

**NHS DENTAL SERVICES ENTER AND VIEW VISITS BY HEALTHWATCH
CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH**

To: **Health Committee**

Meeting Date: **6th December 2018**

From: **Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and
Peterborough**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **The Committee is asked to consider the findings of the
Healthwatch Enter and View visits to Wisbech Dental
Access Centre**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to note the report**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. Healthwatch were set up under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to listen to people's experiences of using health and care services and formulate views about what could be improved.
- 1.2 In April 2017 Healthwatch Cambridgeshire merged with Healthwatch Peterborough to form a new organisation called Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough delivering the Healthwatch function for both areas.
- 1.3 Shortly after the merger Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough became aware of the difficulties people in Peterborough were experiencing finding an NHS dentist and so undertook work to find out more about dentistry services. It was established that this is a problem for people living in Cambridgeshire also, particularly the north of the county.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 Healthwatch have recently undertaken Enter and View visits to the Dental Access Centres (DACs) in Peterborough and Wisbech to speak to people about their experiences trying to access an NHS dental service.
- 2.2 It is clear that people in other areas of Cambridgeshire also experience the same problem. However, Healthwatch has focussed on these two centres as this is where most feedback has been received from.
- 2.3 There is a general misconception that people register with an NHS dentist but this is not the case since a new contract was introduced in 2006. NHS dentists take people on for a specific course of treatment only.
- 2.4 There are a number of significant concerns that are impacting upon the health and wellbeing of many people in Cambridgeshire. Lack of preventative care and the disproportionate effect on people of lower incomes and other vulnerable groups is especially worrying. More detail is set out below.
- 2.5 Children have no priority in the present system. All adults and children are treated equally. Healthwatch understands that the numbers of children having multiple tooth extractions in Cambridgeshire are increasing. The impact of multiple tooth extractions on young people's future dental health is concerning.
- 2.6 Preventative dental care and information is minimal across the County.
- 2.7 The report about the Healthwatch findings is currently being drafted. The sections below set out a summary of what Healthwatch has found so far. Further detail will be given verbally at the meeting. The report is expected to be published before the end of the year.

3. WHAT LOCAL PEOPLE TOLD HEATHWATCH

- 3.1 People are experiencing problems finding an NHS dentist and do not have access to routine dental care.
- 3.2 When people have a dental emergency it is extremely hard to find an NHS dentist who will treat them so they attend a DAC.
- 3.3 Many NHS dentists have set up in private practice.
- 3.4 The DAC service is highly valued by local people.

4. WHAT THE DENTAL ACCESS CENTRES TOLD HEATHWATCH

- 4.1 The DAC service cannot meet the needs of all of the people who come to the service. Often they can only provide pain relief. People have to find a dentist for the treatment, in many instances this is not possible.
- 4.2 People are often referred to the DACs for root canal treatment and extractions. The DACs are not altogether sure why this happens.
- 4.3 The numbers of people being turned away from the DACs is substantial and increasing. Healthwatch has been informed that in 2016/17, 5,474 people were turned away from Dental Access Centres in in Cambridge, Huntingdon and Wisbech. In 2017/18 this rose to 7,425

5. FURTHER CONTEXT

- 5.1 NHS England are aware of the problems that people have accessing NHS dentists in many areas of Cambridgeshire and have informed Healthwatch that commissioning arrangements are being reviewed.
- 5.2 There is a shortage of dentists and dental nurses. Dentists recruited from abroad have to wait several months to be cleared to work in the UK. This process is through a private company. The delays are frustrating for practices as they need dentists urgently.
- 5.3 There are concerns that the UK leaving the EU will impact on the number of European dentists willing and able to work in this country. There is evidence to show that some European dentists and dental nurses have already returned home.
- 5.4 GPs have told Healthwatch that they often have people presenting to them with dental problems because people cannot find an NHS dentist and cannot afford a private one. GPs are then in a very difficult situation as they do not give dental care but are aware of the impact of poor oral health on people general wellbeing. Th exact extent of this and what the GPs responses are is unknown.