

PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT GROUP

Terms of Reference

1. Background

The MRC Centre for Environment and Health was formed in June 2009 as a partnership between Imperial College and King's College London (Director Paul Elliott and Deputy Director Frank Kelly), funded by the UK Medical Research Council and Public Health England, establishing itself over the past ten years as a leading centre of excellence in environment and health research in the UK.

Recently we have also been awarded funding from the NIHR for the creation of two Health Protection Research Units (HPRUs), one in *Chemical and Radiation Threats and Hazards* (Director Paul Elliott) and a second in *Environmental Exposures and Health* (Director Frank Kelly), officially launched on 1st April 2020. This follows a highly successful collaboration for the previous NIHR HPRU in Health Impact of Environmental Hazards (Director Frank Kelly). The two new HPRUs will conduct research across various themes. For details of the research themes please see attached document.

The MRC Centre and HPRUs established a joint Public and Community Oversight Group (PCOG) to ensure that the public and community voice impacts our research strategies, projects and functions and that our research is accountable, transparent and relevant. Although the priority of the PCOG is **public and community involvement (PCI)**, the group may also be invited to take part in **public engagement (PE)** activities, and participation in research where relevant.

We use NIHR INVOLVE definitions, namely that **public involvement** is where members of the public are actively involved in the activities, organisation and governance of research projects, while **public engagement** is where information and knowledge about research is provided and disseminated to the public.¹

2. Aims

The *Public Community Oversight Group* aims to:

- Support the governance of public involvement and engagement approaches and activities within this HPRU
- Identify research priorities addressing public concerns
- Advise on research plans, protocols and materials

¹ NIHR, 2013, INVOLVE, 2014

- Identify and facilitate ways to involve members of the public in research
- Disseminate research results in lay summaries
- Support researchers to assess the impact of PCIEP in their work

3. Membership

Membership of the PCOG is by invitation. Membership is open to those who are both directly or indirectly affected by, or interested in, our research areas. Members will include public and community representatives (both with and without previous experience of PCIEP) to make sure that the group benefits from varied skills, expertise and experience.

Membership of this group is voluntary but requires members to be committed to attending meetings and respond to emails/correspondence. The initial term of membership is for a two-and-a-half-year period, subject to review. When members are unable to attend meetings, contributions to the areas to be discussed are expected via e-mail or post. New members may be recruited to the group if there are gaps in experience/knowledge/capacity of group members.

The PCOG may advise the PCIEP Committee to invite other representatives of voluntary or community organisations on a one-off or long-term basis. In addition, the Committee may also invite those with responsibility for **public engagement** within their organisations or those academics/scientists/researchers/practitioners with **public involvement/public engagement** interest or activities may be invited on a one-off or long-term basis. Observers, guests and presenters may also be invited on a one-off basis. Other research bodies e.g. [*Medical Research Council (MRC)*] and their representatives may be also invited.

4. Meetings

The PCOG will meet approximately three times a year for two hours. Longer or more frequent meetings may be agreed to discuss certain actions and priorities.

The meetings will be co-chaired by a '*professional*' and a '*lay*' chair. The lay chair is not expected to take on any other responsibility apart from chairing the meeting together with the professional chair on the day of the meeting. Meeting dates will be circulated in advance.

The PCOG members may be sent research material, such as research proposals and protocols electronically or by post to review and comment on between group meetings. Although members may have particular interests in one theme, they are encouraged to contribute to all discussions on all Themes across the two HPRUs.

5. Confidentiality

The broad principles of the PCOG are openness and transparency. However, members may wish to discuss issues that need to remain confidential. On these occasions, the meetings may have two parts, one for non-confidential matters and another one for confidential matters. Guests or non-members will be excluded from the confidential parts of the meetings. When material is circulated or discussed and it is of confidential nature, then it must be stated or marked as '*Confidential*' or as '*Strictly Confidential*'.

All information of a confidential nature must be treated with strict confidence both during the time that a member is involved with the PCOG and after their involvement ends. In line with the Data Protection Act 1998, members must not remove, destroy, share or discuss any confidential information inappropriately unless specifically requested to do so.

Members' personal information will be kept secure and confidential at all times. Members' personal data will be encrypted and held on a system restricted to just the people that need access to it.

6. Accountability and Responsibilities

The PCOG is a voluntary group and members are accountable to each other for the aims of the group. There may also be accountability to the PCOG for specific tasks.

The main responsibilities of the PCOG members are linked with its aims and objectives. In addition, members will monitor and review the group's progress and show mutual respect to each other.

8. Rewards and Recognition

We consider that members of the public who are involved in research should be rewarded and recognised for their contribution. Payment or non-financial incentive in recognition of members' time will be based on NIHR INVOLVE's Policy on payment of fees and expenses (February 2016).

Travel expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with this policy together with other reasonable expenses and costs.