



2024 – 2025

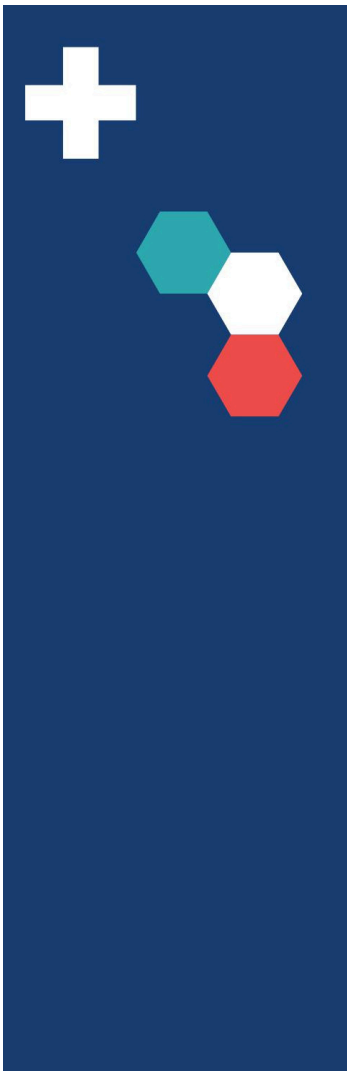
**NIHR**

Health Determinants  
Research Collaboration  
Sandwell



**Sandwell**  
Metropolitan Borough Council

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# Message from Our Director

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One year ago, we officially launched *Better Research for Better Health* - one of 30 Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) funded by the National Institute for Health & Care Research.

Since then, our dedicated team have been working with our collaborators, partners and stakeholders, including Sandwell's diverse communities, to drive the programme forward. We are incredibly grateful for their support, insights and enthusiasm as we work towards our shared goal - to strengthen how we use evidence and research to make a difference to people's lives.

I am delighted to share what we have achieved so far and what we have learned, and reflect on how we can build on this together over the coming year.

**Dr Lina Martino, Director of Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Sandwell**

# What We Do

The NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) helps the council use research and evidence to improve health and wellbeing across the borough.

HDRCs focus on the many factors outside of healthcare that influence people's physical and mental health, known as the wider determinants of health. These include things like air quality, housing, employment, education, transport and community safety. These everyday conditions shape how long and how well we live.

Through our four workstreams, we are improving how research is carried out, how it informs decisions and how findings are shared. This helps us design and deliver better services, tackle inequalities and create healthier communities.



1

**Capacity and Infrastructure:** Building staff skills, systems and standards to strengthen how we do and use research.

2

**Culture & Evidence-Informed Practice:** Embedding research and evidence in everyday council decision-making.

3

**Systems & Partnerships:** Working with universities, the NHS and other partners to share data, ideas and expertise.

4

**Community Participation:** Involving residents and community groups so research reflects real experiences and local priorities.

# Our Partners

Our system, academic and community partners are active members of HDRC Sandwell's governance structures, ensuring Sandwell HDRC is shaped by diverse expertise and perspectives.

## Co-applicants



## Wider Partners



# Our Year in Numbers



**100%**

of council directorates and service areas took part in our Research Skills and Knowledge survey

**230**

people attended our external events, alongside **45** organisations



**35**

organisations took part in HDRC workshops to help shape our work and engagement



**15**

We delivered engagement events, including our Launch Event, Roadshows and Internal Survey Wednesdays



**8**

We partnered with local authorities across the Midlands to embed evidence in practice

**650**

Over staff members took part in our Insights work, including **617** who completed our Research Skills and Knowledge survey



**189**

staff have expressed interest in getting involved in the HDRC



**17**

We worked with universities across the UK and formed **19** research collaborations



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# Capacity and Infrastructure

## Achievements and Impact



### Set the Benchmark

Our first Research Skills & Knowledge Survey, achieving one of the highest national response rates, gave a clear picture of training needs. The findings are shaping a new training programme and the methodology has been recognised by NIHR as best practice.



### Mapped our Strengths

Our dataset mapping interviews that were carried out with council departments identified the data we have and highlighted opportunities for linking data to support needs assessment, evaluation and research.



### Built Strong Governance Foundations

We are setting up a Research Governance Advisory Group and developing new research governance documents to make research across the council more consistent, ethical and locally focused.

#### Map Datasets



#### Develop Processes and Form Advisory Group



#### Establish Systems to Support Council Research



Training Needs Analyses  
and Deliver Training to  
Upskill Staff



Link Datasets for  
Research and Evaluation

## Next Steps

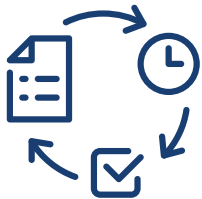
Launch a Research Skills  
Training Programme to  
upskill staff

Explore data linkage to  
strengthen use of  
intelligence

Implement a Research  
Governance Process so  
all research meets high  
standards

# Culture and Evidence-Informed Practice

## Achievements and Impact



### Understood our Culture

We ran an Insights project to establish a research culture baseline at SMBC and launched HDRC intranet pages to support staff in understanding and applying research and evidence in practice.



### Strengthened Equality Focus

We audited Equality Impact Assessment use in Cabinet Reports and are developing a combined Equity, Environment and Health Impact Assessment (EEHIA) tool to support more consistent practice, helping embed continuous evaluation across SMBC.



### Child Friendly Borough Baseline

We collated data on health, social and wellbeing needs of children and young people in Sandwell.

Mapping the  
Current Culture -  
Opinion



Mapping the Current  
Culture - Comparison



Translating  
Evidence into  
Practice



Impact of Interventions  
on the Wider  
Determinants of Health

Decision-Making  
Processes



## Next Steps

Publish Insights Project findings and a literature review with UoB to strengthen research culture in SMBC

Work with SMBC partners to consider how to progress and implement the EEHIA

Hold regular knowledge-sharing sessions and establish research champions at SMBC



# Systems and Partnerships

## Achievements and Impact



### Research Prioritisation

We worked with partners, academics and the community to integrate data on the wider determinants of health with community perspectives to identify HDRC research priorities.



### Information Sharing

We gathered and analysed the perspectives of academic partners and Sandwell Council staff to identify barriers to information sharing, forming the basis for our next stage of work.



### Research Strategy

We are working with stakeholders to develop the HDRC Research Strategy, based on our identified priorities, to guide the next phase of the workstream's progress.

#### Research Prioritisation



#### Research Strategy



#### Wider System Partnerships



#### Academic Partnerships

#### Information Sharing and Governance

## Next Steps

Publish the Research Strategy to guide the next phase of our research-based work

Develop a Policy Framework to accompany our Research Strategy

Address the barriers identified to information sharing between academia and local authorities

# Community Participation

## Achievements and Impact



### Strengthened Engagement

We worked with partners to create a HDRC Sandwell Public and Community Engagement Plan (SPACE) and developed a Communications Plan and Payment Policy to recognise people's contributions.



### Brought Voices to the Board

We codesigned recruitment packs and training with SHAPE Forum and public health work experience students, enabling a community representative and young people to join our HDRC Board to be a voice for Sandwell residents.



### Roadshows Across Sandwell

We delivered 6 roadshow events at community venues across Sandwell, creating opportunities to engage residents and strengthen local partnerships.

#### Launch Event and Roadshows

#### Community Representative Recruitment and Baseline

#### Community Grant



#### Planning and Policies



#### Community Researchers and Voluntary Sector Training



## Next Steps

Create more involvement opportunities through a steering group and community research programme

Baseline research activity in the voluntary sector and identify support or training needs

Develop voluntary sector training offers on research skills and using evidence in practice

# How To Get Involved

- 1 Join our Community Research Programme**  
Express an interest in finding out more about our Community Research Programme, which will provide communities with the skills to get involved in local research projects.
- 2 Take part in our Evidence into Practice workshops**  
Our workshops bring together council staff, partners and community groups to share learning and good practice about research and evidence.
- 3 Join our Community Steering Group**  
Help guide the direction of the HDRC engagement and ensure community perspectives stay at the heart of what we do.
- 4 Engage with voluntary sector training**  
Influence and take part in training designed with voluntary and community organisations to build confidence in using research and evidence-based practice.
- 5 Take part in research skills training for Sandwell Council staff**  
Develop your skills by taking part in our training programme to help you apply research and evidence-informed practice in your role.



Email **[sandwell\\_hdrc@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:sandwell_hdrc@sandwell.gov.uk)** to join our mailing list and receive the latest news, events and opportunities



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