

# Report to Cabinet

**15 November 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) proposal
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Syeda Khatun Public Health & Communities
<b>Director:</b>	Liann Brookes-Smith (Public Health)
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Lina Martino – Consultant in Public Health <a href="mailto:lina_martino@sandwell.gov.uk">lina_martino@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

### That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Receive the Health Determinants Research Collaboration proposal and supporting documents for consideration and comment (Appendices 1-3).
- 1.2 Approve receipt of funding up to £5 million and implementation of the proposed 5-year programme, subject to the pending bid being successful.
- 1.3 Approves the implementation of the following action points identified within the Strategic Investment Unit Appraisal Report to reduce any risk to the Council:
  - (a) That NIHR's terms and conditions of funding are passported to delivery partners in agreements with Sandwell MBC and include the following:
    - Procurement in accordance with Sandwell MBC's own procurement requirements
    - Maximum funding allocation for each delivery partner



- Evidence required to support grant claims
  - Grant claims paid in arrears
  - Repayment of grant in the event of non-delivery of outputs
  - Monitoring requirements
  - Responsibility for funding overspends on delivery of the project
- (b) That all estimated costs are reviewed with delivery partners to ensure that the outputs of the project can be delivered within available funding.
- (c) That agreed output levels are agreed with partners involved in the delivery of the project and monitored throughout the funding period.
- (d) That overhead costs are reviewed to ensure that defrayment can be evidenced in accordance with the funder's requirements.
- (e) That the Risk Register is reviewed to ensure all risks relating to the project are identified and adequately mitigated.
- (f) That capital equipment purchased for the project is notified to Strategic Finance at the end of the financial year and is included on the council's Asset Register and accounted for accordingly on the authority's Balance Sheet.
- (g) That VAT/tax advice is received from the Council's tax consultants and adhered to accordingly.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The funding would provide us with a unique opportunity to progress our ambitions to use information and intelligence in a more strategic way to improve outcomes for Sandwell residents and reduce health inequalities over the longer term. The bid and detailed budget have undergone a full appraisal by the SIU (Appendix 2).



### 3. **How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?**

- 3.1 The HDRC would align to our Borough-wide Levelling Up Programme (LUP), which will invest in affordable homes, improved skills infrastructure, better leisure facilities, an improved public realm, active travel infrastructure, social value and local spend, and local employment opportunities. The HDRC would give us the means to ensure that the LUP and related work across the Council is informed by evidence and robustly evaluated.
- 3.2 Meeting the objectives of the proposed HDRC programme will lead to higher quality of the services we deliver and commission, and more efficient investment to improve Sandwell as a place, including education, skills, employment, community cohesion, transport, housing, economy and the built environment – which are the wider determinants of health, and the objectives of the Corporate Plan. Over the longer term this will lead to improved health outcomes and reduced inequalities in both physical and mental health across the life course, contributing to the Vision 2030 of a thriving, optimistic and resilient community.
- 3.3 The HDRC would therefore have potential benefits across all Corporate Plan priority areas throughout the programme and beyond.

## 4. **Context and Key Issues**

### **Background**

- 4.1 The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is the biggest funder of health research in the UK. They are providing up to £5 million of funding to a number of local authorities to establish Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) in their local areas.
- 4.2 HDRCs aim to boost research capacity and capability within local government to embed a culture of always using evidence when making decisions. HDRCs use research findings to understand how decisions impact on health and health inequalities. They also carry out research where evidence isn't already available.



- 4.3 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) is the 12th most deprived local authority in England and life expectancy is 2-3 years shorter than the national average. Inequalities have been deepened by the pandemic, austerity and climate change, yet Sandwell's superdiverse communities, industrial heritage and green spaces are key assets. A research needs analysis in 2021 found a strong culture of evidence-based decision making in the Public Health directorate, but this was weaker across the wider Council. Existing structures and collaborations show commitment and potential to be more research active and evidence-informed, but limited capacity to take this forward.
- 4.4 We have submitted a proposal to form a HDRC (*Better Research for Better Health*) in partnership with the University of Birmingham and the voluntary and community sector (VCS), represented by Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Sandwell Consortium. This proposal is one of 20 shortlisted and we have received very positive feedback from peer review.
- 4.5 We attended an interview on 6 September 2023 with a panel consisting of with a panel made up of local government representatives, senior researchers and public contributors, chaired by Professor Brian Ferguson (Director of the NIHR Public Health Research programme). Our HDRC team was represented by Lina Martino (Consultant in Public Health, SMBC); Liann Brookes Smith (DPH, SMBC); Louise Kilbride (CEO, Sandwell Consortium); and Miranda Pallan (Professor of Child & Adolescent Public Health, UoB).

### **HDRC vision, aims and objectives**

- 4.6 The Sandwell HDRC will be based on the theme of Poverty and Cost of Living, aligning with the LUP to address the wider determinants of health and tackle systemic disadvantage in the Borough.
- 4.7 The HDRC vision is to undertake evidence-informed, robustly evaluated activities that reflect the needs and values of our diverse local communities. The Sandwell HDRC will align with a borough-wide Levelling Up Programme to improve the wider determinants of health.
- 4.8 The HDRC aims to transform SMBC's research culture and infrastructure to:
- Make the best use of empirical evidence to inform decision-making and investment



- Robustly evaluate services to ensure quality, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness
- Facilitate research activity with partner organisations and local residents
- Effectively disseminate research outputs for wider influence

4.9 This will be achieved by:

- Strengthening research and development capacity, resources and infrastructure
- Embedding a strong research culture for evidence-informed decision-making
- Developing robust systems and partnerships for cultural and knowledge exchange
- Creating a community-led research culture

### **HDRC workstreams, key deliverables and timelines**

4.10 HDRC objectives will be delivered via four parallel workstreams:

- Build capacity and infrastructure through workforce development and training; data science infrastructure for information sharing and evaluation; and research governance structures and processes
- Embed research culture and evidence-informed practice by supporting translation of evidence into practice; embedding needs assessment and evaluation; and increasing use of evidence in decision-making
- Strengthen systems and partnerships through academic collaborations for research and learning; structures and processes for wider system partnerships; and effective information sharing
- Promote community participation through expanding PPIE structures; widening participation and representation in research; and facilitating engagement

4.11 The HDRC has a 5-year phased approach.

Year 1: programme establishment and planning, setting baselines and training

Year 2: full programme commencement

Year 3: dissemination, review and growth, including first publications

Year 4: review and consolidate learning



Year 5: sustainability through designing and implementing an ongoing programme of activity

## **Collaborations and partnerships**

4.12 The HDRC will be a core partnership between SMBC, University of Birmingham and the voluntary sector, supported by wider collaboration and engagement. Partnership with Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations and Sandwell Consortium will ensure that local residents and community groups are represented and involved.

## **HDRC staffing and governance**

4.13 The HDRC will be a collaboration with UoB and the VCS, working with local and regional partners, and a pan-Council unit working across departments. A HDRC Board will provide strategic oversight, reporting to SMBC's Health & Wellbeing Board, Full Council and Cabinet via SMBC Leadership Team to provide updates, seek endorsement of key decisions and secure high-level strategic engagement.

4.14 A total of 12 full-time staff will be recruited to support delivery of the HDRC from the programme funding. Strategic leads from SMBC and UoB are existing staff members who have jointly developed the HDRC delivery plan and will lead on the development of the HDRC from the programme start. For new staff there will be flexibility in how and who we appoint, within the content of appropriate partnership arrangements as necessary.

## **5 Alternative Options**

5.1 Without the funding we would continue to attempt to achieve as much of these objectives as we can within existing resources and partnerships. However, what we can achieve in this way is severely limited as we do not have the capacity or infrastructure to achieve positive change at the scale and pace anticipated with the funding in place.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<p>Resource implications are contained within the main body of the report and in more detail in the bid document (App 1). There are no requirements to match or continue any funding received for this programme.</p>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>No direct legal implications arising from the recommendations. Successfully implementing the proposed HDRC programme would enhance current governance processes through improving how they are informed by local and research evidence.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>A risk assessment has been carried out and the Risk Register was included in the SIU appraisal documentation (see report in App 2). Key risks identified were failure to convene leadership groups and recruit new staff; insufficient capacity of internal leads to support the programme; low uptake of training and engagement activity; breaches of GDPR, ethical protocols; and safeguarding (linked to community engagement activity). Mitigations of these potential risks are covered in the proposed HDRC plan, including: continued engagement of key partners and stakeholders; dedicated budget for backfilling SMBC staff time, with early planning of recruitment campaigns; and timely development of processes and protocols for partnership working, research governance and ethical approval.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment is attached (Appendix 3) outlining the equality implications of the proposed HDRC programme. Overall it is likely that the programme will have benefits across a range of protected characteristics and other marginalised groups through using evidence and research to improve the quality of local services and initiatives focusing on the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, and the emphasis on involving local residents in shaping research priorities.</p>



<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The proposed HDRC would have a positive impact on health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities through improving the wider determinants of health – the conditions in which our residents are born, live, grow, work and age. It will achieve this through strengthening the use of evidence and evaluation to inform the services and interventions we deliver and commission as a Council, therefore enhancing quality and efficiency of investment.
<b>Social Value</b>	The HDRC will align to the Levelling Up Programme to ensure that this and related work across Directorates are evidence-informed and robustly evaluated, and reflect the needs and values of local residents. It will therefore enhance the social value of this work over the longer term.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations. However, the longer term impact of this work in alignment with the Levelling Up Programme is likely to have beneficial impacts on air quality in the Borough through enhancing decision making processes around improvements to the built environment.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations. However, the longer term impact of this work in alignment with the Levelling Up Programme is likely to have beneficial impacts on care leavers, particularly through enhancing work to improve education, skills and employment opportunities in the population.

## 7. Appendices

App HDRC SIU Appraisal Report  
App HDRC Equality Impact Assessment

## 8. Background Papers

None

