phases of the commissioning process, VCS involvement is extremely limited in tender panels and final Host selection. Even in situations where VCS organisations are applying for the Host

²⁴ Help and Care is an independent charity working with older people and carers in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole, with its head office in Bournemouth. It began operating in 1985 it now works delivering partnership services with the public sector to ensure effective engagement with local communities. It aims to provide innovation in service development and raise the needs, rights and aspirations of older people and carers of all ages. More details are available at <http://www.helpandcare.org.uk/home.aspx>.

²⁵ HAP UK Ltd is an independent not-for-profit social enterprise organisation established in 2003. The company grew out of a multi-agency partnership set up by Community Health Councils and other voluntary sector organisations to deliver a pilot independent complaint advocacy project for the Department of Health. It's head office is located in Melksham, Wiltshire. Material sourced from <http://www.communityvoicesonline.org/hosts/home.aspx?id=8> HAP UK website is listed as <http://www.hapforums.co.uk/> though at the time of writing the link was not working.

contract there remains scope within commissioning good practice to involve the sector in that commissioning activity. Potential conflicts of interest can be specifically declared but having a member of the tender panel from the VCS will allow representation of the sector in its deliberations whilst not particularly representing any particular organisation. This is particularly crucial to ensure the independence of the LINK and LINK Host organisation from any government organisation to facilitate the ultimate work of the LINK and Host in consulting with local communities about the delivery of health and social care services in their locality.

The findings above seem to show that a majority of local authorities in London have neglected the VCS in their final deliberations on the appointment of a LINK Host organisation, and therefore missed an excellent opportunity for the VCS to feed into the decision making process, and feedback to VCS networks in the borough about the decisions made. Consequently an opportunity may have been missed to enable the fullest possible accountability for the final decisions made and for the VCS and other local parties to be explicitly clear about the final choice of LINK Host organisation in a local area. Indeed only half of the CVS we interviewed said they were clear on the selection decisions.

Table 4: Stakeholder Involvement in LINK Host Commissioning Stages

% LAs Involving Representative	Local Needs Analysis	Development of Specification	Tender Panel	Final Host Selection
Local Authority Staff	97	97	100	97
PCT Representative/s	93	87	57	67
Local Residents	90	73	63	53
Current Patients	67	57	33	33
VCS Representative/s	90	77	30	17
Other	57	43	33	27

Base = 30 Local Authorities

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Local Authority Survey 2008

Table 5 overleaf shows the advertising patterns for the LINK Host opportunities. Local authorities report a wide range of advertising use for their LINK Host opportunities showing that the majority of local authorities had made the decision to use the OJEU²⁶ process to commission (60 per cent), and that eight out of ten publicised the LINK Host opportunity on their website. Over seven out of ten (73 per cent) of LINK Host opportunities in these boroughs were publicised through the local voluntary sector networks, and 73 per cent publicised through other means including local and national press advertisements, Supply2gov website and health and social care publications.

Table 5: Publicity Mechanisms for LINK Host Commissioning

% of Local Authorities	Yes	No	Don't Know
Used Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) process	60	40	0

²⁶ The guidance given to Local Authorities around LINK Host commissioning was that it was up to them to decide whether or not to use the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) process to commission their LINK Host arrangements. Given the value of the LINK Host contracts in excess of the threshold of £144,000 then regular service contracts would have to be advertised in this way. Most (113) local authorities have made the decision to use this process which requires notification of the contract opportunity to be made via the OJEU process.

Posted on authority website	80	7	13
Publicised through local voluntary sector networks	73	17	10
Publicised through other mechanisms	73	13	13

Base = 30 Local Authorities

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Local Authority Survey 2008

Commissioning Conduct and Outcomes in London

After advertising the contract opportunities, most local authorities in London preferred to use two stage commissioning processes²⁷, with 67 per cent utilising this approach, whilst 33 per cent used a one stage process²⁸.

Local authorities report relatively good numbers of organisations who responded to the publicised commissioning processes. 33 per cent report receiving more requests for information about the LINK Host contract than they had expected, whilst 20 per cent report receiving more tenders than they had expected (**see Table 8**).

However for the majority, response levels for information about the LINK Host contract opportunity were at expected levels with 37 per cent reporting expected levels of information requests.

Tender response levels do seem lower than expected with 53 per cent of local authorities saying they had received less tenders than they had expected.

Despite this, the overall levels of response across local authorities in London - for those able to supply the information – show that on average most authorities were able to select LINK Host organisations from a number of responses.

Results for each type of process used for the commissioning of the LINK Host organisation show that for:

One stage process (10 local authorities)

- 112 requests for Invitations to Tender were made – an average of 14 per authority, a minimum of 6 and maximum of 21;
- 44 tenders were eventually submitted – an average of just over four per authority, a minimum of one and maximum of 7;
- 43 per cent (19) were submitted by VCS organisations, 39 per cent (17) by not for profit organisations, and 18 per cent (8) by private sector organisations;

²⁷ A two stage commissioning process will commonly involve asking potential tenderers to submit an expression of interest (EOI) or complete a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ). These documents are then assessed by the commissioners and a shortlist of organisations is invited to submit a full tender. These tenders are then assessed and tenderers asked to make a further presentation to a tender panel, or appointment is made on the strength of the tender document supplied.

²⁸ In a one stage process potential tenderers are just asked to submit a full tender for the project opportunity which is then assessed and a shortlist drawn up, those on the shortlist are then invited to a tender panel to present their proposals and an appointment decision is made from there.

- 50 per cent of these authorities appointed CVS or VCS organisations with head offices in their borough to be their LINK Host.

Two stage process (20 authorities – though only 17 were able to give all the required information)

- 188 requests for Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) were made – an average of just over 12 per authority;
- 93 PQQs were returned – an average of just over 5 per authority;
- 96²⁹ organisations were invited to submit a tender – just over 5 per authority;
- 67 final tenders were submitted – just over 3 per authority;
- Of those able to report breakdowns for 57 received tenders, 37 per cent (21) were submitted by VCS organisations, 42 per cent (24) by not for profit organisations, and 21 per cent (12) by private sector organisations;
- 45 per cent of these authorities appointed CVS or VCS organisations with head offices in their authority area to be their LINK Host.

These figures illustrate the sheer wealth of information provided during the LINK Host commissioning process, but also illustrate that there is little difference in the chances of a local VCS organisation being appointed whether involved in a one or two stage process. Indeed there is little difference in the average volume of response between those authorities using one or two stage processes.

Table 6 illustrates the overall funding pattern for LINK Host organisations across the 26 responding boroughs for the 3 contracted years.

It shows that:

- Projected funding for these boroughs for the 3 years was over £12.5 million;
- LINK Host organisations have been contracted for over £11.5 million in the 26 boroughs able to supply figures;
- This means that 91 per cent of the projected funding for LINK Host activities has been used by the established contracts;
- Per head of population LINK Host arrangements as currently contracted will cost £1.99 per person, this compares with a national per head cost of £1.35 per person (see **Table 3**) though the range in London covers a low of £1.25 to a high of £3.01 per head.

²⁹ Discrepancy with previous figure reflects incomplete response by some respondents.

Table 6: Projected and Contracted Funding for LINK Host in Responding London Local Authorities

Total Projected Funding	£12,586,000
Mean Projected Funding per Authority	£484,077
Total Population	5,787,200
Mean Projected Funding per Head	£2.17
Total Contracted Funding	£11,500,758
Mean Contracted Funding per Authority	£442,337
Total Population	5,787,200
Mean Contracted Funding per Head	£1.99
	Base
	26

Source: LINK Host Projected Funding Allocated to Local Authorities December 2007 and Research as Evidence LINK Host Local Authority Survey 2008

A majority of local authority respondents (65 per cent) do not know whether projected or contracted funding of LINK Host organisations is more or less than the funding for previous patient and public involvement work in their borough. However amongst the minority that do know about the comparison, a majority (just under a quarter – 24 per cent of all London local authorities) say that this funding is significantly less or slightly less than the budgets utilised before.

Local authorities were also asked about the numbers of staff involved in the delivery and project management of the LINK Host commissioning. All respondents indicated that the LINK Host arrangements were one part of a range of responsibilities they held in their job role at the local authority.

In terms of the numbers of staff employed by the local authorities to manage and administer the LINK Host arrangements the average levels across the 30 responding authorities were:

- 17 full time and 27.5 part time staff are employed to manage and administer the LINK Host arrangements;
- This is an average of 0.5 full time staff and just under 1 part time staff member per authority with a minimum number being 0.1 full time and part time staff with a maximum of 2 full time and 4 part time staff in some authorities.

These findings illustrate that contract management responsibilities of these staff are just one of many contracts these staff hold responsibility for.

Funding of this activity varies considerably across local authorities with a fifth identifying that no budget has been set aside for funding this. However, across the 70 per cent of respondents who had allocated a budget the total funding set aside for this work was over £725,000, an average of just over £24,000 per authority.

However, this varies widely across authorities with management budgets in authorities starting at 1.9 per cent of total contract value up to 4-6 per cent in others and reaching a high of 14-17 per cent of total contract value in others.

Opinions on the Commissioning Process

Local authority respondents were asked about the levels of involvement of the VCS in the LINK Host commissioning activity and their opinions on how the process had worked.

Table 7 shows that a significant proportion of local authorities believe they have involved the VCS a lot in the stages of LINK Host commissioning such that:

- 47 per cent believe the VCS was involved a lot in identifying local needs;
- 47 per cent believe the VCS was involved a lot in agreeing local priorities;
- 40 per cent identified that the VCS was involved a lot in developing the specification for the LINK Host activities; and
- 57 per cent have seen the VCS involved a lot in their previous consultation work.

Table 7: Involvement of the VCS in LINK Host Commissioning Activity – Local Authority Opinions

% of Local Authorities Stating VCS involved a lot....	%
Identifying local needs for health and social care services	47
Agreeing the local priorities for health and social care services in my borough	47
Developing the specification for delivery by the Host organisation	40
Previous consultation work with the local authority before the appointment of the Host organization	57

Base = 30 Local Authorities

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Local Authority Survey 2008

Table 8 overleaf shows that for a majority of local authorities the LINK Host commissioning process is perceived to have gone well.

Table 8 shows that Local Authority respondents involved in LINK Host commissioning believe that:

- Local needs were well reflected in the tender documents issued for the LINK Host contract (93 per cent said they agreed that this was the case) and that the specifications were tailored to these needs (97 per cent);
- The VCS was seen to have played a key role in tender development activities with 76 per cent of authorities agreeing that the VCS had had enough input into it, and 73 per cent agreeing that the VCS had been given enough opportunities to provide information on local health and social care needs;
- 72 per cent of local authorities in London thought the VCS was well represented amongst received tenders, 73 per cent thought that the quality of VCS tenders was generally good, and 72 per cent that relationships between appointed LINK Host organisations and the local VCS was good.

Table 8: Local Authority Opinions on the LINK Host Commissioning Process

% of Local Authorities	Agree	Strongly Agree	All Agree
The specification for LINK Host arrangements in my borough was tailored to local needs	35	62	97
The specification for LINK Host arrangements in this borough adequately reflected local needs	45	48	93
The specification for LINK Host arrangements in this borough had enough input from the VCS in the borough	35	41	76
My authority has given enough opportunities to the VCS to provide information on local health and social care needs as part of the needs analysis work for the Host commissioning	45	28	73
VCS tenders for the LINK Host Organisation contract were generally of good quality	59	14	73
The VCS was well represented amongst the tenders for the LINK Host organisation contract that we received	41	28	72
Relationships between the appointed Host organisation and local VCS organisations are generally good	41	31	72
We received a good number of requests for information about the LINK Host organisation contract from the VCS	48	21	69
We received more requests for information about the LINK Host organisation contract than we had expected	21	14	35
We received more tenders for the LINK Host organisation contract than we had expected	17	3	20

Base = 30 Local Authorities

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Local Authority Survey 2008

These figures show that Local Authorities have been relatively satisfied with their own conduct of the LINK Host commissioning arrangements, but other comments from them illustrate their own problems with delays brought about by the late receipt of Government guidance on how the commissioning process should be handled. As respondents noted:

"All too rushed, government underestimated the impact it would have on workloads, there was not enough time given to think the process through"

"Guidance from central government should have been in early, and there was a lack of clarity in the material we did receive"

"Timescales were difficult, we felt very pressurised, there were lots of delays from above which put pressure on us"

"the process was far too quick and as an authority we felt we didn't have enough time to think it through properly and spend enough time consulting with all relevant agencies/people"

However not all experiences have been negative as one local authority respondent identified:

"This has been an excellent learning opportunity in terms of how our authority can work with and communicate with the voluntary sector"

However, there are also significant numbers of existing mechanisms by which the VCS can be involved in these activities. Local authorities indicated that a third fund community empowerment networks in their authority areas, and 70 per cent are able to identify other VCS health and social care forums within their authority areas working on a range of specialist and community interests.

A key challenge will be how these mechanisms could be used to facilitate or enhance LINK Host activities in those boroughs.

Moving Beyond the Commissioning Process

For some authorities, appointment of the LINK Host organisation has been in place for a number of months. Respondents were asked if service quality measures had been established, 70 per cent of authorities indicated that such measures were in place.

86 per cent of authorities report they are satisfied or very satisfied with these arrangements. Although the measures vary considerably there are a number of key patterns across them. Examples of the measures developed are shown by the following quotes:

"KPI's set out in the original spec, to be reviewed at the end of the year"

"We ask for ethnic breakdown, number of organisations involved, list key issues raised on quarterly basis, number of events put on, number of hits on website, inspections undertaken, partnership working description of, comment on success and failure, details of any complaints"

"A monitoring sheet has been established including the number and representation of people recruited to link membership, training that is delivered, support for meetings, existence of details on the website, activities they undertake. We require a twice yearly return"

Whilst these measures will seek to assess Host performance levels and LINK Annual Reports³⁰ will illustrate further delivery progress there are also a range of challenges now faced since all 33 London Boroughs have now appointed a LINK Host. The respondents to the local authority survey were asked to indicate what they felt were the main challenges they faced after commissioning their LINK Host.

Their responses are focussed around five key themes showing some of the issues they felt were to be addressed in the next few months of LINK Host operations. The themes include and are illustrated with some selected quotes from the interviews:

- Managing the LINK and LINK Host to maintain its independence and ensuring that adequate overview and scrutiny practice is in place to oversee its activities;

"Having the resource to manage it on an ongoing basis"

"Specifically focussed on the managing role, we are still looking for balance between being supportive and contract management"

³⁰ See <http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.gov.uk> for more details of the content of the LINK Annual Reports

- Ensuring that effective working relationships are established between organisations and communities and that appropriate communication channels are opened up;

"Maintaining open and clear communication with the LINK Host - avoiding the LINK becoming a moaning shop"

"Relationship between the Host and our health and wellbeing scrutiny committees there's real potential for them to become adversarial"

- Ensuring that social care is prioritised alongside health care;

"Ensuring that social care issues have same priority as health issues"

"making sure all health and Social care goes through the LINK – we're trying to get the PCT not to do their own consultations and put it through the LINK instead"

"Making sure social care isn't left behind"

- Managing expectations of what the LINK Host is able to do and cover;

"Expectations of those involved - community thinks the money will stretch much further than it will"

"It's going to be about being clear on what can they do and what can they not do?"

"doing it within existing resources - the money is tight for what is expected."

- Ensuring full representation of the local community and its people.

"Issues around getting a fully represented range of groups and not just the same old groups involved"

"It is the same old faces turning up to be involved and in some cases these are people who don't want to move on from PPIs and I think this has had an impact on new people getting involved".

Respondents were asked to indicate if there were any training or development needs that arise from these challenges. For 50 per cent it is either too early for these needs to be identified, or there are none.

The areas where training and development needs are highlighted by local authorities include:

- Awareness raising of the role and activities of the LINK;
- Networking with other boroughs; and
- Engagement with hard to reach groups.

Respondents see that these needs will be best addressed by in-house training, work by the NHS Centre for Involvement and development work by the LINK Host themselves.

LINK Host Experiences of Commissioning

20 responses were received from appointed LINK Host organisations and their responses illustrate the LINK Host experiences of the commissioning process. Our analysis begins by profiling appointed LINK Hosts, and then highlights their own experiences and comments on the LINK Host commissioning process.

Background and Experience of Appointed LINK Hosts

The appointed LINK Hosts we interviewed show a diverse range of experience. **Table 9** shows that:

- 85 per cent of LINK Hosts define themselves as voluntary or third sector organisations, with 40 per cent of them being CVS;
- 80 per cent hold charitable status;
- 45 per cent operate regionally, 50 per cent sub-regionally, and 40 per cent operate nationally;
- 80 per cent have bid before to deliver services for the local authority;
- 30 per cent currently deliver health and social care services, and 80 per cent have been involved in patient and community consultation activities before.

Table 9: Characteristics of Appointed LINK Host organisations in London

Organisation Characteristics	% of all
Private Sector	15
Voluntary/Third Sector	85
Made up of:	
<i>Charity</i>	10
<i>Infrastructure Organisation</i>	15
<i>Frontline VCS organisation delivering health and social care services</i>	5
<i>Consortia of VCS organisations</i>	5
<i>User led VCS advocacy organisation</i>	5
<i>Social Enterprise</i>	5
<i>CVS</i>	40
Have charitable status	80
Local operations	100
Regional	45
Sub-regional	50
National	40
Have bid to deliver other services for the local authority before	80
Currently deliver health and social care services	30
Involved in patient and community consultation before	80

Base = 20 LINK Host Organisations

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Organisation Survey 2008

These findings show that appointed LINK Hosts have a wealth of previous experience on which to draw particularly around service delivery for the local authority. Involvement

and experience of wider PPI activity is more variable. The survey asked respondents to indicate about past involvement in a range of PPI activities and whether staff had experience or running such activities in the past.

Table 10 shows that:

- A majority of LINK Host organisations have previously been involved in CEN, PPI, and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs);
- Only a minority of LINK Hosts identify previous involvement in the main precursors to LINKs, with just 25 per cent of LINK Hosts being involved in CHCs, or the CPPIH; only 13 per cent of LINK Host have been involved in the Independent Complaints and Advocacy Services, whilst 19 per cent were involved with the Patients Advice and Liaison Service;
- Experience of running these forms of PPI activity is even less pronounced with less than one in five (19 per cent) of LINK Hosts reporting having run PPI activities before, whilst a quarter have run CEN activities before;
- However, there is a wide range of experience amongst the staff in LINK Host organisations with a majority (63 per cent) of LINK Host organisations reporting staff experience in OSCs, and 38 per cent reporting staff experience of CEN and PPI activities.

The previous experience of LINK Host organisations is relatively well spread amongst staff working with these forms of PPI, but for most of the appointed organisations they are relatively new to PPI activity not having been involved in most of the previous forms we questioned them about. This may mean that they bring fresh new perspectives to the conduct of this work, but there is also a danger that previous expertise, experiences, and good practice may be lost if these previous PPI approaches are not reviewed and reflected in the development of the LINK in each local authority area.

Table 10: Forms of PPI Activity that have previously involved appointed LINK Hosts

% of all	Organisation involved before	Organisation has run before	Staff involved before
Community Health Councils (CHC)	25	6	25
Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)	56	19	38
Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH)	25	N/A	31
Patients Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)	19	0	31
Independent Complaints and Advocacy Service (ICAS)	13	0	25
Community Empowerment Networks (CEN)	81	25	38
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs)	56	0	63
Other	44	6	19

Base = 16. LINK Host Organisations who said they had previous involvement in PPI activity.
Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Organisation Survey 2008

Whilst the experience profile of appointed LINK Hosts shows a wide range of expertise our survey showed that only two organisations (Parkwood Healthcare and the Shaw

Trust) out of those that we interviewed had bid to be the LINK Host in any other local authority areas. Our earlier analysis shows that this was a common feature of the activities of some organisations who have achieved success across a number of local authority areas in London and the rest of England.

Delivering LINK Host Activities

All appointed LINK Hosts state that their LINK Host activities are currently located within the boundaries of the borough in which they have been contracted to work, despite the fact that 6 of these organisations have head offices based in other parts of the country.

Respondents were asked to indicate details of their staffing structures, **Table 11** shows the outcome of these illustrating that:

- Current LINK Host arrangements across 20 London boroughs use 91 staff, 32 full time, 17 part time and 42 volunteers;
- This is expected to rise to 115 in the future with an additional eight full time staff and an extra 16 volunteers;
- Currently 55 per cent of LINK Host organisations do not staff their activities with part time staff – a situation which will not change in the future;
- 80 per cent of LINK Hosts do not use any volunteers to deliver their activities currently which will remain unchanged for 95 per cent of these organisations.

Table 11: Current and Future Staffing Arrangements of LINK Hosts in London

	Full Time	Part Time	Volunteers
Current total	32	17	42
Mean	1.6	0.9	2.1
Minimum	1	0	0
Maximum	3	2	15
Future total	40	17	58
Mean	2	0.9	2.9
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	3	3	22
Change in staff numbers	+8	0	+16
% change in staff numbers	20	0	28

Base = 16 LINK Host Organisations who said they had previous involvement in PPI activity.

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Organisation Survey 2008

A diverse range of management and governance arrangements are emerging. However, for 35 per cent of the LINK Host organisations we spoke to this is still work in progress, though a number of common approaches are beginning to emerge. These include:

- Central group or executive elected by LINK membership with sub-groups or committees for specific group or other issues;
- Full election of all members through local community elections;
- Steering group elected by community groups.

However, even where such approaches have been agreed most are yet to be implemented as elections are awaited.

This sense of further development to come is further supported by figures from the LINK Host survey that show that 25 per cent of these organisations have agreed service quality measures with local authorities. This compares with the 70 per cent of local authorities who say they have established such measures.

For the five organisations to have established such measures:

- 2 organisations are satisfied with the measures in place;
- Measures will require further development as four of the five organisations say they are currently working to work plans, rather than specific service quality targets.

For those organisations where they have yet to be established this is because they are still under development because of recent contracting or the need for further development work. Measures though, are expected to be in place soon.

Arising from these issues the LINK Host organisations were also asked to highlight their top three challenges. Responses can be identified against four key themes with some selected quotes providing more detail:

1. Inclusiveness

"Involving people and communities who have previously not been involved in such activities"

"Ensuring the LINK represents as many local groups as possible and is as inclusive as it can be"

"To launch the LINK successfully - to make sure it is as inclusive and representative as possible"

"Achieving a critical mass within the LiNK - i.e. ensuring sufficient representation of difficult to reach groups and groups that have not traditionally been represented on PPI"

2. Consultation overload

"Dealing with seeming consultation overload in the borough at the moment"

"We're being bombarded by PCTs for input"

3. Governance

"it's about moving from reactive to proactive work within the executive who seem currently to be focussing heavily on day-to-day practicalities rather than planning ahead"

"Governance, getting clarity on what it means to be a Host"

"Governance that encourages the steering group to take on local authority views, accept what we have to do and who the local groups are we need to reach out to"

"getting LINK executive to function effectively and quickly. It has been slow to finalise policy and sort out governance arrangements."

4. Establishing the LINK and its difference from previous PPI activity

"Establishing LINK as the primary consultation mechanism for health and social care - why will PCT use LINK when they have their own existing mechanisms"

"Getting LINK to be seen as worthwhile as replacement to PPI and CHC"

"Doesn't attempt to be a super ppi forum and continue to do the same old things"

"Recognising that LINK is different to PPI role"

From these challenges the LINK Hosts identify that there are a number of training and development issues to address that include:

- Training and supporting service assessors;
- Effective working relationships and networking with suppliers and providers;
- Effective community networking and engagement techniques and support;
- Social care knowledge of steering group and executive members;
- LINK Legislation and policy.

Further needs are likely to emerge as 20 per cent of LINK Host organisations have yet to formally identify training and development needs.

For those identifying needs, training and development responses are seen to come from four main sources – internal HR teams, the NHS Centre for Involvement, LVSC, and the

London CVS network, though there could be further opportunities for LVSC as LINK Host arrangements mature and develop over time.

LINK Host Opinions on the Commissioning Process

Respondents were asked about their involvement in a variety of aspects of the LINK Host commissioning process. **Table 12** illustrates our findings concerning how involved LINK Host organisations felt in some aspects of the commissioning process. It shows that:

- Less than 15 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts were involved in needs analysis, priority setting, or specification development work as part of the LINK Host commissioning process;
- This is despite the fact that over two fifths have been involved a lot in previous consultation work by the local authority they are now working with.

These findings show that there does seem to have been some resistance amongst local authorities in involving some organisations in their needs analysis work, particularly those likely to have been made a LINK Host in the future. Whilst adhering strictly to principles of traditional procurement practice such practice does not fit so well with 'pure' forms of commissioning practice as advocated by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC)³¹. Such commissioning practice sees a much wider role for consultation and use of local expertise as part of the commissioning to identify the best possible picture of local needs to be addressed by the eventual delivery of the work being commissioned. Our findings suggest as yet such an approach is yet to be common amongst the commissioning practice in these London boroughs.

Table 12: Involvement of the LINK Host in Commissioning Activity

% of LINK Hosts stating they were involved in...	A lot	Not at all
Identifying local needs for health and social care services	15	40
Agreeing the local priorities for health and social care services in my borough	10	40
Developing the specification for delivery by the Host organisation	10	70
Previous consultation work with the local authority before the appointment of the Host organization	45	35

Base = 20 LINK Host organisations

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Organisation Survey 2008

Overall, experiences of the LINK Hosts commissioning by those appointed as LINK Host has been unsurprisingly positive:

- 85 per cent of LINK Hosts think the specification for the LINK Host contract was tailored to local needs and 70 per cent thought it adequately reflected local needs;
- 70 per cent of LINK Hosts thought the commissioning process was appropriate and 75 per cent agreed that the commissioning documentation gave clear guidance on the activities expected of them;

³¹ For further details on policy guidance on work with third sector organisations see http://www.ogc.gov.uk/key_policy_principles_creating_opportunities_for_smes_and_third_sector_organisations.asp

- 75 per cent did not think the LINK Host commissioning process discriminated against voluntary or third sector organisations – though 15 per cent said that it had;
- 65 per cent of LINK Host organisations were clear how their tender had been evaluated and 85 per cent were clear on the reason/s why they had been selected as the LINK Host for their area;
- 80 per cent of LINK Host organisations thought the commissioning was well handled by the local authority.

Whilst most experiences for LINK Host organisations were positive this was not universally so, such that:

- 90 per cent of LINK Host organisations did not think they were given enough opportunities to share knowledge of local social care and health needs as part of the LINK Host needs analysis work;
- Only 40 per cent of LINK Host organisations thought this process was better than other previous commissioning exercises they had been through.

Some quotes from LINK Host organisations reveal that there was particular dissatisfaction with the overall timing of the commissioning process highlighting:

"We experienced lengthy delay in the process, we were told we had won it but it was ages until we were able to start, this was very frustrating."

"I felt there was a lot poor organisation, lots of delays and we were expected to turn things around very quickly once the contract was won."

"Time between commissioning and signing of contract has been over long, and the contract is not signed off yet"

"When the tender was put out, the long term dates should have been agreed with regard to interviews as some key people were unavailable due to leave. This could have had major implications."

Whilst another LINK Host organisation mentioned:

"The amount of work and paperwork and admin work required seems excessive. Was that really necessary for an arrangement that now seen as a grant in the eyes of the inland revenue and therefore exempt from VAT?"

These findings show a large number of similarities with emerging findings from an ongoing evaluation of the commissioning work of London Councils that confirms issues with untimely feedback, paperwork demands, and general positive experiences in many aspects of the commissioning process.³²

³² Unpublished SQW (2009) 'Review of London Councils Grant-Making: Interim report to London Councils' London Councils, London.

CVS Perspectives on LINK Host Commissioning

The final element of data collected in this research concerned the views of local CVS some of whom who had applied to be the LINK Host, and others who had made the decision not to bid. Responses were obtained from 20 CVS illustrating a further perspective on the LINK Host commissioning approach in local authorities in London.

CVS Success in the LINK Host Commissioning Process

Of the 20 responding CVS, 15³³ had submitted bids to be LINK Host. In 60 per cent, or nine local authorities, the CVS was successful. Six CVSs bid unsuccessfully³⁴.

Six of the CVS we interviewed did not submit a bid to be the LINK Host organisation for their local area. Their reasons for not bidding offer some useful perspectives on the wider CVS experience of the LINK Host commissioning activity across London highlighting that they had not bid because:

"we knew that we didn't have the required experience on our own and the successful applicant would not entertain a joint bid"

"The bid timetable was extremely tight and fell over the Christmas period. We have raised concerns with the council under the compact but were met with resistance to change. Subsequently and at the last minute the council extended the deadline by one week which may have enabled the CVS to bid"

"We decided as a matter of policy that we wished to engage in the overall policy management of the LINK by participating in the Management Group rather than being the Host (delivery body)."

"We did not feel we would have been objectively and fairly treated during the tender process and in any case had a number of urgent priorities we were also dealing with at the time."

"we wanted to encourage a local organisation to go for it to builds their own capacity, which is what happened"

"We were in the process of a merger, and felt our resources needed to be directed elsewhere at that time."

³³ This includes Voluntary Action Westminster who bid in both Westminster and City of London, being successful in both.

³⁴ The actual number of bids is not known as 12 CVS in London failed to respond to the survey, details of these non-respondents can be found in Table 1.

CVS Satisfaction with the Choice of LINK Host

Amongst the 12 CVS that have not been appointed³⁵ as the LINK Host in their local area, 40 per cent are not satisfied with the choice of LINK Host. Furthermore, in these areas, 40 per cent of CVS say their local VCS is also dissatisfied with the choice of LINK Host. This rises to 57 per cent amongst those CVS that submitted an unsuccessful bid.

However, 18 per cent of CVS are satisfied with the LINK Host organisation appointed, and 33 per cent say their local VCS is satisfied with the choice of LINK Host.

CVS Involvement in the LINK Host Commissioning Process

Table 13 illustrates a comparison of the views of CVS respondents compared with those of local authority staff on the involvement of the local CVS and the wider VCS in specific parts of the LINK Host commissioning process. These figures clearly show the divergence of views between local authorities and CVS/VCS in our survey, particularly on the engagement of both the local CVS and wider VCS in needs analysis and specification development work.

In particular, highlighting that:

- Local authorities are much more likely than their CVS counterparts to believe that the local VCS was involved a lot in needs analysis, priority setting and specification setting, such that 47 per cent of local authorities believe the VCS was involved a lot in needs analysis compared to just 26 per cent of CVS staff on CVS involvement, and 16 per cent of CVS on wider VCS engagement. The difference is even more pronounced for priority setting and specification development;
- Previous consultation work is viewed more positively by both the CVSs and local authorities, but the CVSs still have concerns about the engagement of the wider VCS with only 30 per cent saying that the VCS has been involved a lot in past consultation exercises.

Table 13: Views on CVS/VCS Involvement in Elements of LINK Host Commissioning

% stating that CVS/VCS was involved a lot in....	CVS on CVS	CVS on VCS	Local Authority on VCS
Identifying local needs for health and social care services	26	16	47
Agreeing the local priorities for health and social care services in my borough	21	15	47
Developing the specification for delivery by the Host organisation	16	10	40
Previous consultation work with the local authority before the appointment of the Host organization	55	30	57

Base = 20 CVS and 30 Local Authority responses

Source: Research as Evidence LINK Host Organisation Survey 2008 – Local Authority and CVS Surveys.

³⁵ Includes the six CVS who did not bid for LINK Host contracts.

Furthermore, CVSs also indicated that existing methods of community engagement or empowerment are a common feature of their localities. These results show that 45 per cent of CVS identify local authority funded CENs in their areas, whilst 80 per cent of CVS can identify other VCS health and social care forums in operation in their borough. Knowledge of these activities is more pronounced amongst CVS than local authorities. This again raises some concerns about the needs analysis work conducted by those local authorities in preparation for the LINK Host commissioning.

CVS Experience of the LINK Host Commissioning Process

CVS experiences of the LINK Host commissioning process are less positive than those reported by local authorities and appointed LINK Hosts.

Consequently:

- 40 per cent of CVS thought their organisation was given enough opportunities to provide information on the health and social care needs of people in their borough compared with 10 per cent of appointed LINK Host organisations and 73 per cent of local authorities;
- 50 per cent of CVS respondents think the LINK Host specification was tailored to local needs compared with 85 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts, and 97 per cent of local authorities;
- 45 per cent of CVS think the LINK Host approach was appropriate compared with 70 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts;
- 50 per cent of CVS did not think the LINK Host commissioning process discriminated against voluntary or third sector organisations compared with 75 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts;
- However, 40 per cent believe that it did discriminate, compared with 15 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts, whilst 72 per cent of local authorities thought the VCS was well represented amongst tenders received;
- 58 per cent of CVS are clear how proposals were evaluated compared with 65 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts;
- There is a less common view on the selection criteria for the LINK Host with 50 per cent of CVS saying they were clear of the criteria, compared with 85 per cent amongst appointed LINK Hosts;
- CVS seem least satisfied about the overall commissioning process of all our respondents with only 15 per cent saying that their LINK Host commissioning experience was better than other previous commissioning experiences, compared with 40 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts;
- 35 per cent of CVS believe that the LINK Host commissioning was well handled by their local authority compared with 80 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts.

Some quotes illustrate some of the detail behind this dissatisfaction stating:

"After we completed the PQQ in January of this year, we were told that the tender documents would be with us by March, however we finally received them in June. We submitted the tender and made a presentation to a panel and had been given the date when we would hear the result. However by the end of that week we had heard nothing and the process was then extended twice. We had to submit further information within very short timescales and the basis for evaluation was changed."

"I feel the Local Authority made a good job of interpreting & implementing what was, frankly, abysmal guidance from the DoH"

"The general feeling is that the patients had too much influence. We missed the tender by only 4.5 points but we felt the feedback we received lacked real substance. In fact the person giving it gave some initially unclear feedback re governance. She had to fetch the scoring sheets herself to clarify what she meant! The LA also publicised the results of the tender and the points in a public document before we were even advised of the outcome."

"Commissioning in this borough is not geared properly to the VCS. There is no one standard approach and the PCT commission differently from the LA. We're trying to make this part of the Compact but we're concerned that the commissioners don't understand the needs of the VCS."

"The procurement process as designed seemed to be ok (although the amount of work involved in tendering was huge), however there were major hiccups and delays in its delivery which makes it difficult to say the process was handled appropriately."

"Like many other CVS we were encouraged to tender. We accept that the winning Host had a stronger bid, based on certain technical elements. There is a strong sense that the Host is extremely reliant on us to make this work, and a strong expectation from the council that we will support this, which raises questions about the appointment of the Host. An even stronger focus on local needs and knowledge in the tender may have helped with this. Underlying this is a bit of a sense that there was no choice based on the hard figures from the tender to go with the appointed Host even though not everyone was sure they are the right one."

Findings from an ongoing review of the commissioning of the VCS by London Councils shows very similar issues being raised by VCS organisations. In particular the review of London Councils work in this area shows VCS concerns about commissioning timescales, evaluation criteria and scoring, and output and outcome definitions³⁶.

³⁶ Unpublished SQW (2009) 'Review of London Councils Grant-Making: Interim report to London Councils' London Councils, London.

To address these concerns respondents were asked to identify three main improvements they would make to the LINK Host commissioning process. A number of themes emerged from these responses including:

- The need to improve consultation and understanding of local community need before commissioning took place and that the local VCS is more actively involved in these activities;
- Earlier notice of commissioning timings and deadlines and improved planning around key holiday times to avoid undue pressures on all potential tender organisations;
- A simplified, consistent commissioning process making better use of e-tendering approaches;
- Greater clarity in tender documents of contract requirements and tender assessment criteria;
- More openness on the reasons why a particular LINK Host has been selected;
- Local VCS organisations more directly involved in the commissioning process including right at the beginning in first planning stages.

Conclusions

Our findings from the five elements of data collection enable us to address each of the original research questions. These are answered as follows:

1. Identify whether a Host organisation has been commissioned;

Our findings show that all 33 London Boroughs have now appointed a full time LINK Host organisation, though a number of these will not have assumed duties until January 2009³⁷.

2. Identify the nature and type of the appointed organisation;

Voluntary or third sector organisations have been appointed in 27 of the 33 London boroughs with private sector organisations assuming the responsibility in six boroughs. 24 per cent of boroughs have appointed their local CVS as LINK Host, whilst 39 per cent have appointed an organisation with its head office outside the borough.

Nationally, 26 per cent of LINK Host appointed across England were local CVS or equivalent VCS organisations.

3. Assess how the procurement process was conducted;

The commissioning process was conducted in many different ways. However, most (67 per cent) local authorities opted to undertake a two stage procurement process involving pre-qualification questionnaires, tenders, and presentation and interview panels. Local authorities believe that the process was appropriate and handled well, whilst appointed LINK Hosts agree. Local CVS organisations are less happy with its conduct. 40 per cent of CVS believe the commissioning process discriminated against VCS and third sector organisations, and only 15 per cent of CVS say they LINK Host commissioning experience was better than previous commissioning experiences they had had.

4. Identify what budget is available for the LINK, and how much is utilised by the local authority for management and administration of the contract;

In local authorities able to supply figures the total contracted cost for LINK Host activities in London was over £11.5 million a cost per head of population of £1.99 almost 1.5 times the per head cost in authorities outside Greater London.

A fifth of local authorities report not setting aside a budget for the management or administration of the LINK Host arrangements in their borough, but total budget earmarked across authorities for this activity totals over £725,000 for three years representing just over six per cent of the total contracted cost in London. However, these proportions vary widely across London rising from a low of 1.9 per cent of total contracted cost to a high of 17.1 per cent.

³⁷ Croydon Voluntary Action's appointment as Host remains subject to contract.

5. Collate the number of organisations that applied to Host, and what proportion of these were VCS, not-for-profit, or private;

Overall 111 tenders were submitted for LINK Host contracts across London authorities, 40 per cent submitted by VCS organisations, 41 per cent by not for profit organisations and 19 per cent by private sector organisations. 35 per cent of successful tenders were from local VCS or CVS organisations.

6. Assess how tender specifications were developed and the range of organisations involved;

Local authorities generally believe that the VCS was involved a lot in commissioning process including needs analysis, priority setting, and specification development with 70 per cent saying the VCS was involved a lot. However, CVS and LINK Hosts disagree saying that their level of involvement was much less pronounced.

7. Identify the proportion of appointed Host organisations that deliver health and social care services themselves;

30 per cent of appointed LINK Host organisations deliver health and social care services themselves.

8. Collate details of previous patient involvement practice and process activity;

80 per cent of appointed LINK Hosts have been involved in PPI activity before, most commonly involving CEN, PPIf or OSC activity. Only a minority were previously involved in CHC or CPPIH activities.

9. Collate details of governance arrangements for each LINK;

For 35 per cent of the LINK Host organisations we spoke to governance arrangements are still under development. However, planned developments are focussed on three common models - a central group or executive elected by LINK membership with sub-groups or committees for specific group or other issues, the full election of all members through local community elections, and a steering group elected by community groups.

10. Collate details of LINK staffing arrangements at appointed Host organisations;

Current LINK Host arrangements across 20 London boroughs use 91 staff, 32 full time, 17 part time and 42 volunteers. This is expected to rise to 115 in the future with an additional eight full time staff and an extra 16 volunteers.

Currently, 55 per cent of LINK Host organisations do not staff their activities with part time staff – a situation which will not change in the future. 80 per cent of LINK Hosts do not use any volunteers to deliver their activities currently which will remain unchanged for 95 per cent of these organisations.

11. Identify if any other local authority funded Community Empowerment Networks or VCS health and social care forums exist in each borough;

In three boroughs – Merton, Newham and Sutton the CEN is included in the contract for the LINK Host activities. Furthermore, 30 per cent of local authorities and 45 per cent of CVS identify that local authority funded CENs exist in their boroughs, and 70 per cent of local authorities and 80 per cent of CVS are able to identify other VCS health and social care forums in existence in their localities. These arrangements offer good potential opportunities for facilitating LINK Host activities in these boroughs, the key challenge will be to access and utilise them as effectively as possible.

12. Collate overviews of the relationship between local VCS organisations and appointed LINK Host organisations;

Relationships in some areas are reported to be poor. Amongst the 13 CVS that have not been appointed as the LINK Host in their local area, 40 per cent are not satisfied with the choice of LINK Host. Furthermore, in these areas, 40 per cent of CVS say their local VCS is also dissatisfied with the choice of LINK Host. This rises to 57 per cent amongst those CVS that submitted an unsuccessful bid.

However, 18 per cent of CVS are satisfied with the LINK Host organisation appointed, and 33 per cent say their local VCS is satisfied with the choice of LINK Host.

Amongst local authorities, 72 per cent say that the relationships between appointed LINK Host organisations and the local VCS was good

13. Identify Community Health Council (CHC) funding prior to abolition;

Information on local budgets for CHC funding prior to abolition are not readily available, but conversations with the LINK policy team at the DoH reveal that the global budget for LINK Host activity matches the £84 million set aside for CPPIH activities prior to its abolition in 2006. However, it is important to note that local authorities and PCTs are able to allocate further funds to PPI activity if required in line with their wider legislative commitments to consult widely on other health and social care planning matters.

14. Collation of the measurement mechanisms for the support quality of each appointed Host organisation.

For a majority of local authorities it is too early to identify measurement mechanisms for support quality. 70 per cent of local authorities say they have established such measures with their appointed LINK Hosts, whilst 25 per cent of appointed LINK Host organisations say that service quality measures have been established and agreed. The majority of LINK Host organisations say that such measures remain under development and will be in place in early 2009.

Further Research and Policy Opportunities

Whilst this analysis has highlighted the above responses to the questions posed it has also highlighted further data collection and analysis opportunities. These further research and policy opportunities include:

- Analysis of LINK Annual reports to review activities, management issues, and funding matters addressed by LINKs and their Host organisations;
- Case study assessment of good practice in the development of LINK Host activities and how local CVS might best work with non-CVS or VCS LINK Hosts;
- An examination of ways in which commissioning practice has successfully engaged with the VCS and how that might be replicated in other areas;
- Further national comparisons of the funding and appointment of LINK Host organisations looking at the issues that contribute to the need for higher per head funding in London local authorities;
- The potential added value of a pan London VCS infrastructure organisation dealing specifically with health and social care issues. This could act as a single point of contact for the VCS and policy makers to facilitate improved information sharing, consultation, feedback and networking to underpin the work of London LINK Hosts, but also the increased responsibilities upon PCTs and Health Authorities to consult and engage with their local communities.