

Guiding Principles for Public Involvement
Working with people in Coventry

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Background

The Coventry Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) has a vision to create a research environment that is open, creative, and dynamic. The HDRC will help Coventry City Council (CCC) become more research-active and evidence-based in its decision making about how resources are used to tackle health determinants. The HDRC will help to reduce health inequalities, reducing avoidable and unfair differences in health between groups of people, through better use of evidence and research. To achieve this, the Coventry HDRC brings together collaborators from different sectors: CCC, universities, NHS, voluntary and community organisations, and public contributors, with funding from NIHR.

What is Public Involvement?

Public involvement will ensure that **research is done ‘with’ or ‘by’ people in Coventry**, and not ‘to’, ‘for’, or ‘about’ them¹.

Involvement is an active partnership where **the public are involved in shaping the prioritisation, design, conduct and use of research**, and is different to recruiting people to take part in research. In the HDRC, we will also involve the public in **how the HDRC is developed and delivered**. Active involvement could include the public **making decisions** about how research projects are designed, **carrying out the research**, or advising on data governance and research ethics.

Public involvement in the HDRC will help ensure that the public rightly have a voice in a collaboration that may affect them. Involvement will also help research to be meaningful, relevant, and impactful, and should provide positive experiences and outcomes for the public involved. This means we need to involve people in Coventry as part of the research team, together with our collaborators. Through our work, we also plan to contribute to the international evidence-base that informs practice in public involvement.

Developing the Principles

The aim of the Public Involvement Principles is to define and embed the core values and standards that will inform public involvement in the Coventry HDRC.

This document is for all collaborators involved in the Coventry HDRC.

The Public Involvement Principles is intended to be live document and has been co-developed by collaborators including two public contributors and academics and professionals with public involvement expertise. The development has been informed by existing research and understanding about public involvement, and discussed via HDRC workshops, meetings, and written feedback to improve relevance to our collaboration. The approach is intended to be flexible, allowing for change and progress as we move from establishing the HDRC infrastructure, towards co-producing research and impacting on health determinants. Whilst specific public involvement activities will evolve as the HDRC takes shape, activities should be consistent with the principles described here.

Keywords, Definitions, and Abbreviations

Health determinants: Factors in our daily life that affect our health, including the environment we live in (e.g., housing, neighbourhoods, pollution, food), the economy (e.g., income, job security, work conditions, education) and our social relationships (e.g., inclusion, discrimination, early years, social cohesion).²

Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC): NIHR funding to local authorities of £5-million over 5 years to create a research culture, in partnership with collaborators.²

Collaborators: Individuals involved in the Coventry HDRC as public contributors or as professionals from collaborating organisations (Coventry City Council, universities, NHS, VCSE, steering groups).

Pillars: The Coventry HDRC includes five interdependent pillars, or workstreams, each leading on delivering a different workplan. These pillars are Governance, Training & Skills, Public Involvement, Evaluation, and Impact & Implementation.

Public contributors: Members of the public involved in research activities or programmes as active collaborators and decision-makers. Public contributors can include the public, service users, and carers, with councillors also representing the public voice.

Voluntary, Community or Social Enterprise (VCSE): Charities, Community Interest Companies, or organisations operating not-for-profit and with a social mission.

Research: The term research means different things to different people. The definition used by the Department for Health is: “*the attempt to derive generalisable new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods.*” However, there are multiple ways of gaining and thinking about knowledge. Collaborative and inclusive research must value these differences and share knowledge towards action.

Public involvement: Research done ‘with’ or ‘by’ the public rather than ‘to’, ‘about’ or ‘for’ them. Involvement is an active partnership where the public shape the design, conduct and use of research, and is different to recruiting people to take part in research.¹

Public engagement: Information and knowledge about research is shared with the public, such as via events, festivals, forums, or campaigns, as part of a two-way process.¹

Community researchers: The public bring their knowledge and experience to generate research about their community and can receive training or support from researchers (similar concepts are peer researchers, lay researchers, citizen science).^{3,4}

Research participation: Members of the public take part in the research as a participant, such as providing information or data via a survey or interview about their experiences.¹

Co-production: An approach that involves collaborators (e.g., researchers, practitioners, members of the public) working together to develop research from the start, with an equitable balance of power, responsibility, and decision-making. Value is meaningfully given to the different experiences and skills that each collaborator brings to the research process.^{5,6}

Why is Public Involvement in the Coventry HDRC important?

The HDRC is committed to involving the public so that our research can best impact on health determinants in Coventry.

We will work with individuals and communities to shape how the HDRC functions, how we conduct research, and how we will apply research to positively impact upon health determinants and inequalities.

Enabling and achieving good public involvement means we can better serve our community, as the public have a right to be involved in research that could affect them. Public involvement will help our work to be more meaningful, ethical, and relevant, and means we can better learn from the skills, expertise and ideas held among the public. We want to ensure that the public benefit from being involved in the HDRC, and that we do not cause harm or contribute to inequality of opportunity or outcome.

To do this, we outline the values that should guide Public Involvement in the HDRC. These values have been identified following discussions among the Coventry HDRC and alignment with the evidence-base as reviewed by Gradinger et al. (2015)⁷.

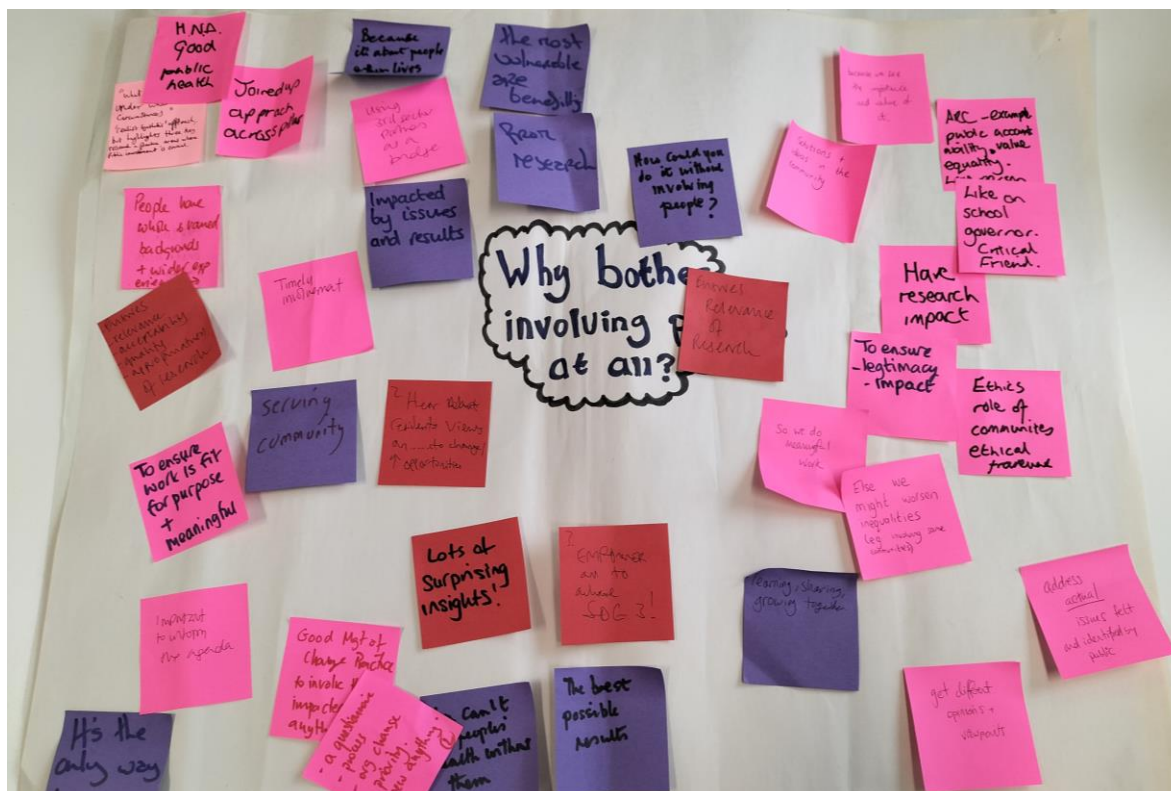


Figure 1. Activity from the Coventry HDRC cross-pillar workshop on Public Involvement, September 2023.

Our Values

Diversity and inclusion

Our collaboration will value inclusion and diversity at the centre of our work, so that we reduce and do not worsen inequalities. Our public involvement and engagement activities will give a voice to Coventry's diverse communities⁸, and we will actively reach out to different communities and understand the most appropriate ways to do this. Care should be taken not to overburden the same people⁹, and the HDRC must proactively develop new partnerships appropriate for different activities. We must reduce biases in our structures (e.g., recruitment, governance) and processes (e.g., communication, research), including through co-development and responding to Equality Impact Assessments. This aims to improve representation of different groups in research and recognise that intersectionality means people have unique identities and experiences. Involving diverse groups will improve the representativeness and generalisability of our research.

Equity of power

Our public involvement processes and activities must share power in how decisions are made. The HDRC must challenge power imbalances and empower the voices of marginalised communities towards achieving equity¹⁰, including through providing appropriate support and resources. We need to listen to what people are telling us, as well as what people are not telling us. Power imbalances and other reasons may mean the public do not directly tell us things, and we must recognise and respond to this.

Transparency and accountability

We want to create positive impact with our work. We must be honest and transparent about any limitations about what could be achieved from projects and research (e.g., limitations in funding costs or scope, scope for implementing evidence-based recommendations, limitations on modifying validated research methods, availability of existing evidence). We must be accountable to what we have said we will do and ensure processes for how the public and our collaborators can provide feedback about being involved. We must keep good and accurate records about our work, and plan for how our learning could be sustained into the future to avoid duplication of effort and harms because of any reversals or retractions of HDRC work. To bring in independence, we will be guided by external policies for public involvement and seek scrutiny from forums such as the Independent Steering Committee.

Trust and Respect

We must respect and value the different perspectives, skills, knowledge and strengths that our collaborators and communities bring. We will demonstrate respect by being committed to public involvement, and working in ways that are open, honest, and flexible. Demonstrating respect and consistency with our principles can help us to build and maintain trust with our communities. We will also build trust by living by our principles and committing to working collaboratively as equal partners.

Reciprocity

Mutually beneficial two-way relationships should be developed with the public and our wider collaborators to ensure reciprocity⁵. Efforts and commitments from the public towards improving research should return benefits to the public (e.g., benefits to self-confidence, skills development, meeting people)⁹, including that evidence-based recommendations can be acted upon to create change. The creation of tangible resources or artefacts beneficial to communities may be valued. We will work with our collaborators to determine what type of benefit they would most value, so that reciprocity is driven by our collaborators. As described above, we must also be transparent about benefits that the public may expect from being involved, and be accountable to meeting our pledges. Each pillar should ensure that public contributors and collaborators are given specific feedback to demonstrate their influence and the difference their contribution has made.

Sustainable partnerships

The goal should be to develop long-term relationships with individual contributors, community groups, and voluntary organisations, beyond the end of specific research projects and funding grants^{8,11}. Sustainable partnerships should be built on trust and respect, with appropriate and effective involvement of organisations in the community¹¹. The HDRC will identify and collaborate with existing networks and projects to champion sustainable partnerships. The successes of existing projects should be valued and incorporated, including identifying projects in the local authority, Universities, lived experience panels, voluntary and community networks, and beyond.

Evidence for practice

We recognise public involvement is an area of practice that can be informed by evidence and can contribute to the public involvement evidence base. We will build opportunities to generate evidence when we can, in order to avoid the waste where public involvement is undertaken and not reported, with valuable learning lost.

Establishing a culture

Supporting and enabling all collaborators to think about, plan, embed, and value public involvement across the HDRC is important to establish a culture of good public involvement. Each pillar of the HDRC should understand the value and benefits of public involvement and take the lead in incorporating public involvement into their work. The impact that public involvement has made to research and decision-making should be intentionally captured, understood, and shared with collaborators. The HDRC should help facilitate a broader culture change, whereby good public involvement in research becomes embedded in wider activities beyond the scope of the HDRC.



Figure 2. The six values of Coventry City Council.

What Does Public Involvement Look Like?

We must make sure that people interested in being involved are informed about what their involvement may look like and provide clear purpose and processes. Some examples of public involvement are provided by INVOLVE¹², and include members of the public:

- being co-applicants and grant holders for funded research
- advising on committees
- co-producing research materials
- being co-researchers such as interviewing research participants

In the Coventry HDRC, public involvement will also include:

- shaping the HDRC evaluation
- prioritising areas for HDRC research
- advising on our governance
- co-producing plans and resources

Public involvement is **not** where people take part in a research study as a participant, for example by being invited to complete a survey or attend a focus group¹².

Co-Production

Co-production is a collaborative approach to developing research and services, where different people jointly own decision-making and share power from the start⁵. In HDRC research, this could include members of the public, professionals delivering or commissioning services, councillors, and researchers working together throughout the research cycle (though we recognise that some people may only want to be involved in parts of the research)⁵. A ladder has been used to visualise progress towards co-production, although the journey towards co-production is much more multi-dimensional¹³.



Co-production: Equal and reciprocal relationships are built and maintained. Joint decision-making and sharing of power happen from design through to delivery. Different perspectives and skills are included and valued⁵.

Consultation: The public are asked about their views or may be asked to attend meetings or do surveys. This can help inform decision-making, but if the public do not have the power to influence change this can be tokenistic and lead to consultation fatigue¹.

Coercion or educating: People attend meetings or events as passive participants, and their views are not taken into account. In educating, people are only helped to understand a service or project.

Figure 3. Adapted from resources by Think Local Act Personal (2021) available at <https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org/>.

Public Involvement Standards in the HDRC

The work of the Coventry HDRC will also be guided by six UK standards for public involvement, previously developed by a UK partnership¹⁴. Below are some examples of how we will meet these standards and involve the public across the Coventry HDRC. These examples may differ from those typically provided about public involvement in research, as we are also developing research infrastructure, culture, and partnerships.

Inclusive opportunities

We will plan public involvement activities to ensure opportunities are widely and fairly advertised to give equitable chance for different groups to be involved. To achieve this, we will ensure we input more resources to engage groups who typically receive fewer opportunities to engage in research and public involvement. There should be demonstrable involvement of diverse groups in the HDRC, with feedback captured from the public about their experiences of involvement. Equality Impact Assessments should be regularly conducted and reviewed by all pillars and for HDRC research projects. Effort should be taken to identify, monitor, and mitigate any unintended consequences that could worsen social inequalities (such as involvement opportunities that do not reach, or are not accessible to, all communities) or otherwise contribute to negative experiences for public contributors.¹⁵

Working together

Individuals and organisations that could be affected by the work of the HDRC should have opportunities to influence the collaboration. Value is placed on the benefits of diverse skills, knowledge and experiences so that public involvement increases the relevance, appropriateness and quality of research⁷. We should try and share a common language when talking about the work of the HDRC. Appropriate forums suitable for diverse collaborators to work together should be in place. The HDRC pillars should work together to avoid overburdening communities and ensure a joined-up approach to involvement where appropriate.

We should also recognise and collaborate with existing networks and partnerships. The HDRC should build upon work that has already been completed, such as recognising that research priorities can align with the Coventry Marmot principles¹⁶ and the work of priority setting partnerships¹⁷.

Support and learning

The HDRC should support, facilitate, and fund quality training for collaborators in how to confidently implement good public involvement. Support and training opportunities should be equally available to public contributors and community researchers. We should plan to capture our learning with respect to public involvement in the HDRC, evaluate our progress, and implement evidence-based recommendations in line with our evidence into practice value.

Governance

Public representation should influence the structures in the HDRC, including the Governance Pillar, ethics committee, and decisions about policies and processes. The HDRC must implement appropriate processes and policies regarding public involvement. This includes ethical guidance for public involvement, data protection processes for the collation, storage, and use of personal data from public contributors, and proportionate remuneration processes, as our public contributors should be paid for their involvement¹⁸.

Two-way communication

The HDRC Communications Plan should describe how the HDRC can achieve two-way communication and engagement with the public. Communications from the HDRC should include the use of Plain English summaries, visual and diverse means of online and offline communication, and inclusive and accessible communications. There should be meaningful, active and ongoing communication with the public, as part of a two-way process. We should ensure effective communication between HDRC collaborators, so that ineffective communication does not negatively impact on the public.

Impact and Evidence

The implementation of these principles, and development of the public involvement approach, will be overseen by the Public Involvement Pillar.

Public involvement should have a demonstrable effect on the HDRC and its work, and we must evidence and communicate this. Public contributors should be involved in updates about their contributions (e.g., outcomes of funding bids, changes and decisions made because of their contributions). Public involvement activities and impact should be monitored, recorded, and reported so that we can share the impact of public involvement with all stakeholders (collaborators, the wider public, the funder, CCC staff, and councillors). The reporting of public involvement in research should include the GRIPP2 checklist to improve transparency and quality¹⁹. The impact of public involvement should be reported to a high quality, with broad dissemination. We must plan how to record public involvement activities so that future work, within or beyond the HDRC, can build on this learning.

Feedback from public contributors about the effectiveness and experience of their involvement must be captured, including individual stories about people's journeys as public contributors. Collaborators will ensure that public involvement activities are evaluated using appropriate tools, and we will evaluate the quality of public involvement in the HDRC to identify areas for development²⁰. Public Involvement will also be embedded in the Evaluation Pillar and inform the development and conduct of the HDRC evaluation.

We should draw on the public involvement evidence base to inform our work, as well as contribute to the evidence-base with our work. Lessons from public involvement in the HDRC may influence local, national, and international understanding of developing a research collaboration.

Courses and Training

List to be updated regularly.

- *Co-Production Collective*

A community committed to learning, connecting, and championing co-production, they have produced resources on embedding co-production:

<https://www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/>

- *Agora Digital Centre*

The Agora Digital centre provides consultancy and training for patient and public participation, involvement and engagement in health and social care research:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/agora-digital-centre/>

- *INVOLVE*

Resources and guides about co-production, public involvement, and engagement.

<https://www.involve.org.uk/>

- *The FabLAB Coventry: Citizen Social Science*

The FabLAB provide community maker spaces and workshops, as well as training for skills and experience in community research. This free course for adults leads to an accredited qualification: <https://fablabcov.coventry.ac.uk/learn-with-us/accredited-courses/lv2-citizen-social-science/>

- *NIHR training for involvement and engagement*

Live training (e.g., scheduled webinars) and recorded training about involvement and engagement delivered by NIHR can be found here:

<https://www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk/PPI/resources-for-researchers/training-for-involvement-and-engagement>

- *Public Involvement in Research*

Free, flexible online course via Coursera and Imperial College London for researchers, the public, and other professionals. Content covers doing and evaluating public involvement and co-production at different stages of the research cycle: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/public-involvement-in-research>

- *Co-Creating Welfare (Wellbeing) Course*

Training resources to help create, implement, and evaluate co-creation processes. Content co-developed by European partners (including Coventry), with example activities and resources for public engagement:

https://ccw.southdenmark.eu/?page_id=488

[Co-creating wellbeing 2024 course](#)

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