

# **Report of Healthwatch Bradford and District to the meeting of the Health and Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

---

**Subject: Access to NHS Dentistry in Bradford District**

**L**

## **Summary statement:**

Report from Healthwatch Bradford and District on continuing problems with access to NHS dentists in the district.

---

## **Portfolio:**

### **Health and Wellbeing**

Report Contact: Victoria Simmons,  
Manager Healthwatch Bradford and  
District  
Phone: 01535 665 258  
E-mail:  
[Victoria@healthwatchbradford.co.uk](mailto:Victoria@healthwatchbradford.co.uk)



## 1. Summary

Healthwatch Bradford and District have major concerns about access to NHS dentists in Bradford District; members of the public report difficulty in finding practices accepting new patients.

In a survey of over 1,000 local people, 43% of adults and 30% of children had no access to an NHS dentist.

On the NHS Choices website, there are currently no practices listed as accepting new adult patients for NHS treatment, and only two indicate that they can accept children.

Healthwatch are concerned that little progress has been made to increase access, despite the development of a proposal by NHS England to open up new appointments in the worst affected areas of the district by re-investing resources from commissioned but unused UDAs (units of Dental Activity).

## 2. Background

Since Healthwatch Bradford was established in 2013, we have been hearing growing concerns from the public about difficulty with accessing NHS dentistry. It is the most common reason for people contacting Healthwatch Bradford and District, with people trying to find a dentist but finding that no practices are accepting new NHS patients.

Healthwatch has been working to raise the profile of the issue of access to NHS dentists, in order to seek improvements in the commissioning of NHS dentistry for the district.

Since this issue was last discussed at this committee, we have met with representatives from the Local Dental Committee and NHS England who felt more evidence that there were difficulties with access to NHS dentists was needed. Healthwatch carried out a public survey, speaking to over 1,000 people, to gather this evidence.

Healthwatch organisations from across West Yorkshire have been involved in a Task and Finish group which was set up by NHS England to explore ways of improving access to NHS dentists across the region.

## 3. Report issues

The appendix to this report gives a summary of findings from the Healthwatch survey carried out at the beginning of this year. It indicates that there remains a significant issue with a large proportion of the district's population not able to access routine NHS dental care.

43% of respondents to our survey did not have access to routine NHS dental care. Many of these people reported experiencing dental pain, and 10% had attended A&E as a result. A lack of primary care dentistry is creating pressure on urgent and emergency care services.

30% of parents in our survey told us that their children did not have an NHS dentist, with many parents saying that their children had never seen a dentist. We heard accounts of children who had not had access to routine dentist check-ups having to have teeth

extracted in hospital – and even after this secondary care intervention they had not been able to access ongoing care to help prevent future problems.

The poor oral health of children in Bradford is a particular concern with our District's rate of tooth decay in children at 46% compared to national average of 28%. While much good work is being done in the district with schemes like Building Brighter Smiles, a lack of access to routine dental care for families undermines Public Health work on prevention and education.

In our survey, 74% of those who did not have an NHS dentist said that they had tried to find one, but had been unable to. It is very difficult and frustrating trying to find a dentist in our area who is offering appointments for new NHS patients. Healthwatch regularly check NHS Choices and ring round local practices, in order to try to help people who contact us about this problem.

At the time of writing this report, there were no practices in Bradford listed on NHS Choices as accepting new NHS patients. The nearest listed as taking patients was in Armley, but when we called the practice they advised that in fact they had no appointments for at least three months and that we should call back in November. In September 2016, a 'mystery shopper' exercise conducted by Healthwatch across the whole of West Yorkshire identified only 2 practices in the region which were accepting new NHS patients.

During one week in December 2015, dental practices across West Yorkshire were asked to make a record of the number of calls they received from people who were seeking an NHS dentist and who the practices had to turn away. 52% of West Yorkshire NHS primary care dental practices took part. 2,500 calls were made to these practices from patients trying to make an appointment unsuccessfully. The areas in which there were most calls were Bradford and Kirklees.

At the meeting of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2015, NHS England reported that people looking for a dentist are signposted to NHS 111 and that this would provide an improvement in the information provided. There was also a commitment made to consider local options for improving information to enable patients to access services. The experiences of people who contact Healthwatch for advice indicate that there has been no improvement on this issue.

### **NHS England Pilot Scheme**

NHS England established a Task and Finish Group to explore the difficulties with access to NHS dentistry across West Yorkshire and to make commissioning recommendations to NHS England. This group included the Local Dental Network and received input from representatives from Healthwatch in Bradford and Kirklees.

A business case was developed in April 2016, which set out clearly the need for action to be taken in Bradford, e.g.

*"The West Yorkshire Oral Health Needs Assessment highlights a lack of accurate signposting to dental services, with NHS Choices not always being up to date. The Bradford and Kirklees areas, in particular, show very few practices accepting new NHS patients. This has been echoed by Healthwatch, Local Care Direct and the Local Dental Committees. The result is a high volume of often unnecessarily*

*repeated calls to 111 and, in turn, a high volume of patients seen in Unscheduled Dental Care that could have been seen more appropriately in Primary Care.”*

*“Increasing Costs: In 2014-15, the overall overspend for all Unscheduled Dental Care providers against budget was £1,523,736. If no action is taken it is anticipated that this will increase as patients are unable to secure routine dental care.”*

*“The number of patient complaints that NHS England receive about primary care dental services are rising: 44 were received in 2013-14 while 90 were received in 2014-15, an increase of 105 %. Records of the reason behind each dental complaint are not held, but the experience of the Contracting Team in completing responses is that the majority are connected with not being able to access NHS dental services.”*

The recommendation put forward by the Task and Finish Group was to set up a pilot project where 6 dental practices in the Bradford City, 6 dental practices in Bradford District and 6 practices in the North Kirklees CCG localities would be offered a financial incentive to treat up to four new patients (depending on need) over one hour, every day of the week (Monday to Friday). This would result in approximately 360 new patients seen each week in a primary care setting - approximately 18,288 new patients over the course of 2016-17.

This business case was based on analysis of the ‘claw-back’ monies reclaimed from commissioned and paid-for UDAs (Units of Dental Activity) which were not delivered by dental practices. Additional investment in the proposed pilot scheme would be offset by the predicted under-delivery of UDAs – essentially reinvesting money already in the system which would otherwise be reclaimed by NHS England.

Healthwatch welcomed this pilot scheme, along with other proposals made by the Task and Finish Group to improve signposting services for people searching for a dentist, and to carry out a further needs assessment for vulnerable groups in our area.

**To our knowledge no action has been taken by NHS England, we have not received any recent updates on the progress of the pilot scheme.**

Healthwatch across West Yorkshire are keen to continue to work with NHS England and others on this issue and to look at ways to potentially improve access. We are carrying out some analysis of the rates at which patients are recalled for routine dental check-ups across the region. Many patients who have an NHS dentist are recalled for a check-up every six months, although NICE guidance states that adults who have healthy teeth only need to see a dentist every two years. If recall intervals for dentally fit patients could be increased, this would potentially open up appointments in which dentists could see new patients.

**4. Options**

n/a

**5. Contribution to corporate priorities**

n/a

6. **Recommendations**

- That the Committee note the problem of lack of access to NHS dentists in the District, as highlighted by Healthwatch's survey.

7. **Background documents**

n/a

8. **Not for publication documents**

n/a

9. **Appendices**

Headline findings from Healthwatch survey & extracts from responses.

## Access to NHS Dentists - headlines from our survey

Healthwatch Bradford spoke to 1,019 people in a survey carried out from January to March 2016.

We talked to people in the local transport interchange, bus stops, shopping areas, the city market, pharmacies, community and advice centres, children's centres and GP practices. The survey was also promoted through the local media, Healthwatch website, and social media.

### Headline findings:

- 43% did not have an NHS dentist
- 30% of parents told us their child/children did not have a dentist

### For those with a dentist:

- 39% of people with a dentist had experienced problems finding a dentist in the past
- 21% who had a dentist said it was difficult for them to get to their current dentist, with many travelling out of the area to see an NHS dentist
- Most who had a dentist reported that they were happy with their care

### Trying to find an NHS dentist:

- 403 people had no dentist but wanted to find one
- 74% of people said they had tried but couldn't find a local dentist accepting NHS patients
  - 45% had contacted local dentists
  - 31% tried internet searches
  - 28% asked family and friends
  - 25% had used NHS Choices
  - 17% had contacted NHS 111
- 21 people said they didn't know how to find an NHS dentist

### Impact

- 10% of those who don't have routine NHS dental care have had to attend A&E because of dental pain
- A further 20% of people have used emergency dental services
- Other people told us that they had resorted to 'DIY dentistry' including extracting their own teeth

These quotes are a small sample taken from responses to our survey and illustrate some of the difficulties people in Bradford are experiencing with access to NHS dentistry.

BD3. No dentist:

*"My younger sister (10 years old) had toothache, it was very bad and she was crying a lot. We took her to the big hospital (A&E) but they said they didn't have dentists there who could help, so just gave her some gel. In the end she had to go to Leeds to see a special dentist. They found she had holes in her teeth and some needed to be taken out. She went twice or three times to Leeds. We all had to go on the bus. Now it's all ok. But still don't have a dentist, she doesn't go to the dentist for check-ups and nobody else in the family has been to the dentist since we've lived in the UK."*

BD18. No dentist:

*"Cannot find dentists taking on NHS patients. My son has recently turned 6 and never had dental check-up only the flourish varnish [through school]. Wondering on long term impact of my son not seeing a dentist. I have also called dentists and told waiting list is full. Call back in 6-12 months. So call them at a later date and told again to ring in 6-12 months as can't add me to the waiting list!"*

BD4. No dentist:

*"I waited 8 years and even then I had to pay private. I ended up with severe gum disease with not being able to find a dentist and to even deal with this is meaning me having to pay private. Dentists that could take on NHS dentists are instead just offering private care. Many won't even reply to email if you ask about NHS treatment. I've ended up extracting one of my own wisdom teeth which in this day and age is ludicrous. Dentistry has in effect privatised itself."*

BD7. No dentist:

*"All dentists on NHS Choices who claim to be accepting NHS patients when contacted are offering private appointments for the next day but to see an NHS dentist they have a list consisting of 100s of people. It is impossible to find an NHS dentist in Bradford. No dentist will accept NHS patients. Even those who claim they are accepting will look in your mouth and then fail to offer you another appointment."*

BD12. No dentist:

*"Used to have dentist but was taken off list after cancelling my check-up appointment as I had just come out of hospital the day before. I then lost a family member 2 weeks after and haven't been able to find an NHS dentist since. I have attended both A&E and emergency dental services to have a tooth looked at."*

BD18. Has dentist, previously had difficulty:

*"We moved here in 2011 and I have only just got my family an NHS dentist in Jan 2016- our first appt is July 2016. It has taken me 4.5 years to find an NHS dentist, having tried all the options on your list. During this time I have attended A&E with dental pain/problems. It has been ridiculous trying to find an NHS dentist. I was entitled to free dental care when I was pregnant, but my private dentist wouldn't accept this. I called the NHS dental line (Leeds) and left several messages with no one responding to my calls."*