

SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE HEALTH SCRUTINY MEETING OF 26 JANUARY 2022

The primary focus of this meeting was to consider Dentistry Services in Suffolk and make recommendations for improvements (**Appendix 2a**- covering report).

Prior to this meeting, East Suffolk Council had undertaken a comprehensive review of Dental Services and their report is appended. The Report from East Suffolk is thorough and revealing and the Committee expressed its' thanks to East Suffolk for providing this as part of the Evidence Set (**Appendix 2b**).

Healthwatch Suffolk also undertook a review of Dental Practice in Suffolk and much of their report is harrowing to read, detailing the distressing actions taken by patients who were unable to access treatment and resorted to removing their own teeth (**Appendix 3**).

It is difficult to comprehend how this Service has deteriorated to such a level, compromising the health of those most vulnerable in society who can neither access a dentist nor afford to go private. It was estimated that 50% of children have never visited the Dentist.

The NHS states its' commitment to "holistic and integrated care" and yet Dentists do not have access to the "Spine" which connects patients' medical information. Gum disease, broken and decaying teeth, ulcers etc all impact heavily on patients' wellbeing – and may be contra-indicated for some medical interventions, or significant reasons for their ailing health but will not be evident in their medical records.

Not least, it is extremely distressing to be suffering pain and be unable to access the help needed through lack of available Dentists.

The Committee were informed that in Bury St Edmunds, some emergency dentistry was being provided by a mobile vehicle run by a Charity.

It is especially timely that this Scrutiny takes place now, as in March 2023 the Service will transfer from NHS England to Clinical Commissioning (to be renamed Integrated Care Services). The money (budget) for this Service will be transferred to ICS but since it is desperately underfunded, in a critical state and with insufficient Dentists in the Country and even less willing to work in the current NHS system, it would place an impossible and wholly unreasonable burden on the new ICS.

The Committee was informed that additional emergency funding had been provided for two months and dentists were being incentivised to operate a 12 hour per day service (8-8), working evenings and weekends. It is unclear how many Practices were able to accommodate this given the shortage of Dentists.

It is proposed that the 111 Service will be changed to accommodate a dental specific option – although it is not known when this will be implemented.

My conversations with Dentists in Essex and colleagues in Cambridge indicate that this situation is replicated throughout the Country and more Dentists are currently planning to leave the NHS with yet more devastating consequences.

This is already a crisis situation and I propose that the recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Committee, in relation to Dentistry, are formally endorsed by West Suffolk Council.

Present for this item were:

Tom Norfolk - General Dental Practitioner, Joint Chair of the Local Dental Network (East of England), Lead Dental Clinical Adviser to NHSE/I (East of England) and Executive Member of the National Association of Dental Advisers
David Barter, Head of Commissioning, NHSE/I East of England
Greg Brown, Ipswich and East Suffolk and West Suffolk CCG
Andy Yacoub, Healthwatch Suffolk

It was regrettable that David Barter of NHS England joined the Meeting remotely but for the entire time experienced technical issues and thus the Committee could not fully hear his responses to the questions.

The documents appended will provide detailed information on the issues and background to the Scrutiny so I will not repeat these.

Following a very intense Scrutiny the Committee proposed the following recommendations – please note these are DRAFT for your information and have not yet been formally approved.

1. Commended the report from East Suffolk Council Scrutiny Committee for its thorough approach and wished to thank the Committee for sharing its findings with the Health Scrutiny Committee;
2. Commended the emerging Dental Strategy which is being introduced in the region and wished to thank the invited professional panel members and their organisations for their active involvement in bringing about service improvements; and
3. Thanked Healthwatch Suffolk for its report setting out views from the public and patients about their experiences of accessing dental services.

Recommendations

4. The Committee noted the national general dental services contract had been passed from the Department of Health to NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) and was currently being reviewed with the acknowledgement at all levels that it was no longer fit for purpose. The Committee wished to escalate the following key points of concern to NHSE/I, via the NHS East of England Regional Team, acknowledging that some of these points were outside of NHSE/I Regional Team's remit:
 - a) The current system of payment for Units of Dental Activity (UDAs) and the use of targets and clawback of funding were acting as a

disincentive to take on NHS work. The contract review should seek to replace the current funding arrangements with a system of funding which provided greater flexibility to local commissioners to incentivise dentists to undertake NHS work particularly in those areas of greatest unmet need.

- b) NHS contracts needed to be offered which provide sustainability in the profession such that dental providers can have confidence about future income levels for business planning purposes.
- c) The range of procedures, skills and techniques available on the NHS should be equivalent and not inferior to those administered through private practice.
- d) Patients should be able to register with an NHS dental practice and expect an ongoing commitment to continued care similar to that offered by a GP practice.
- e) The development of shared medical/dental patient records was strongly supported, in so far as legal and data protection allow;
- f) The application process for dentists trained abroad to join the NHS performer list should be simplified to remove excessive barriers and dental professions should be included on the Government's shortage occupation list.
- g) Patients waiting for clinical treatment or surgery should be prioritised for dental care where oral health was a factor in scheduling their treatment.

5. The Committee also:

- a) Recommended to the Suffolk Dental Task Force and the County Council's Executive Director of People's Services that a specific programme of work should be undertaken focusing on the promotion of good oral health in children with a view to making Suffolk an exemplar of good practice. This should include co-production work involving Healthwatch Suffolk and engagement with parents, schools, public health and 0-19yrs services.
- b) Recommended that particular effort be made to communicate the importance of diet and avoidance of sugary soft drinks in the early years to parents, carers and schools.
- c) Recommended to the Suffolk Dental Task Force that clarity should be provided about the pathway and prioritisation arrangements for people needing urgent dental care and promote this information widely within the system and the public and patients.
- d) Requested an information bulletin setting out the pros and cons of fluoride in drinking water for improving dental health (but noted that the East Suffolk report on dentistry asserted that natural fluoride in Suffolk drinking water should be taken into account in any discussion of fluoridation, p.37).
- e) Requested a written response to a question posed by a member of the Committee about the arrangements for conducting dental needs assessments and NHSE/I's understanding of the current level of unmet

need in Suffolk, as the answer was not fully heard due to connection problems. Acknowledging the rapidly changing position due to COVID, it was suggested this should be requested later in 2022 when it was hoped the position may have stabilised.

- f) Supported the proposals for an initiative to develop training for dentists and dental practitioners in Suffolk, recognising that this is the responsibility of Health Education England as opposed to NHS England.
- g) Commended the work of the Suffolk Dental Task Force to improve access to dental care for looked after children through the identification of lead practices for children in care teams.

Appendices:

Appendix 2a - Agenda Item 5 – Pages 13-14
Health Scrutiny Committee, 26 January 2022
Access to NHS Dentistry in Suffolk

Appendix 2b - Evidence Set 1 – Pages 15-39
Health Scrutiny Committee, 26 January 2022
East Suffolk Council's Scrutiny Committee
Review of Access to NHS Dental Provision in East Suffolk

Appendix 3 - Evidence Set 2 – Pages 41-52
Health Scrutiny Committee, 26 January 2022
Healthwatch Suffolk
Dental Services in Suffolk
A Summary of enquiries to Healthwatch Suffolk

Councillor Margaret Marks
West Suffolk Council on the Health Scrutiny Committee