

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2025

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Oral Health Strategy

According to the minutes of council's Health And Well-Being Board from 2018 Reading Council should be taking the lead on developing an oral health strategy. What progress has been made? And when can we expect a workable strategy?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor McEwan, the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor McEwan, Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health:

Thank you for your question. We recognise that progress on developing an oral health strategy has not been as quick as we would have liked, and whilst a draft strategy has been in development for some time, the Covid-19 pandemic and staff capacity issues have combined to defer its implementation, renewal, and publication.

We continue to recognise that children in Reading remain disproportionately affected by tooth decay, with over 30% of 5-year-olds experiencing tooth decay, which is higher than the national average (23.4%)¹. Furthermore, a recent report by Healthwatch reinforced the need to improve oral health, and the Health and Wellbeing Board are committed to implementing the recommendations from this report.

Whilst a strategy has not yet been published, there is work ongoing locally to improve the oral health of children and families in Reading. This includes health promotion activities and dental hygiene sessions as part of our health visiting and school nurse contract, as well as oral health awareness campaigns through children centres in Reading. In addition, a portion of the Household Support Fund is being used to provide dental kits (toothbrushes and pastes) to children that come from a low-income household. However, we recognise that there is more that can be done that requires a co-ordinated approach across partners, including the NHS and access to dentistry.

We will be setting up a new oral health improvement board that will be tasked with developing an all-age oral health strategy and action plan throughout 2025. We are also eagerly awaiting further details from the new Government on their commitment around giving the children the best start in life, as well as proposals for the roll out of supervised toothbrushing.