NIHR | Health Determinants Research Collaboration Leicestershire

Leicestershire County Council

Involving the public in research prioritisation

Background

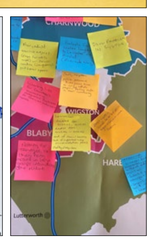
Although Leicestershire is relatively healthy and wealthy, this masks wide variation at a neighbourhood level. In Leicestershire, health inequalities resulting from wider, social determinants include circulatory diseases, higher in men (26.1%), and cancer, higher in women (34.4%). HDRC Leicestershire started our development year in January 2024, one of the first big pieces of work we started was to identify research priorities. We did this through document review and public engagement.

What did we do?

Our HDRC reviewed council strategies and published published information and data and data to identify key health challenges in our area, who is affected most and how they link to the wider building blocks that determine our health. Our Public Advisory Group (PAG) reviewed our process and data, ensuring it would be public friendly when we presented information to the wider public.

We then hosted a Public Assembly at Leicestershire County Hall where we shared our insights into seven key factors that impact on the health of our communities. We asked the public to contribute their stories and thoughts on these factors. Following this, we also brought workshops to Leicestershire schools to hear from young people about their view on what determines the health of our communities.

Who got involved?



We heard from adults and young people through discussion and creative outputs at these events.

Our youth engagement involved three schools in Leicestershire, a total of 60 young people in years 7-10 (or aged 11-14) attended three workshops.

Sixty-one Leicestershire residents attended our public assembly in March 2025. We recruited participants to purposefully reach groups that are more likely to experience health inequalities. Of the people who attended the public assembly:

- 56% had disabilities
- 43% were living in areas of deprivation
- 20% identified as LGBT

Quotes from participants about their experience

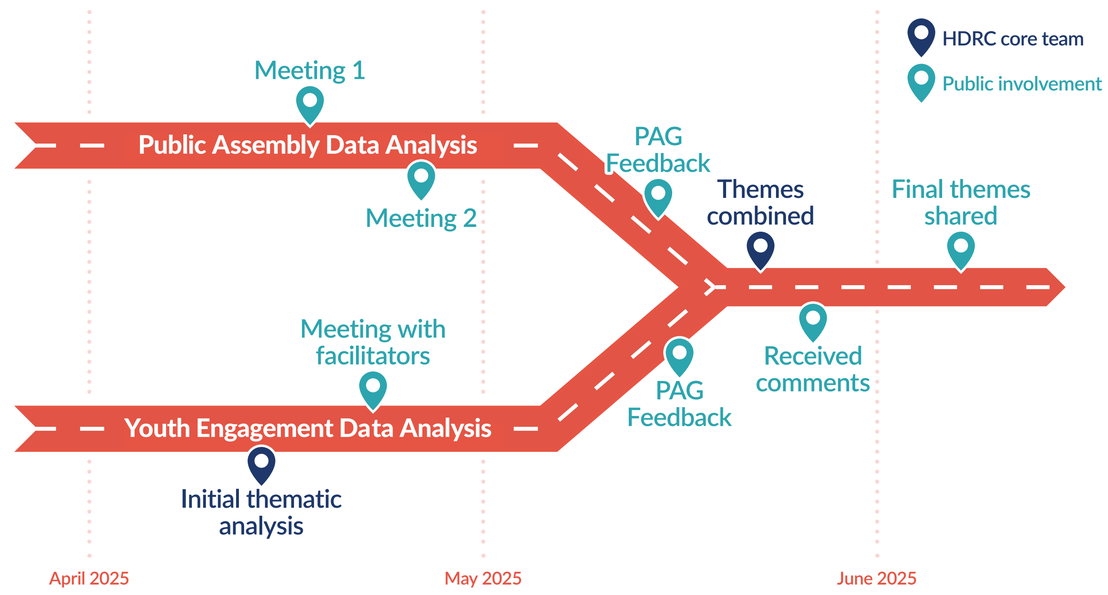
"I had no idea what today would be. I am leaving happy and feeling uplifting because I've been listened to."

"I heard examples of other people's life experiences, it opened my eyes to wider problems & issues."

"Everything was well expected beforehand. Each group lead listened really well, and they made us feel valued."

How did we analyse the information?

We included the public in analysis of the findings, ensuring that they were involved meaningfully throughout our thematic analysis.



Our priorities

The following themes highlight the key areas and topics we will focus our research on, they are not exhaustive, and we will be flexible to include new themes/topics as they emerge.

Findings also included the need to prioritise underserved groups and learning from other places. Therefore, our research will have these values at our centre while exploring the wider determinants of health listed below.

What is around us?

Spaces and places that influence health
The importance of the surroundings where we live and work, a built environment, infrastructure and amenities that promote health, for example food outlets, religious spaces, exercise facilities, and substance regulation.

Protecting, using, and living in the countryside and other green space
Protecting green and blue spaces in urban and rural places so that they can contribute to clean air, provide places to walk and exercise, and habitats for animals and other wildlife. This includes living in the countryside and relationships with farms, allowing healthy, fresh, local food to be available.

Spacious, affordable housing
Access to and affordability of high quality, safe housing with gardens and enough space for those living there.

Who is around us?

Isolation and sense of community
The importance of community and belonging, with 'fun' community spaces to come together and engage in recreational activities, share interests, stories, knowledge and make networks. This could include digital networks, spaces to play and watch sports, cinemas, parks, community events, or restaurants. Also, the negative impact of feeling lonely, isolated or excluded and not having community to connect with.

Community empowerment and knowledge sharing
Communities and individuals having access to knowledge and information that will support, empower and equip them make informed decisions. This includes knowledge about their health, nutrition and the wider factors that shape health. For example, knowledge about their rights, benefits, and how to access support and services. It also includes the need for advocacy between and within communities.

Community Safety
Feeling of safety and calm in the local area/neighbourhood, with limited noise and disruption. This includes perceptions and safety needs relating to low-level crime, such as anti-social behaviour, fear and intimidation, noise. It also includes infrastructure such as streetlights, safety precautions, and the presence of supportive communities and reliable neighbourhood policing to ensure community safety. Alongside physical safety, this theme considers online and digital safety.

What are our opportunities?

Inclusive opportunities to discover and pursue aspirations
The need for choice and options when it comes to education, employment and volunteering opportunities, and the links between these. This should also include alternative routes to employment, volunteering and skills development.

Income and cost of living and thriving
How much money people have coming in, whether that be earnings, family or government financial support or other means, and how much things cost, not just to live but to thrive. This may include cost of services or resources including food, rent, fuel and furnishings, and the barriers experienced to get adequate income.

Inclusive and accessible transport
Both public and personal transport being accessible and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities. This includes planning to facilitate proximity to walking or cycling routes, allowing access to community, green spaces, public transport, and health spaces. It also includes accessibility for those with frailty or disabilities, and access to and affordability of bikes and cars.

Dr Sarah McNeill / Cecily Henry / hdrc@leics.gov.uk

Z0198