

Health and Wellbeing Board
14 MAR 2024

Developing a place-based approach to research across Oxfordshire

Report by Adam Briggs, Deputy Director of Public Health

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED:

To DISCUSS and COMMENT on the development of a place-based approach to research across Oxfordshire, including how to best involve and work with HWB members and to support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Executive Summary

2. This paper summarises why research is crucial to the work of local government to improve health and tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire. The paper asks for to HWB comment on the development of a place-based approach to research across the county.

Background

3. At times of resource constraint, the use of research and evidence becomes increasingly important to prioritise scarce funds. By using high-quality, systematic research to unpick why different approaches work for different populations and in different settings, local government can make better use of limited resources to deliver improved health outcomes for everyone in Oxfordshire.
4. Oxfordshire's communities and residents are critical to the development of a place-based approach to research. To help develop this, Oxfordshire Community Research Network (OCRN) was launched in March 2023 and is funded by UK Research and Innovation (OCRN was one of 25 successful collaborations out of 291 applications)
 - a. The OCRN is made up of local community and volunteer groups, as well as council representatives and public involvement leads from across the universities and hospital trusts. The OCRN has agreed it's three key objectives: delivering community-led research; supporting research prioritisation; coordinating public and community involvement in research.
 - b. HealthWatch Oxfordshire have completed an extensive [review of community research activity](#) across Oxfordshire, making recommendations for improving community research in the county.
 - c. The network is starting the development of its community research strategy and designing its staffing requirements. The network has also recently identified an evaluation partner to help identify what's working and how things could be done better.
 - d. OCRN has recently received a six-month £25k funding extension to support community research workshops and an external evaluation of the network's

development and related activities. Following this, the Network will apply to UKRI for up to £1m over five-years to further develop its work.

- e. OCC has also successfully been awarded an [Oxford Policy Engagement Network Fellowship](#) in partnership with Nuffield Department of Primary Care, University of Oxford to help with network's design and expansion.
5. Oxfordshire has two internationally recognised universities and two major academic NHS trusts. Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford both have strategic ambitions to work more closely with local communities and local councils to support wellbeing and tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
 - a. OCC has been working closely with central administration teams at Oxford Brookes University and University of Oxford to support a place-based approach to research in Oxfordshire.
 - b. As part of this commitment, OCC is partnering with University of Oxford and with Oxford Brookes University to create a Local Policy Lab. The Local Policy Lab will support an annual cohort of graduate students to spend 6-8 weeks tackling policy-relevant research questions based in or with local government (OCC or district councils). The Local Policy Lab initiative is being launched on 18th March, 2024 with projects starting from late April. Projects will focus on climate policy and on the wider determinants of health and tackling inequalities. Students will be supported by university staff working in partnership with council staff. Research topics will be proposed and prioritised by local authorities working in partnership with the CRN to ensure that policy labs focus on policy-relevant research that matters to residents (annex 1).
 6. Oxfordshire County Council is embarking on the development of a cross-council research strategy, to be led by a new OCC Head of Research (figure 1). The strategy will develop a programme of research to allow OCC to work with colleagues across community, academic, health, governmental and business organisations locally, regionally, and nationally to make better use of our unique assets. These include our community relationships, data, services and staff. Work to embed research across OCC includes implementing a new Research Strategy Board, putting in place the necessary governance and assurance processes, and creating a range of training and professional development opportunities.

Figure 1. Four pillars of an OCC research strategy



Corporate Policies and Priorities

7. This work is consistent with a range of OCC corporate priorities and the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including improving health and wellbeing, and tackling inequalities.

Financial Implications

8. Progressing the plans in this report will include applying for external research funding – leveraging some of the £40bn+ invested in research in the UK each year. For example, OCC has recently secured funding from the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Oxford and Thames Valley for a new two-year social care research post.

Legal Implications

9. N/A

Staff Implications

10. Development of a place-based approach to research will involve the development of training opportunities for staff, councillors, and residents, and the creation of new posts in local government, NHS trusts, and in universities.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

11. Equality and inclusion is being incorporated throughout this work, and forms a core part of the development and delivery of this programme of work.

Sustainability Implications

12. This work can support the county's wider sustainability agenda by helping understand the breadth of work on sustainability and health. This includes climate being one of the areas of focus for the Local Policy Lab.

Risk Management

- 13. The Oxfordshire Community Research Network is currently funded through to Summer 2024 and without ongoing investment or successfully applying for external funding applications there is a reputational risk for OCC and reduce trust from community groups in research and academics.
- 14. There is a risk that research insights do not directly impact local decision making and improve health outcomes. This is mitigated by working across OCC and with communities to ensure that research is both policy relevant and matters to people in Oxfordshire.
- 15. Research funding applications are very competitive and have no guarantee of success. Closer partnership working between communities, councils, academics and NHS trusts will ensure that funding applications have the best possible chance of success, learning from the expertise available in the county.

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Annex. An illustration of how to identify policy-relevant research that matters to residents

