

From: Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

To: Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee - 18 May 2023

Subject: Implementing the Research, Innovation & Improvement Unit in Kent County Council

Classification: Unrestricted

Past pathway of paper: None

Future pathway of paper: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary: Recent local studies indicate keen interest within the council staff to engage in health-related research to improve strategic planning and frontline practice, but lack the capacity and resource to do so. While some ongoing research related activities are operating in Kent County Council, a central Research Innovation & Improvement Unit has been proposed to build upon and join up these activities, and strategically build Kent County Council into a Centre of Excellence for Research Innovation & Improvement (RI&I). The Council's Public Health Team is applying for funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the programme is called Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). If successful, funding will be used to develop the Research Innovation & Improvement Unit.

Recommendations: The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the proposal to establish a central Research Innovation & Improvement Unit.

1. Background and rationale

- 1.1 Over the last few years, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) has advocated the need for local government to become more research-active and develop their own capability for building a local evidence base around population health and wellbeing. Research activity demands infrastructure within and owned by local government, mirroring the culture of research that has been successfully embedded in the NHS.
- 1.2 A recent survey and a group workshop were conducted with senior officers from Kent County Council (KCC), indicating most were keen in using and

participating in research, innovation and improvement projects but lacked the capacity and support to undertake and apply them in frontline practice.

2 Research activities in KCC

- 2.1 Over the last year a team from the University of Kent has been working with KCC's Public Health team to undertake specific engagement and research work such as evaluation of the Violence Reduction Unit.
- 2.2 More recently, a RI&I subject matter expert has been seconded from the NHS as a programme lead to set up a Centre of Excellence within the Public Health department, kickstarting several infrastructural activities such as participation in funded national research studies.
- 2.3 Further exploratory work has indicated room for improvement for better governance oversight and reporting arrangements, better workforce learning and development and recognition of staff participation in these activities.
- 2.4 Examples of other research activities include: Adult Social Care collaboration with the Kent Research Partnership, funded by the NIHR, who undertake a number of initiatives such as Research Fellowships; Children Services partake in number of national research projects and have recently been awarded 'outstanding' rating by Ofsted as acknowledgment of service improvements implemented in response to evidence collected through research; KCC's Analytics Team also undertake research related activities and provides limited support on research governance.

3. Proposal to set up a RI&I unit for KCC

- 3.1 To address the above challenges, it has been proposed to develop a central RI&I Unit that would perform the following functions:
 - Provide oversight for governance and reporting arrangements for research activities in KCC.
 - Oversee a consistent approach for research prioritisation aligning with KCC strategic priorities.
 - Design and liaise with respective directorate research teams in implementing regular research management pathways around funding opportunities, ethics approval, information governance, data access and research methods.
 - Act as focal point and liaison with other teams for collaborative pathway development such as KCC Learning and Development (Challenger), Data Protection and Information Governance, Human Resources (developing funded researcher placements for KCC led research projects), Strategic Commissioning for contract monitoring,

and Communications for professional and public dissemination of research results.

- Act as starting point for initiating research collaboration with universities, charities and other external organisations across mutually agreed research priorities and themes.
- Act as a focal point in collaborating with national and international research projects and programmes e.g.: NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN) Portfolio of studies which consists of clinical research studies that are eligible for support from the NIHR CRN in England.
- Oversee how the research findings can be transformed into a robust local evidence base and applied towards improving council activities and practice, whilst operating within current financial constraints.

3.2 To ensure maximum utilisation of existing resources, RI&I unit will look to operate within a '**hub and spoke**' model. The Hub will be the RI&I Unit while the spokes will include existing research teams based in different directorates such as the Kent Research Partnership in Adult Social Care or Kent Analytics. New spokes will be established where required, for example in the GET Directorate who have already expressed an interest.

3.3 Over time, the RI&I Unit will engage and collaborate with respective districts and partnership groups such as the Kent Housing Group around designing implementing research activities of mutual interest.

3.4 The Central RI&I Unit will also collaborate considerably with the emerging Research & Design function being established by the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) as per the ambition outlined in the recently published Integrated Care Strategy (ICS) (*We will drive research, innovation and improvement across the system*).

3.5 To pump prime the setting up of the RI&I unit, it has been proposed to apply for the next funding call of the [NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration](#), as explained in the next section.

4. Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)

4.1 The HDRC funding call has been set up by the NIHR who wish to fund a set of innovative research collaborations between local government and the academic sector which focus on improving the wider determinants, or drivers, of health i.e. education, employment and housing, environment, economy and transport. This is intended to be a UK-wide initiative led primarily by local government.

4.2 A successful HDRC site will have to be able to demonstrate, among other things:

- Programmes of work and activities of the HDRC are of equal value to the local authority and to researchers involved in the collaboration.

- Proposed shared posts and projects will address the needs of the local authority and the requirement for academics to demonstrate the impact of their research.
- Increased research capacity and collaboration will at a local level aid evidence driven decision making.

4.3 The HDRC will strengthen a research culture across the organisation, demonstrating co-creation and dissemination of research driven by the policy and decision-making needs of local government.

4.4 The funding available consists of £5 million over 5 years to be led by respective local authority public health teams (£5million/council). Eligible costs include:

- core staff costs (eg: Director's time dedicated to the collaboration, an HDRC manager, Research facilitator posts, IT support, administrators etc).
- training and development; materials and consumables for core HDRC facilities.
- communication and dissemination activity costs.

5. Update on HDRC application

5.1 Over the last three months, the Consultant lead and RI&I programme lead have met with the Corporate Management Team, Divisional Management Teams, and other senior officers to describe the proposed vision and approach to setting up the RI&I. All expressed an interest and support for this.

5.2 An initial expression of interest (stage 1) by Public Health on behalf of KCC was submitted to the NIHR in mid-April, accompanied by nine letters of support from local partner organisations including the Kent and Medway Medical School, the University of Kent and Canterbury and Christchurch University, who have all expressed interest to be academic partners in the bid.

5.2 If shortlisted, KCC will be invited to make a Stage 2 proposal throughout June, July and August, with interviews taking place during September and contracts being signed from December 2023. During the Stage 2 process, Public Health will conduct further work with respective directorates in finalising the agreed structure and governance arrangements, timelines and detailed financial costings.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations: The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the proposal to establish a central Research Innovation & Improvement Unit.

7. Contact details

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