

Health and Wellbeing Board Choose Committee.



Date of meeting:	12 March 2026
Title of Report:	Health Determinants Research Collaboration Update Report
Lead Member:	Councillor Mary Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care)
Lead Strategic Director:	Professor Steve Maddern (Director of Public Health)
Author:	Dr Ruth Harrell/Professor Gary Wallace/Elaine Fitzsimmons
Contact Email:	Gary.wallace@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	N/A
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report updates the Health and Wellbeing Board of the progress of the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). This is a grant funded programme funded by the National Institute of Health Research with the core objectives of:

- Developing the culture and skills to ensure a learning approach informs decision making to impact positively on the wider determinants of health.
- Produce knowledge for use locally and of value nationally, especially for similar coastal communities

Recommendations and Reasons

Members are requested to note the content of the report which is largely for information, but to be aware that the council has been offered extended funding until December 2028 (additional 15 months) to continue its work; but also be aware that in the current challenging financial climate, releasing staff to undertake research projects has meant a number of novel and creative solutions have been necessary to avoid underspending on the budget.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Alternative options are not considered in this paper.

The funding is a welcome contribution to support cultural change in the council, encourage an environment of enquiry which allows teams to explore difficult operational challenges which can sometimes run counter to the need to reduce inequalities.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The objectives for the HDRC in terms of areas of focus are very widespread and the HDRC have used the priorities in the Plymouth Plan, combined with the Thrive Strategy to contribute to the focus on key areas of work (these are described in the paper).

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The HDRC is wholly funded by the NIHR as a grant which initially ran until October 2027 but now extended to December 2028 as a minimum. The council has a formal contract with the NIHR which specifies how the funding can be used. The funding cannot be used for anything other than delivering the core objectives as set out in the grant conditions.

Financial Risks

Despite being wholly grant funded and ring fenced the financial risk around this resource, is of losing the funding if it cannot be spent as required. The HDRC had some initial challenges and delays around recruiting staff (which is like all HDRC's across the country) but is now showing just a small underspend.

The greatest challenges in terms of spend is associated with releasing council staff (we offer backfill to cover the costs). Staffing is tight because of the operational position of the council and the ability to release people but more importantly replace their skills, and knowledge means that several projects take longer than expected to be implemented.

Legal Implications

The project is subject to a formal agreement between the NIHR and Plymouth City Council and then subsequent to this a partnership agreement with the University of Plymouth which is in the process of being updated now the council has a better understanding of governance associated with research.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

The NIHR has a carbon reduction strategy for research which the HDRC must comply with. Some of the aspects are very similar to the council approach but also includes specific issues such as ensuring data from people is only collected where it is essential to do so, and ensuring before any research takes place we have to declare that this is new research (and does not duplicate other research).

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

There are international & national principles of good practice for research that the council is bound to adhere to under the contract signed with the NIHR. These reflect issues around equality, equity, and ensuring diversity in research.

All of the projects reflect wider determinants of health so address a number of the council's responsibilities and particularly focus on issues which are relevant to our population. Projects address specific aspects such as child poverty, debt, food security and consider groups with protected characteristics and/or groups which are particularly sensitive to health inequalities, e.g. unpaid carers, asylum seekers, women and girls and associated violence.

The HDRC has been actively working with the Research Specialist Service of the NIHR in understanding ethics and integrity in undertaking research. The HDRC became aware that despite there being comprehensive academic processes, these didn't adequately cover the issues which the council would consider needed to be addressed to ensure that citizens, staff and the reputation of the council were protected. Information governance, safeguarding and the scenario of maintaining a longer-term relation with research participants were some key areas where the council has developed a local process for assurance.

Appendices

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
		<i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing Report - HDRC							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Professor Steve Maddern											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 02/03/2026											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Mary Aspinall, agreed via email											
Date approved: 03/03/2026											