



NORTHUMBERLAND  
**LINK**

NORTHUMBERLAND  
**LINK**

# **Annual Report**

**1st April 2008 - 31st March 2009**

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## Thoughts and comments from active LINK members

"It has given me a greater understanding of the way systems are meant to work together."

"I've learnt a great deal since I joined this LINK and that's saying something because I've been around in this game a long time!"

"This is the way forward"

"I have a clear vision of the way ahead"

"It's all coming together!!"

This first year has been one where we have built up our membership; created a structure for involvement and started to identify members' priority issues and actions. This report covers the full range of work done by the members of the LINK in dealing with issues raised by LINK members, and issues referred by the statutory sector.

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## Acknowledgments

Many people have worked very hard in support of Northumberland LINK at an area level 'our thanks to them' and to the people listed below involved in development through participation in the Steering Group.

Heather Abrahams

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Pauline Greaves

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Elizabeth Richardson

Ray Thompson

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Northumberland County Council officers have provided support for the development of Northumberland LINK our thanks to them -

George Irving, John Dowswell, Jackie Roll,

Claire Elliot, Janice Rose, Kirsten Francis

## Background to Northumberland

Northumberland is a county of contrasts and its people face a number of socio-economic challenges as well as opportunities. The least populated county in England, it incorporates upland expanses and coastal areas designated for their natural beauty, alongside former coal mining and industrial communities in the south east.

It is also one of the fastest ageing areas, with significant in-migration of older people and ex-migration of young people. Northumberland's economy cannot be divorced from that of Tyneside – almost a third (28%) of the county's workforce commute there on a daily basis. Despite this, overall economic performance is poor with disposable income levels significantly lower than both the regional and national equivalents. Many of the available jobs are seasonal, part-time or relatively unskilled, there are significant transport and infrastructure challenges and limited learning and employment opportunities are evident across much of the county.

The Sustainable Community Strategy ('Releasing the strength of our communities – a sustainable Community Strategy for Northumberland to 2021', agreed in 2007), sets out a vision and challenge so that by 2021 'everyone in Northumberland has the same life opportunities, is broadly satisfied with the quality of their lives and is able to influence decisions that affect them'. This overarching vision is supported by seven long-term aims:

- Enjoy a good standard of living
- Live safely and in comfort
- Lead healthier lifestyles
- Readily access the things they need

- Take part in cultural activity
- Care about our environment
- Get involved and bring about change

The priorities referenced within the Local Area Agreement centre on the following issues:

- Educational attainment and early years
- Sexual health
- Business growth
- Accessibility
- Pathways to Services
- Mental health
- Independent living
- Community empowerment
- Domestic violence and bullying
- Climate change
- Road safety
- Environmental quality
- Affordable housing
- Waste management
- Healthy living
- Worklessness and income deprivation
- Tourism
- Alcohol misuse
- Cultural participation
- Volunteering
- Smoking cessation
- Anti-social behaviour

From the outset, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) has been embraced in Northumberland as a mechanism to deliver real improvement and builds on an existing, strong ethos of partnership working across all agencies and sectors in Northumberland. The LINK is funded through the LAA and supports a range of health, care, well being and 'stronger community' related outcomes.

Northumberland is in a process of political and structural transition. It is experiencing a change in political leadership at the same time as transition from a two-tiered system with a county council and six districts to its new unitary authority status which came into effect in April 2009.

Innovative plans for local communities to play a greater role in influencing Northumberland's brand new council form a crucial part of the picture, including a structure with three area committees for the south east, west and north and a number of smaller local forums. Area committees will be responsible for managing delegated 'local services', and, along with parish and town councillors, will also be involved in area based scrutiny. Partnerships are also set to be established at area level, with three area community partnerships.

In addition to area organisation, the transition plan provides for a more local network of community forums. Each locality is different in terms of population, geography and political makeup. Community partnerships or groupings of parish councils are likely to become the host organisations of community forums, where these exist. Locality officer posts have been created to facilitate and support the development of community forums and ensure the council's engagement with local residents, voluntary and community groups and other organisations more tangibly influences the council's decision making structure.

These arrangements will be in addition to the variety of differing partnerships and other working relationships throughout the county currently supported by both public sector and voluntary/community organisations. These include, for example, thematic based partnerships within the framework of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership focussing on economic

prosperity, place shaping, health and well being and stronger communities; a number of community of interest partnerships such as the FACT and the Older People Partnership as well as a range of networks hosted by the voluntary sector such as networks for children and young people's services, equality and diversity, learning and skills, as well as the LINK.

[NHS North of Tyne](#) is the commissioning body for Northumberland, and there are four other major providers of health and care services:

[Northumberland Care Trust](#) is responsible for planning, delivering and purchasing the right health care for local residents, for promoting health improvement and providing community health services; and for managing most social care services for older people and adults with disabilities on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The new unitary authority has a Care and Well Being Scrutiny Committee to oversee this provision.

- [North East Ambulance Service](#)
- [Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust](#)
- [Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Trust](#)

The Northumberland LINK has been liaising with these bodies on their engagement and governance plans, and works with them as a Liaison Group to support Northumberland LINK's own agenda.

## Northumberland LINK Structure

An interim steering group was brought together to help oversee the handover from Council – hosted arrangements into the new governance structures, facilitated by the LINK hosts, Adapt NE and Northumberland Community Development Network. This group was made up of representatives of the voluntary and community sector, ex PPI (Patient and Public Involvement) members and individuals from the county.

From June 2008, this group became the 'governance task group,' with responsibility for developing:

- Governance Structure of the LINK
- Terms of Reference
- Code of Conduct
- LINK Membership Criteria and Application Forms
- Developing some initial Policies and Procedures
- Agreeing protocols for external representation

A facilitated away day in July 2008 established the basis for this development programme and agreed LINK governance structures.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1

LINK members wanted Northumberland LINK to take an innovative approach based on the model identified by the NHS Centre for Involvement Guide No.12. Members identified:

- an area based approach
- an action learning community development culture
- a strong emphasis on including people

The LINK structure is therefore designed to ensure that LINK members can make an input and have a say at a number of levels. There are regular area meetings, mirroring the new arrangements in the County Council's plans. There is also a strong emphasis on LINK members playing an active role in finding out the views and interests of people within their communities.

Members of the LINK can be involved in many different ways as follows:

- Contribute to work/task group meetings
- Contribute to area meetings
- Become a LINK 'champion' in their local community or communities of interest
- Take LINK issues to external groups and networks
- Become active in research work
- Be nominated to be part of the LINK steering group

- Receive information such as newsletters, e-bulletins
- Contribute their views through the postcard campaign or web-based Forum
- Attend open meetings and events

## **Membership**

From June 2008, Northumberland LINK began recruiting members to the LINK. Membership is open to individuals and groups based in Northumberland of any age. The membership consists of:

- Individual members
- Group/organisation members
- Associates

Any individual member or group is entitled to full voting rights when there are decisions that need to be made by the LINK membership. Northumberland LINK invites members to define themselves as 'active' or 'support' members, which determines the role that they can play in the governance of the LINK.

Associate membership is open to anyone who works or volunteers for a statutory organisation (for instance NHS bodies, County Council), County Councillors and private sector organisations. Associate members receive the same information that full members receive, but the difference is that they have no voting

rights. The decision to have associate members is to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Northumberland LINK now has a membership of 130, made up of 50 groups / organisations and 80 individual members. Around 200 people have been involved in events and activities as part of the 2008-9 programme.

The following is a statistical evaluation of involvement with the LINK to date:

- **Gender** – there are slightly more women than men involved.
- **Age Groups** – individual membership profile is 3% under 25, 10% over 60 and 87% between 25 and 60.
- **Sexual orientation** – 6% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
- **Disability** – 60% of individual members identified themselves as having a particular interest in disability (though not necessarily having direct experience of disability)
- **Ethnicity** – 2% of individual members are non-white, and a further 15 people involved through a migrant support programme.

## **Policies and Procedures**

The LINK governance group agreed a number of procedures and policies at a meeting in November 2008, and has met bi-monthly since that date. They have completed a considerable amount of work in this time and have developed and agreed the following policies and procedures:

- Members Expenses policy and procedures
- Procedure for responding to issues raised
- LINK Complaints policy
- Communications strategy
- Remit and accountability for Task Groups
- Specification for external LINK representation

## **Northumberland LINK Communication Strategy**

Northumberland LINK has made a commitment to developing an accessible framework for sharing information and decision making.

The following have been agreed:

- Brand guidelines have been established which will be consistent across all communication material

- Each LINK member will be asked for their preferred communication method and this preference will be followed.
- In recognition of the increasing use of web-based communication, each active LINK member will be offered an IT health check covering hardware and software access, internet connectivity and IT skills where requested.
- Materials will be made available in British Sign Language, Braille and Audio. Other versions are available on request.
- A newsletter and E-bulletin to be published every three months, to coincide with press releases to local newspapers ever three months.
- There is a members' online forum on the Northumberland LINK website and a Facebook page for young members is being developed.
- The LINK has produced a 'Have Your Say' postcard campaign for registering views and a procedure to ensure that issues will be followed up.
- Northumberland LINK has a web site where all reports produced by the LINK, minutes of meetings are available for all members of the public to access.
- Further mapping of groups and organisations across Northumberland will be carried out during 2009/10 to

ensure the LINK's membership continues to grow and access increases

## **Training, induction and action learning**

Northumberland LINK has taken an action learning approach to developing its protocols and methods for engaging people in and with the LINK. It has developed a training programme for its active members, using NCDN's approved centre status, accredited through the National Open College Network at Level 2, covering skills in:

- Identifying Need in Communities
- Community Consultation and Community Research Skills
- Engaging Communities – Improving Health
- Health Inequalities
- Policy and Decision Making in Communities
- Representing Your Community of Interest

Three full day workshops have taken place during 2008-9 with a further three planned with steering and task group members; and a rolling programme throughout the life of the LINK to induct new members into the work of the LINK. A core group of 12 people took part in these days, with a further 10 participating in one or more elements. The days generated a toolkit for engaging people

locally; a process for identifying priority issues; an agreement about methods the LiNK will use in researching issues<sup>2</sup> and a specification for LiNK representatives, advocates and champions and. All three of these roles will be developed further during the coming months.

## **Equality and Access**

Northumberland LiNK has been able to make good use of its contacts into diverse communities by building in a dialogue between the LiNK and the Northumberland Equality and Diversity Network, hosted by NCDN. This has enabled the LiNK to engage directly with members of the LGBT Network; disability and deaf network; black and minority ethnic group members; migrant support groups; youth projects and young disabled groups, older people's forums and an emerging faith network. This has meant that the core group of active members has widened in terms of diversity, and also that there are mechanisms in place to take LiNK issues to these diversity groups on their own ground. Part of the LiNK budget has been set aside to enable groups supporting diverse communities to be resourced to help encourage feedback and engagement by their clients.

The LiNK is developing a special programme to involve young people in its work, including action planning with youth-focussed

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2

partners, special projects, a dedicated web-space, and support for a small number of young advocates to play an active role in the LINK.

## **Working with Key Partners and Other Organisations**

### **Partners and Communities of Interest**

The active involvement of partner organisations has been particularly encouraged, and at a special event in January 2009, 35 specialist and community groups helped to identify their priorities, as well as working out how best to complement their influencing work with that of the LINK. There was a consensus amongst these organisations that the LINK would be an appropriate vehicle for filling a networking gap for all those groups involved in health and social care issues. Further discussions are taking place with the Service Providers on how best to complement their plans for engagement with VCS organisations and users. The LINK has been playing an active role in ensuring a voice for VCS groups in the development of new arrangements for the personalisation of care.

### **Liaison Group**

In addition to a number of instances where service providers and commissioners have requested that the LINK supports their consultation and engagement initiatives, Northumberland LINK has been developing plans for a Liaison Group, made up of

representatives of each of the local Trusts and the County Council. This stakeholder group has been invited to participate in a joint meeting with governance group members, and to help LINK members identify the most useful ways of building a partnership approach. The next step will be to agree a protocol for effective communication in the best interests of meeting the health, well-being and care needs of local people.

## **Northumberland LINK's Priorities**

Northumberland LINK's work plan is based on issues that have been raised by members of the LINK. The work plan priorities agreed so far are:

- **Transition from children's to adult services**

A task group is identifying ways to consult with young people and their carers on what changes they would like to see.

People's stories are being gathered and recorded where appropriate to build up a picture.

A seminar is planned with service providers and LINK members to explore the process and look for new ways of working

LINK members are involved through the In-pact Forum in a pilot in Berwick-upon-Tweed looking at a holistic approach

- **The personalisation of care**

The LINK hosted an event for partner groups where the transformation agenda was shared and including questions and answers and some recommendations agreed. The LINK is working with the Care Trust to identify opportunities for involvement in key areas as they develop.

The LINK is seeking to influence the process and timing for consultation over the closure of some day services.

- **Dual diagnosis**

LINK members with particular interest and expertise have met with providers to explore next steps in improving the joining up of services. There will be further involvement in alcohol strategy development.

- **Provision of Talking Therapies**

LINK members are looking at how to develop ideas and influencing activity relating to the provision of Talking Therapies and have been approached by Relate to explore partnership approaches.

- **Economic Inclusion and Mental Health**

Northumberland LINK has participated in discussions with a practitioner / VCS group and promoted a questionnaire on improving access to appropriate services and information; and will develop further links with a CAB-led project to identify further opportunities for linking health and economic inclusion activity.

## **Involvement in Consultations**

Northumberland LINK has also responded to a number of consultations during the year including:

- *Improving access to G.P. and community health services in Northumberland* – proposals for a new health centre August 2008.

- *A new Direction of travel for urgent healthcare in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland*  
NHS North of Tyne is inviting the public to respond to their draft Urgent Care strategy
- *NHS North of Tyne Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2013*  
Feedback on 24 goals in a draft plans for 'maximising wellbeing and health with local people.'
- *Specialist Emergency Care Hospital*  
Northumberland LINK hosted three area pre-engagement consultations with Northumbria Healthcare Trust. These resulted in a number of responses relating both to the plans and the consultation process, and the LINK's involvement has been carried through to the full consultation stage.

## **Briefings**

A number of briefings have been posted on the LINK website and have generated some discussion through the year. These have included:

- *'Understanding What Matters: A guide to using patient feedback to transform services' Department of Health publication. May 2009.*
- *Health Care in Remote Areas*  
"Most people who live in rural areas on average live longer, have better physical and mental health and enjoy healthier lifestyles. However, the poorest and most disadvantaged rural residents have much poorer health outcomes and experience consistently lower levels of physical and mental health." Commission for Rural Communities' Rural Ref Bulletin No. 2.

- *'Equality in Later Life' - A Healthcare Commission study of older people's mental health services*  
The study reveals disturbing age discrimination in mental health services.

## **Northumberland LINK Timeline of events and activities 2008-9**

### **May 2008**

LINK host team established, member recruitment underway

LINK Workshop on 'the client perspective' at Transformation event for health and social care practitioners

### **June 2008**

Transitional steering group interim LINK meeting, Morpeth

### **July 2008**

Host LINK presentation at VCS Consortium Conference, Alnwick Garden

LINK governance awayday Choppington Social Welfare Centre  
LINK task group meeting on NHS North of Tyne public consultations, Choppington

### **August 2008**

Website launched

### **September 2008**

LINK governance group meeting, Morpeth

LINK on agenda at local scrutiny committees

## **October 2008**

LINK governance group workshop, Hexham, governance document agreed

LINK consultation with Northumberland equality and diversity group

LINK West Area meeting, Hexham

LINK North Area meeting at Bell View Resource Centre, Belford

LINK South East Area meeting at Blyth Community Enterprise Centre

## **November 2008**

LINK West Area meeting, Hexham

LINK North Area meeting, Belford

LINK governance group meeting, St George's Morpeth

LINK South East Area meeting

LINK at Older People's Housing Event, Widdrington

## **December 2008**

'Identifying Needs in Communities' and 'Community Consultation' two day workshops, Ashington

LINK at Carers' Rights Day, Haltwhistle.

LINK host contract management meeting with liaison group

LINK at Prudhoe Older People's Forum

## **January 2009**

Partners' Group event for LINK organisational members, Stannington.

Day workshop 'Representing Your Community,' Hexham

LINK West Area meeting, Hexham.

LINK North Area meeting, Belford

LINK South East Area meeting, Blyth

## **February 2009**

Link members attend "Getting better together" National LINK Conference, held in London

Disability Network Meeting, Ponteland

LINK input at launch of Northumberland Carers' Forum for carers and families affected by drugs, solvent, and alcohol use, Ashington.

Toolkit for LINK promotion developed

## **March 2009**

LINK promotion at 'Working with volunteers' event, Seaton Burn

LINK Steering Group Meeting at Wansbeck Works, Ashington

LINK West Area meeting, Hexham

Consultation engagement with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust regarding proposal for specialist emergency hospital in Cramlington.

LINK South East Area meeting, Blyth, and consultation with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Diversity Exchange Conference, with Northumberland LINK Annual meeting & workshop exploring the LINK model for engaging with communities.

## **Working with Regional and National Networks**

Northumberland LINK members have also been involved in some regional and national LINK work including the following:

- Attendance at a national LINK Conference February 2009
- Planning for facilitating a workshop at the Regional LINK Conference in July 2009. Northumberland LINK is working with the other LINKs in the North East it is hoped to bring members together from across the region to discuss the feasibility of a regional LINK organisation and to see whether it is possible to agree a way forward on how local LINKs can work together in the future The LINKs across the North East now have a regional web site and County Durham LINK has been a key player in helping to set up regional networks.
- Developing a successful application to participate in a national action learning pilot to explore extending the scope of the LINK into new service areas. Northumberland LINK was particularly keen to promote the extension of existing LINKs to cover children's social care, but was not able to secure support given the current climate around safeguarding. The pilot will now focus on transport with a particular emphasis on the needs of young, older and vulnerable people.

## Northumberland LINK – Income and Expenditure 2008 - 2009

| <b>Income</b>   | <b>Budget<br/>2008-<br/>2009</b> | <b>Budget<br/>March<br/>2009</b> | <b>Actual<br/>March<br/>2009</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| LINK Income   | 165,000                          | 165,000                          | 165,000                          |
|   | <hr/> 165,000                    | <hr/> 165,000                    | <hr/> 165,000                    |
| <b>Expenditure</b>  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Contract fee retained by<br>Northumberland County Council                 | 15,000                           | 15,000                           | 15,000                           |
| Host costs  | 75,000                           | 75,000                           | 75,000                           |
| Learning and Support for user<br>involvement                              | 7,500                            | 7,500                            | 7,500                            |
| Training in engagement and<br>research skills                             | 7,500                            | 7,500                            | 7,500                            |
| Action Learning support   | 5,000                            | 5,000                            | 5,000                            |
| Web-based networking  | 15,000                           | 15,000                           | 15,000                           |
| Paper Based Materials   | 5,000                            | 5,000                            | 5,000                            |
| Meetings network events   | 10,000                           | 10,000                           | 10,000                           |
| Specialist / locality partners offering<br>access to specific communities | 15,000                           | 15,000                           | 3,000                            |

Out of pocket, care and travel costs  
for LINKs members engaged  
activities.

|         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|
| 10,000  | 10,000  | 7,000   |
| 165,000 | 165,000 | 150,000 |

**Surplus**

**15,000**

### Summary

All activities took place in line with projected expenditure, with IT support and website development undertaken by NCDN.

Training workshops took place throughout the year and associated accreditation costs were covered.

Paper based materials were produced and promotional banners and publicity material distributed to community venues.

### Under spend

Budget was identified for specialist community partners of which £3,000 was allocated for the production of the Business Plan.

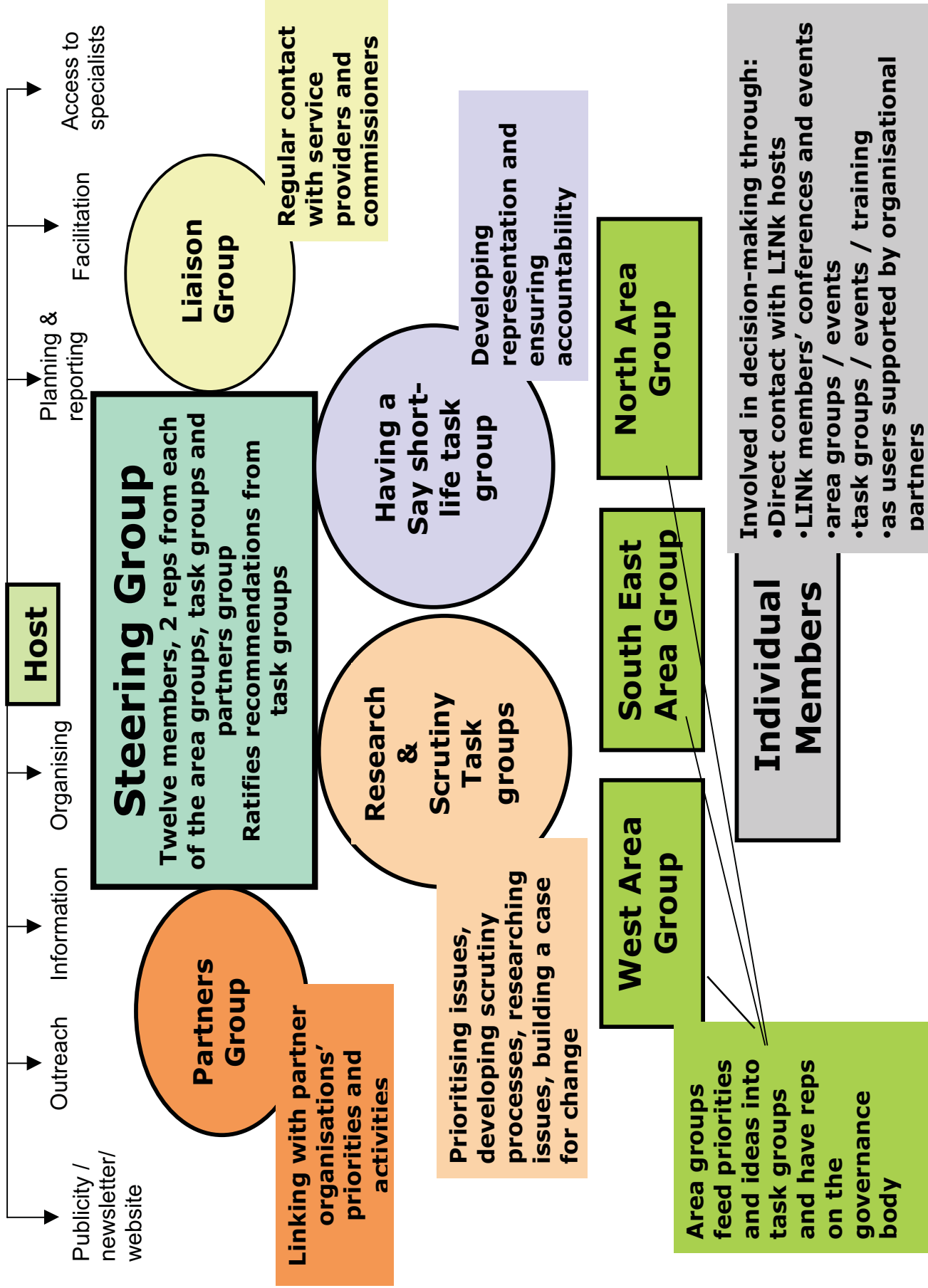
The remaining £12,000 will be brought forward into 2009 / 2010 to support task group work.

Out of pocket expenses to cover care and travel costs of LINK members engaged in activities was under spent by £3,000 which will be rolled into 2009 / 2010.

## Research and Scrutiny Methods

**Short-life task groups** on each theme to:

1. Generate a range of current case studies / individual 'journeys' through the system to illustrate the points where change is needed. These need to include these people's ideas for improvements, and could possibly be made into a DVD.
2. Design simple research surveys to establish patterns in people's experiences of a particular service and to identify solutions.
3. Monitor and share statistics produced by the service providers
4. Liaise with officers / practitioners involved in managing and delivering the particular service to develop action plans.
5. Use relevant legislation to back up requests for improvements
6. Invite service leads to LINK meetings or to sit on Q&A panels
7. Seek meetings with the heads of services
8. Extend representation by LINK members on standing committees, fully briefed and accountable to the research and scrutiny task group.
9. Visits to services elsewhere to make good practice comparisons



**Host**

Publicity / newsletter/ website    Outreach    Information    Organising    Planning & reporting    Facilitation    Access to specialists

**Steering Group**  
 Twelve members, 2 reps from each of the area groups, task groups and partners group  
 Ratifies recommendations from task groups

**Partners Group**

Linking with partner organisations' priorities and activities

**Liaison Group**

Regular contact with service providers and commissioners

**Research & Scrutiny Task groups**

Prioritising issues, developing scrutiny processes, researching issues, building a case for change

**Having a Say short-life task group**

Developing representation and ensuring accountability

**West Area Group**

Area groups feed priorities and ideas into task groups and have reps on the governance body

**South East Area Group**

**North Area Group**

**Individual Members**

Involvement in decision-making through:

- Direct contact with LINK hosts
- LINK members' conferences and events
- area groups / events
- task groups / events / training
- as users supported by organisational partners

If you would like this report in plain large print or another format please call 01434 600599 or email [info@northumberlandlink.org.uk](mailto:info@northumberlandlink.org.uk)



This report is published on behalf of Northumberland LINK by Adapt (North East) and Northumberland Community Development Network. Northumberland LINK, PO Box 205, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 9EA.

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