

Responsiveness and Accountability Workstream
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Malcolm Alexander
National Association of LINKs Members
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21st January 2009

Dear Malcolm,

Thank you for your letter of 14 January. I have to say that I am puzzled by the majority of its content. Firstly, you seem to be suggesting that NALM is synonymous with the third sector. Clearly this isn't the case, it is one organisation - with company status - amongst thousands. I have been clear throughout NALM's existence that the Department does not view it as a representative body in the way that you do. Our view is that any organisation which seeks to represent the views and interests of LINKs needs to have been given the mandate to do so by LINKs themselves. This is not the position with NALM or any other LINKs organisation yet in existence.

You say that ... 'NALM has England-wide support and has the legitimacy the Government itself cites for LINKs'. I would counter that recent discussions on the LX website would seem to suggest otherwise. It is clear that many contributors to LX do not support NALM and do not believe that NALM is an organisation well suited to represent the interests or views of LINKs participants. I do of course understand that these views are not necessarily representative of the total LINK membership, but this is the very point I have tried to convey to you. Just as I cannot claim that views expressed on LX are representative, nor can you claim that NALM is representative either.

The Department has taken the view that until there is an association that has developed through the involvement of LINKs and their membership

overall it would not be appropriate to give any group or association of LINKs' membership any special attention or endorsement. We have always made this clear to you.

You are right that I have met with you and have corresponded a number of times. I cannot see how this exchange can mean anything more than normal communication with interested parties – I meet with many such parties but none of them write to me in the vein that you do. I should also point out that the exchanges between us have always been instigated by you, I don't remember ever seeking your views – I have only ever responded.

I did say that I thought it would be reasonable for you to speak at the conference on 5 February, and indeed if you are attending the event (as one of the nominated representatives of your LINK) you can still do so, as can any other attendee. I understand that there will be an opportunity for delegates to discuss how LINKs can best work together at various different levels, including nationally, and what support they need, and from where, to help them to do that. What Sarah Crossland was keen to ensure was that you did not get the impression that there would be an opportunity for you to address the whole conference.

With regard to the suggestion for you to contact the Healthcare Commission I think this is a misunderstanding and I apologize if we said anything that day-which caused confusion.

You ask about the people involved in the design of the conference. Two groups have been convened to assist with the planning of the day – a working group made up of representatives from major stakeholder organisations, and a reference group, which included people involved in LINKs, both host and member input.

You ask for minutes of the meetings at which your request to speak was discussed. I can confirm that we have asked both the working and reference groups for their view as to whether NALM should have a platform at the conference and/or whether its steering group members should receive extra places as you requested. All of the responses we have received have been negative, with members feeling this would not be appropriate.

I am sorry that you feel concerned at the way in which the Department or indeed I personally have treated NALM. I have tried to be clear from the outset that we have not viewed NALM as the representative body for LINKs members with a mandate from LINKs themselves.

I am keen that my views in response to your letter are seen by interested parties and, for this reason, I would like it to be posted on the LX web

community. Please advise me if there are any reasons why this would not be appropriate.

Yours sincerely



PP Meredith Vivian