

Report of:	Mark Adams – Joint Director of Public Health Mayor Andy Preston – Lead Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health
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Submitted to:	Single Member -17 th November 2021
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Subject:	Developing a Research Culture in Middlesbrough Council
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Summary

Proposed decision(s)
That the Executive approves that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegated authority is granted to the Director of Public Health to submit a bid to the National Institute of Health Research to look to secure a Health Determinants Research Collaboration function.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent?
Executive	Yes – over £150,000 and more than two wards will be affected.	This report is not confidential.	For the purposes of the call-in procedure, this report is not urgent.

Contribution to delivery of the 2021-24 Strategic Plan		
People	Place	Business
This work contributes to all nine of the priorities in the 2021 – 24 Strategic Plan by creating a culture that uses the best available evidence in all decision making.		

Ward(s) affected
All

What is the purpose of this report?

- The report provides details on the proposal to develop a research culture in Middlesbrough Council and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council via the submission of a bid to secure a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) from the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR).
- If successful, the bid is worth up to £1 million a year for five years with potential for the funding to be made long term pending a review in year four. Discussions are ongoing as to whether the bid covers Middlesbrough Council only or South Tees (with Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council) including which of the two Local Authorities would submit the application.

Why does this report require a Member decision?

- Within the Executive scheme of delegation the Executive are responsible collectively for determining any matters relating to bids for funding which are financially or strategically significant and have not provided for within the financial and policy framework.

4. Therefore a decision is required to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health to submit the bid to the NIHR.

Report Background

5. The health of the public is fundamentally influenced by the wider determinants, or drivers, of health. The work of Local Government profoundly impacts on these drivers, but there is, to some degree, a paucity of useful evidence around what can impact on these drivers and how to influence them. It is vital that Local Government is better supported to become more research-active and further build this evidence base.
6. Research activity requires an infrastructure within Local Government, mirroring the culture of research that has taken many years to develop in the NHS. Currently, this infrastructure and culture is missing within most Local Authorities.
7. This funding call offers the opportunity to Middlesbrough Council to be at the forefront of this work.
8. The HDRC specification document says that

NIHR HDRCs will be nationally recognised centres of 'research excellence, based in and led by local government, which receive core funding from the NIHR. Their focus will be on building research capacity and capability between local government and the academic sector. Fundamental to each collaboration will be a multi-disciplinary Research and Development (R&D) team. Each HDRC will support public health capacity building by enabling local authorities to become more research-active and thus more involved in shaping and driving forward the research agenda in a way that is most informative for the decisions and issues they face.

9. The important point here is that the HDRCs will not do actual research – they will grow and foster the culture and processes that allows research to happen (similar to Research and Development functions in the NHS) – creating the platform for Local Authority Officers to collaborate and access other external funding to both use and create research evidence.
10. The specification document¹ suggests five possible areas that a successful HDRC will influence and work within, namely (1) culture, (2) resource and capacity, (3) collaborations, (4) leadership and (5) dissemination – with suggested bullets for consideration against each of these (listed in appendix one of this document).
11. How each bid proposes to achieve the required outcomes and changes is for the bidders to decide; there is one mandatory element in that each HDRC must appoint to a Director of Research and Development akin to the equivalent roles in the NHS.
12. The NIHR is looking to fund five HDRCs in the first instance – with expressions of interest submitted by 23rd November 2021, with a second application stage in early 2022 and contracts awarded in June/July 2022.

The Middlesbrough Council bid

13. The proposal is that a bid is submitted to host a NIHR HDRC in conjunction with Teesside University.

¹ See <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/nihr-health-determinants-research-collaborations-hdrc-specification/28341>

14. Discussions are ongoing to work out whether the bid should be submitted with Middlesbrough Council alone with Teesside University or whether it should be joint with Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. A joint approach would build on existing partnerships and arrangements (e.g. Public Health South Tees, Joint Health & Wellbeing Board) but NIHR have indicated that the bid would need to articulate the benefits (specifically what does Council A add to the culture change of Council B). Bids have to be submitted by a Local Authority – not Universities (but with them as partners).

15. The bid will build on our assets – for example:

- a. The existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Public Health South Tees and Teesside University (signed May 2019)
- b. The scoping work carried out by Scott Lloyd (Public Health South Tees) and Professor Dorothy Newbury-Birch (Teesside University) between October 2020 and January 2021 (one of 15 pieces of work funded by NIHR to scope out the HDRC concept). The South Tees work explored how the operationalisation of the MoU had gone, undertook a deep dive into three areas in both Local Authorities (namely Children’s Services, Planning and Regeneration) to understand what being research active meant to them and some wider work with partners, Councillors and Heads of Service. The report – supplied alongside this paper – made a number recommendations such as using the existing MoU to secure further research funding and extend this arrangement to other areas of the Local Authorities and to map the latent research skills of existing staff (we know that many of our staff have PhDs, Masters degrees or equivalent experience).
- c. The skills and experiences around research of our staff – for example, Scott Lloyd started a NIHR Local Authority Pre-Doctoral Fellowship on the 1st September 2021 and Robin Bedford holds a NIHR Clinical Research Network Green Shoots Award.

16. The initial thinking is that our bid will:

- a. Develop an internal culture and processes that enable all members of staff to develop their research.
- b. Pending approval by Corporate Directors, to build on the scoping work by supporting research activity in Children’s Services and Regeneration (incorporating Planning) and also Adult Services – as work in these Directorates matures, others will be supported.
- c. Employ a Director of Research and Development, who will be supported by a number of other staff such as Research Managers/Officers.
- d. The Director will drive the culture change whilst the Managers/Officers will support the focused work in Children’s Services, Regeneration and Adult’s Services.
- e. Teesside University will provide support around training, research processes, specialist advice and offering access to formal qualifications (e.g. Masters and Doctoral degrees).
- f. Additionally, there will be functions to:
 - i. Independently evaluate the work of the HDRC.
 - ii. Develop a Local Authority equivalent of what the NHS would call a patient and public involvement and engagement function.
 - iii. Involve the Voluntary and Community Sector in the HDRC.
 - iv. Commission an external party to act as a critical friend (initially, this has been discussed with Craig Blundred, the Director of Public Health for Hartlepool).

What decision(s) are being asked for?

17. The decision asks that delegated authority is granted to the Director of Public Health to submit a bid to the National Institute of Health Research to look to secure a Health Determinants Research Collaboration function.

Why is this being recommended?

18. Securing a NIHR HDRC will be positive for Middlesbrough Council and the University in so many ways.

19. It has the potential to significantly raise the profile of Middlesbrough Council. We will be at the forefront in improving the use of evidence to inform our decision making. Our Officers will collaborate more and secure research monies so that we know better what is working and what isn't working. We can use the HDRC to attract the best talent to the Local Authority, the University and the wider system. The opportunities that the HDRC will bring will help us to develop and retain our staff. The extra monies that we will secure will create more local jobs.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

20. Other potential options/decisions include:

- Continue as we are – this is an option although it does not achieve the benefits mentioned above.
- Attempt to implement the culture change without the HDRC resource – this is an option but would unlikely achieve an impact without significant investment of Officer time.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

21. At the bidding stage there are no legal implications for Middlesbrough Council. If successful, the lead bidder will enter into a contractual arrangement with the funder.

22. If the bid is submitted on a South Tees basis with Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council and is successful, a partnership agreement will need to be agreed between Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council and Teesside University.

Financial

23. Each HDRC is worth up to £1 million a year for five years, with a review in year four which could result in the funding being continued into the long term.

24. If Middlesbrough Council was the host for the HDRC, the Corporate Policy on external grants would apply – requiring 8% of the funding for overheads.

25. There is a cost not covered by the HDRC in that additional Officer time will be required to support the implementation of the proposed changes; however, the longer term benefit of the work will outweigh the initial input particularly as more external monies are secured.

Policy Framework

26. This decision does not have any impact of the council's policy framework.

Equality and Diversity

27. A level one impact assessment has been completed.

28. The proposed HDRC should not result in policies and practices that impact inequitably on any individual or groups because they hold one or more protected characteristics; indeed, by placing health inequalities at the core of the work this should have a positive impact on equality and diversity.

Risk

29. The relevant risks this decision would influence are cited below, with an explanation as to why they are relevant and how it would affect each risk.

Risk No	Risk Description	
O8-008	If effective partnership working is not achieved , then this will reduce the Council's ability to deliver strategic priorities and key services, resulting in reduced outcomes for local communities.	This funding bid is seeking to enhance partnership working between the two local authorities, Teesside University and engaging with the Voluntary and Community Sector as well as the public. This bid if successful will have a positive impact on this risk.
O8-054	Failure to adhere to Local Code of Corporate Governance and deliver governance improvements outlined in the Annual Governance Statement.	This bid is looking to support development of key areas which are clearly linked to good governance so this would have a positive impact on this risk.
O8-056	If the Council's operations and its culture fail to align, or evolve to keep pace with, its strategic objectives, then these will not be achieved, or not achieved in full.	One of the key areas within the specification document for the bid is culture. The bid is seeking to develop a culture within the organisations for members of staff to develop their research and utilise this to support decision making so this will have a positive impact on this risk.
O8-027	If the Council fails to recruit or retain staff to key posts , due to perception of the Council or competition from other employers, then this could result in reduced capacity and knowledge, leading to reduced outcomes for local communities. (The predicted recession and further austerity reduces the risk in some areas but not all). The economic austerity reduces this risk in some areas but not all).	The opportunities which the HDRC will bring will help develop staff and also retain them so this will have a positive impact on this risk.

O1-005	If poor economic growth occurs, then this will reduce public and private sector investment in the town, including town centre retail, housing development and business.	If the bid is successful then it will create more local jobs which will have a positive impact on this risk.
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Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

30. Approve the proposal to submit a bid to look to secure a NIHR HDRC by the deadline of 23rd November 2021.

Background papers

- NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration specification – available at <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/nihr-health-determinants-research-collaborations-hdrc-specification/28341>
- How to develop an existing Memorandum of Understanding between Public Health South Tees and Teesside University into a research system for Middlesbrough Council and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council into a Research Ecosystem: Final Report (scoping report by Scott Lloyd, Professor Dorothy Newbury-Birch and colleagues funded by the NIHR Public Health Research Programme – completed January 2021)
- Memorandum of Understanding between Public Health South Tees and Teesside University

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Appendix One – Possible areas that a successful HDRC will influence and work within (from the specification document)

Culture

- Creating a culture within the host local authority, and its collaborators, of making enhanced use of research evidence to inform decision making aimed at improving health and tackling health inequalities across all functions and departments.
- Identifying opportunities for research and evaluation of local authority initiatives.
- Assessing where more robust evidence could add value in aiding decision making.
- Acting as a champion for R&D with other local authorities, either in neighbouring areas or similar authorities in other parts of the country.

Resource and capacity

- Supporting local authority functions to source information by undertaking tasks such as reviews of literature and accessing / producing evidence-informed summaries.
- Applying for research funding or collaborating with academics who are applying.
- Enabling research to be undertaken by ensuring that any necessary research systems and processes are put in place.
- Training local authority staff in accessing and making best use of evidence-based resources.
- Signposting staff to training resources and career development opportunities.
- Developing strong collaborations with providers of tailored capacity-building activities intended for local government audiences, such as the NIHR Academy and the NIHR School for Public Health Research.
- Facilitating public engagement in the research agenda.

Collaborations

- Developing stronger relationships between the collaborating Higher Education Institution and other academic groups.
- Working in partnership to attract research funding from a range of funders, including NIHR.
- Linking effectively with the appropriate national public health bodies across the UK.
- Working effectively with other HDRCs to share good practice and learning.
- Encouraging the development of relationships with academics from non-traditional public health disciplines where appropriate to areas of interest for the authority.
- Developing relationships with local NHS R&D functions to serve the shared population's research needs.
- Having clear mechanisms in place to engage with local communities to identify research needs and to disseminate the work of HDRCs in ways that are relevant to those communities.

Leadership

- Seeking out opportunities for the local authority to undertake research or make use of research findings, ensuring that these are central to the organisation's leadership and decision-making processes.
- Leading discussion within local systems and/or across similar local authorities about the role of research in improving decision making.

Dissemination

- Communicating research findings in appropriate formats for the local government audience and for the communities served by the HDRC.

- Clear channels for disseminating the work of HDRCs both to local groups, including strong engagement with the underlying populations, and to local authorities that are faced with similar issues (for example, an HDRC might focus on a topic such as coastal health, in which case there should be clear plans for sharing relevant findings and knowledge with local authorities in similar areas).
- Working across statutory and non-statutory organisations in the defined geography and/or across groups of similar local authorities to share learning from research aimed at improving population health and reducing health inequalities / tackling disadvantage.