



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**29<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2024**

### **RHONDDA CYNON TAF HEALTH DETERMINANTS RESEARCH COLLABORATION**

#### **REPORT OF DIRECTOR - PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES, CLLR. BOB HARRIS.**

**Author: Louise Davies, Director - Public Health, Protection and  
Community Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the award of funding to establish the Rhondda Cynon Taf Health Determinants Research Collaboration (RCT HDRC) and to seek approval of the aims and objectives of RCT HDRC from 2024-2028.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the award of £5 million to the Council from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) to establish the RCT HDRC.
- 2.2 Endorses the role of the Council in leading a new collaboration with Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University, Cwm Taf University Health Board, Interlink RCT and Public Health Wales which seeks to tackle the wider determinants of health to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of residents in RCT.
- 2.3 Approve the aims and objectives of RCT HDRC and delegate responsibility for overseeing delivery of the programme by the collaboration and achievement of the outcomes of RCT HDRC to the Director - Public Health, Protection and Community Services.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Reducing health inequalities is central to the priorities of this Council. Poverty and its impacts are long-standing challenges in RCT that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and ongoing cost of living crisis.

COVID-19 laid bare the relationship between poverty, the wider determinants of health and the inequalities in health outcomes for the most disadvantaged.

- 3.2 Over the next five years this Council will face difficult decisions about how to improve the life chances of its residents in the context of growing demand and constrained resources. RCT HDRC will strive to ensure that these decisions are rooted in the best available evidence, and that by the time the next Corporate Plan is produced, the Local Authority (LA) has a culture of co-production with citizens, a robust evidence base to identify what works and what matters, and an evidence informed approach to policy making.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 NIHR is financed by the Department of Health and Social Care and is the nation's largest funder of health and care research with a mission to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. The Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) is a new element of NIHR research infrastructure funded by its Public Health Programme that is based in local government. The purpose is to enable LAs to become more research-active, undertake new research and use existing evidence to inform our decision making and undertake evaluation activities. There is a central focus on health inequalities and actions to tackle issues faced by disadvantaged groups and areas. Awards of £5 million (total) per LA over 5 years are available to successful LAs.

- 4.2 The HDRC Programme was launched in 2022 with a rigorous application and interview process that determined awards were made to 13 local authorities. A second year of funding was announced and applications from LAs were invited in April 2023. A bid for RCT was co-led by the Council and Wales Centre for Public Policy, in collaboration with partners from Cardiff University, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, Interlink RCT and Public Health Wales. In 2023, 11 LAs were successful in receiving full funding to establish a HDRC with 6 other LAs receiving one year of development funding. RCT is the only LA in Wales to be awarded full HDRC funding, from January 2024 to December 2028.

#### **4.3 What does RCT HDRC aim to achieve?**

##### **4.3.1 The vision**

**The vibrant research culture of the RCT HDRC underpins an evidence-based decision-making system, which breaks the cycle of poverty, by improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and addressing the wider determinants of health.**

### 4.3.2 Aims

To achieve the vision, by the end of the five-year period RCT HDRC aims to demonstrate:

- I. RCT LA is a research active organisation where research is embedded in the LA culture and a sustainable research infrastructure has been developed.
- II. Increased use of research evidence in LA decisions about wider determinants of health and health inequalities.
- III. Increased research literacy among Staff, Citizens, Senior Leaders and Elected Members.
- IV. Evidence of improved capability of LA staff & citizens to routinely generate & use research evidence.
- V. Funding has been secured for research to inform and evaluate LA efforts to break the cycle of poverty, address the wider determinants of health and reduce health inequalities.
- VI. A stronger collaboration between the public, LA, Interlink RCT and Community Voluntary Organisations, CTM University Health Board, Wales Centre for Public Policy and Cardiff University, Public Health Wales, & other partners.
- VII. Regional & national research infrastructure is mobilised to support RCT HDRC objectives and build the reputation of RCT LA as a centre of excellence for health determinants research.
- VIII. RCT HDRC learning is actively shared with other LAs & Health Boards across Wales and with LAs and academic communities across the UK with an interest in improving collaboration across research, policy and practice.

### 4.4 How will the HDRC realise our vision and aims?

- 4.4.1 RCT HDRC brings together organisations and people, who until now, have not routinely and systematically collaborated to generate and use research. This will bring in the essential capability needed to drive a sustained culture of research and evidence within the LA.
- 4.4.2 To achieve our aims, RCT HDRC will deliver a co-ordinated set of objectives that will, over time, change the culture of RCT LA. **Appendix 1** of this report sets out the detail of those objectives (known as work packages), how we will measure success and monitor impact/outcomes. Work packages will be co-led by LA senior officers and domain experts from partner organisations.
- 4.4.3 The investment from NIHR will create a new multi-disciplinary Research and Development Team in the LA that draws on the expertise and experience of the partner organisations (**Appendix 2 - Figure A**).

This team will:

- Target key decisions on the wider determinants of health (e.g. housing, employment services, and school attendance and attainment) with projects that bring together the best available evidence and expertise to provide recommendations for action.
- Provide training and development to staff to improve core skills and research literacy across the LA.
- Identify opportunities for new research and create multi-disciplinary groups to develop these into fundable research proposals; and
- Work to adapt the LA's internal processes to ensure that the way that individuals, services and the organisation are managed supports the generation and use of research evidence.

4.4.4 Woven through the HDRC will be work that will support citizens to be collaborating partners in the work of RCT HDRC. Using the relationships and networks of Interlink RCT, RCT HDRC will recruit 'citizen researchers' who will work alongside the Research and Development Team, receiving training and support to enable them to do so.

4.4.5 Underpinning governance arrangements will establish the cross-organisational working practices and develop a monitoring framework for RCT HDRC. The governance arrangements for RCT HDRC are set out in **Appendix 2 - Figure B** of this report. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities are members of the Strategic Oversight Board for the HDRC. There are also strong links to the Council's Information Management Board. Within the operating infrastructure of the HDRC, it will use existing internal processes of reflection and data capture to monitor impact and generate learning which will be shared with staff, councillors, the public and wider networks across Wales and the rest of the UK. With strong support from leaders in RCT LA, these activities will drive a change across the organisation, leading to positive impacts on the lives of the local population.

#### 4.5 **What will be the added value and impact?**

4.5.1 RCT HDRC will provide essential capacity and develop LA capability to advance evidence-based practice, to generate knowledge to inform decisions, and to test and innovate to improve the health of our populations. As a result, the LA will tackle health inequalities in RCT and address wider health determinants that directly affect the life chances of our residents.

4.5.2 Each RCT HDRC Work Package will generate short and medium-term impact which will contribute to the expected long-term impact of the RCT HDRC as a whole: a research culture within the LA, in which the workforce are evidence-aware and research confident, research is

embedded in LA decision-making cycles and health inequalities and outcomes are improved for the citizens of RCT.

- 4.5.3 At the end of 5 years, the innovation delivered by the RCT HDRC will influence the health determinant priorities of a new Corporate Plan. By 2027-28, the impact of the RCT HDRC will mean the LA has a culture of co-production with citizens, a robust evidence base to identify what works and what matters and an evidence informed approach to policy making that affects the wider determinants of health and health inequalities. This will be the foundation for building the future strategic priorities of this Council and making sustainable changes to reduce poverty and improve the life chances of our population.

## **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 5.1 As this report is to provide an update on the funding award to the Council and to seek approval of the strategic aims and objectives of the RCT HDRC, there are no equality and diversity or socio-economic duty requirements at this stage.

## **6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 As this report is to provide an update on the funding award to the Council and to seek approval of the strategic aims and objectives of the RCT HDRC there are no Welsh language implications at this stage.

## **7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 7.1 Members of the public have already shaped the development of the RCT HDRC. The views of residents were a key component of the application for funding made to the NIHR. Residents told us they think it will make a difference to their communities and they have helped us plan how to work and communicate with them. Citizen involvement and participation is a cross cutting area of work for the RCT HDRC and there will be opportunities for members of the public to:

- Become citizen researchers.
- Be part of the management and advisory teams.
- Engage in workshops to review research priorities in RCT.
- Learn about research and findings through events, our website and social media.

Interlink RCT are a key partner in the RCT HDRC and they will support achievement of the public participation objectives for the HDRC.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 8.1. RCT HDRC is fully funded by the NIHR award of £5 million from January 2024 to December 2028. The costs of the new staff infrastructure, operating costs and delivery of well supported community involvement activity will be met from the grant.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 10.1 The Council's Corporate Plan "Working with Our Communities" sets out its vision where 'All people, communities, and businesses can grow and live in a healthy, green, safe, vibrant and inclusive County Borough where they can achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives and work, both now and in the future' and sets out its four well-being objectives:

- **People and Communities** – Supporting and empowering Rhondda Cynon Taf residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
- **Work and Business** – helping to strengthen and grow Rhondda Cynon Taf's economy.
- **Nature and Environment** – a green and clean Rhondda Cynon Taf that improves and protects the environment and nature.
- **Culture, Heritage, and Welsh Language** – recognising and celebrating Rhondda Cynon Taf's past, present, and future.

- 10.2 All four of the Council's well-being objectives impact on the wider determinants of health and ensuring the success of the RCT HDRC will support and contribute holistically to the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.

- 10.3 The Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act established a duty that public bodies act in accordance with the sustainable development principle and sets seven well-being goals to be achieved through five ways of working. RCT HDRC will make a positive contribution towards the well-being goals; in particular, that of a healthier Wales, a prosperous Wales and a more equal Wales. The approach aligns closely with the five ways of working:

- Long term – the collaboration aims to ensure the work of the HDRC is sustainable beyond the 5 years of initial funding and the outcomes achieved become embedded in the Council's way of working into the future.

- Integration – the collaboration will establish a diverse new partnership between health, academia, community and the LA with the citizen voice integrated throughout the work of the HDRC.
- Involvement – the involvement of the public in all RCT HDRC activities is a core principle on which the RCT HDRC is based.
- Collaboration - RCT HDRC is a collaborative venture that has full support of key partners and citizens in the development of the work programme and achievement of success outcomes.
- Prevention – The vision of RCT HDRC is to ensure the LA can reduce health inequalities and address the wider determinants of health through evidence based practice, to prevent ill health and promote longer and healthier lives for the residents of RCT.

10.4 The Council has recently been approached to create a Business in the Community Place Partnership, and should it determine to support the BITC proposal, the work of both collaborations will be aligned to ensure they are complimentary.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

11.1 RCT HDRC offers a new and innovative opportunity to work with sector leading partners, academia and our communities to establish a culture of evidence informed practice and decision making, and research activity across RCT and the LA. The new funding ensures the required governance, infrastructure and relationships within the collaboration can be established. This will enable the Council to make positive progress to achieve the vision of tackling poverty and reducing health inequalities in RCT and improve the lives and health of our residents into the future.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

None

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee**

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Officer to contact:**

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