



CABINET – 21 JUNE 2024

**HEALTH DETERMINANTS RESEARCH COLLABORATION
PROGRESS UPDATE**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the County Council's funding award to become a National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC).
2. The Cabinet is requested to support the HDRC activity, enabling collaborative discussions and opportunities for future research.

Recommendations

3. The Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) Note the successful HDRC funding award and the progress to date;
 - (b) Support the planned HDRC activity; and
 - (c) Advocate for the use of research evidence in decision and policy making.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. Support for the HDRC from Elected Members and senior officers is critical to moving the County Council towards being a research active organisation that produces knowledge and uses it in decision making.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The Health and Wellbeing Board received a report on the matter on 29 February 2024 where it resolved to support the establishment and growth of place-based collaborative research focused on wider determinants of health and to receive further updates in due course.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

6. The NIHR is one of the largest funders of health and care research in the UK. It is funded by the Department for Health and Social Care to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research.
7. Research on the wider determinants of health will align with and support delivery of all outcomes in the Council's Strategic Plan (2022-26).

Resource Implications

8. The NIHR has awarded £5.25m to establish the HDRC over a 6-year period. There is a stop/go transition point at the end of the development year (2024) with progression subject to meeting the anticipated outcomes.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

9. None

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PART B

Background

10. The publication in 2016¹ of 'Improving the Health of the Public by 2040' emphasised the need to better understand how to influence important drivers of health, such as housing, transport and employment to reduce health inequalities. The NIHR has subsequently placed increasing importance on funding research on these wider determinants of health. It has also recognised the pivotal role that local government has in influencing these health determinants.
11. In 2022 the NIHR established the HDRC programme. In 2023 the NIHR launched its second round of funding, and the County Council was successful in securing £5.25m over six years to establish its own HDRC, subject to suitable progress in the interim initial year of funding.
12. It is understood that at stage 1 of the funding round, the NIHR received approximately 40 applications of which 20 were invited to stage 2. Sixteen of these were successful, with Leicestershire and Surrey the first two-tier counties to gain HDRC status. The successful funding award is thus a significant achievement, and the Council joins a small group of 30 HDRCs across England, Wales and Scotland.
13. HDRC funding is an 'infrastructure grant' and as such the funding is not to undertake research, but rather to establish the capacity and capability to undertake research within the local authority, and in collaboration with allied universities, voluntary sector partners and the public.
14. Whilst overall the health and wellbeing of Leicestershire is good, statistics mask serious health differences within the county. Over 11,000 residents experience the highest levels of disadvantage in the country, over 12,000 children live in poverty and over 32,000 people live in fuel poverty. There are high levels of asthma, cancer, obesity and diseases of the heart. People living in the most deprived areas live approximately 5-6 fewer years than those in the least deprived areas.
15. The HDRC investment will support the County Council to work with partner organisations and residents to generate more of its own data through research, using this and existing evidence to improve the services that it provides and inform the Council's strategic priorities.
16. Funding will be used to recruit a HDRC research team, embedded within the existing Business Intelligence Service in the Chief Executive's Department of the Council. The HDRC will complement the current business intelligence function and will utilise existing technical infrastructure. It will also fund academic time for mentorship and collaboration, support research skills

¹ <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/41399-5807581429f81.pdf>

development and training, fund community engagement and coproduction activity and ensure knowledge exchange and impact, embedding research into practice.

Proposals/Options

17. The overarching aim of Leicestershire County Council's HDRC is to fully embed evidence-based decision making across the authority to reduce health inequalities and deliver health-promoting services that enable Leicestershire's residents to thrive. The council's research culture will develop through six pillars of action:
 - (a) Increasing community participation in research, adopting the UK Standards for Public Involvement.
 - (b) Maximizing new and existing data and expanding expertise in data engineering, artificial intelligence, evidence synthesis and qualitative methods.
 - (c) Building research capacity through training, academic career pathways and building community research confidence.
 - (d) Developing collaboration with academic partners, capitalising on the existing local NIHR infrastructure through a 'One NIHR' approach.
 - (e) Continuous improvement using an external developmental evaluation of performance and outcomes.
 - (f) Mobilising knowledge into policy and practice, working with networks and district councils.

18. The HDRC unit will be integrated into the Council's existing governance and core business. It will report to an Internal Leadership Board chaired by the HDRC Co-Directors, and through that to the Corporate Management Team, Cabinet, and Full Council. An External Oversight Committee will provide external expertise and challenge, while a Public Advisory Group will provide advice about community involvement in research.

19. The key deliverables that have been agreed with the NIHR for the development year (January – December 2024) are:
 - (a) Establish a 'research environment' plan for the HDRC: the plan will set out the building blocks for creating an active research environment in collaboration with stakeholders.
 - (b) Produce a research workforce development strategy: the strategy will set out how to build a research capable authority, supporting staff research skills development and recruitment of the HDRC team.
 - (c) Establish the Public Advisory Group: a Public Advisory Group (PAG) will be recruited so that they can help the Council develop its public and community involvement, engagement and participation (PCIEP) strategy and understand who are the underserved communities and their health needs.
 - (d) Develop a research governance plan: this plan will set out accountability structures and reporting pathways, how the HDRC will be

supported through the senior leadership of the council and through the political processes.

Consultation

20. The HDRC application was informed through community engagement during its development (for example survey and focus groups) and a public contributor, who was one of the co-applicants, is continuing to support the programme.
21. Other partners include: the Universities of Loughborough, De Montfort, Nottingham and Leicester, including the Biomedical Research Centre and NIHR Applied Research Collaboration-funded Centre for Ethnic Health Research; Voluntary Action Leicestershire and Healthwatch Leicestershire; and Leicestershire Academic Health Partners.

Equality Implications

22. An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken at this point, however, the HDRC will be embedding equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its work, as the programme's aim is to reduce health inequalities.

Human Rights Implications

23. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

24. This HDRC is designed to facilitate future research which will result in a positive impact on population health and the aspects of the environment that impact upon health.

Background Papers

Report to Health and Wellbeing Board 29 February 2024: Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Briefing Report

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1038&MIId=7406&Ver=4>

Improving the Health of the Public by 2040: Optimising the research environment for a healthier, fairer future, Academy of Medical Sciences (September 2016)

<https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/41399-5807581429f81.pdf>

NIHR news release: initial launch of HDRC, October 2022

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/50-million-awarded-to-local-government-to-tackle-interventions-for-health-inequalities-through-research/31654>

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