



South Tyneside Council



# South Tyneside Annual Research Report 2024



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**THIS IS  
SOUTH  
TYNESIDE**



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# Introduction

**This the first annual report on research activity aimed at understanding and improving health and wellbeing in South Tyneside. This research agenda fits within South Tyneside Council's broader transformation ambitions and renewed emphasis on using data, intelligence, and analysis to inform service delivery, improvement, and decision making [1].**

This report reflects on what we mean by data and evidence led decision-making and describes our journey so far to increase our health and wellbeing related-research capacity and capability. The report features examples of recent evaluation and related activities, reflects on our progress, and outlines a series of recommendations to grow this agenda.

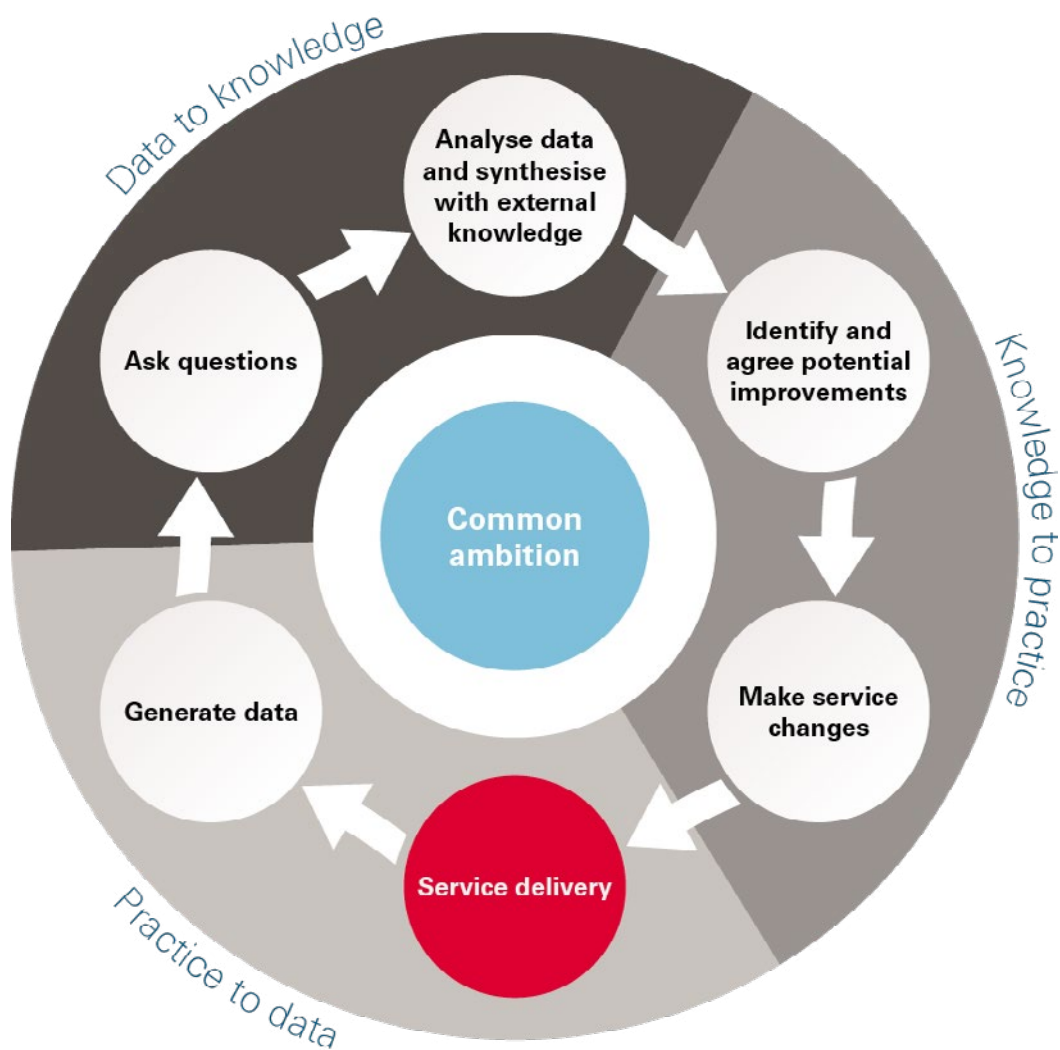
## What is evidence-led decision making?

Evidence-led decision making is broadly defined as an approach to making well-informed decision about policies, programmes, and projects using the best available evidence. Some definitions specify research-evidence, whilst others encompass a broader range of sources.

The World Health Organization definition of evidence-informed decision-making includes making use of the best available evidence from research, as well as other factors such as context, public opinion, equity, feasibility of implementation, affordability, sustainability, and acceptability to stakeholders. This recognises that the political context, economic interests, institutional constraints, citizen values and stakeholder needs tend to play an important and sometimes conflicting role within decision-making processes [2].

The use and generation of evidence does not stop at making decisions. The Health Foundation takes this a step further and describes how data, the building blocks of knowledge, can be used in a continuous cycle, both to make as well as learn from the decisions [3, 4].

Figure 1: Common stages of learning and improvement cycle



## What is research and why is it important for local government?

For this context, research generally refers to a systematic, rigorous, and replicable process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data to generate knowledge or insight. This includes both quantitative, such as analysis of datasets and performance indicators, and qualitative methods such as collection of data on opinions through surveys, focus groups and consultation exercises [5].

Research can support local government decision makers to understand:

- the views of residents and other stakeholders,
- needs and assets of their communities,
- local social and economic environment in which they operate,
- alternative ‘ways of doing things’ as a basis for innovation and change in policy, service delivery and management and organisation, and
- the impact of strategies, policies, programmes, and services on the well-being of communities and the locality [5]

Evidence from health and care organisations has demonstrated that embedding research as part of practice and culture of a service can a positive impact on delivery and outcomes as well improve workforce recruitment and retention [6].

## How can research support public involvement and community engagement?

In South Tyneside, we want to increase the opportunities for people to have their say on what matters to them and be involved in the design of plans and services. This helps us to prioritise and develop our approaches appropriately. We also want to involve residents in the co-production of our policies and practices as much as possible. By doing so, the design and implementation are more fit for purpose [7] [8]. By encouraging participation in research, we ensure that the evidence base is more reflective of the populations we work with and does not exacerbate existing inequalities [9]. Participation in research also has benefits to the individuals involved. For instance, through access to novel therapies and services, felt valued and had made a difference through contributing their own experiences, and gained new skills and knowledge [10]



**The next section describes the recent developments in understanding our research needs, capacity, and capabilities. This report also highlights local contributions to the evidence base.**



# Our journey so far

**In September 2020, an email was circulated amongst Fuse Network members seeking partners to develop and submit a bid to National Institute for Health and Social Research Local Authority Research System call.**

From this initial enquiry, a team led by Professor Jo Gray, came together to co-design a research proposal. The team included staff from South Tyneside Council's Public Health and Economic Policy services, South Tyneside Inspire, Northumbria University, Newcastle University and North of England Commissioning Support Unit. The co-designed project was successfully awarded £45,923.69 to conduct a survey and series of focus groups to understand how South Tyneside Council (STC) could increase its use of research evidence and increase its ability to conduct its own local research on impact of services it provides.



**fuse**

The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health

## Who are Fuse?

Fuse is the virtual Centre for Translational Research in Public Health. It operates across the five North East universities: Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, and Teesside. Fuse's mission is to transform health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities through the conduct of world-class public health research and its translation into value-for-money policy and practice.

<http://fuse.ac.uk/>



## What is the National Institute for Health and Care Research?

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) are funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. It funds high quality and timely research, infrastructure, and workforce that leads to improved outcomes for patients and the public and makes the health and social care system more efficient, effective, and safe. <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/>

The results from the survey (N=124, 4.3% of the staff total) and focus groups (N=31) found that there was an extensive range of evidence needs but not always aligned with academic definitions of research. There was a lot of interest and motivation for engaging in and conducting research but a lack of time, access to funding, training and organisational research culture were all identified as barriers. There were a few examples of research collaborations with external consultancies, academia, and the third sector. However, this was inconsistent and often depended on existing links between individual researchers and local government officers.

A consensus development workshop involving the research team and study steering group reflected on the findings and informed the development of the research capacity toolkit and a set of recommendations to increase research capacity and capabilities locally [11].

### NIHR Local Authority Research System call Recommendations [11]:

- external funding to support a research infrastructure within STC,
- increased communication and links with external organisations and research partners,
- development and adoption of a comprehensive research strategy within STC,
- implementation of a research infrastructure within STC including a hub and/or department dedicated to research including appropriate leadership and resources,
- needs assessment and upskilling within STC likely to include applied research methods for employees,
- action from research funding bodies to recognise local government research agendas and needs, and
- change of culture in both academic communities and STC



# External and internal inputs and their outcomes



In December 2020 Tom Hall, South Tyneside Director of Public Health, was appointed to work with the NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN) North East North Cumbria Lead for Public Health Research portfolio alongside Gateshead DPH Alice Wiseman. With this funding, they have been supporting the NIHR national expansion into Public Health Research encouraging research development in their boroughs and across the region. They also feedback to the local CRN about what works well and what does not in terms of research outside medical settings. As part of this, the two local authorities agreed to co-fund Research Operations Officers to support the delivery of research locally.

This work builds on Tom Hall's involvement in the successful development of the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration North East and North Cumbria (ARC NENC). He acts as Deputy Lead for ARC NENC Inequalities and marginalised communities research theme, alongside Lead Professor Clare Bambra and Deputy Lead Professor Monique Lhussier [12].

This additional capacity and learning, along with the findings from LA system call, informed our bids to the NIHR Health Determinations Research Collaboration. These are local government partnerships which are aimed at boosting local authorities' capacity and capability to conduct high-quality research to tackle health inequalities.

Our bids involved stakeholders from across the council, the voluntary and community sector, elected members, and researchers from Northumbria and Newcastle Universities. Whilst our bids have been unsuccessful, the collective thinking and effort which created our plans has informed subsequent research related activities. It has also increased awareness and interest in staff from different council teams as well as with our local partners. Staff have gone on to develop their research skills further through training and dedicated funding.

**There has also been an increase in evaluations of local interventions, both externally funded and internally commissioned the borough. Many of these activities are highlighted in this report.**





# Community Insights Research Project

**Community Insights Research Project has showcased the value of bespoke local research to staff and partners as well as increasing our understanding and improving health and wellbeing in South Tyneside. It has been a transformative piece of work, informing a range of strategies and project plans.**

The catalyst for the project started in January 2021 at the South Tyneside Health and Well-being Board meeting. Board members had collectively voiced their aspiration for the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy to be community-informed, specifically including voices from groups and individuals who are more deprived or are usually under-represented in current engagement activities. It was recognised that to achieve this local, primary research to capture the health and wellbeing priorities of our communities was needed. The findings could then be used to inform the development of the refreshed strategy.

## Data collection and methods

Led by Dr Anna Christie STC Public Health and Dr Shelina Visram from Newcastle University, a team of academics from Newcastle and Northumbria universities and practitioners bid for funding through NIHR Clinical Research Network North East North Cumbria (NIHR LCRN NENC) Targeted Health Needs Awards Targeting Health Needs Call 2021.

**To meet the requirements of the funding call our proposal had the following objectives:**

1. explore the health and wellbeing priorities of those who live and/or work in South Tyneside, with a view to identifying gaps in existing knowledge,
2. mentor and develop the research skills and knowledge of practitioners, and
3. co-produce research questions with the aim of bidding for NIHR and other appropriate funding to undertake robust research and evaluation activity.

The final project cost £40,000 with matched funding from STC.

Data was collected through focus groups and community insights sheets distributed at venues across the borough. Local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations helped with recruitment and occasionally, the facilitation of the focus groups as they had good working relationships with the diverse range of population groups we wanted to hear from. The team also gathered views on what we could do to make South Tyneside a healthier and happier place to live, work and learn.

## Key findings

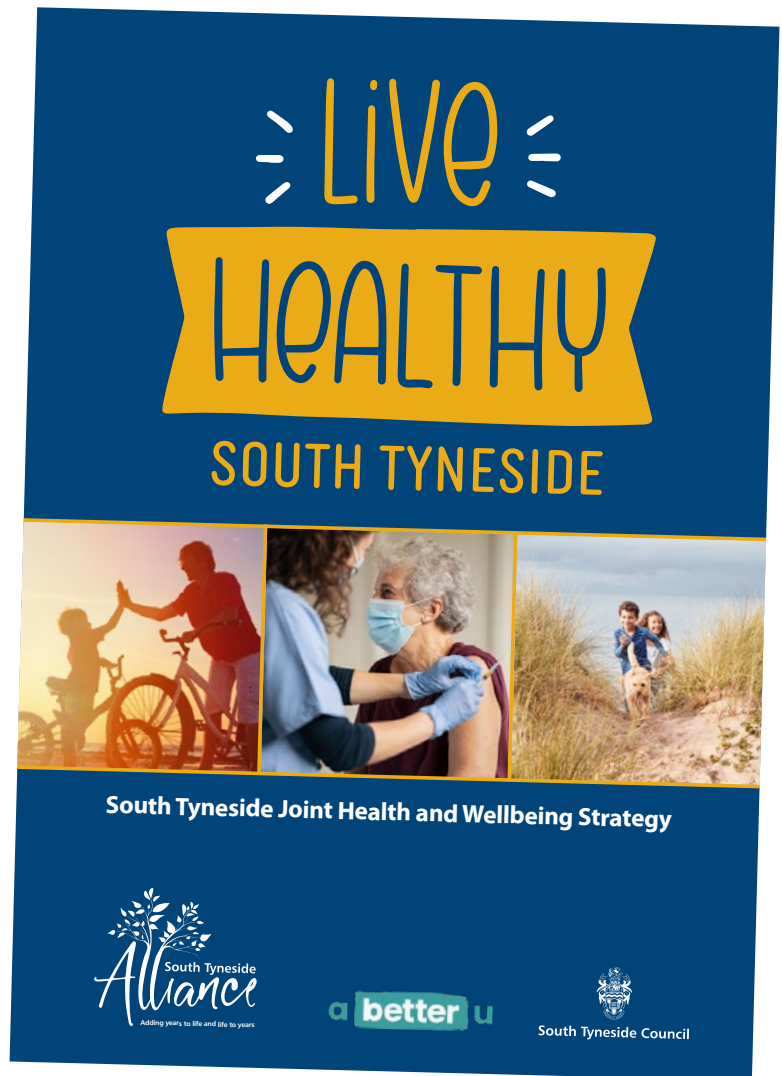
We heard from a range of people from aged 8 to 87 from across the borough who told us about a range of factors which they felt influenced health and wellbeing in South Tyneside. These included positive factors such as access to the coast and living in friendly neighbourhoods and support from voluntary and community sector organisations. Negative factors included poverty, crime, lack of employment opportunities, prevalence of drug and alcohol use, unhealthy foods availability and affordability, as well as issues accessing and navigating statutory services.

The suggested ways to make South Tyneside a healthier, happier place included: the provision of additional leisure, social and retail opportunities; safe spaces and activities for children and young people; improving access to health services; and action on the wider determinants of health. Some participants also highlighted feeling excluded from local decision-making processes.

[Community insights report](#)  
[- South Tyneside Council](#)

## Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The findings were presented at a series of strategy development workshops with focused sessions for health and care practitioners and local stakeholders, elected members, and young people. Building on the successes and challenges of the previous [Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-21](#) and outputs from our [Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment](#), the Community Insights were a key strand of evidence which supported the identification of the specific outcomes and priorities that the new strategy seeks to achieve.



Outcome	What does good look like?
Giving every child and young person the best start	Every child and young person, regardless of their background, is provided with the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential
Financial security to lead healthy, fulfilling lives	A thriving, sustainable and inclusive local economy in which the benefits and opportunities are distributed fairly across all communities
Good mental well-being and social connectivity across the life course	Cohesive and vibrant communities where all members feel included, valued, and supported
Safe and healthy places to live, learn, and work	Environments that help people to be healthy and make the most of the good things around them



JOINT KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP | 30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2023



## Research development event

In October 2023, South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Inspire co-hosted a networking and workshop event at the Word, South Shields. Representatives from the council, NHS and VCS organisations who were awarded **Know Your Neighbourhood** funding and those who facilitated the Community Insights were invited. The aim was to share community-led practice, the research findings and how it has informed the Strategy and delivery plans.

In the afternoon, delegates heard about what makes a good research question and put this into practice. Together they co-designed research questions broadly related to the themes of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The audience then voted for their favourite with prizes awarded.



# Task 1: Generating questions

1. Find the table that most closely relates to your interests (linked to the HWS priorities):

- Best start in life
- Financial security
- Mental wellbeing and social connectivity
- Safe and healthy places
- Fair delivery of services

2. Spend some time listing your interests as they relate to your community or practice

3. Come up with open-ended questions relating to these interests; discuss these with others

4. Work as

## Community-led research questions

- How do we create awareness and accessible information to people to engage with services?
- What does a 'great growing up' mean to parents and children?
- Safe spaces - what does an empowering relationship look like?
- What makes King Street safe and healthy?
- Understanding the impacts and perceptions of safety for children & young people in schools?
- How does the lack of affordable transport affect different sections of the population?
- What is the impact on their health and wellbeing for young carers in South Tyneside?
- Understanding economic inactivity in South Tyneside, priority groups, barriers & solutions?
- How do communities perceive anti-social behaviour in South Tyneside?
- How can the system and partners find out about each other's work/signpost?

**These questions highlight the types of knowledge and evidence required for the council and its partners to understand and support our residents and service users more effectively.**

**Plans are underway to put on further events to continue the collective engagement across South Tyneside in this research agenda.**



# Open, nationally competitive funded projects

There are range of sources of open, nationally competitive research funding calls. In health and care research, this includes:

- Funding opportunities | NIHR
- Apply for funding – UKRI
- Grant funding schemes and guidance | Grant funding | Wellcome
- Funding and partnerships - The Health Foundation

Following are two examples of South Tyneside-led successful awards.





## Best Start in Life Alliance Evaluation

In 2019, following a successful brokerage by Dr Peter van Der Graaf at Fuse, members of the South Tyneside Public Health and a Newcastle University led research team were successful in a bid to the [Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme \(PHPES\) - NIHR School for Public Health Research NIHR SPHR](#). The evaluation project aimed to understand what worked in relation to the Best Start in Life Alliance and some of its key initiatives, namely the Mental Health Champions and Young Health Ambassadors.

The evaluation team conducted a systematic review of 'Alliancing', that is, the South Tyneside method of how services work collaboratively across the whole health and care system to achieve the best outcomes for residents and patients. They found that the approach offers an opportunity to achieve system-level change with the potential to benefit local populations.

They chose a realist synthesis approach to the evidence review. This method aims to answer the "what works for whom under what circumstances?" rather than just "what works?". They found three core features for success: achieving a system-level approach, placing local populations at the heart of the system, and creating a cultural shift.

The findings were published in February 2023 in the [European Journal of Public Health](#).

The team also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with the Mental Health Champions and Young Health Ambassadors (N=19) to identify the potential benefits, barriers, and facilitators of these interventions. The findings have been used to inform ongoing developments of these initiatives.

[www.fuse.ac.uk/events/fuseresearchevents/previousresearchevents/fuseresearchevent-howcanwegiveourcommunitiesthebeststartinlife.html](http://www.fuse.ac.uk/events/fuseresearchevents/previousresearchevents/fuseresearchevent-howcanwegiveourcommunitiesthebeststartinlife.html)

[Fuse open science blog: How can we give our communities the Best Start in Life?](#)





## Social Navigators

In 2022, South Tyneside Homes Welfare Support Team worked with AskFuse team to write a successful application to the **PHIRST Evaluations - NIHR Public Health Interventions Research Studies Teams (PHIRST)** funding call to evaluate the **Social Navigators project**. This project aims to improve the financial, health and social wellbeing of financially excluded individuals and their dependents by working with dedicated staff called 'Social Navigators'.

The evaluation aims to explore how the Social Navigators impact on financial stability and the health and social wellbeing of clients accessing the service, informing the future development, and recommissioning of the service. The evaluation will also make recommendations for how to apply and adapt this approach to other local authorities. The evaluation team plans to conduct an analysis of routine service data, interviews, and estimating the financial value of the service to understand the impact on health and wellbeing. The team will also develop a knowledge mobilisation plan with local stakeholders to get the research findings into policy and practice. **An Evaluation of the Social Navigator Project - NIHR Public Health Interventions Research Studies Teams (PHIRST)**



## NIHR Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (SPARC)

In 2023, we had three placements funded through the NIHR Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (SPARC). This funding supports NIHR Academy Members to work in local authority settings and staff from LA settings to experience a range of NIHR and/or academic settings.

The aim is for awardees to enhance their careers by experiencing research from a different perspective or taking the next step in developing a practitioner-academic career.

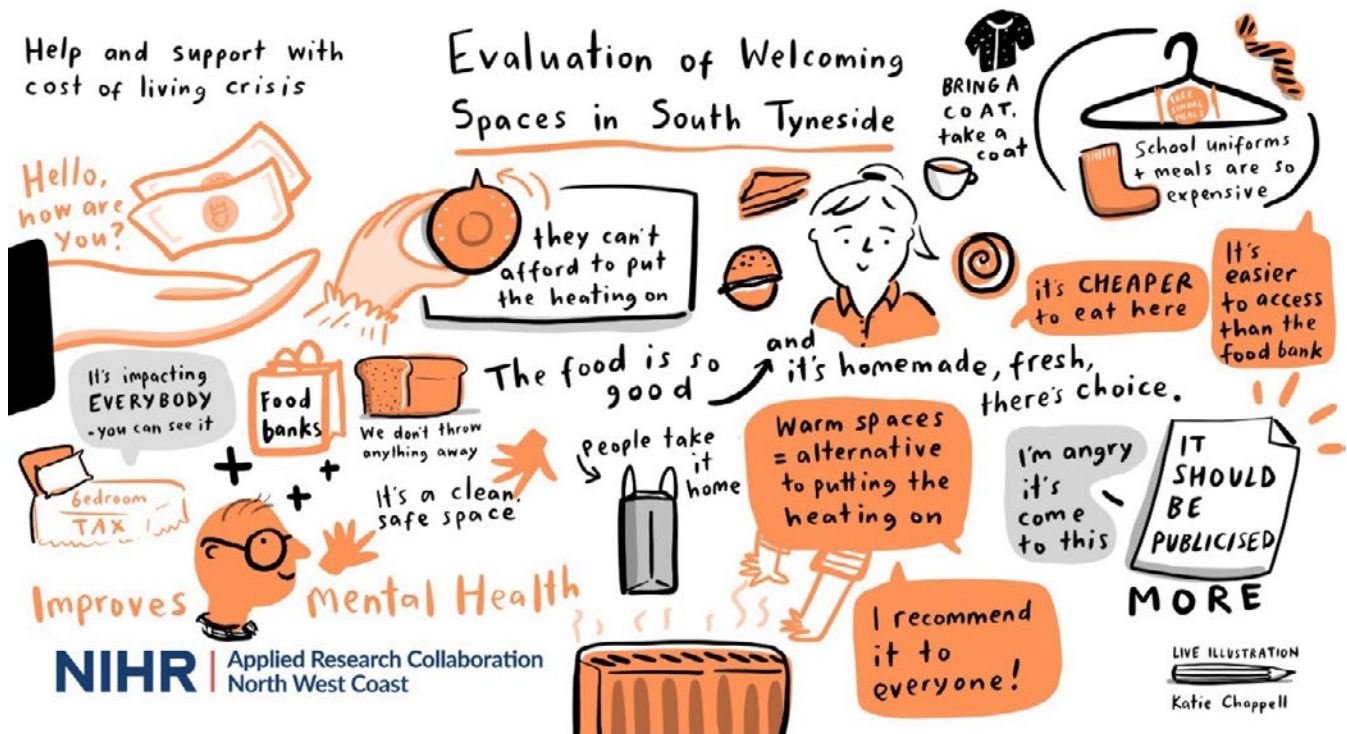


Illustration by Katie Chappell about the Help and support with cost of living crisis theme from the South Tyneside Welcoming Spaces Evaluation



## South Tyneside Welcoming Spaces

Dr Piotr Teodorowski, NIHR Academy Member, working with South Tyneside Public Health and Policy and Insight teams was funded to evaluate the Warm Spaces scheme, now known as **Welcoming Places**. The aim of the placement project was to gather public perception and experiences of the 'warm spaces', one of the initiatives coordinated by the South Tyneside Council and community organisations to assist residents with the cost-of-living crisis.

The evaluation identified lessons learned which coalesced around three themes: the positive experience of attendees, the provision of cost-of-living help and support and their integration within a wider network existing provision. The final report made several recommendations to support the development and sustainability of the initiative.

[Evaluation of Warm Spaces/Welcoming Places in South Tyneside](#)



## REPRESENT Study

Dr Laura Gray, from the Educational Psychology Team, used her SPARC award to spend a day a week with Dr Ruth McGovern, Senior Lecturer in Public Health Research at Newcastle University. Dr McGovern is leading a research programme to develop a poverty-informed learning health and social care system to prevent mental health problems in disadvantaged children and parents.

The SPARC award has meant that Dr Gray has been able to further develop her network of external researchers and become involved with Dr McGovern's REPRESENT study. The protected research time has meant that Dr Gray will be able to remain working with Dr McGovern and her team following the completion of the SPARC award and continue the collaboration between the two teams in the future.

[Newcastle University \(fuse.ac.uk\)](https://fuse.ac.uk)

## Anti-Poverty Strategies

Brogan Turner, Policy Officer in the Council's Policy & Insight team, is using her SPARC award time to develop her qualitative research and policy analysis skills. Supervised by Professor Clare Bambra and Dr Vic McGowan from Newcastle University, Brogan is currently undertaking a thematic framework analysis of local authorities' anti-poverty strategies to identify recurrent themes and actions and their alignment with the wider determinants of health. The findings will support the development of the South Tyneside anti-poverty strategy and ongoing work programme.

# Embedding research in practice

## South Tyneside Educational Psychology Service

**The South Tyneside Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is made up of nine Educational Psychologists (EPs). The service also supports placements for Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) who train via a doctorate programme.**

TEPs spend two years with a local authority and are encouraged to complete their thesis research during their placements. However, lack of capacity and organisational research infrastructure often prevents ongoing research engagement. South Tyneside EPS has been developed to ensure research is a key priority and address these challenges.

The current TEP is currently exploring collaboration between EPs and Professionals who work in youth justice. The aim is to understand what is happening and its aims, where it is not happening, and the perceived barriers. Previous TEP thesis research conducted in South Tyneside included exploratory studies into partnerships between school staff and parents of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, how secondary school refugee students experience school belonging, and how and why children and young people use social networking sites.

Further research by EPs has included how storytelling helps children build relationships with school staff/parents, understanding how to best support girls with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at school, and developing and evaluating a mental health and emotional well-being intervention with students in Year 7. There are also ongoing research projects on exploring social skills interventions and what works for autistic people, an evaluation of the

impact of the Early Intervention Panel; and how children demonstrating Emotionally Based School Avoidance feel about school as expressed via artwork.

Prior to completing the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology, Dr Gray worked within the Neurodevelopment and Neurodisability Team at Newcastle University. She has maintained links with this team and each year she teaches a “Research in Practice” session to Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs). In her current role, Dr Gray specialises in and is the Lead for research for the team. This means one day a week protected to engage with research-based activities including developing research projects and support colleagues with the evaluation. This has enabled collaboration with external researchers on different projects, including supporting Dr Sarah McGeown and her team at Edinburgh University to validate the reading intervention developed through the Love to Read project. Dr Gray was also involved with the NIHR funded Policy Research Programme project, Resetting Service for Disabled Children, led by Dr Lindsay Pennington at Newcastle University. The report for this is due to be submitted to Cabinet Office.

# Locally led and commissioned research and evaluation

## Better Mental Health Fund

In 2021, South Tyneside Council received a grant from the Better Mental Health Fund (BMHF) following a successful bid. As part of the funding arrangement, researchers from Newcastle University were commissioned to evaluate the local projects in South Tyneside to understand what difference the fund had made to the organisations involved, their beneficiaries and the wider impacts. In total, 14 service providers and 7 beneficiaries took part in individual and group interviews online and in person.

The three main groups of beneficiaries reached were 1) vulnerable adults, through mental health training and facilitation, 2) specific groups of vulnerable adults i.e., women, veterans, and older people, and 3) the younger generation, i.e., sixth formers, vulnerable young women, and care-experienced young people. The funded organisations were able to fill identified gaps in existing services, widen impact through extending their reach and build workforce capacity and community mental health resilience. Barriers to outreach and retention were identified, including COVID-19 effects and the shortage of funded time to deliver the projects. The challenges associated with the short-term funding arrangements were also captured [13].

## Healthy Homes

Starting in 2023, the South Tyneside Council Healthy Homes service is working with approximately 50 households in the two deprived wards in South Tyneside, namely Simonside & Rekendyke and Biddick and All Saints. They will identify households requiring support in terms of issues such as home improvements, and money and debt advice, and carry out baseline assessments and signposting to necessary agencies. The service aims to deliver both health and housing improvements for the residents involved.

An evaluation, led by Dr Phil Hodgson from Northumbria University, aims to explore the benefits of the Healthy Home service. The evaluation entails the creation of a data capture tool allowing the service to highlight financial benefits of the advice and interventions given, qualitative interviews with service user and the development of a strategy and potential outcome measures for future, larger-scale evaluations of housing advice services.





## Winter readiness conversations

As part of the anti-poverty and social isolation work programmes, Christina Hardy (Senior Public Health Practitioner) launched a pilot community intervention to provide brief advice and rapid referral for issues that our communities are likely to face during winter 2023/24. The intervention upskills a broad range of public-facing staff and volunteers to be able to have conversations on topics such as debt, fuel poverty, benefits, vaccination, health, and housing. As part of usual public interactions, a picture card is used by practitioners to prompt an individual to consider areas they may want support with.

Evidence review and partner engagement have been used to consider the needs of communities, areas to focus on as part of winter readiness, useful onward sources of support, and having supportive brief conversations.

An evaluation led by Nicole Ahmed, Public Health Registrar, is reviewing the benefits and outcomes in communities, changes in the way services operate, and staff / volunteer opinions. The aim is to understand if the intervention provides support in a timely and useful way for communities and how it can be tailored for different population groups in future.

## Social prescribing

In 2023 Miranda Trevor, Public Health Registrar, conducted an evidence review and mapping exercise to develop a series of strategic recommendations to maximise the opportunities of social prescribing in South Tyneside. This involved looking at the evidence for social prescribing as well considering the current guidance around what works. The McKinsey 7 S model, typically used to improve performance and align processes, was used to frame the recommendations. The recommendations were based on available evidence as well as input from local leaders of organisations and services that provide social prescribing.

# Research participation

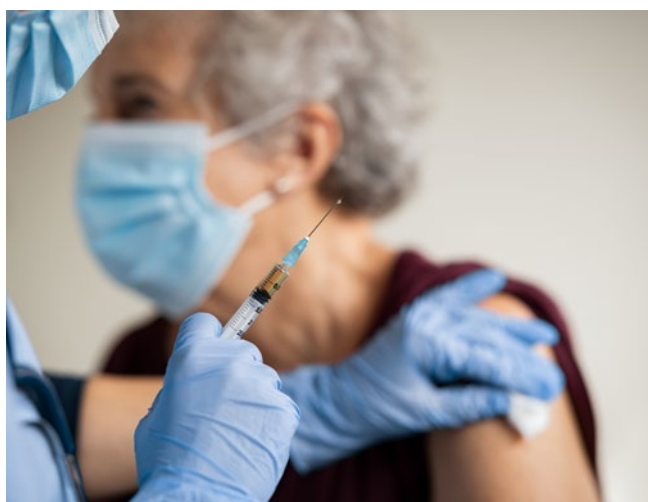
South Tyneside Council staff are often approached to take part in research or help facilitate access to potential research participants and/or study sites. We act to support this as much as possible, particularly when the research aligns with our Council priorities.

Examples include:

## COVID-19 Vaccinations

Between 2021 and 2022, staff from the South Tyneside Public Health team took part in a study which explored the experiences of Directors of Public Health and relevant local authority staff working to ensure a high level of COVID-19 vaccine uptake across all population groups. The aim of the study was to generalise the insights for building back fairer after the pandemic.

[“Build it and they will come”? Learning from public health teams’ experience of tackling low rates of Covid-19 vaccination](#)



## MapMe2 Study

Since 2021, we have helped facilitate South Tyneside as a study site for the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Programme MapMe2 Study. This is a national study evaluating the MapMe intervention, a tool to improve parental acknowledgement and understanding of childhood overweight and obesity, in the National Child Measurement Programme. The tool aims to improve child weight outcomes. As there are high rates of childhood obesity in South Tyneside, we are eagerly awaiting the results of the study anticipated to be available in 2024.

[Can embedding the MapMe intervention, a tool to improve parental acknowledgement and understanding of childhood overweight and obesity, in the National Child Measurement Programme lead to improved child weight outcomes at one year? - NIHR Funding and Awards](#)



# Supporting university students

We have supported university students with research projects from undergraduate through to PhDs. These are research projects which are seeking participants and research sites, or students carrying out discrete pieces of research or evaluation which meets a current priority for the council and/or our partners.

Examples include:

## **Experiences, health, and wellbeing of Universal Credit claimants and support staff before and during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Alison Jane, School for Public Health Research, Newcastle University conducted a series of interviews with Universal Credit claimants and support staff over 2019 and 2020. This work looked at experience of the change in Universal Credit policy before and during the pandemic, including the impact upon claimant's health and wellbeing. The research led to recommendations for implementation changes that could be made to the policy to limit its negative impacts.

## **Exploring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on access to healthcare in the UK**

The team working on the anti-poverty agenda in South Tyneside are interested to know if the cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on people's use of health services. This could include changes in how people access their GP, hospital appointments, community pharmacy and dentistry, as well ability to pay for prescription or over-the-counter medicines.

This was proposed as a potential research project and was taken up by a pharmacy student from Newcastle University, supervised by Dr Shelina Visram. The student planned to conduct interviews with participants across the North East to explore this issue as well as understand what solutions exist or could be put in place to reduce the negative effects of the cost-of-living crisis and improve people's quality of life.

## **Deprivation and deaths of despair: A qualitative investigation in the North East of England**

Tim Price, supervised by Professor Clare Bambra, is undertaking a PhD study to understand differing rates of self-harm, alcohol, and drug related deaths in the community. Tim is exploring stakeholders' views on what has helped to address these problems, and what has been tried but has not been effective. Learning this will help to improve our understanding of what underlying factors drive these causes of death and what can be done to address them.

# Progress to date

**This report has captured the recent and current developments in building a research active culture within South Tyneside. This section reflects on the progress made against the recommendations made in the NIHR Local Authority Research System project report.**

## **External funding to support a research infrastructure within South Tyneside Council**

South Tyneside was unsuccessful with our bids to the first two rounds of the NIHR HDRC funding rounds. This was for specific funding to develop research infrastructure within a local authority. Despite the lack of additional funding, we are learning about and developing the necessary mechanisms required to facilitate research more effectively and efficiently with a local authority context. This includes working closely with NIHR CRN who support the delivery of research and the newly established NIHR Research Support Service Specialist Centre for Public Health who are, amongst other things, developing on guidance on ethical approval and governance arrangements, training, and funding to foster research culture in local authorities.

## **Increased communication and links with external organisations and research partners**

Public health staff are actively involved with both national and regional research infrastructure arrangements and have played a significant role in shaping the offer to local authorities. This includes the Advisory Board for NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health. Whilst not a dedicated resource for the council, this will bring more relevant and timely opportunities for local authorities to become more research active.

Staff from across the council and our partners frequently engage the services of AskFuse. This service has brokered relationships with academics on shared research interests and found teams to deliver locally commissioned evaluations, such as the Healthy Homes evaluation. Council staff are engaged with academics from Insights North East who are now working on a scoping review to develop a work programme to examine the evidence on how to work differently with people with multiple and complex needs.

There have also been several funding opportunities that have generated discussions across council teams and academics. Whilst some have been unsuccessful, they have established relationships and increased awareness of the potential opportunities.

## **Development and adoption of a comprehensive research strategy within South Tyneside Council**

The bids to the NIHR HDRC funding opportunity allowed us to develop a comprehensive research strategy for South Tyneside. However, these plans were revised in line with current capacity and resource and evolved to the plan on a page outlined below.

## **Implementation of a research infrastructure within STC including a hub and/or department dedicated to research including appropriate leadership and resources**

Currently, there is no specific hub and/or department which oversees and supports the delivery of research in South Tyneside Council. Currently, some research and evaluation activities are being tracked by the Public Health Team. This includes work to develop bids for external funding, requests for participation in research, student projects and locally commissioned research and evaluation. However, it is unknown if this is a full comprehensive view of all research activities and is not a specific requirement prior to starting.

## **Needs assessment and upskilling within South Tyneside Council likely to include applied research methods for employees**

The initial NIHR local authority research call highlighted that there are staff with specific research related skills and knowledge, with some routinely being used. However, more work is required to have a more complete view on the current research capabilities of the workforce and levels of interest to learn more. As such, a key feature of the HDRC funding bid was to develop a South Tyneside Academy of Research (STAR). The aim of the STAR was to boost the skills and knowledge of staff and our partners to be able to use, implement and generate evidence to enable us to deliver on our ambitions more effectively.

Whilst there are a range of opportunities available freely online and regional events where research findings are disseminated, e.g. [Fuse Events](#), there is work to do to connect staff to the current offer. The next step would then be to identify and prioritise training to address the gaps which would be the most beneficial to our staff and their teams. Council staff are also supporting the development of training to support policy development in local authorities with external organisations such as Insights North East and NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health.



## **Action from research funding bodies to recognise local government research agendas and needs**

Whilst this recommendation was not aimed at South Tyneside Council it is encouraging that the NIHR have awarded the second round of local authority Health Determinants Research Collaborations. This brings the total to 24 live HDRCs as of 1st January 2024, with an expectation that the total cohort will grow to 30 HDRCs the following year. This is an investment of over £100 million aimed at boosting research capacity and capability in local government. The latest round of investment means there are four HDRCs in the North East and North Cumbria area.






The HDRCs, along with the new NIHR Research Support Service Specialist Centre for Public Health, NIHR NENC ARC, NIHR CRN, Fuse, and Insights North East, means there is a lot of opportunity to learn from peers as well as specific offers in relation to training, support with governance and ethics and resource to support research in local authorities.

## **Change of culture in both academic communities and South Tyneside Council**

Recent developments have shown that there is a greater emphasis from the NIHR on increasing research capacity and capability within non-NHS settings and specifically local authorities. Likewise, the recent activities have demonstrated that there is an appetite amongst staff to develop their skills, get more involved in research and values evidence and evaluation as an integral part of the development and implementation of services and innovations. Furthermore, the engagement at the October 2023 Research Development event suggests that there is an opportunity to spread a research culture beyond the council and the current academic connections.

# Next steps

This review highlights that growing research capacity and capability is still a work in progress. The plan on page outlines the current and future activities. This incorporates our key elements of our original plans, co-produced with VCSE and academics colleagues, as well as aspects of the South Tyneside Transformation Board which aligns with our overall ambitions to grow a sustainable research culture.

 <b>Leadership &amp; governance</b>	 <b>South Tyneside Academy of Research &amp; Technology (START)</b>	 <b>Data systems &amp; infrastructure</b>	 <b>Public involvement &amp; community engagement</b>	 <b>Knowledge into practice and policy</b>
Internal research hub	Needs Assessment	External data and evidence observatory	Engagement leads network	Learning system cycles
Governance and ethical approval processes	Peer networks	Data Strategy	Co-production and engagement events and activities	Publications of novel practice and policy developments
Research study and engagement registry	Training	Internal data platform and analytical capacity	Communication strategy	Referencing frameworks
Research champions network	Conferences and events		Equality objectives and tools	
Research enquiry service				

# Leadership and governance

## Internal research hub

This could be a specific virtual team who will serve as a working group to support the development and delivery of effective and compliant research studies and evaluations. It requires senior leadership to ensure activities align with the council's ongoing strategic priorities.

The work of the internal hub team would entail developing a system for gaining appropriate governance and ethical approval arrangements, standardised research collaboration agreements and data sharing agreements. In addition, the hub would maintain a study and engagement registry, including potential research questions and evaluation projects. This team should ensure that there are no overlapping or duplication of activities. This would also avoid over-researching and -engaging specific areas and/or population groups and avoiding reputational damage from failing to learn from previous results.

All council teams would have responsibility to register internal and external research activities with the internal hub prior to start of study delivery.

## Research champions network

The internal hub could be supported by the growing network of research champions coordinated by Meg Logan, a Research Operations Officer within the Public Health team. This network regularly receives updates about current and future research funding calls, training and development opportunities and details on studies looking for participants and/or study sites.

The research champion role is a voluntary role with representatives from different settings who have expressed an interest in research and are willing to champion the use of generation of evidence for their team or organisations. As of December 2023, there were 17 champions representing 11 council teams and 9 external organisations across the borough.

This network should be expanded to include representatives from all relevant services and key partner organisations to share learning and research, evaluation, and engagement plans.

## Research enquiry service

The managed by the internal hub, and supported by research champions network, Research Enquiry Service could provide ad-hoc peer support, signpost to relevant research infrastructure organisations as well support completion of internal processes.

# South Tyneside Academy of Research and Technology (START)

## Research skills and knowledge needs assessment and training

This would entail mapping and maximising existing training opportunities as well as assessing current knowledge and skills in relation to use, interpretation and generation of data and evidence. Training and development opportunities could be initially targeted to build a skilled cohort across the system. By building the skills and knowledge of a core group who represent parts of the wider system should influence their respective teams and services to increase their use of and generation of data and evidence.

## Peer networks

These could form around specific research topics and/or skills to provide peer support and learning. For instance, modelling the newly formed PowerBI Network and geospatial and location-based data analysis.

## Conferences and events

The October Research Development Event highlighted there are staff working across South Tyneside with a keen interest in using and generating research and evidence to improve their services. Furthermore, there was a recognition that many are creating evidence but lack the skills, knowledge, and mechanisms to share this more widely. By having a local research conference style events this would enable staff, volunteers and public to present to and learn from their peers. These could also provide opportunities to work collaboratively on evaluation plans and future research funding calls.

# Data systems & infrastructure

## External data and evidence observatory

We are procuring a data observatory to act as a 'one stop shop', pulling together data and evidence themed around our corporate ambitions. The data observatory will be in the public domain to support more transparent on why we are focusing resource to specific areas and/or system development. It is planned to test this interactive data dashboard for a year.

## Data Strategy, Internal data platform and analytical capacity

We are developing a three-year data strategy to ensure we collect and process data accurately, staff within the organisation have the skills to interpret and analyse data, and make use of available technology to maximise efficient access and sustainability.

# Public involvement & community engagement

## Engagement leads network, co-production, and engagement events and activities

There are a range of staff for whom engagement and co-production are either a focus or key element to their role. By forming a network this will support learning, reduce duplication and adoption of appropriate methods for the target audience and purpose of activities.

## Communication strategy

This strategy will support how we communicate and engagement with stakeholders throughout the research process as well as the final publication of outcomes and learning. This is integral to achieving more transparency around how we make data and evidence informed decisions.

## Equality objectives and tools

The refresh of our equality objectives and tools, such as Equality Impact Assessments, will ensure we consider a diverse range of views and participants involved in our local research activities and that they are focused on addressing and mitigating existing health inequalities.





# Knowledge into practice and policy

## Learning system cycles and referencing frameworks

A key marker of success in achieving a sustainable research culture will be evident in the life cycle of policy and practice decisions, implementation, and evaluation. There will be clear demonstration through referencing frameworks of what data and evidence informed each step in the continuous process of learning and improving how we do things as organisation to support our resident and service users.

## Publications of novel practice and policy developments

As well as drawing upon existing evidence, we will publish our learning and novel practice and policy developments using appropriate methods and forums.

# Appendix A: Sources of research funding

Below is a list of some of sources of research funding. It is not exhaustive, with opportunities available through commercial and charitable organisations as well.

**GrantFinder** is the leading funding database in the UK covering local, national, and international sources of funding including charitable trusts, societies, research councils, national government, and corporate sponsors. The research and development grants typically fund the development of a new product, service or process, with a view to bringing it closer to the market. The result might be a medical treatment, a consumer device, or a piece of software that accomplishes a particular task, to name a few. [Research and Development Grant Funding UK - GrantFinder](#)

**The Health Foundation** funds research and policy analysis work to shine a light on how to make successful change happen. [Funding for research projects - The Health Foundation](#)

**National Institute for Health and Care Research** funds, enables and delivers world-leading health and social care research that improves people's health and wellbeing, and promotes economic growth. NIHR has specific programmes for [Public health research | NIHR](#) and [Social care practitioners | NIHR](#). All funding opportunities can be viewed [Funding opportunities | NIHR](#)

**Nuffield Foundation** awards research funding to original and robust ideas that aim to improve people's lives. Grant applications should fall within or across its key areas of interest: Education, Welfare and Justice. [Research Funding | Apply for Funding | Nuffield Foundation](#)

**UK Research and Innovation** (UKRI) invests in research and innovation to enrich lives, drive economic growth, and create jobs and high-quality public services across the UK. [Opportunities – UKRI](#)

**Wellcome** funds researchers to take on important questions relating to life, health, and wellbeing, with creative approaches that push boundaries. [Grant funding schemes and guidance | Grant funding | Wellcome](#)



# Appendix B:

# Regional research infrastructure organisations

## **Fuse - The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health**

Fuse is a virtual centre. It operates across five universities in north-east England: Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, and Teesside and connects with partners from across all sectors involved in public health. Fuse aims to transform health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities through the conduct of world-class public health research and its translation into value-for-money policy and practice.

### **AskFuse**

AskFuse is a rapid response and evaluation service for Fuse's policy and practice partners. This includes those in public health, local authorities, the NHS, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Commissioning Support Units, Public Health England, Voluntary and Community services, charities, and many other organisations.

AskFuse can help to develop new guidelines, strategies, interventions, service reviews, evaluations, co-organise events and help in many other ways. AskFuse does this by linking you with Fuse research experts to explore needs for, and agree the nature, timescales, and cost of any work. Initial AskFuse enquiries and advice are entirely free.

### **NIHR Research Support Service**

In October 2023, the NIHR launched a new Research Support Service (RSS). This service provides free and confidential advice to develop funding applications within the remit of the NIHR, including clinical, applied health and social care research, and post-award advice to award holders. Access to support, advice and expertise is available for all researchers across England applying to NIHR research programmes or research training awards as well as to non-NIHR funders such as charities.

The RSS is delivered collaboratively through eight hubs, with our local one delivered by Newcastle University and Partners. This Hub supports research across the full breadth of specialisms, designs, and funders, including studies involving under-researched sectors. Hosted in Newcastle University's Population Health Sciences Institute, the hub sits within a world class research, health care and training ecosystem, recognised by its Academic Health Science Centre, Newcastle Health Innovation Partners.

All hubs support a broad range of research designs, from pre-application through to post-award delivery, as well as providing specialist topic or methods expertise. There are also specialist centres with expertise in public health and social care research.



### **RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health**

The NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health works nationally to support the development of research capacity and capability to enable practitioners, researchers and anyone working outside of the NHS to carry out high quality public health research. Their expert team provides pre-award application advice tailored to researchers' needs and post-funding support. They can also offer training, support with governance and ethics and resource to support research in Local Authorities.


### **RSS Specialist Centre for Social Care**

The NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Social Care brings together world-leading interdisciplinary experts with a broad range of experience in social care research, working nationally to support researchers across the full range of social care services and settings. The centre provides a breadth of methodological expertise and research support to researchers of all levels and experience, to design and deliver innovative social care research that is inclusive, co-produced and environmentally sustainable.

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## For further information:

 0191 424 6678

 [anna.christie@southtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:anna.christie@southtyneside.gov.uk)

 [www.southtyneside.gov.uk](http://www.southtyneside.gov.uk)

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