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Patient & Public Involvement Forums

## National Association Steering Group

Rosie Winterton  
Minister of State for Health Services  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
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London  
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08 June 2007

Dear Ms Winterton

### National Association of Patients' Forums - Steering Group

I am writing to inform you that following a national ballot of all Patients' Forum members conducted by the Electoral Reform Society, a Steering Group of 18 members has been elected to represent the membership of Forums across England. The ballot was conducted on a regional basis with each region electing two representatives to the Steering Group. The key objective of the Steering Group is to examine the opportunities for creating for Forum members, a national body that may have a future role in relation to LINKs and the proposed new PPI framework. The National Association Steering Group (NASG) will provide a representative and accountable voice on behalf of Forum members across England.

The Steering Group held its first meeting on May 22nd to agree priorities (which are attached) and to elect a Chair and Vice Chair.

The officers now wish to discuss with you a range of issues including the following:

- Role of Forum members in the new LINKs system and continuity between the new and old systems.
- The danger that patients' interests and patient care will be put at risk because of the long delay before LINKs will be operational.
- Short deadlines and lack of realistic action by the Department of Health, resulting in huge gaps between Forums closing and new Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) starting meaningful work.
- Delays in setting up the new system leaving patients and the public without an effective and powerful voice, just as the NHS is facing massive service cuts across the country.
- No hard information about LINKs budgets.
- Problems of conflicts of interest through the involvement of the voluntary sector in the LINKs system.
- Vague and weak system for monitoring the NHS and holding to account local NHS hospital Trusts and PCTs.
- Loss of dedicated volunteers who make up the current system of patient involvement.
- Huge and damaging loss to local accountability in the health service if Forum members leave the system.

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- Assurance to Patients' Forums that transition to a new system will not result in the NHS becoming effectively unaccountable to patients and the public.
- Consultation and involvement of the NASG in planning for any changes to the public involvement system.

Members are confident that they can play a very positive and active role within the evolving PPI framework. We need to meet you in the immediate future to discuss these issues, specifically in relation to a proposal to delay the whole process for a year to allow for a proper and adequate transition to take place from Patients' Forums to LINKs.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Alexander, Chair



Ruth Marsden, Vice Chair

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## Steering Group of the National Association of Patient and Public Involvement Forums

The first meeting of the Steering Group held on 22 May 2007 agreed the following objective and priorities for its first three month work programme.

### 1. Parliamentary process around the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Bill

- To represent local and national views and interests of PPI Forum members to Health and Local Government Ministers, the Health Select Committee, the All Party Group on PPI, MPs and Peers. The Steering Group will brief and advise Peers prior to and during debates in the House of Lords, on ways in which the Bill can be improved. The Steering Group will form alliances with a range of partner and stakeholder organisations, including those in the statutory and national voluntary sector, local authorities and other relevant organisations, in order to build a powerful and influential national alliance in the interests of PPI Forum members, the new LINKs and the public interest.
- To mobilise networks of Forums and Forum members and to form appropriate alliances to achieve our objectives.

### 2. LINKs; role, structure and powers

- To enter into negotiations with the DH, regarding 'fitness for purpose', adequate levels of resources and transparent procurement arrangements for LINKs.
- To demand that LINKs are established as independent bodies.
- To seek to ensure that the 'enter and view' arrangements for monitoring the NHS services are effective.
- To seek guarantees that the potential for 'conflicts of interest' between LINKs and third sector organisations, which have contractual relationships with local government and the NHS are reduced to a minimum.
- To maintain and develop the focus on the specialist services, e.g. ambulance, mental health and cancer services.

### 3. The Transition Process from PPI Forums to LINKs

- To demand that the 'duty to consult' is enhanced by any changes to the legislation.
- To actively oppose the abolition of Patients' Forums until there is a fully functioning new LINK system in place.
- To seek guarantees from the DH that there will be seamless continuity between Patients' Forums and LINKs.
- To press the DH to take active steps to prevent the loss of PPI Forum members (active citizens) from the PPI system during the transition.
- To make representation to the DH to abide by the public statements of Ministers and senior Civil Servants in relation to an effective transition and harnessing of the experience of PPI Forum members.
- To campaign for clear and simple pathways for the 4300, trained, knowledgeable and effective Forum members and other current participants in PPI organisations across England to join LINKs.
- To press for the effective transmission of information and knowledge from the current to the new system through the active participation of Forums, FSOs, CPPH and the DH.

This is the opening position of the Steering Group. Members recognise the limited time available to them to influence the development of the new system and are keen to become actively involved in the transition arrangements immediately. The Group's priorities and work programme will be reviewed as events take shape and as Forum members views develop and change.

Our ultimate goal is to build a national elected association of Forum/LINKs members that will be influential in the development of health care and health policy across England.