

**Findings from innovative ‘dark
kitchens’ research, funding success
and how you can get involved**



Welcome to the fifth edition of the HDRC South Tees newsletter.

As a quick reminder, HDRC stands for Health Determinants Research Collaboration.

It's an exciting partnership between Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland councils and Teesside University.

The HDRC's vision is that our area will become a leader for research and innovation.

This will help us reduce unfair and avoidable differences in health and improve people's life chances.

In this newsletter find out about a focus on high-risk foods, funding successes and fantastic research opportunities.

Shining a light on 'dark kitchens'



What are 'dark kitchens'?

They're delivery-only food businesses operating via apps like Just Eat and Uber Eats.

Dark kitchens are a new concept and council teams including planning, environmental health, and Public Health are still learning how to engage with them.

Diets high in fat, salt, and sugar are key risk factors and encouraging healthier eating requires systemic change.

Out of home food environments, like dark kitchens, are important as the food from there is often less healthy.

To gain a better understanding of dark kitchens Middlesbrough Council partnered with Teesside, Newcastle, Lancaster, and Liverpool universities, and secured £92,600 for a scoping study which collected data through interviews and an online workshop.

Public Health South Tees collaborated with Teesside University on a six-month research study with council staff.

They found inconsistent definitions of dark kitchens, limited data, and challenges in monitoring these kitchens within existing planning and environmental health systems.

While inspection outcomes are generally positive, concerns include unregistered operators and the impact on the local food environment.

The team is seeking funding to undertake more research.



Meet the team

In each edition of the newsletter we introduce different members of our team.

Andrea Mountain is a Research Associate within Teesside University's School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law.

Her work focuses on health inequalities, poverty and food insecurity.

Since joining the university in 2015, she has contributed to projects on loneliness, extreme hardship and improving blood-borne virus testing in GP surgeries.

She currently works on the Healthy Foods Project and supports the Community Based Researcher element within the HDRC programme.

Funding success

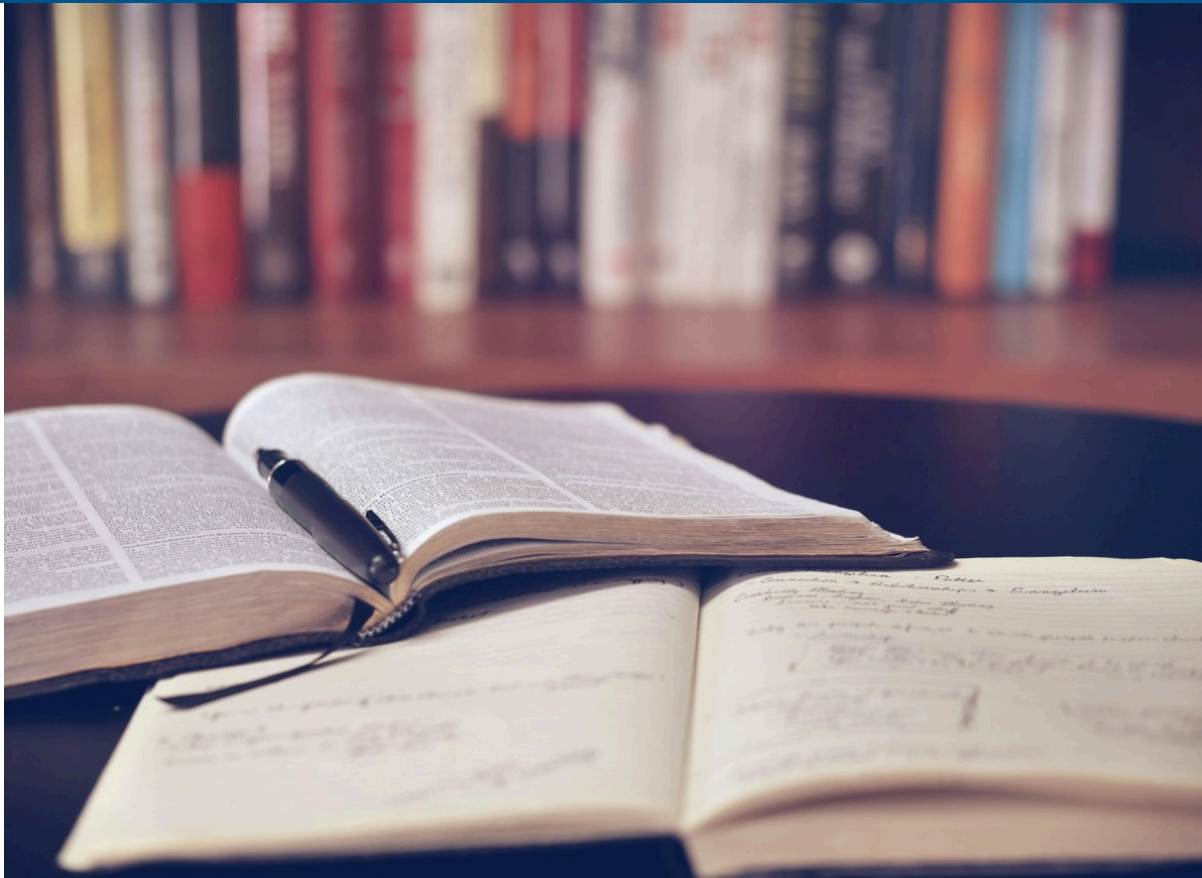
We are delighted to share that we've been successful in securing funding for two exciting new research bids, developed in collaboration with leading universities across England.

This is a significant achievement and reflects the strength of our partnerships, the quality of our work, and our continued commitment to advancing impactful research within our communities.

These new projects will build on our existing work, creating further opportunities to develop innovative approaches and strengthen our research capacity.

We look forward to working closely with our academic partners to bring these projects to life and to ensure they deliver meaningful outcomes.

We'll be sharing more details about these new initiatives, including project aims, partners and all involved in upcoming editions of the newsletter - watch this space!



Part-time PhD Studentship opportunity

As part of our mission to embed a positive research culture, HDRC South Tees and Teesside University are offering an amazing opportunity for two part-time fees paid PhD studentships to individuals working at the council.

We are looking for individuals who wish to do a PhD related to any aspect of local authority working.

Both studentships will start in **May 2026**. The normal registration period for a part-time PhD programme is 7 years.

Please note: this PhD opportunity is a fees-only studentship undertaken in your own time.

Authorisation from your line manager and director is required as time off from your substantive role is not included.

If you are interested, please contact HDRC@Middlesbrough.gov.uk and we'll arrange a quick chat.

Reflect, share and act sessions



HDRC South Tees are running a **'Reflect, Act, & Share'** session on **May 8**, from **9am to 12.30pm** at Middlesbrough Town Hall's Spencer Room.

This session will explore what works, and what doesn't, in supporting community research and collaboration, and to plan how we can act on those insights together.

Whether you're directly involved in community work or curious about community-based research, we would really value your voice.

If you would like to attend, just reply to this email and we'll add you to the list. The session is limited to 7 spaces, but we will be operating a waiting list.

There will also be a second session, where colleagues will have the opportunity to work directly with our team of community-based researchers to share and discuss findings.

To express interest, please email Rachel_Summerhill@middlesbrough.gov.uk.



Middlesbrough Council

PO Box 50, Middlesbrough, TS1 9FT

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