

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD

11 JULY 2025

QUESTION No. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Francis Brown to ask the Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board:

Is the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Quarterly Implementation Dashboard sound?

It is like a toolkit inventory. A sophisticated check list that seeks to confirm that the various action plans to support the five priorities identified in the RBC Health and Wellbeing Strategy are present. Each action is updated every three months with a status of green amber or red. The wording of the actions has been honed over time to improve the chances that the entire strategy will be delivered on time. Indeed, the development of a dashboard is an essential step on the pathway to delivering the strategy. The completeness of this large tool kit is not questioned. The timeliness of the metrics for each action is its potential weakness.

Two worrying observations:

1. The commentary clarifies the scope of each action and the identity of the associated partners. The text is invariably qualitative but never quantitative.
2. In the Jan 2025 report the text is supported in Appendix A by 50 charts. In more than half of these the latest data is for the year 22/23 or earlier. These data series are helpful in identifying relevant historic trends. However, they are of little relevance as dashboard indicators. The feedback loop is far too long.

These two observations challenge the integrity of the dashboard which currently shows the majority of the dashboard ratings as green. To continue with the analogy: we have the tools (the actions) but we will not know (in some cases for years) if the tools are being used effectively and efficiently. It may be a while before it is realised that the desired strategy is not on track for delivery. This is very risky.

The completeness of this large tool kit (of actions) is not questioned. The lack of timely and meaningful dashboard metrics is questioned.

Does the Board commend the progress so far but share my concerns?

To make a second analogy: a grower is interested in the overall yield, every step of the way losses can be expected. A proportion of seeds germinate, a proportion will show two leaves and so on. These are timely “proxy” measures. Each wave of sowings can be progressively assessed. The probability of achieving the seasons target becomes clearer as time progresses.

Does the Board feel that using proxy measures would increase the probability of a timely delivery of the strategy?

REPLY by the Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board (Councillor Eden):

Thank you for this well-timed question. You raise important points including about the timeliness of the measures in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy dashboard.

You are right that there is a risk of measures becoming meaningless because they are dependent on outcomes that are measured with an unavoidable time lag. This is part of the conflict between

ensuring the level of quality to identify trends over time, and promptness for monitoring purposes. You are also right to ask about the potential imbalance between the use of quantitative and qualitative data.

There are a range of ways the board could do this, including proxy measures as you suggest.

It is important to ensure that we are using our scarce resources most effectively to achieve the outcomes that are our priorities.

This is not easy and in some of the priority areas within the strategy it is particularly difficult. This may partly explain your observation about an apparent dependence upon qualitative data.

As you know, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Reading is the responsibility of the Health and Wellbeing Board and this problem has been recognised by the board.

Our Director of Public Health and his team have been taking action to address this by engaging the Local Government Association to conduct an independent review of the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board over the past six months.

The review interviewed board members and held workshops with stakeholders to develop a shared view of the role, purpose and priorities of the Board, to consider best practice and new ways of working that will drive action and impact.

We will be discussing their recommendations at this meeting and I hope you will be able to stay to listen to this discussion, but I would certainly encourage you to take a look at the report.

One of the recommendations was a desire for the board to reduce the number of priorities which they wish to focus on.

A 'rapid' Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is being undertaken that will come to the next Health and Wellbeing Board meeting to inform our key priorities.

As well as informing the work of the health system locally it will also give us an opportunity to identify the most valid indicators so that our dashboard can be most useful. I also hope that we will be able to refresh the way our board works to be more dynamic and responsive to the needs of our town.