



Getting Ready for Wigan LINK

with Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Context

Every Local Authority in the country was tasked by the Department of Health with contracting an organisation to “host”, or administer and support, a new Local Involvement Network or “LINK” from April 1st 2008. These are to provide a new mechanism for public and patient involvement in health and social care services within the boundaries of the local authority, and to replace the pre-existing Public & Patient Involvement Forums which each dealt only with the health services of a particular NHS trust.

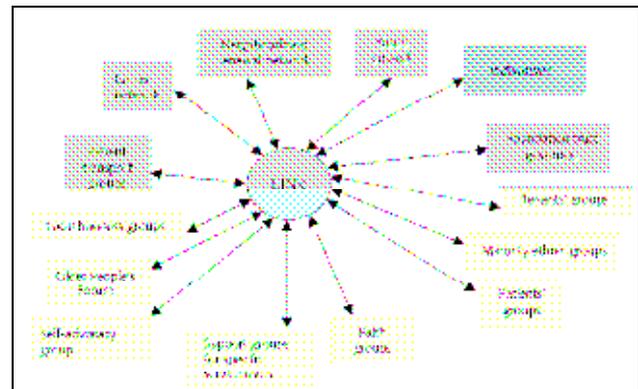
Wigan Council was keen to consult with the various relevant stakeholders to establish how they would like the Wigan LINK to be tailored to local needs and aspirations, and what that would mean for the terms of reference for the contract with the host organisation; and in the process to build capacity for effective consultation and involvement in health and social care in the borough, and build commitment and enthusiasm to make the new structure work for Wigan.

ICA:UK was contracted in September 2007 to design and deliver a process to meet these aims, having just delivered a separate series of multi-stakeholder facilitated review and planning events for the Council over the summer and autumn.

Process

In fact the aims and scope of the project weren't altogether clear at the outset, but with the client we were able to clarify these as we developed a series of events to meet the client's needs.

A pair of half-day launch workshops were held in October, in different parts of the Borough - to launch the process, reflect on and learn from participants' experience of involvement in health & social care in the past, and clarify the aims and scope of the project for those willing and able to get involved. Participants were invited on the basis of their potential capacity to consult between them with the full range of relevant stakeholder groups across the borough.



Membership of a LINK – from “Getting Ready for LINKS”, Department of Health, August 2007

A training day was then held in November to equip participants with the principles, methods and confidence to go out and consult with their groups in a rigorous and consistent way. A half-day closing event in early December was designed to enable participants to reflect on and learn from their application of what they had learned, to weave together the results of their consultations into a single consensus vision for the new Wigan LINK, and to identify the implications of this vision for the terms of reference of the host organisation, in

terms of the skills, knowledge, attitudes & approach required to deliver it.

The tailored training and consultation process we developed combined the strengths of both ICA's ToP (**Technology of Participation**) methodology, and elements of the PA (**Participatory Appraisal**) approach as well. The training drew on ICA:UK's ToP **Group Facilitation Methods** course, and also the **PA4Change** course developed by ICA:UK Associates Marilyn & Chris Doyle and Michelle Virgo (Zebra Collective).

Participants were trained to use the ToP *Focused Conversation* and *Consensus Workshop* methods to consult with their stakeholders on "their vision for Wigan LINK – how they would like it to be", within the framework of the PA4Change principles and approach to participatory research. Each participant was provided with an ICA:UK *sticky wall*, so that they were fully equipped and ready to use the methods they had learned.

Outputs

The ToP *Consensus Workshop* method was used again in the closing event to weave together the product of each of the stakeholder workshops. A total of 227 stakeholders had been consulted through 10 parallel consultations, and a total of 63 vision titles were woven together into a clear and simple nine key vision elements.

The skills, knowledge, attitudes and approaches identified by the group to enable this vision to be delivered were used by the Council, with the involvement of stakeholders, to tailor the terms of reference for the host organisation and to assess the tenders received.

After starting the process in October feeling that Wigan had been slow to start preparing for the new LINK and might have trouble catching up, by the end participants were saying that they felt Wigan was very well placed to get the kind of LINK it needed, and in good time to appoint the host by April.

Feedback

Each of the events was well received. Participants highlights included:

- "Having gained the knowledge and the confidence to get the message out there and gain feedback"
- "Having the opportunity to be involved in something new and to learn through participation"
- "The day has more that met my expectations"

Adrian Hardy, Assistant Chief Executive of Wigan Council and the client for the contract, wrote:

"ICA:UK took a concept that was ill-defined by the client, and translated it into a series of questions and exercises which enabled a group of community volunteers and public sector employees to enter into a constructive dialogue about the preferred characteristics for the future LINK organisation. Of equal value was their training in the use of the Consensus Workshop and Focused Conversation methods, which, albeit brief, gave confidence and enthusiasm to the participants for them to roll it out with their own organisations as they themselves sought a cross-section of views on how the LINK should operate.

I am happy to recommend ICA:UK - not only for this piece of work, but also for other consultation exercises they have done with the Council, which have been equally productive".