

Health and Wellbeing Board

16 MAR 2023

Developing community research capacity and partnerships across Oxfordshire

Report by Adam Briggs, Deputy Director of Public Health

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED to**

DISCUSS and ADVISE on current proposals to develop our approach to community research across Oxfordshire, focused on addressing the wider determinants of health and tackling inequalities.

SUPPORT proposed funding bids to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

Executive Summary

2. Research is a key tool for local government to understand how its services and programmes impact health and inequalities, and the role of different approaches and interventions to address the needs of different populations. We would like to develop three key areas of research work: developing our Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) research capabilities, creating a community research network, and making better use of our data.
3. This paper summarises our research ambitions and potential opportunities for Oxfordshire. The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to comment and advise on our approach and how we can work together to maximise the impact of this work.

Background

4. This paper summarises three key research opportunities of Oxfordshire and invites discussion and comment on how we can best take an inclusive cross-county approach.
5. Research is a key tool for local government to understand how its services and programmes impact health and inequalities, and the role of different approaches and interventions to address the needs of different populations. This can help with the more efficient and effective use of constrained local government resources as well as meet council and health and wellbeing board priorities to improve wellbeing and tackle inequalities.

6. Over the past 18 months, Adam Briggs (Deputy Director of Public Health, OCC) and Priyanka Vasantavada (Public Health Research Practitioner, OCC) have been working with the public health directorate as well as colleagues across OCC and Thames Valley to support the development and delivery of research to tackle the wider determinants of health and inequalities.

i. NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)

7. Between Sept 2021 and July 2022 we developed our application to be an [NIHR HDRC](#). HDRCs are local government-led partnerships funded for £5m over five years to develop local authorities' capacity and capabilities to deliver research focused on the wider determinants of health and inequalities. Ten local authorities were funded in 2022.

8. Despite being unsuccessful, the process of developing the application illustrated the widespread support from councillors and partner organisations to develop OCC's approach to research.

9. NIHR have recently announced the [2023 HDRC funding round](#), with expressions of interest due by 18th April and full applications to follow in August for shortlisted organisations. For successful applications, funding would start in December 2023.

10. We would like to build on our previous application, as well as our current plans on data integration and community research networks (details below), to resubmit an application in 2023. We want to collaborate closely with colleagues and stakeholders from across the county throughout this process, including setting up a task and finish group of council officers and interested individuals from across Oxfordshire to co-develop the bid.

ii. Data integration

11. Oxfordshire County Council is the owner of a range of individual-level data assets, this includes areas such as social care, drug and alcohol services, and community safety. Data integration efforts are ongoing across the region. For example, OCC is working with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) to link social care data with primary and secondary care data as part of the [Thames Valley and Surrey Care Records](#) and the Oxfordshire-wide Public Health Informatics (PHI) programme. And Thames Valley Police have a data linkage project bringing together social care data with health care and criminal justice data to help [tackle violent crime](#).

12. We are proposing to take forward two pieces of work related to data integration in partnership with people working in data and intelligence across OCC.

13. The first is taking forward two internal projects to explore the opportunities and challenges to linking our own internal data assets for understanding health needs and for service evaluation. The second piece of work aims to partner with [The Bennet Institute for Applied Data Science](#), University of Oxford, to pilot the development and implementation of a safe and secure open-source data platform for health system and local government data in Oxfordshire, called

OpenSAFELY-Local, building on the [OpenSAFELY project](#) that has transformed access to primary care research. The initial funding proposal has been submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

iii. **Community Research Networks**

14. In August 2022 we were one of 25 collaborations out of 291 applicants to be awarded a small amount of pilot funding from UKRI. The funding is to set up a [community research network](#) (CRN) and promote the 'sustainable and equitable involvement of communities in research'. The £25,000 Expression of Interest (EOI) funding is for use between March and August 2023. EOI funding recipients will be invited to submit applications for full implementation of CRNs (funding up to £600k over three years) from around July 2023, to start Jan 2024.
15. The four key goals of the full implementation are:
 - Develop the knowledge, skills and capability required to support research produced with, by and for local communities
 - Strengthen and sustain the connections between local communities and local research organisations
 - Invest in, pilot and scale community-engaged research activity
 - Collate and share knowledge about their practice with UKRI and other relevant stakeholders
16. The initial funding is being used to develop and run community engagement workshops and partnership meetings, to explore the role of community research champions, and to commission a report on the opportunities and learning from ongoing community research activity in Oxfordshire.

Opportunities for Oxfordshire

17. Through these three areas of work, we have the opportunity to overcome some of the key barriers to delivering applied local government research on wider determinants of health and inequalities, such as community engagement and data integration. Furthermore, we have the potential to access funding that would create a step-change in how OCC uses research to support decision making and how we can understand the impact of our work on local residents and communities.
18. Funding would enable:
 - Dedicated staff to support research and development at OCC and across Oxfordshire
 - The development and implementation of a county-wide research strategy focusing on wider determinants and inequalities, supporting decision making across the council
 - A more integrated approach to research training and development
 - Closer community partnerships to develop sustainable community-led research projects and programmes
 - Research placements for academics in OCC and for OCC staff in academia
 - Improved staff recruitment and retention

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. This work is consistent with a range of OCC corporate priorities, including prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents and tackling inequalities.

Financial Implications

20. This work could lead to external research funding for OCC and partner organisations – this does not have direct implications for existing OCC or HWB member budgets.

Legal Implications

21. Additional research funding would have associated grant conditions that will be reviewed by legal prior to agreement.

Staff Implications

22. Delivery of the research projects described above will require using the funding awards to recruit skilled staff.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

23. Equality and inclusion is being incorporated throughout this work, and forms a core part of the development and delivery of our research funding proposals.

Sustainability Implications

24. This work can support OCC's wider sustainability agenda but helping us to understand the breadth of our work on sustainability and health.

Risk Management

25. The application processes for funding listed here will be most resource intensive in March - April 2023 (deadline for expression of interest for HDRC), and again in May to August 2023 (writing both full application for HDRC and for CRN).
26. These research funding applications are very competitive and have no guarantee of success. Furthermore, given the council's relative inexperience of writing and costing research funding applications, the process is unlikely to be straightforward. We will build on our experiences with our 2022 HDRC application and aim to partner with colleagues from across Oxfordshire to support the development of the bids. Any unsuccessful bid still has the potential to help Oxfordshire develop its community research agenda and be more competitive for future funding applications.

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Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil