Research Governance in South Gloucestershire Council

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Introduction

Research governance aims to ensure quality research and better managing the risks to all those involved in research projects, including safeguarding the public and the interests of the council.

For research to add value to the organisation and be used as an evidence base for decisions it must be carried out in a planned, open, rigorous way and be capable of repetition.

Research is defined as an attempt to discover answers and new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods.

For the purpose of this research governance framework we only want to know about research which requires access to the personal data we hold and/or requires us to mediate access to our customers, service users, stakeholders and/or staff. This could be because the research involves interviews, focus groups, surveys etc.

It does not cover consultation. A **consultation** is when we invite people to have a say on a question, proposal or options with the aim of influencing our decisions. Examples include service improvements, strategy / policy changes, the budget and council priorities. It should have a defined start and end date; not be an ongoing dialogue.

Research governance does not cover the **sharing or analysis of anonymised datasets**.

The **sharing of personal and/or sensitive data** is also covered by the council's data sharing guidance and requires strict protocols to be followed.

External requests for data that do not contain personal or sensitive fields, even where these requests require work to provide bespoke analysis of existing data sets, would usually be dealt with under the council's Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Requests Policy.

All studies and projects which meet this definition of research are subject to research governance.

Research governance

Proper governance is essential to ensure that there is public confidence in the policies, strategies, programmes and services that are developed and delivered.

We also have a duty of care towards research participants and those carrying out research are required to take steps to minimise undue intrusion and harm to them.

This research governance framework sets out the standards and defines mechanisms to deliver them. It provides the conditions to encourage high quality creative and innovative work to assist services in identifying best practice and improve services.

This research governance framework applies to:

- South Gloucestershire Council staff
- Contracted providers
- Independent organisations / agents acting on behalf of the Council and/or requiring access to the Council's information or clients

Each department has at least one research governance champion who oversees the implementation of the framework. These champions will examine the research proposal to ensure it meets the required standards, is ethical, rigorous in method and of value to the organisation. They will give final approval for all research studies.

The research governance champions will aid the dissemination of results and avoid duplication of research work.

Research standards

It is essential that existing sources of evidence / research are considered carefully before planning a research project. Research should never duplicate other work unnecessarily.

Research projects should:

- have a coherent aim
- demonstrate a clear link to strategy, policy or practice,
- contribute something useful to existing knowledge, and
- have been approved by an appropriate manager.

Researchers must ensure that all groups in society are respected and appropriately represented.

Ethical research

Informed consent is at the heart of ethical research. Those involved in research must be aware of their legal and ethical duties and all studies should have appropriate arrangements for obtaining informed consent.

Informed consent involves providing an explanation of the nature and purpose of the research, the role of the participant, any possible harm they might experience and the degree of anonymity / confidentiality.

Particular care is needed in obtaining consent from children and vulnerable adults, such as those with mental health problems or learning difficulties. Arrangements must be made to ensure that relevant information is provided in appropriate written or pictorial form. In these cases consent should be sought from those who have a legal authority to give it such as parents and guardians or other legal representatives. The role / responsibilities of parents, carers or supporters during the research should be clearly explained.

Risk of harm must always be kept to a minimum and explained clearly to the participants. It must always be explained whether or not there are arrangements for compensation in the unlikely event of non-negligent harm.

Suggested templates for participant information and consent forms are available in Appendix 1.

The appropriate use and protection of data is also critical. All those involved in research must be aware of their legal and ethical duties in this respect. Particular attention must be given to systems for ensuring confidentiality of personal information and to the security of these systems.

Data collected during research must be kept confidential and secure. It must be retained for an appropriate period to allow further analysis by the original or other research teams subject to consent and to support monitoring of good research practice by regulatory and other authorities. In most cases this stored data should be anonymised and kept for 12 months from the publication date.

Further guidance around ethical research is included in Appendix 2.

Gaining approval for research projects

All council staff must ensure that this framework is met before conducting, commissioning or responding to a request for research.

Researchers are required to submit a proposal explaining the purpose and scope of the study/project. The application and review process will normally be undertaken via email. No research can take place without authorisation.

Where the research is small scale and/or it does not include direct contact with staff / customers or access to sensitive personal information then the proposal need not be as detailed.

On receipt of the application, a research governance champion will review the proposal and seek the views of relevant operational managers / data owners and legal services as required. Where approval is not given immediately recommendations for changes will usually be made and / or conditions placed on the project. Occasionally the research governance champion(s) may offer to work with the researcher and advise on revisions to the proposal or reject the proposal on the basis that it is not in the interest of the service/council for the research to take place. They will also look at the suitability of the researcher and where appropriate ensure that any corporate commissioning/procurement guidelines are followed.

In cases where changes are made as the research progresses, applications must be re-submitted.

We aim to give you initial feedback within 28 days.

If you are unhappy with the decision / recommendation, in the first instance you should talk to the research governance champion(s) who assessed your application.

If you remain unsatisfied you can ask for an independent review by another research governance champion.

You will still need to go through NHS governance procedures if research is in a health care setting.

Research proposals

When applying for research governance approval you will need to give information about the aim, links to strategy, policy or practice and the value of the research to the council, service and/or customer. It will need to explain your approach and consider any ethical issues which need to be managed. It is recommended therefore that the research proposal and associated methodologies are well developed before you complete the form.

If you are not an experienced researcher you may find the form a useful checklist when thinking through the research design.

Question 1 will help you decide if your proposed work is subject to research governance approval.

Question 1: Are you attempting to discover answers and new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods (is your project 'research') **and do you need access to the personal data we hold and/or require us to mediate access to our customers, service users, stakeholders and/or staff?**

If '**yes'** you will need to complete an application for research governance approval.

If '**no**' your project is not covered by the research governance framework so you do not need to continue with the proposal. However, it might fall under other processes, e.g. freedom of information or data protection so further investigation is recommended.

If you are unsure whether your project is research, consultation or performance management please seek advice from either the corporate research & consultation team or a research governance champion by emailing researchgovernance@southglos.gov.uk.

The following questions (Questions 2, 3 and 4) will help you decide how much of the form you need to fill in.

Question 2: Are you external to South Gloucestershire Council (e.g. a university)**?**

Question 3: Will your research require contact with any of the following:

- **Staff**
- **Service users / customers**
- **Stakeholders**

Question 4: Will your research require access to information / data held by the council for reasons other than to monitor performance or plan services:

- **Service users / customers are named**
- **Service users / customers are anonymised**

If you have answered '**yes**' to **any** of these questions you will need to complete all parts of the form to seek approval of your project.

If you have answered '**no**' to **all** these questions you can complete the shortened version of the form.

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Revision date	Summary of changes	Changes marked
Feb/Mar 2013	Updated with project team comments	No
July 2014	Updated with new contact email address and revised research champion names	No

Application for research governance approval

Is your work covered by the research governance framework?

1	**Are you attempting to discover answers and new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods** (is your project 'research')?	**Yes**	**No**

How much of the application do you need to complete?

2	**Are you external to South Gloucestershire Council (e.g. a university)**	**Yes**	**No**
3	**Will your research require contact with any of the following:** • **Staff** • **Service users / customers** • **Stakeholders**	 **Yes** **Yes** **Yes**	 **No** **No** **No**
4	**Will your research require access to information / data held by the council for reasons other than to monitor performance or plan services:** • **Service users / customers are named** • **Service users / customers are anonymised**	 **Yes** **Yes**	 **No** **No**

If you answered '**no**' to **all** these questions please complete only questions 5, 6 and 13.
If you answered '**yes**' to **any** of these questions please complete questions 5 to 13**.**

About you

5	**Applicant name:**
	Organisation:
	Address:
	Email:
	Phone number:
	Line manager / project sponsor name:

If you are a South Gloucestershire Council employee please name your line manager and ensure that you have got their approval for the project. If an academic project please give details of your supervisor.

About your research project

6	**Research title:**
	Date of application:
	Reason for the study (what you are trying to learn and the value to South Gloucestershire Council / customers):

	Aim / purpose (what you are trying to find out and why, the strategic fit)**:**
	Proposed research methods (if sampling please give details of how you will ensure it is representative and your arrangements for accessing participants / their details):
	Timescales, estimated costs and resource requirements:
	How you plan to report and disseminate findings to the council, participants and stakeholders:

If you said '**no**' to **all** the questions in 2, 3 and 4 please go now to question 13.
If you said '**yes**' for **any** of questions 3 or 4 please also complete the following questions.

Permissions, ethics and information governance

7	**The risks and ethical issues involved in this study and how you intend to manage them:**
8	**The arrangements that will be made to obtain informed consent:**

9	**Where relevant, give details of the arrangements for information security and governance related to this project**		

10	**Does your research involve:** • **Children under the age of 18** • **Vulnerable groups / adults**	**Yes** **Yes**	**No** **No**

If your research involves children and / or vulnerable groups please also complete questions 11 and 12.

11	**Details of the safeguard checks and procedures you will undertake for all researchers working on this project:**
12	**Service user and stakeholder involvement in the design:**

Declaration and signature

13	**I confirm that I have read and agree to follow the standards and ethnic principles as set out in the research governance framework**		**Yes**	**No**
	I confirm that I am aware of the requirements of the public sector equalities duty and have considered the equalities impact of this research		**Yes**	**No**
	I confirm that I am aware of the requirements of the data protection act and the responsibilities of myself and my organisation when processing and sharing information / data		**Yes**	**No**
	I confirm that all necessary applications have been / made to other research governance processes, e.g. the Health Research Ethics Committee, and copies are attached	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
	Signature:			
	Print name:			
	Organisation & position held:			
	Date:			

Please attach any other relevant information and email to
researchgovernance@southglos.gov.uk

For internal use only

Research Application Approved?	**Yes**	**Yes with changes**	**No**
Research governance assessment notes including estimated costs for South Gloucestershire Council, details of revisions and/or additional conditions set:			

Appendix 1: Informed consent checklists

There are two elements: the participant information sheet and the consent form.

The participant must be given a copy of their signed consent form and the information sheet.

Participant information sheet

The research project

(keep brief and in plain English)

- Title of the project
- Why we are doing it
- Who is doing it
- What will happen to the results
- Contact details for further information

Your participation

(Select the sections relevant to your project)

- Why you have been chosen to take part
- Whether you can refuse to take part
- Whether you can withdraw at any time and how
- What will happen if you agree to take part (brief description)
- Whether there are any risks involved and what will be done to ensure your well being / safety (e.g. side effects)
- Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study
- What will happen to any information/data/samples
- How your participant in the project will be kept confidential
- Whether there are any benefits from taking part (e.g. payment)

Standard text

- Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong
- You will be given a copy of this to keep, together with a copy of your consent form

Participant content form checklist

- Name of participant
- Title of project
- Researcher name and contact details

1. I agree to take part in the above research.
2. I have read the participant information sheet and I understand what my part will be in this research.
3. I am aware of how my data will be kept confidential. I agree to the researcher processing personal data about me described as sensitive data within the meaning of the data protection act 1998.
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

- Name of participant (signature, print, date)
- Name of parent / carer if appropriate (signature, print, date)

If you wish to withdraw from the research please complete the form below and return to the research named above.

- Title of project

I wish to withdraw from this study.

- Name of participant (signature, print, date)

Appendix 2: Principles of ethical research

Consider carefully the possible consequences of the study for human beings	Researchers need to be sensitive to the possible consequences of their work and where possible prevent harmful effects. Researchers will rarely be able to prevent action based on their findings. However, they need to be aware that information can be misconstrued and attempt to pre-empt misinterpretations.
Conduct research with objectivity, integrity and impartiality	Researchers should uphold their professional integrity without fear or favour. Obligations to funders / employers should be clarified in advance. They should not engage or collude in selecting methods designed to produce misleading results, or misrepresent findings by commission or omission. Researchers have a duty to make potential users of their data aware of the limits to its reliability (without overstating or understating the validity).
Ensure that the physical, social and psychological well being of participants is not adversely affected by the research	Consent forms and legal requirements to participate do not absolve researchers from an obligation to protect participants as far as possible from harm. Researchers must try and minimise disturbance to their participants and to their environment. Special care needs to be taken where there research participants are young or vulnerable. Researchers should enable participants to protect their own interests by giving appropriate information about the consequences of taking part.

Seek informed consent of participants	Participants, even if required to take part by law, should be as informed as possible. Researchers must provide an explanation of the nature and purpose of the research, the role of the participant, any possible harm they might experience and the degree of anonymity / confidentiality. Participants must be made aware of their entitlements to refuse to participate or withdraw from the research. Where participants are children or adults who may have difficulties in understanding or communication, consent should be sought from parents / guardians etc.
Respect the privacy of individuals, maintain confidentiality of records and prevent disclosure of identity	Researchers should only ask for and record personal information where it is necessary. The identities and records of participants should be kept confidential. Wherever possible the link between data and identifiable individuals should be broken, e.g. through codes. Data should be kept secure and retained for 12 months from the research publication date. Individuals should not be identified in the analysis or presentation of results. Small numbers (under 10) should be suppressed and presented as a #.
Participants should be treated with equality and not discriminated against	The design of the research should not discriminate against research workers or participants. Where appropriate participants or their representatives should be involved in the design, conduct, analysis and reporting. This ensures the research is relevant to their concerns. Equalities impact analysis must be undertaken and research findings reflect the ways people differ.
Methods and procedures used to produce published data should be open to scrutiny and assessment	Researchers may be given information that by law they are required to keep confidential. However, the methods and procedures they have used are not confidential and should be made available for scrutiny and assessment by colleagues / fellow researchers.