

Review of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Reading 2025-26: Background, Key Findings and Recommendations

*Accompanying Paper for Reading Health and Wellbeing Board -
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Background

- A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is a process through which the current and future health, care and wellbeing needs of the local population are assessed to inform and guide the planning and commissioning of health, wellbeing and social care services within a local authority area. Under the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, local Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBB) are responsible for producing a JSNA.
- A JSNA is:
 - **Joint** – owned by, and for the benefit of, all HWBB partners
 - **Strategic** – high level, identifying the key priorities for an area and informing the Joint HWB Strategy.
 - **Needs Assessment** – outlines the health and wellbeing needs of residents
- The current Reading JSNA is not a single product, but a range of resources hosted on the [Reading Observatory](#).
- A recent Local Government Association review of the HWBB identified issues and opportunities relating to the JSNA and highlighted the need for improvement to ensure the JSNA is fit for purpose.
- The purpose of this review is to ensure the Reading JSNA is fit for purpose for informing the HWBB and partner organisations about the needs of local people to support decision making to improve their health and wellbeing outcomes.
- This also aligns with the Council's ambition to become more evidence and intelligence-led, and the work of the Reading Local Authority Research Practitioner over the coming 18 months.

Objectives of the Review

- Review the required functions and use of the Reading JSNA.
- Determine whether the current JSNA is fulfilling its function and, if not, what we can change to improve this.
- Review how the JSNA is governed, produced and delivered and what the final product looks like.



Methodology

- 3 stages to the review:

Stage 1

- **Initial review by JSNA Leads for Reading and West Berkshire**
Identified strengths and areas for improvement of the current JSNA focusing on its content, output, and process (creation and post-production).
- **Review of good practice**
Review of JSNA examples of good practice from other local authorities to help identify what works well elsewhere and what could be adapted or improved to increase the value of the JSNAs in Reading and West Berkshire.
- **JSNA Survey**
A survey was distributed to stakeholders to help understand levels of awareness and use of the JSNA.
- **Review of the Reading and West Berkshire Observatory**
This explored the cost, design, and use of the Reading and West Berkshire Observatory.
- Emerging themes for recommendations generated from Stage 1.



Methodology

Stage 2

- **HWBB engagement**

Findings from Stage 1 and emerging themes for recommendations shared with HWBB members.

- Engagement included an interactive workshop focused on prioritising emerging themes alongside a broader discussion on what data should be included in the JSNA and what should the JSNA be used for.
- Additional themes for recommendations generated from Stage 2.

Stage 3

- **Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) engagement**

Findings from Stage 1 and emerging themes for recommendations shared with DLT members from Adults, Children and Place Directorates.

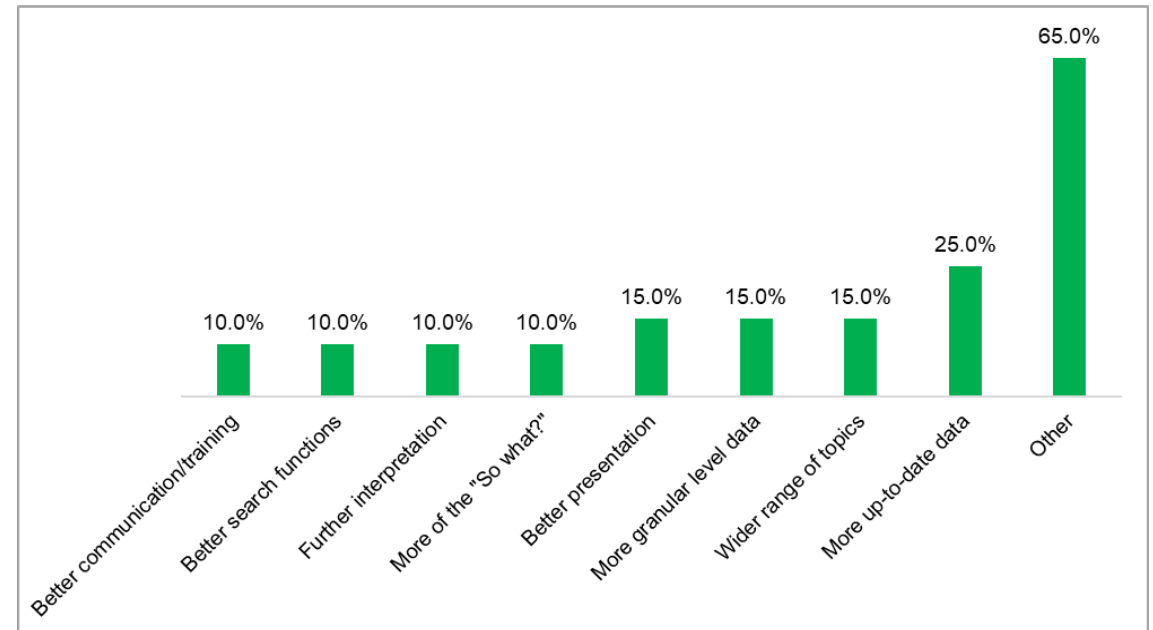
- Involved feedback and discussion on the JSNA Survey findings and emerging themes alongside a broader discussion on what data should be included in the JSNA and what should the JSNA be used for.
 - Additional themes for recommendations generated from Stage 3.
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Reading JSNA Review – summary of survey findings

83 valid respondents; **76%** had heard of the JSNA; 79% knew how to access it; 90% used the JSNA **occasionally or rarely**; 4.1% (2) used it **regularly**.

- 9.3% (4 respondents) rated the JSNA as **excellent**, 81.4% (35/43) rated it as either **very good or good**, no-one rated the **JSNA as poor**.
- The top three themes that people liked about the JSNA was that it was **accessible to use and navigate** (34.8%), it included a **broad range of data** and it was **well-presented** (both 30.4%).
- The top five most common uses of the JSNA were: **general awareness** (59.1%), **policy/strategy development** (50%), **needs assessments** (45.5%), **service planning** (43.2%), and **deciding priorities** (40.9%).
- 50% (22/44) thought there was **something missing** from the JSNA; the two main themes about what was missing were a **lack of internal and partnership data** and **detailed information on specific geographies and cohorts**.

What changes can be made to the JSNA to make it better?



Number of respondents = 23 (35 total responses)

Reading JSNA Review – areas for improvement

- Establish **HWBB governance** and **joint ownership** of the JSNA programme
- Data quality, relevance, and scope
 - Implement a process for **regular review, archive, and update** of JSNA content
 - Ensure all JSNA outputs include **interpretative comment** and **implications for services/action** ("So What?")
 - Develop the JSNA as a “Living” document
- Inclusion of **community voice** and **assets**, ensuring marginalised groups are represented
- Usability, navigation, design and communication
 - Investigate feasibility of **displaying data** in different ways
 - Make information easy to find
 - **Improve system communication** about the JSNA
- Place-based and **granular data**, aligned to the **neighbourhood health agenda**
- Ensure all **stakeholders** are **jointly involved in** and **collaboratively own** the JSNA
- Embed the development and delivery of **Health in All Policies** in the JSNA
- Implement a process and **training for wider staff on deep-dive HNA production** (HNAs seen as the most valuable by survey respondents)



Recommendations

1 Clear purpose, scope and alignment

- **Recommendation**

Clarify and agree the purpose, scope, and role of the JSNA so it is clearly understood, aligned to HWBB priorities, and focused on solving real system and community problems.

- **Key actions**

- Agree the core purpose of the JSNA (what problems it aims to solve);
- Align JSNA priorities explicitly with HWBB priorities and outcomes;
- Review whether there should be alignment with, or contribution to, a Berkshire-wide JSNA through further engagement with wider Berkshire partners;
- Clarify how the JSNA supports commissioning, neighbourhood working, and system planning and the interface with the new ICB-level PH Intelligence Unit.



Recommendations

2 Establish the 'State of the Borough' JSNA report as a regular biennial high-level summary of the key health challenges and needs across Reading

- **Recommendation**

Following on from the State of the Borough Report initiated in 2025, establish the 'State of the Borough' JSNA report as a structured, overarching borough-level summary report published every 2 years, aligned to JSNA priorities and ensuring its use as a structured tool to inform system decision-making

- **Key actions**

- Align the State of the Borough report with the JSNA and Health and Wellbeing Board cycle
- Embed community insight and co-production with Council and system partners within the report development process
- Use the report as a strategic tool to inform neighbourhood health plan development and system decision-making



Recommendations

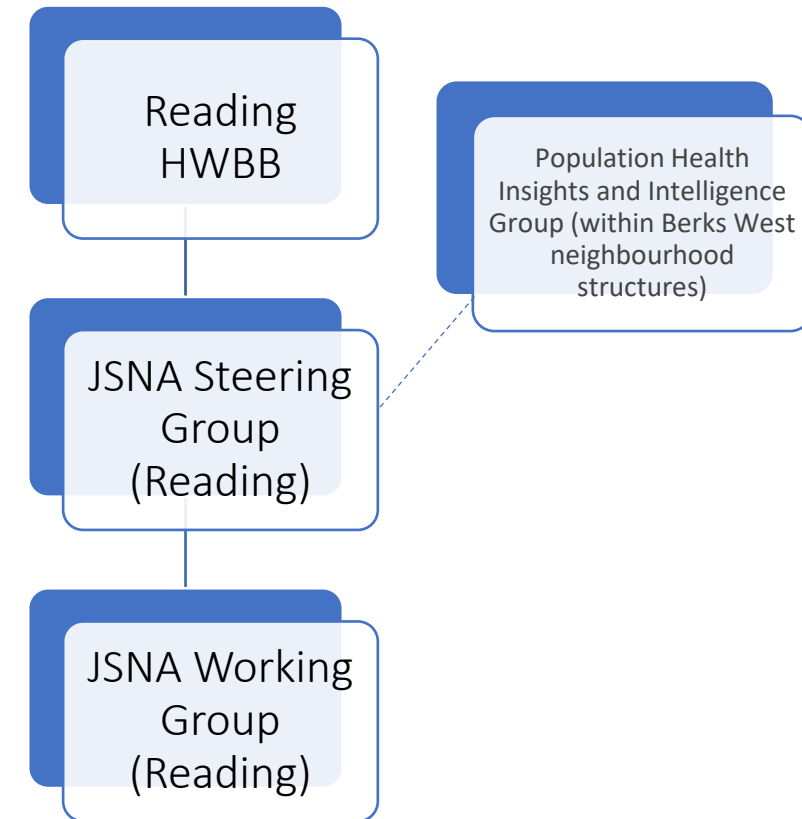
3 Engagement, governance and sustainability

- **Recommendation**

Establish strong governance arrangements and shared ownership to ensure the JSNA remains current, relevant, and used, moving it towards a 'living' JSNA.

- **Key actions**

- Establish a JSNA Steering Group (providing joint, strategic oversight) and Working Group (including analysts from partner organisations and leading implementation) at Reading level, with the Steering Group reporting to the HWBB and via a dotted line to the PHIIG (Population Health Insights and Intelligence Group) at Berkshire West level, to support connections with neighbourhood health governance;
- Agree a rolling programme of work, including a 2-yearly State of the Borough Report, with clear timelines;
- Ensure council directorates, NHS, VCSE, and partners are actively involved;
- Review JSNA and Observatory content item by item;
- Implement review, update, and archive schedules.



Recommendations

4 “So What?” and “What Next?” – moving from insight to action

- **Recommendation**

Make interpretive commentary and action-focused insight a mandatory part of all JSNA outputs, including within 2-yearly 'high level' State of the Borough JSNA reports, and strengthen the quality and impact of deep-dive Health Needs Assessments (HNAs).

- **Key actions**

- Commit to publishing State of the Borough JSNA reports on a 2-yearly rolling basis for system partners' use;
- Ensure that each State of the Borough JSNA section, and deep-dive HNA outputs, includes:
 - So What? – implications for people, services, and places
 - What Next? – actions for strategy, commissioning, and delivery;
- Support training, Health Needs Assessment templates, and JSNA champions to appraise and reference evidence on what works to improve outcomes, and to embed JSNA use to inform action.

Recommendations

5 Health inequalities focus and granular, local-level population insight

- **Recommendation**

Make health inequalities a central, visible, and consistent focus across the entire JSNA, and develop granular insights for small areas.

- **Key actions**

- Use granular geographic and demographic data and present health intelligence and insights for smaller geographies to support decision-making (e.g. at neighbourhood and ward level);
- Analyse inequalities by place, population group, and service access;
- Develop local capacity for future modelling to predict emerging inequalities and need.



Recommendations

6 Community voice, co-production and lived experience

- **Recommendation**

Embed community voice and lived experience throughout the JSNA, and ensure the JSNA maps community assets alongside needs.

- **Key actions**

- Explore opportunities to develop participation infrastructure, building on existing local assets, and make further use of participatory research approaches to strengthen inclusion of qualitative insight, to improve understanding of the needs and experiences of groups experiencing structural disadvantage and poor health outcomes;
- Explore options to co-produce asset mapping and needs analysis with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and communities;
- Include detailed case studies and narratives where appropriate.



Recommendations

7 Service-level and system intelligence

- **Recommendation**

Strengthen the JSNA's role in linking need to service provision and ensuring local accountability of the health and care system.

- **Key actions**

- Strengthen data sharing, map available datasets across the system to strengthen understanding of the landscape, and include additional service-level data from NHS, Adult Social Care, VCSE, and Connected Care;
- Compare prevalence of need with service access and outcomes and highlight gaps, variation, and unmet need (e.g. children's mental health);
- Ensure stronger connections between Council (including public health, social care and other Directorates), ICB, and Connected Care datasets;
- Ensure system partners are involved in shaping the overall JSNA and deep-dive Health Needs Assessments.



Recommendations

8 Health in All Policies

- **Recommendation**
Embed Health in All Policies across the JSNA to influence decisions beyond health services.
- **Key actions**
 - Strengthen intelligence and analysis around the health impacts of housing, transport, employment, culture, leisure, and planning;
 - Provide practical examples showing how services can respond to data insights;
 - Support preventative and upstream action across Council directorates.



Recommendations

9 Data journey, innovation and AI

- **Recommendation**
Modernise how data is analysed, interpreted, and presented to improve insight and usability.
- **Key actions**
 - Clearly describe the data journey: data → insight → action
 - Explore further use of AI to support:
 - Interpretive narrative (“what does the data mean?”)
 - Search and navigation
 - Future modelling
 - Use case examples to show applied intelligence in practice.



Recommendations

10 Structure, accessibility and user experience

- **Recommendation**

Redesign the JSNA to be accessible, user-friendly, and consistent and ensure JSNA outputs are tailored to key audiences, including HWBB members, commissioners, integrated neighbourhood teams and VCSE partners.

- **Key actions**

- Redesign the landing page, navigation, and overall structure;
- Rebrand the JSNA with a clear, understandable title;
- Ensure all documents meet accessibility standards;
- Explore opportunities to develop interactive dashboards and customisable reports.
- *Note: exact options and costs underpinning these improvements will need to be finalised with the external provider (or alternative providers) over the coming months.*



Recommendations

11 Communications, awareness and impact

- **Recommendation**

Actively promote and champion the JSNA to build awareness, increase routine use and demonstrate its value.

- **Key actions**

- Develop targeted re-branding and communication strategies for different user groups (internal and external);
- Clearly articulate what problems the JSNA solves;
- Use Google Analytics to understand usage, alongside qualitative feedback;
- Share impact stories and case studies showing how the JSNA has driven change.



Options for HWBB consideration

- **Option 1: Maintain the current JSNA approach**
Continue with existing inputs, structure and outputs.
- **Option 2: Incremental improvements to the existing JSNA**
Improve selected elements (e.g. data updates, work to improve usability and accessibility, regular stakeholder communications, additional reports).
- **Option 3: Comprehensive Internal JSNA Refresh Programme – all recommendations and actions outlined**
Implement a structured, phased refresh programme to strengthen JSNA governance and transform the JSNA into a system-wide intelligence and decision support tool, with stronger joint ownership across HWB partners.
- **Option 4: Comprehensive Internal refresh with additional technical support**
As above for Option 3 but including additional resourcing to support a programme of re-design and improved user-accessibility of the Berkshire Observatory website, potentially incorporating additional automated outputs beyond ward geographies, such as Neighbourhood Health Profiles. Further engagement with the provider and other Berkshire LAs will be required to refine options and establish expected costs.

Decisions required

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

- Approve the proposed improvements to the JSNA
- Approve the proposed new JSNA governance arrangements and provide input on system representation
- Endorse the JSNA's purpose as a core system intelligence tool to underpin evidence-based decision-making.



Next steps

Subject to approval by the HWBB:

- Governance arrangements established within the next 3 months
- Early improvements delivered within 6 months
- Phased implementation:
 - Co-design of delivery plan with partners
 - Data and analytical improvements, including exploring procurement of a new or refreshed Reading Observatory
 - Content refresh and pilot outputs
 - Relaunch and embedding
- Updates to HWBB on delivery plan, progress and impact.

