

**Report:
Piloting Research Training in
North and West
Northamptonshire Councils**

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National Context

- The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) have invested millions into programmes to build an evidence-informed culture within local government to tackle health inequalities.
- Central Government are also including the need for evidence-informed decision making within various statutory policies.

“It’s clear that people working in local government have the added advantage of knowing their local areas and communities. This investment will equip them to embed a lasting legacy of research culture to help local populations take important steps forward in tackling health inequalities.”

NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration

- Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem.⁵ Where possible, localities must learn from the experiences of others to guide their activity to that which is most effective. When developing the local strategy, duty holders should use resources such as the YEF Toolkit⁶,

Home Office Serious Violence Duty

How to build an evidence-informed culture

- Providing Continuous Professional Development is identified as one key activity to build an evidence-informed culture (Cooke, 2005).
- The Northamptonshire Integrated Care System received funding from the East NIHR Midlands Research Delivery Network to provide research skills training to West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Councils' officers.
- Training was developed and delivered by the University of Northampton with the support of both councils.
- This training adds to other activities that have taken place over the past 24-months to build our evidence-informed culture.
- We take guidance from the FUSE Local Authority Champions of Research to guide our culture development activities (see local model and highlighted ongoing activities).

Cooke (2005): <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2296-6-44>

FUSE (2019): <https://fuse.ac.uk/askfuse/resources/LACoR%20Final%20Report%20October%202019.pdf>

Training Development

- A skills survey was distributed to West and North Northamptonshire Councils' officers through their internal newsletters and manager briefings, to consult staff on their wants and needs for research skills training.
- The survey questions were guided from previous research, such as the SEER survey (Brennan et al., 2017), the Local Authorities Champions of Research (FUSE, 2019).
- The survey and supporting comms were further refined and piloted through co-development with the councils' leads for this project.
- There were 60 responses from North Northamptonshire Council and 38 responses from West Northamptonshire Council.
- A Research Skills Development Strategy was developed for each council by the University of Northampton.
- Example screenshots are included on the next page and the full Strategies can be read here:

<https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/local-authority-research-skills-training-strategies-for-west-and->

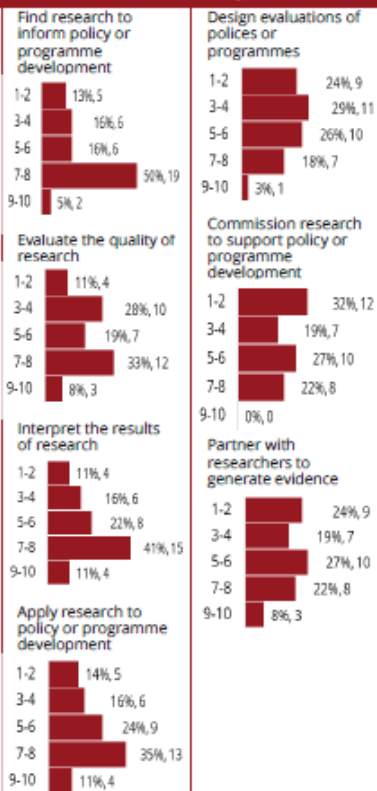
Brennan et al. (2017): <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-016-0162-8>

FUSE (2019): <https://fuse.ac.uk/askfuse/resources/LACoR%20Final%20Report%20October%202019.pdf>

Current Capability and Capacity*

- 42% of WNC staff have not received any formal research methods or skills training (16 out of 38).
- 92% hold at least an undergraduate degree (32 out of 37), which suggests some experience of conducting research, with 74% gaining their last qualification within the last 10 years (28 out of 38).
- 61% were not currently involved in any research projects.
- In terms of facilitating research activities:
 - 39% responded that Senior Management were 'very supportive' (15 out of 38).
 - 47% responded that Line Management were 'very supportive' (18 out of 38).
 - 34% responded that their Colleagues were 'very supportive' (13 out of 38).

Self-rated research skills (1 – lowest, 10 – highest)



Current self-confidence in knowledge and skills



On average, **71%** of staff responded 'never', 'very rarely', or 'sometimes' when asked how often they use these research skills as part of their job.

* Based on 38 WNC respondents

Facilitators and Barriers to Engaging in Research

- Staff were asked to select 5 factors that are core facilitators, and 5 factors that are core barriers, to engaging in research in the future, from a list of commonly reported factors.

Facilitators	Barriers
Being interested in research	Time to engage with research
Relevance of research to your job	Money to support research
Relevance of local authority sector	Availability of other resources to support research
Line management support	Knowledge about how to get involved in research
	Having the skills or confidence to get involved in research
	Access to expert advice

Organisational support to engage with research had an almost even split between facilitator (17 votes), barrier (19 votes), and neither a barrier or facilitator (18 votes)

Interest in Receiving Research Skill Training

- 90% of staff 'may be interested' (48%) or were 'very interested' (42%) about engaging in research training in the future (out of 60).

Staff were interested in receiving training on the following topics: (could select multiple responses)



Research Training Package Design

- Staff were asked a series of questions to help design the delivery of the training.

Preferred Delivery

95% of respondents wanted live taught workshops, lectures, and seminars.

↓
We will host a mix of in-person and online sessions and record these sessions, where possible, to upload them onto iLearn.

55% wanted self-directed online learning modules.

↓
We will provide a list of free to access online training, webinars, and guidance on iLearn.

63% wanted one-to-one mentoring.

↓
We will offer a monthly drop-in for staff to discuss their research.

Training Session Duration and Location

A one-off training session or a 2-4-week short course was the preferred length of training.

↓
We will deliver one-off live taught sessions and the free to access training on iLearn will have varied durations.

↓
One-off training sessions will last no more than 4-hours.

68% preferred training at the council offices and 84% at the University of Northampton.

↓
We will offer in-person training at the WNC council offices and offer training at the University to allow networking with Northants colleagues.

Preferred Times and Days

Mid-morning and mid-afternoon were the most preferred times for training.

↓
We will vary training times to ensure staff have the opportunity to access training.

↓
We will not deliver training after 3:00pm.

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays were the most popular day to attend training.

↓
We will vary training across these preferred days.

Communicating Training Sessions

Organisation and Department emails and newsletters and through management are how staff currently hear about upcoming training.

↓
We will communicate upcoming training via these channels, as well as have an intranet page.

When will training start?

- Free to access training on iLearn will be launched at the start of October 2024.
- Monthly Drop-ins will launch at the end of October 2024.
- In-person training will launch in November 2024.

Sustaining the Development of a Local Authority Research Culture

- There is growing evidence on how to effectively improve research culture and grow the use of research within local authorities.
- The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) have invested in local authorities to support their use of research and explore the mechanisms that are needed to enhance councils' research cultures.
 - Evidence reports and guidance can be found here: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/exploring-how-support-local-government-health-research>
 - Find out more about NIHR's support, research, and grants for local authorities: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/working-with-partners/local-authorities>
- [Professor Joanne Cooke](#), has also provided evidence of how to develop research cultures, capability and capacity. Some of her evidence is used below to inform possible actions:

Action	Responsibility	Progress
Model positive behaviour, disseminate research findings, and feel you are making a difference.	As part of this training package, Dr Declan Ryan and Dr Tash Bayes will collate case studies from NNC staff to publicise on the intranet page.	Staff who provided their contact information in the skills survey have been contacted to start the case study development.
Develop skills and confidence through training and opportunities to apply skills.	NNC have secured funding for Dr Declan and Dr Tash Bayes to develop this first iteration of research skills training.	Training will be launching in October 2024 and will run until March 2025.
Grow partnerships and collaborations.	Senior leaders and officers continue to grow partnerships with the academic and voluntary sector.	Networking opportunities are being explored to ensure all NNC staff have the chance to meet and collaborate with our academic and voluntary sector stakeholders.
Release resource, liberate talent, and learn by doing.	NNC officers are developing research projects, placements, and guest lectures for students at the University of Northampton so officers can get involved in research activity.	Developments have started in the Public Health Team and aim to branch out into other departments. NNC management will explore NIHR's various research funding for local authority officers to deliver research projects and learn from academics.

Training Delivery

- For each council, a repository of existing free-to-access online training and guidance was collated by the University of Northampton and uploaded into the councils' Learning and Development training portal, iLearn, see screenshot on the next page as an example.
- The iLearn content was sense checked by NIHR colleagues to assess the topics covered and comprehensiveness.
- Monthly training sessions were delivered in-person and online over a six-month period. The topics were determined by the survey responses and guidance from similar projects.
- Each in-person training was delivered for 3-hours and replicated for staff in North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire councils, with some single sessions taking place at the University of Northampton.
- A condensed 1-hour version of the in-person training was delivered online to cater to those with limited capacity.
- Monthly troubleshooting sessions were also offered for council officers to get one-to-one support from academic colleagues.

Training Delivery

The screenshot shows a user interface for a course titled "Developing Your Evaluation Skills". At the top left is the West Northamptonshire Council logo. The navigation bar includes "Home" and "My Learning Record". A search bar is located at the top right. The course title is prominently displayed in the center. Below the title, there is a "What this course covers" section with a list of topics and a description. To the right, there is an "Accessibility" section with controls for text size and a "Launch ATbar" button. Below that is a "Calendar" section showing a calendar for March 2025. On the left side, there is a sidebar with a list of course topics, each with a play button icon. At the bottom of the sidebar, there are several blue buttons with white text, each preceded by a play button icon, representing different sections of the course.

West Northamptonshire Council

Home My Learning Record

WHERE CAREERS THRIVE

Dashboard / My courses / Developing Your Evaluation Skills

Developing Your Evaluation Skills

Course Search

Your progress

What this course covers

This course brings together a range of free training resources to help improve your use of evaluation and evidence-informed decision making. The resources include:

- short elearning tasks
- webinar recordings
- recommended readings
- government guidance that you can work through at your own pace

It covers topics such as sourcing evidence, public involvement and engagement, the different types of evaluation and data collection techniques, ethical principles, equality, diversity, and inclusion in research.

If there is a topic not covered that you would like advice on, then contact Declan Ryan (Declan.ryan@northampton.ac.uk).

Accessibility

A- A A+ R A A+ Launch ATbar (always?)

Calendar

March 2025

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Events key

- Hide global events
- Hide course events
- Hide group events
- Hide user events

Open all Close all

Instructions: Clicking on the section name will show / hide the section.

- ▶ Searching the Literature for 'What Works'
- ▶ Research Methods
- ▶ Using Data to understand the local population
- ▶ What are Health Inequalities?
- ▶ What are Risk and Protective Factors for health and wellbeing
- ▶ Engaging Communities in Intervention Development
- ▶ Designing an Intervention
- ▶ Evaluating your Intervention

- In-person and Online Workshops
- An Introduction to Research
- Designing Evaluations
- Interpreting Research Results
- Partnering with Researchers
- Methods to Engage Diverse Communities in Consultation
- Applying Research to Practice

Attendance

- **143 attendances** across in-person and online workshops.
 - 3-hour in-person workshops.
 - 1-hour online workshops.

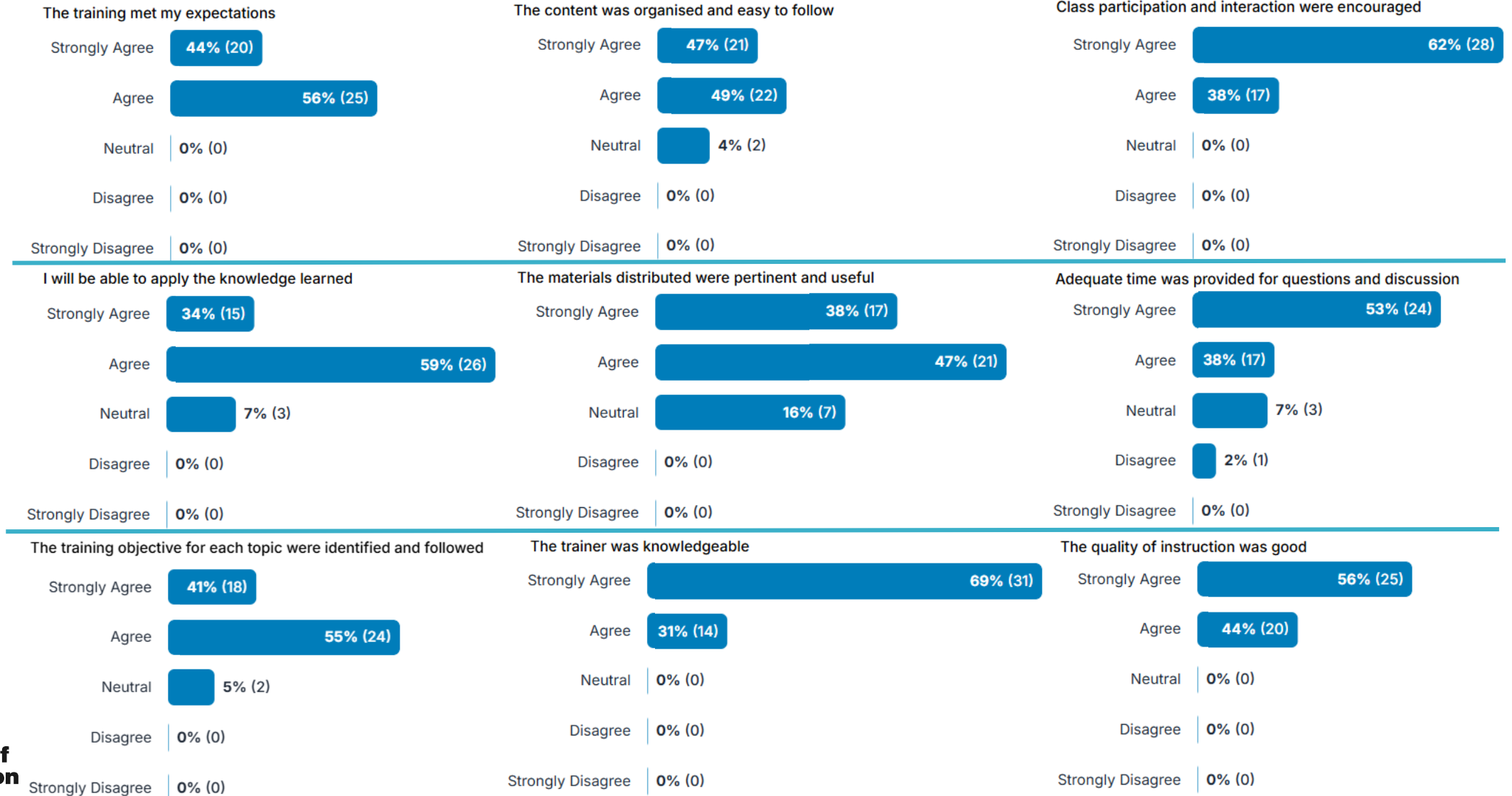
		An Introduction to Research		Designing Evaluations		Interpreting Research Results		Partnering with Researchers		Methods to Engage Diverse Communities in Consultation		Applying Research to Practice	
		In person	Online	In person	Online	In person	Online	In person	Online	In person	Online	In person	Online
NNC	Signed up	0	9	2	22	4	12	2	14	2	23	2	16
	Attended	0	7	1	12	4	10	2	12	0	13	1	10
WNC	Signed up	6	8	6	16	10	10	4	9	7	10	10	8
	Attended	6	7	5	12	7	8	1	5	5	5	4	6
Total attended		6	14	6	24	11	18	3	17	5	18	5	16

Attendance

- Directorates represented at the point of booking.
- All Directorates represented apart from Law and Governance at North Northamptonshire Council.
- All Directorates represented at West Northamptonshire Council.

North Northamptonshire Council	West Northamptonshire Council
Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing	Chief Executive Office
Children's Services	Children's Trust
Finance and Performance	Communities and Opportunities
Place and Economy	Finance and Resources / Corporate Services
Public Health Communities and Leisure	People
Strategy and Change / Chief Executive Officer	Place

Feedback – Post-Training Survey (46 respondents)



Feedback – Post-Training Survey: Suggestions on how to continue support (12 responses)

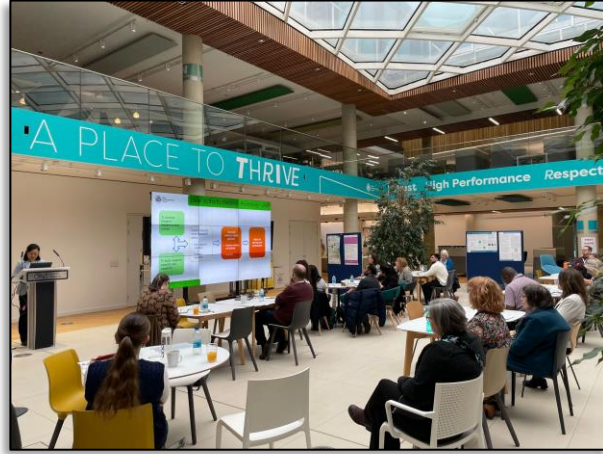
- Good practice guides and practical sessions.
- Research Support officers attending service or team meetings.
- Using council data and service insight within workshop examples.
- Creating networks across councils, VCSE, ICB, and academia.
- Celebrating research and showcasing champions/enthusiasts as examples of good practice.

In-Person Research Celebration

- Celebrating achievements and modelling positive behaviour are two further activities to build an evidence-informed culture (Cooke et al, 2018).
- We hosted a three-hour in-person Research Celebration Event for each council in March 2025.
- Council officers and external partners were encouraged to submit research posters for an exhibition, while four officers provided oral presentations about their experiences of conducting research.
- The in-person events gave people a chance to network and meet their new Local Authority Research Practitioners.
- Approximately 17 and 20 people attended the North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council events, respectively.
- Pictures from the events can be viewed on the next page and the book of posters and slides can be viewed here:

Cooke et al. (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-018-0363-4>

In-Person Research Celebration



Online Research Celebration

- A three-hour online event also took place to share learning about how to build an evidence-informed culture from partners external to the councils and the county.
- Approximately 27 people attended the online event throughout the day, including representation from:
 - Coventry City Council
 - Leicestershire HDRC
 - South Tees HDRC
 - Doncaster HDRC
 - Middlesbrough Council
 - Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
 - NIHR Newcastle Research Support Service
 - Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board
- The recording can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/kmfznD1DW7Y>

Feedback – Verbal

Strengths of the training:

- In-person sessions invited active engagement.
- Sessions well-pitched well; suitable for people both new and familiar to research.
- Liked the option of in-person and online sessions in case longer in-person sessions difficult to attend.

Weaknesses of the training:

- In-person sessions seemed long which was a deterrent, but worth the time once engaging.
- Online training more passive, and easy to get distracted, which impacts on the training.
- Liked the idea of the troubleshooting sessions but either did not need them during the training period, or did not know about them.
- Relevance of research needs to grow, e.g. through the language used to describe it and the way it is promoted and encouraged.

Feedback – Verbal

Impacts of the training:

- Confidence increased: In how to do research and the need for it; In knowing how to create meaningful research questions.
- Gave permission to do small-scale research as it has more value / insight than doing no research at all.
- Increased readiness to engage in / do research.
- Provided opportunities to network with people in other departments never previously connected with.
- Made staff feel valued and like they are worth investing in.

Future plans:

- LAs work a lot with voluntary sector, and voluntary sector should realise the need for research. So, as research culture and opportunities grow, example to places like voluntary sector.
- Expand cultural readiness, e.g. make CPD and PDRs more standard across the councils, more research networking events, and more training for directors / leads so they realise the need for research to increase their support to their staff to engage in research.
- Would like a training session on how to analyse data – as these are practical tasks / activities, it would be useful to know how to do them.

Feedback – Our personal reflections

- The Learning and Development and Comms teams are integral to growing this training programme.
- The language and marketing of research needs co-development to increase its accessibility; perhaps pitched as 'evidence-informed practice'.
- Having in-person and online training of different durations helped increase the accessibility of the training.
- Location of in-person sessions will always be a strength for some and a barrier for others.
- Although troubleshooting sessions had low uptake, we think these can still be valuable and may be better delivered by the Research Practitioner/Manager in the council.
- One-to-one support and mentorship will be an important part of encouraging research engagement, and the LARP will absolutely support this.
- Creating frequent opportunities for in-person workshops has wider benefits by encouraging networking across directorates and breaking the habit of siloed working.
- Manager / lead buy-in to the training are crucial to staff engagement in research / training.

What's next – The legacy

- Resources in place for the Local Authority Research Practitioners to deliver in-person and online training.
- Comprehensive repository of free to access training on iLearn from various sources.
- Recordings and slides from all the training sessions have been provided to the councils by the University of Northampton.
- Three Local Authority Officers awarded Visiting Fellow status at the University of Northampton.
- At least two new council service evaluations to be delivered by the University of Northampton.
- New relationships and a greater awareness of the different research taking place across the council.
- Energy and empowerment within council staff to champion the want and need for an evidence-informed culture.

Follow-Up

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