

NIHR | Health Determinants Research Collaboration



In this newsletter, we highlight our latest work to strengthen the use of research and evidence in decision-making across Leicestershire. We focus on building capacity, developing research bids, supporting knowledge mobilisation, engaging with communities, and reflecting on our progress and future direction.

Building research skills across the council

We continue to deliver a successful training programme designed to build council staff confidence in research and strengthen key skills. So far this year, more than 40 colleagues from across the organisation have taken part in our first two sessions, Ethics in Research and Designing a Research proposal.

Alongside this, we are pleased to be offering fully funded Master of Public Health (MPH) places at the University of Nottingham for Leicestershire County Council (LCC) staff. At the time of writing, we have just offered two members of staff places on the course to start in September 2026. These staff have been given protected time by their managers and have evidenced how they will influence research culture in their own context using the skills developed on the Masters.

Through these opportunities, we aim to equip colleagues with research skills and knowledge needed to apply research in their roles, while also supporting participants to undertake wider Determinants of Health research projects as part of their MPH.

Collaborating for change

The HDRC Leicestershire team is actively progressing three exciting research bids in collaboration with university partners, focusing on the following topics: digital inclusion, female veterans, and loneliness. While still in development, these projects represent an important opportunity to explore innovative solutions to some of today's most pressing social challenges and allow our team to strengthen their skills in preparing and submitting bids.

As well as strengthening the evidence base in these areas, it is reinforcing strong, collaborative relationships with academic colleagues, laying the foundations for future partnerships and shared learning relating to our nine priority areas.

Embedding research into practice through HDRC Knowledge Cafés

As part of our commitment to knowledge mobilisation and evidence-informed practice, we have launched a series of HDRC Knowledge Cafés - an interactive space designed to bring research to life and connect it directly to day-to-day decision making.

So far, five sessions have been delivered, each following a simple but effective format. A short 20-minute spotlight introduces a research paper or project, followed by a 40-minute facilitated discussion focused on how the learning can be applied in practice. This approach creates a valuable opportunity for LCC staff to reflect, share perspectives, and explore how evidence can inform their everyday working practice.

Feedback from participants has been positive. Colleagues have particularly valued the chance to connect across teams, exchange ideas, and better understand how research relates to their roles. The sessions are helping to build confidence in using evidence and encouraging a culture of collaboration.

The impact is already visible. The HDRC Knowledge Cafés have helped to spark new research bids on digital exclusion, supported fresh analysis of smoking cessation service data, and contributed to ongoing work around supported internships for autistic people.

These early outcomes highlight the potential of HDRC Knowledge Cafés to bridge the gap between research and practice, turning insight into action and supporting better outcomes across our priority areas.

Journal Club - bringing research into everyday practice

There are many ways to embed research into everyday practice across the council. One effective approach, pioneered by our Adults and Communities colleagues, is the Journal Club. Read on to hear insights from Mandy Ewart, Principal Social Worker at Leicestershire County Council.

“The HDRC team have been instrumental in supporting our Adults and Communities department to establish a journal club specifically for adult social care workers. The aim has always been to broaden our team’s research knowledge and help them apply this learning directly to their practice.

With valuable assistance from the HDRC Leicestershire, we were able to co-deliver a workshop that clearly explained both the purpose and the potential impact of journal clubs. This gave us a solid structure to work from, and as a result, we now have two journal clubs running within the department. These have already proven to be an effective way to support staff with their continuing professional development.”

Following the success of Ask HDRC



Following the successful launch of *Ask HDRC*, staff across the council have been making the most of this new route to access evidence and research support. So far, 20 enquiries have led to a range of positive outcomes.

Through the initiative, we’ve connected colleagues with academic experts, developed literature summaries, and begun shaping research proposals for external funding. We’ve also provided practical support on research and knowledge mobilisation, helping staff build confidence in using evidence in their work.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand *Ask HDRC* to include universities and community organisations, creating even more opportunities to collaborate, share learning, and turn questions into meaningful action.

Public and community involvement

Our HDRC Leicestershire team, working alongside the Public Advisory Group (PAG), has developed a new Public and Community Involvement, Engagement and Participation (PCIEP) strategy. This sets out our priorities for the short, medium and long term, ensuring our approach to engagement is meaningful, inclusive, and shaped by the communities we serve.

As part of this work, we have welcomed three Community Research Champions, who will play a key role in strengthening connections with local communities and helping us reach a wider range of voices and experiences.

We have also launched a community grants initiative. This will allow grassroots organisations, to apply for small grant funding, enabling them to explore local research priorities and share lived experiences linked to the wider determinants of health.

By doing so, we aim to deepen our understanding of the issues that matter most, ensuring community voices are at the centre of our work. [Read more](#)



Learning and improving



HDRC Leicestershire is committed to continuous learning and improvement, regularly reviewing our progress to ensure we are delivering meaningful impact. This work is supported by our external evaluation partner, Rose Harvey and Co.

Recently, Rose hosted a workshop with our Board, to explore five identified 'wins' and 'questions' through one-to-one interviews with HDRC team members and partners. Together, we explored key strengths and identified important questions for the future. These discussions led to clear action plans focused on strengthening our vision, ensuring our structure remains fit for purpose, valuing our team and public involvement, and making better use of communications to share our successes.

We also welcomed a visit from our funder, NIHR, represented by Adam Briggs, Ollie Brown, Katherine Arbuthnott and Penny Birmipili. This provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on our progress so far and to deepen our understanding of how our work aligns with the national vision for HDRCs.

The visit left us feeling encouraged by how far we have come, while also challenging us to further strengthen our connections with social determinants networks across our area.

HDRC Leicestershire, supporting research

If you are interested in developing your research skills, getting involved in research or collaborating with our partners, there are various opportunities HDRC Leicestershire can support you with.

Some of our upcoming sessions include:

- Public Health staff: LA-SPARC opening in September 2026
- Council staff workshop: Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Inclusion in Leicestershire.

If you have any questions or queries, please drop us an [email](#).

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