

**Forward Plan reference number: FP/287/11/23**

<b>Report title:</b> Developing a Health Determinants Research Collaboration for Greater Essex	
<b>Report to:</b> Cabinet	
<b>Report author:</b> Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration	
<b>Date:</b> 19 December 2023	<b>For:</b> Decision
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<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex	

## 1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 There are few things more important in life than our health. While many people in Essex do enjoy good health, there are many others, in various parts of our county, who don't. There are a range of wider factors which can contribute to poor health, such as poor housing, poverty, financial insecurity and low skill levels. Taken together, these factors are known as the wider determinants of health.
- 1.2 Central to tackling these wider determinants is good-quality research, which enables ECC and partners to develop the evidence we need to shape decisions on service delivery, and the policies and interventions that can influence both the conditions in which people live and the opportunities available to them. The stronger the evidence, the more effective the interventions that can secure sustained improvements in health outcomes.
- 1.3 Earlier this year, ECC worked with a range of partners to develop a £5m funding bid to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). This bid proposed the development of a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in Greater Essex – the area covered by Essex County Council, Southend-On-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council. This HDRC would be a new, five-year research partnership between local government, universities and local public services.
- 1.4 In late October 2023 the NIHR confirmed that this bid had been successful, and that funding would be awarded upon acceptance of the terms and conditions set out in the NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration contract.
- 1.5 The purpose of this paper is to seek agreement to accept this funding and delegate to officers to implement the Collaborative.

- 1.6 In doing so, it will accord closely with the ambitions within Everyone's Essex, including those relating to the economy and environment; and, more than anything, it will help lay the foundations for a serious, long-term approach to levelling up in our county.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Agree that the Council should accept £4,999,764 funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research for a Health Determinants Research Collaboration.
- 2.2 Agree that the Director, Policy in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer may enter into agreements to accept the funding and implement the partnership.

## **3 Background and Proposal**

- 3.1 There are stark health inequalities across Greater Essex. The difference in life expectancy between the area's most and least deprived wards is around sixteen years for women and twenty-two years for men, reflecting variation in communities' economic and educational opportunities, and their living conditions – the wider determinants of health. Councils across Greater Essex are committed to tackling these wider determinants of health, but securing change is not easy. No single organisation can make progress working alone, yet the scale and diversity of Greater Essex, and the complexity of local public services, make it difficult to define shared priorities and agreed actions.
- 3.2 Good quality research will be essential if ECC and partners are to succeed in tackling the wider determinants of health and reducing inequality. Research can foster a shared understanding of needs, residents' priorities, and effective strategies for addressing health inequalities. To play this role, research must be trusted, speak to partners' concerns, and command attention from those who have the power to implement change.
- 3.3 To this end, Essex County Council (ECC), Southend-on-Sea City Council, Thurrock Council, University of Essex (UoE) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) have developed proposals to create a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in Greater Essex. These proposals were submitted as a bid to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) in July 2023 in response to a national funding call.
- 3.4 The NIHR confirmed in October 2023 that this bid had been accepted and that the Department of Health and Social Care – the department that funds the NIHR's work – had agreed to provide £4,999,764 over five years to fund the Greater Essex proposals. This funding would be awarded subject to the agreement of the standard HDRC contract. The proposed funding would fully

cover the cost of the work and there is no expectation that ECC would have to cover any part of the costs of the work.

### ***What is a Health Determinants Research Collaboration?***

- 3.5 HDRCs are nationally recognised centres of 'research excellence,' based in and led by local authorities. They receive core funding from the NIHR to build research capacity and capability between local government and the academic sector. They are focused on public health improvement, enabling local authorities to undertake research and better use research evidence to inform decisions concerning the wider determinants of health.
- 3.6 The first HDRCs were established following an initial round of funding awarded in 2022. There are currently thirteen in the UK. Funding for the Greater Essex proposals has been offered as part of a second wave of eleven HDRC's, bringing the total in the UK to twenty-four.

### ***What will the Greater Essex Health Determinants Research Collaboration aim to achieve?***

- 3.7 The HDRC will work to build research capacity and capability and drive a stronger research culture across the system. It will:
- conduct high-quality, inclusive research into the wider determinants of health, focused on those areas of Greater Essex where health outcomes are poorest (coastal towns in Tendring, Canvey Island, estates in Colchester, Basildon, Harlow, Southend-On-Sea and Thurrock – this geographical focus is consistent with ECC's Levelling-up strategy). The research will be focused on local needs and challenges as identified through joint strategic needs assessments and consultation with local partners, political leaders and residents.
  - support professionals to undertake research and to use research findings to better inform decision-making. We will work with existing researchers, senior officers, political leaders, and residents to develop Greater Essex's skills-base and help foster a supportive environment for research.
  - engage with GE professionals, politicians, residents and local government peers across England to drive collaboration around research, and secure engagement with the HDRC's research outputs through the creative use of media and ensure that outputs influence policy decisions around the WDH.

### ***How will the development of the Greater Essex Health Determinants Research Collaboration benefit the area?***

- 3.8 The HDRC will deliver a step-change in local authority research capability within Greater Essex. The specific research topics to be examined through the HDRC have yet to be determined (a full research programme will be developed with partners during the first year of the collaboration), the collaboration will enable local authorities and their partners to undertake research which will help them to:

- develop a shared understanding of the needs of residents and communities, and of the key issues affecting the wider determinants of health in Greater Essex;
- determine the policies and interventions that will be most effective in tackling key issues, and evaluate the impact of these policies; and
- work more closely with local residents to define programmes of action that reflect their lived experience, and to enable them to inform and shape solutions.

3.9 The research activities of the HDRC will provide a stronger evidence-base which will help local authorities and partner agencies to take better informed decisions which have a higher chance of securing sustained improvements in health outcomes.

***How will the Greater Essex Health Determinants Research Collaboration achieve these objectives and secure these benefits?***

3.10 The HDRC will deliver these objectives by establishing infrastructure that supports delivery. This will involve:

- establishing a delivery team that brings together local authority officers and university researchers to deliver a research programme and lead practical work to strengthen research practice.
- creating a multi-partner Leadership Board comprising Directors of Public Health, senior officials from the NHS, from local universities and members of the public and voluntary sector. This leadership board will oversee the operations of the HDRC, engaging with partners including Health and Wellbeing Boards and ECC's political leaders to ensure they can influence the research programme. This Leadership Board will be responsible for reporting HDRC activity and outcomes to the NIHR.
- creating an 'advisory group' made up of experts in research and health inequalities to support the delivery team and improve the quality of its work.
- developing a Citizens Involvement Forum that will influence the HDRC's research ideas, work plans, and priorities and ensure we involve underrepresented groups in research. Residents will receive training to enable them to perform these roles.

3.11 Local partners have committed to support the HDRC in this programme of activity. Further detail on the HDRC's activity can be found in our Research Delivery Plan provided as an Appendix to this report.

## **4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions**

4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision

- Enjoy life into old age

- Provide an equal foundation for every child
  - Strengthen communities through participation
  - Develop our County sustainably
  - Connect us to each other and the world
  - Share prosperity with everyone
- 4.2 Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030:
- 4.3 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':
- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
  - A high quality environment
  - Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
  - A good place for children and families to grow

## **5 Options**

- 5.1 Having considered the proposals for Greater Essex HDRC the NIHR has agreed to provide c.£5m in funding over the next five years. The award of this funding is contingent upon ECC accepting the terms set out in the NIHR's standard HDRC contract. This is the contract that the NIHR will use for the first wave of HDRC's and that they propose to use for all councils that receive funding as part of the second wave. There is opportunity scope to vary the particular terms set out in this contract.

- 5.2 There are two options available to ECC:

### **Option 1: Reject the NIHR funding.**

This option is not recommended. This would result in Greater Essex partners missing out on NIHR funding for research. It would severely limit the extent to which partners could collaborate on the development of new insights to inform work to tackle the socio-economic factors that lead to poor health and inequality.

### **Option 2: Accept the NIHR funding**

This option is recommended. This would bring in c.£5m over five years to fund new research capacity and capability, allowing new research to be carried out to inform partners work in places across Essex where health outcomes are poorest.

- 5.3 Should ECC's Cabinet choose option 2, it is recommended that approval to sign the NIHR's HDRC contract be delegated to ECC's Director of Policy and to ECC's Director of Finance.

## 6 Issues for consideration

### 6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 The joint funding bid to NIHR from ECC, with the two universities (University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University, is broken down as follows:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total (Y1-5)
£912,184	£1,019,057	£1,021,039	£1,022,830	£1,024,654	£4,999,764

6.1.2 Over the five years the funding awarded totals £4,999,764. Each year it will be uplifted for inflation as determined by the funder, the Department of Health and Social Care. There are grant conditions, and if these are not adhered to the awarding body has the right to suspend or reduce payment amounts and require repayment of all or part of the funding provided. The conditions require maintaining the working programme as laid out in the bid; submitting reports as required; and complying with the terms of the contract. The start date for the HDRC is expected to be 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 and the work programme in the first six months is focused on mobilising the collaboration from a standing start.

6.1.3 A designated NIHR Manager will oversee the programme, and ECC will be required to complete 6 monthly progress reports, host a yearly 'site' visit and supply yearly financial reconciliations. An annual report to the PHR Programme Director will also be required. This report and the yearly site visit will be critical to the HDRC contracts continuing.

6.1.4 There are various work areas assigned as part of the project which will be commissioned. The programme requires the employment of a small team on permanent contracts which means that an exit strategy will be required, before the end of the five year term when the funding stream ceases, in order to avoid additional cost burdens on ECC. The posts are shown below, with a full year annual cost of £662,000 at current 2023/24 rates. Whilst it is not expected by the Service that there will be any significant liability from these new employees, given turnover rates in the area, there is a risk of ongoing costs once the programme is completed. To mitigate this the service will also endeavour to attract additional funding during the lifetime of the programme and consider wider service recruitment in due course to minimise the impact.

Post	New Post	Annual Cost £'000
HDRC Implementation Manager	Yes	89
Capability Programme Lead	Yes	62
Communication Lead	Yes	62
HDRC Director	No – split 50% of an existing position	57
Researcher	Yes, 6 posts	306
LA HDRC Fellow	Yes, 4 posts of 0.2 FTE	71
Business Support Assistant	Yes (0.5 FTE)	15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>662</b>

6.1.5 ECC will be the Contracting Authority and will be the recipient of the funds.

Payments of grant are made in arrears. The funding is set at £5m over the five years, at 2023/24 prices. ECC's allocated share for each year is shown in the table below in 6.1.6. The funder will assess the payment to be made overall to ECC, and ECC will then pay the University of Essex (UoE) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in turn. Appropriate partnership agreements need to be in place for any element of the HDRC activities that are to be paid to another organisation, back-to-back agreements will therefore need to be in place. The summary of the budgets in the bid are shown below:

	Year 1 £'000	Year 2 £'000	Year 3 £'000	Year 4 £'000	Year 5 £'000	Total (Y1-5) £'000
ECC	763	867	868	868	868	4,234
ARU	84	85	86	87	89	431
UOE	66	66	67	68	68	335
Total Funding	913	1,018	1,021	1,023	1,025	5,000

6.1.6 The summary of the costs for ECC are shown below, for Year 1 to 5. ECC will receive approximately £4.234m. There are costs to maintain the programme, and ECC's share of funding to support indirect costs is £18,000 per annum. This would cover support services such as Legal, Finance, Property and HR.

	Year 1 £'000	Year 2 £'000	Year 3 £'000	Year 4 £'000	Year 5 £'000	Total (Y1-5) £'000
Salaries	555	662	662	663	663	3,205
Travel	98	102	102	102	102	506
Equipment	11	3	4	4	4	26
Consumables	1	1	1	1	1	5
PPI	55	55	55	54	54	273
Other Direct Costs	25	26	26	26	26	129
Indirect Costs	18	18	18	18	18	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>4,234</b>

6.1.7 The share of the Budget for Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Essex are shown below. Once back-to-back agreements are in place, ECC will be the recipient of HDRC funds, and will pay to the two Universities appropriate sums in accordance with the agreement.

	Year 1 £'000	Year 2 £'000	Year 3 £'000	Year 4 £'000	Year 5 £'000	Total (Y1-5) £'000
Anglia Ruskin University						
Salaries	57	59	60	61	63	300
Travel	4	4	5	5	5	23
Indirect Costs	44	43	43	43	43	216
Total	105	106	108	109	111	539
Funded by NIHR	84	85	86	87	89	431



University of Essex						
Salaries	45	46	46	47	48	232
Travel	3	3	3	3	3	15
Indirect Costs	34	34	34	35	34	171
Total	82	83	83	85	85	418
Funded by NIHR	66	66	67	68	68	335

## 6.2 Legal implications

6.2.1 The legal contracts with the universities will need to be structured as a grant agreement rather than a contract for services. This appears to be the correct analysis as this is a joint project in the interests of furthering everyone's knowledge of the wider determinants of health in Essex. The universities are participating in the governance rather than merely providing services to ECC. It will be important to ensure that legal advice is obtained so that this analysis is reflected in the contracts used.

## 7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

## 8 List of Appendices

- Equality Impact Assessment
- Greater Essex HDRC Research Delivery Plan



## **9 List of Background papers**

- NIHR HDRC Specification
- NIHR HDRC Funding call guidance notes