

Public health research ethics in local authority: A mixed methods scoping study

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Introduction

There is a need to develop infrastructure to carry out, disseminate and use public health-orientated research in local government.^{1,2} New capacity-building programmes are being established in response. This includes Health Determinants Research Collaborations hosted in 13 local authorities, and a national Specialist Centre in Public Health Research.^{3,4}

Ethical review is an important aspect of research infrastructure. Ethical review, founded in globally and nationally established principles (autonomy/respect for persons, beneficence/non-maleficence and justice) is a longstanding expectation for medical research, including population health research.^{5,6}

Ethical review committees are in place in universities for research projects conducted by staff members or students. For projects conducted with NHS patients or social care service users, ethical review is undertaken through an NHS or Social Care Research Ethics Committee under protocols administered by the NHS Health Research Authority.

However, these systems may not be accessible or appropriate for people working in local government. The ethical challenges posed by research may manifest in different forms for local government projects than for other forms of public health research. In addition, without bespoke options specific to local government there can be confusion about which processes local government should follow. There is a need for clarity on models of ethics governance needed for local government – this is the first step in establishing such systems.

Study rationale

This project is intended to inform capacity building in local government research ethics governance. It is timely in coinciding with a set of National Institute of Health Research programmes for wider public health research capacity-building. It may contribute to the development of ethics functions, research pathways, and a wider culture of research for local government.

Study scope & research questions

This study aims to describe the scope, purpose and operation of public health research ethics within local government and to identify factors which are salient to the design of ethical review to support research in local government settings.

It is intended to inform and support bodies which are seeking to improve the operation of research governance in local government.

The working research questions are:

- (1) What are the organisational features of governance models used by local government for ethical review of public health research in England?
- (2) What are the perceived strengths and limitations of these models?



⁹Image



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References

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Methods

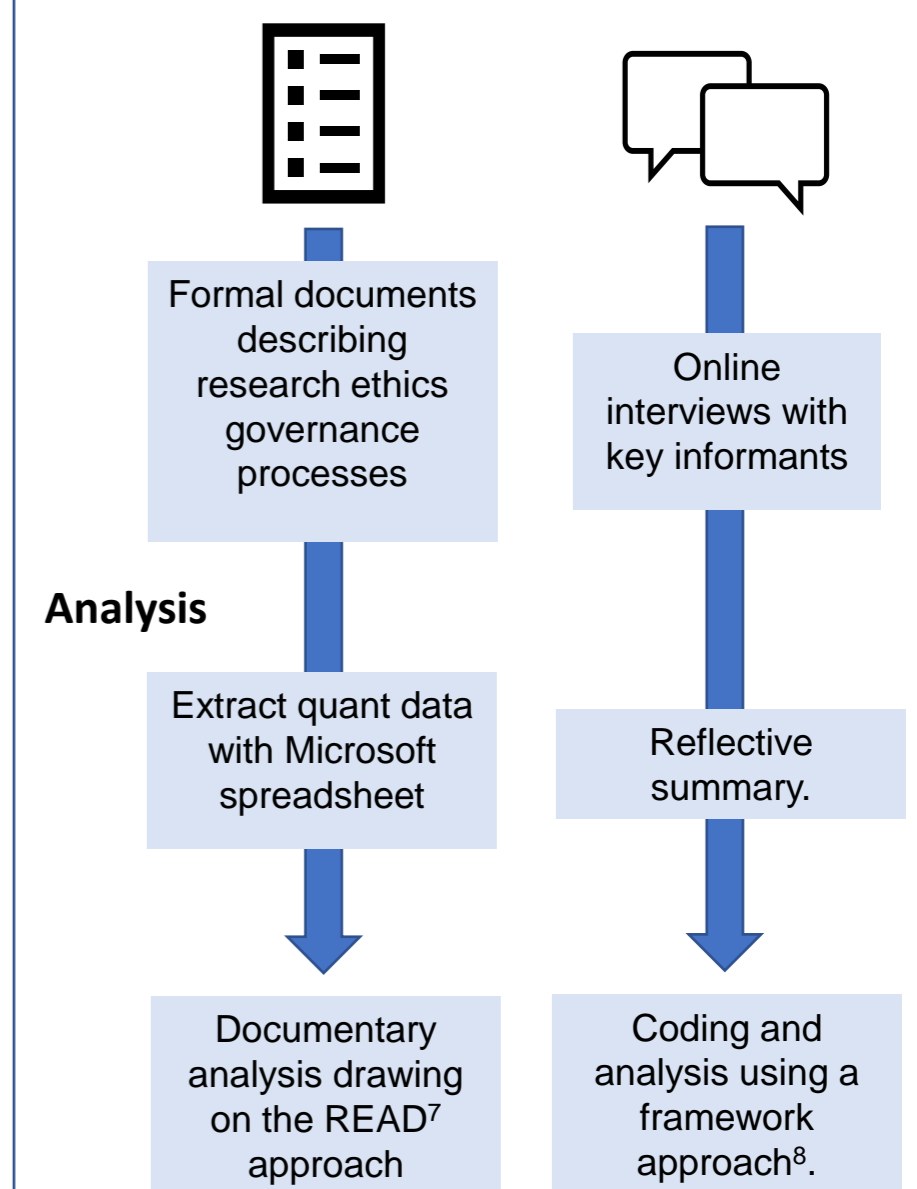
A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to answer the research question most completely.

Data sources

Up to 20 people, each representing a participating local authority, will be identified via the network of Consultants and Directors of Public Health. This group constitutes a purposive sample of local authorities known to have some interest in hosting research.

Data Collection

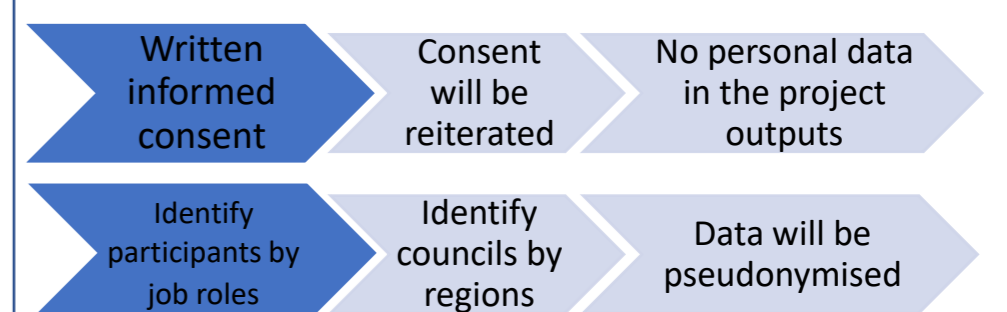
Each council which agrees to participate in the project will be asked for two forms of data:



Ethics

Ethical approval has been received from the University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee (Approval ID Number: 24349.001).

Prior to data collection and analysis the following were considered.



Output

Evidence to support decisions

Changes to ethical review infrastructure

Submit a paper to a peer reviewed journal