SSHERPa Research & Innovation Strategy

1. Executive Summary

2. Introduction

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Health and Care Research Partnership (SSHERPa) was established in response to the NHS Long Term Plan (2019), building upon the strong track record of research across the North West Midlands (Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin) underpinned by a range of long-standing partnership arrangements between health care organisations and academic institutions. For many years these localities have been the most research active setting across the West Midlands region (National Institute of Health and Care Research West Midlands Clinical Research Network: NIHR WM CRN), seeking solutions to the challenges of health and care research issues and working together to drive research, with research programmes (hosted within academia) that are recognized as world leading. The continuance of this highly productive collaboration is needed as the areas' economies are amongst the most challenged nationally, with significant areas for improvement identified within our health and care priorities.

Whilst the Health and Social Care Act 2022 set out a statutory duty to 'facilitate and promote' research, the ambition for SSHERPa is much greater than this seeking to ensure that research is integrated with health and care, aligned with the integrated care partnership priorities and intrinsic to those partners who work together – ensuring that our populations are actively engaged in developing and prioritizing research that supports evidence based service transformation, improves quality of services, reduces inequalities, and support effective and efficient use of resources across organizational boundaries.

SSHERPa set out an ambition to further enhance the opportunities for collaborative research and impact for the localities of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin; with SSHERPa partners clearly articulating the ambition of ensuring research and innovation is at the heart of the locality's health and care integrated care systems (ICS) as they develop.

The SSHERPa Research and Innovation Strategy sets out a key strategic programme of work to deliver the SSHERPA vision, values and goals. Through enhancing relationships and developing multi-disciplinary collaborative research partnerships, we will deliver high quality research that improves the health and well-being of our communities, ensuring that health and care commissioning and service provision is evidenced based and underpinned by research and innovation. It is widely recognized that organisations with a reputation for providing excellence in research attract and retain high quality staff, and achieve better patient outcomes. Through the SSHERPa partnership approach we will reduce competition in research, reduce duplication, maximize our research opportunities, and to expand the opportunities for our local population and health and care staff to become engaged and involved in research.

Key to the SSHERPa research strategy is the strengthening of existing partnerships, and expansion of new partnerships to include organisations that support under-served communities. The partnerships between health and local authority organisations, academic institutions and industry will provide significant opportunities and benefits to the way in which research is developed and how services will be delivered in the future. The successful implementation of this strategy will ensure a culture of research and innovation is embedded within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). We are ambitious in our plans to support collaborative research, to attract and retain high calibre, motivated and innovative staff to support best care in our regions.

3.   Delivering the Vision and Values

This Research Strategy is a key platform for delivery of the SSHERPa vision and priorities. Our collective ambition is to widen those population engaging in, and benefiting from research, addressing the local research priorities of our regional integrated are systems. The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Health and Care Research Partnership ensures a range of partners benefit from collaborative research leadership, the opportunity to secure collaborative research funding and to develop new partnerships to drive improvement. This strategy has been aligned to the Integrated Care Partnership strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS and Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin ICS, with research and innovation as an 'enabling' theme in delivering these strategies. There is a clear association between research, innovation, education and training in improving health and care outcomes and experience. This strategy supports our partners' collective ambition to grow and develop a sustainable multi-disciplinary research active workforce delivering improved outcomes for our populations.

The infographic summarises the key benefits of developing and delivering this research strategy.

People

- Widening participation - of staff, communities, patients, carers, public members
- Public involvement in research leading to improved outcomes
- Uptskilled multidisciplinary workforce driving evidence based health and care
- Learning culture to drive change
- Co-produciion with communities to seek solutions, reduce health inequalities, improve outcomes
- Recruitment and rention of high calibre staff
- Developing and building the workforce of tomorrow

Quality

- Enhanced patient safety and improved outcomes
- Evidence based care delivery and outcomes
- Access to altnernative and evidence based innovatins
- Promoting a culture of innovation, quality improvement and evidence based health and care
- Research active organisations lead to improve care/outcomes

Partnerships

- Enhanced reputation and system partnersnip working improving recruitment and retention
- Inclusive diverse partnership driving best care
- Opprutnities for career development across networks, working in partnership across organisations
- Multidisciplinary education and research across the region
- Collaboratiion not competition to drive high qulaity care
- Reputational benefit for partnering with industry/commercial sector
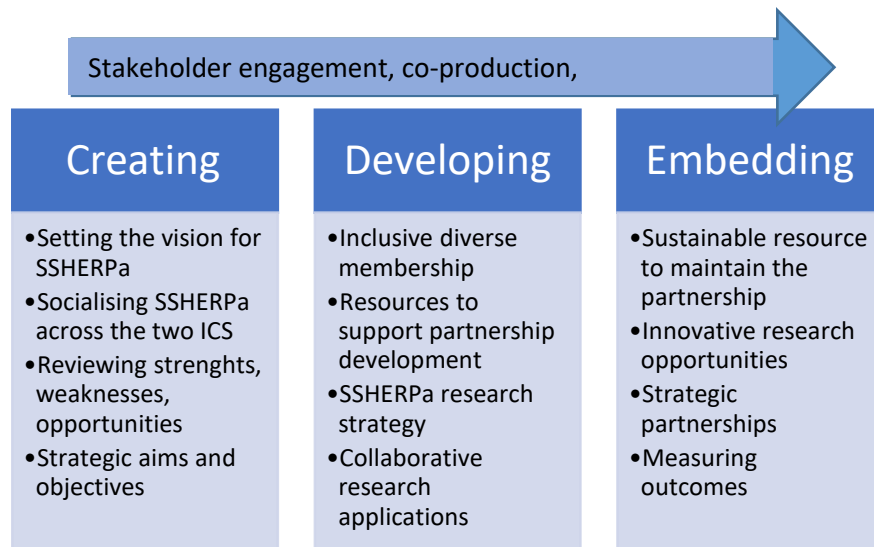
Sustainability

- Creating a learning culture
- Improved staff retention
- Securing additional resources & funding for our localilties
- Increase health and care research reputation

4. Partnership and Engagement

SSHERPa builds upon existing strong relationships between organisations, however in order to develop more inclusive and meaningful research, we need to develop more inclusive partnerships. Through the development of this strategy we have engaged with a range of stakeholders and will continue to ensure that we develop a continuous engagement programme, which supports the development of collaborative research and innovation for our communities; widening and deepening the reach of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Health and Care Research Partnership.

Figure 1 sets out the approach for our engagement strategy and ongoing stakeholder engagement and communication.

In developing this strategy we:

- Carried out a series of engagement sessions with research and innovation colleagues across the two integrated care systems

- Secured NHS England funding to develop our research engagement strategy
- Considered ongoing feedback from our voluntary and community partners
- Developed a proposal to ensure that the voice of patients/public members are represented at the Research and Innovation Committees of the SSHERPa two ICS committees

The figure below highlights feedback from our stakeholders when thinking about the development of SSHERPa

5. Our Vision and Objectives

Our vision for the SSHERPa Research and Innovation Strategy is to: support evidence based health and care transformation, driving best health and care for our communities through excellence in research. We will achieve this vision by delivering against the following core objectives:

1. Developing collaborative integrated research addressing the health and care priorities of our regions, expanding the range and diversity of research undertaken in our region
2. Fostering a culture of collaborative research and innovation with strong leadership championing the strategy
3. Developing the capacity and capability for evidence based health and care
4. Increasing the opportunity for our region's population to engage in research
5. Developing a collaborative infrastructure for research and innovation in our region to support and grow an increased research portfolio
6. Supporting the implementation of best evidence into practice – commissioning and provision of services

We will embed the principles of diversity, resilience and engagement across all of our work to drive change and create the conditions for an integrated research and innovation partnership.

Our strategic objectives provide the framework for how we will achieve our vision and realise our principles through:			
Workforce Development	**People, Places & Communities**	**Impact**	**Innovation**
• Championing a research culture where everyone is valued able to contribute to, and benefit from, research. • Developing innovative career pathways, embedding research into health and care professional roles. • Sharing knowledge and expertise, developing research professional roles across the partnership.	• Creating opportunities for inclusive research across diverse communities. • Enhancing the opportunity for people to shape research, reducing health inequalities across our diverse urban & rural geography. • Enhancing the opportunities to engage in research – championing the people and teams that support this. • Developing infrastructure that supports wider engagement in research.	• Creating an eco-system where research outputs can be rapidly adopted into practice/policy. • Developing co-production strategies that support the mobilisation of knowledge. • Transforming health and care through high quality research • Supporting sustainability through new approaches to health and care research delivery • Supporting economic development through income generation	• Working with business and commercial partners, facilitating deeper partnerships and securing co-investment. • Connecting research and innovation. • Accelerating translation, commercialisation and knowledge exchange.
Supported by high quality research, empowering all to engage, improving outcomes through partnership and leadership			

6.   Making it Happen

Objective 1: developing collaborative integrated research that addresses the health and care priorities of our region, expanding the range and diversity of research undertaken in our region

The research world is a 'competitive' arena, with researchers competing regionally and nationally for funding to support their research programmes. Through adopting a collaborative approach to research funding we will build upon the strengths of our partnerships with academic partners (Keele University and Staffordshire University) to maximise the opportunities for successful funding at a regional and national level. Working with the two Integrated Care Partnerships of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, we will develop collaborative research proposals that address the priorities of these populations.

Key deliverables:

- support colleagues across the SSHERPa partnership to foster emergent research ideas, encouraging partnering to apply to external grant funding opportunities.
- address the research priorities of our regional ICSs through: the development of grant proposals to a range of regional, national and international funders; use of big data/population health management; engaging communities in NIHR portfolio studies.
- Support evidence based practice and commissioning by engaging practitioners, managers, commissioners and members of the public in journal clubs/critically appraised topic groups etc.
- submit research and innovation showcases to regional and national conferences

- host a SSHERPa conference to showcase our achievements in research and to promote the benefits of research and innovation regionally.
- maximise the impact of our research outputs by strengthening key partnerships with regional and national bodies (such as NIHR, Academic Health Science Networks, NICE, professional bodies).
- develop partnership working with academic and industry partners to support research and innovation within the ICSs; supporting the uptake of commercial studies within our region.

Objective 2: Fostering a culture of collaborative research and innovation with strong leadership championing the strategy

Whilst there are significant strengths in research, innovation and education in our region, there is a recognition that not all stakeholders are starting from the same point. As such there is a need to foster and build upon the research and innovation culture in our region; this will involve learning from one another, sharing best practice examples and developing a culture of trust and engagement across our systems, ensuring research is seen as core business in our region.

Key deliverables:

- strengthen and promote partnerships across the two ICSs to further build our reputation as a regional lead for research.
- ensure research is embedded into strategic plans for SSHERPa partners.
- socialise SSHERPa across the two integrated care systems in our region; secure senior academic leadership of SSHERPa committees; secure SSHERPa infrastructure support for all partners.

- develop workforce opportunities for staff to engage in research.
- enhance existing education and training programmes to equip staff across all professions/organisations with the skills to engage in research and embed research into their practice.
- share and adopt best practice for developing a research culture; celebrate exemplar case studies – RG ShropCom; CAT groups; joint posts as example; Stars; CENREE; CHAD.
- develop a culture of collaboration for working with industry/commercial partners in research.

Objective 3: Developing the capacity and capability for evidence based health and care

Key to the delivery of this strategy is the development of a research engaged workforce for the future. Building research capacity and capability can lead to the development of innovative posts that attract and retain a high quality diverse workforce who embrace and actively engage with research and innovation. SSHERPa will provide a collaborative platform through which multi-professional integrated research can be developed, and through which learning, mentoring and development opportunities are optimised.

Key deliverables:

- Optimise opportunities for integrated multi-disciplinary research and innovation education and training
- Develop research placement opportunities through partnership working with Universities
- Develop research champions within a range of health and care settings, promoting the opportunities for research

- Identify areas of best practice and share these as a way to engage colleagues in research e.g. critically appraised topic groups, journal clubs etc.
- Create innovative posts that facilitate health and care research opportunities across a range of roles and across career pathways; support research culture carriers/champions and celebrate their contributions.
- Promote the benefits of health and care research and education at our Universities – and optimise recruitment opportunities working with these establishments into health and care posts that have research incorporated within their roles.
- Establish mentoring/shadowing opportunities, supporting and fostering staff to develop research ideas and secure research funding.
- Developing honorary research post opportunities with health and care professionals with our partnering universities.
- Develop joint doctoral and post-doctoral research posts in collaboration with our partnering universities.
- Enhance relationships with regional clinical research networks and national bodies to optimise opportunities for staff to engage in research (e.g. NIHR CRN WM scholars scheme, NICE, Health Foundation, NIHR pre-doctoral fellowships).
- Support the ongoing development of a learning culture across SSHERPa, through the sharing of training programmes, development opportunities etc.

Objective 4: Increasing the opportunity for our region's population to engage in research

SSHERPA will utilise its strong track record of partnerships to champion a research culture where every individual is respected value and able to

contribute to, and benefit from research. Through the creation of expanded partnerships, with a focus on place based partnerships and communities, we will proactively champion and support public engagement in place-based research; enhancing public and patient involvement and engagement in health and care research activities.

Engaging with communities will strengthen our research strategy enabling us to address those health and care issues most relevant to our region's population, tackling health and care inequalities, outcomes and experience.

Key deliverables:

- widen SSHERPa partnership to include diverse communities (as defined by our place based localities), creating a collaborative research network around each ICS footprint; proactively seeking engagement with new communities supporting under-served population.
- working across boundaries, engaging wider health wider health and care sectors in research; minimising variation, addressing health and social inequalities and driving best care for our communities.
- widen access to participation in research to our region's communities through: the development of community research champions; building a research partnership with voluntary and community sector partners; proactively supporting patient and public involvement in research – from design to implementation.
- stock take and review current research portfolio, work with NIHR CRN WM partners to increase opportunities for our region's population to participate in high quality research studies.

- secure funding to support voluntary and community sector partners and patient and public members to be proactively involved in research.
- develop the opportunities for integrated research health and care roles across sectors.
- increase the opportunities for research and innovation to be incorporated at the heart of ICS working, system transformation and delivery plans.

Objective 5: Developing a collaborative infrastructure for research and innovation in our region to support and grow an increased research portfolio

In order to deliver SSHERPa's ambitions to support health and care research across the region, we recognise there is a need to provide a supportive environment for research through a partnership approach to research infrastructure. In responding to Covid-19 SSHERPa partners identified and accelerated approaches to research support, and building upon this success a key priority will be to strengthen and develop further the support for research across organisational boundaries, engaging diverse communities, and building the health and care research capacity in our regions.

Key deliverables:

- share best practice and knowledge relating to research governance; explore established examples of collaboration between research active and research-ambitious organisations.
- support the development of data sharing for research as key members: the region's 'One Health and Care record'; West Midlands Secure Date Environment (SDE) programme.

- build upon the region's strengths in 'big data' developing programmes of research that support the ICS's Population Health Management activities, addressing the region's health inequalities, ensuring health and care investment decisions are based on best evidence.
- build upon the partnership approach to research facilities (clinical, laboratory, diagnostics, pharmacy, clinical trials unit, community), enabling us to increase our portfolio of research and widen our offer to our communities.
- secure funding to support expanded research infrastructure capability, seek ways in which research studies can be 'taken out to communities' rather than communities needing to 'come to the research', increasing access to research across our urban and rural footprint.
- develop inclusive approaches to research participation through the development of new methodology for research data collection, optimising the use of digital solutions as appropriate
- develop an inclusive framework for patient and public involvement and engagement in research, building upon the best practice examples in our region and expanding these to support diverse communities.

Objective 6: Supporting the implementation of best evidence into practice – commissioning and provision of services

Our aim is to ensure that our health and care research has a positive and sustained impact on the quality of life and care for patients and the public. In order to maximise the benefits of our health and care research portfolio, there is a need to support the implementation of best evidence into practice across public health, health and social care (commissioning and service provision). Building upon the SSHERPa

strengths, and experience of Keele's Impact Accelerator Unit (IAU) we will support the proactive mobilisation of knowledge supporting policy makers, managers, health and care practitioners to implement evidence into practice.

Key deliverables:

- build upon best practice examples of knowledge mobilisation – seeking collaborative funding opportunities to support the roll out of evidence into practice.
- support practitioners to become champions of best practice through empowering them as knowledge brokers and change facilitators.
- support communities to become champions of best practice through empowering them as knowledge brokers.
- support strategic co-created evidence based approaches to transformation to increase the quality of care, working with ICS partners and patient/public members to design services that utilise best evidence.
- support stakeholder led responsive evidence into practice implementation approaches.
- proactively seek funding to support the accelerated uptake of research evidence in our region.
- work with other knowledge mobilisation communities regionally/nationally/internationally to learn from best practice and to accelerate research implementation in our region.
- maximise the impact of our research outputs by strengthening our key partnerships with regional and national research and practice communities (e.g. NICE, NIHR, professional bodies….etc).
- work with academic and industry partners to accelerate the uptake of innovations into practice.

- work with SSHERPa partners to strengthen the innovation pathway for health and care
- celebrate the SSHERPA research and innovation activities, showcasing our achievements to develop the region's reputation locally, regionally and nationally.

7. Sustainability

It is recognised that to continue to build and develop our research and innovation across the SSHERPa partnership requires investment in the programme coordination. To date we have secured short term funding to support the establishment of the SSHERPa network and its management and coordination. Matched funding in kind has been provided through the executive sponsorship of Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust who host and provide executive leadership to the SSHERPa programme team; SSHERPA partners provide additional matched funding in kind through the development of collaborative programmes of work and membership of the ICS Research and Innovation Committees. It is anticipated that 'matched funding in kind' will continue and develop to include the support of shared approaches to the objectives outlined above (such as research governance, data sharing etc.). To support the ambitions of the SSHERPa partnership a proactive approach to securing funding for the integrated SSHERPa programme team will continue, through applications to funders that will directly support the programme team, to building SSHERPa costs within SSHERPa partners research and innovation proposals.

8.   Implementation and Monitoring

This strategy sets out the shared ambition of the SSHERPa partnership to develop the culture of research and innovation in our region, supporting

improved quality of care through the utilisation of best evidence in decision making. Working together with industry, University, NHS, local authority, community and voluntary sector partners, we will aim to make the best use of our collective resources (knowledge, staff, facilities) to expand our research and innovation portfolio to address the health inequalities of our regions, supporting under-served communities to engage in, and benefit from research. This strategy builds upon and enhances the research and innovation programmes already established across the SSHERPa partnership. Progress against delivery of the objectives set out in this strategy will be reviewed annually and assured through reporting to the quality assurance groups within the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Boards. The impact of our planned activities will be captured and reviewed by SSHERPa partners through the ICS Research and Innovation Committee held quarterly throughout the year.