



Welcome to our first Leicestershire Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) newsletter.

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) has funded a HRDC at Leicestershire County Council to develop our research capability and culture. This funding will create a new team to develop collaborations with local universities and other partner organisations and engage in research into wider factors that impact our health – so-called health determinants or wider determinants of health.

HDRCs enable local authorities to become more research-active, embedding a culture of evidence-based decision making. Improving our use of research allows us to make more evidence-informed decisions about our policies and services that affect health and the wider determinants of health.

Wider determinants of health are all around us, and include factors such as where we live, our education, employment and lifestyle. Research in these areas will provide the evidence we need to enhance local services and help improve the health and life chances of our residents.

Leicestershire Health Determinants Research Collaboration has support from the University of Leicester, De Montfort University, the University of Nottingham, and Loughborough University. Following a successful bid, we are now half-way through a development year and subject to final confirmation in the autumn, a further £5 million of funding will be awarded to the council for a five year research collaboration.



Progress so far

Connecting with the public

Working with communities to identify the issues that matter is at the heart of our HDRC, and a Public Advisory Group (PAG) is being created to ensure the community is represented and listened to throughout our work. We will work closely with PAG members who will advise and guide the programme at every step.

The PAG was formed in June 2024 and is currently made up of six members. Recruitment and shortlisting were undertaken by a panel involving our HDRC public co-applicant and representatives from University of Leicester and Voluntary Action Leicestershire. During recruitment, it was decided that two spaces in the PAG be set aside to target recruitment at people who were not already represented in the PAG.

Identifying under-served communities

Through the HDRC we will undertake research that helps us understand how best to reduce health inequalities in Leicestershire. We already know that people from under-served communities have poorer health outcomes and so understanding who Leicestershire's underserved communities are is one of the first tasks of the HDRC team.

A piece of work is currently being carried out to identify and understand under-served groups in Leicestershire that will be targeted for inclusion in community engagement and prioritised in future research.



Meet the Team

The Management Board meets regularly to drive progress. It is made up of colleagues from the council's Business Intelligence team, Public Health department, Policy/Engagement and Communications teams, a public co-applicant and local universities. There is also a wider team of partners that were part of the funding bid that met on 4 March to share ideas for how to fully embed the HDRC, as well as sharing ideas and hopes for future HDRC work.

This year is a development year for the HDRC in which we are preparing for the main collaboration to start in January 2025. A small team has been created in the Business Intelligence Service to deliver the development year tasks and once funding has been confirmed the team will move into the main HDRC programme of work, with further appointments to follow in 2025.

HDRC leads within Leicestershire County Council:

- Mike Sandys, Director of Public Health, HDRC Co-Director
- Tom Purnell, Assistant Chief Executive, HDRC Co-Director (to be replaced by Zafar Saleem, newly appointed Assistant Chief Executive, from 1 September)
- Jo Miller, Head of Business Intelligence

Academic lead partners:

- Elizabeth Orton, Professor and Consultant in Public Health at the University of Nottingham
- Bharathy Kumaravel, Associate Professor in Public Health at the University of Leicester
- Lauren Sherar, Associate Dean and Professor of Physical Activity and Public Health at Loughborough University

HDRC core team members:

- Richard Wilding, HDRC Team Leader
- Sarah McNeill, HDRC Business Partner

- Sarah Hadfield, Senior Research & Insight Officer
- Sacha Johnson, Community Engagement Lead
- Paula Norman, Project Manager
- Stewart Smith, Business Intelligence Business Partner
- Jenna Parton, Public Health Principal
- Sally Brighty, Communications Manager
- Cecily Henry, Public Co-applicant

Staff skills survey

An early task for the programme was to establish a baseline of current research skills and activity at the council. We achieved this through an online staff skills survey.

The survey closed in mid-June, with the 119 responses currently being analysed. Early analysis of the results shows high levels of interest amongst Leicestershire County Council staff to both use and conduct research. Findings from the survey also offer some suggestions for training in research skills such as how to design and conduct research. Encouragingly, many respondents reported already having relevant research skills that they would welcome the opportunity to use more in their current role.

The results of the survey will help inform the development of a local research skills training programme which will be open to local stakeholders.



Our Next Steps

The next steps for our HDRC will be finalised once we have received funding confirmation from NIHR in Autumn 2024. Our current plans for the rest of this year include:

- Submit Progress Report to NIHR Summer 2024
- Develop staff research training plan Autumn 2024

- Mini conference for staff in partnership with University of Leicester
Autumn 2024

Contact us

If you would like to find out more about the HDRC, visit our [website](#) or
contact HDRC@leics.gov.uk