Response received by Healthwatch Oxfordshire from NHS England, in response to request for update on progress since the publication of reports by Healthwatch Oxfordshire.

- ‘Filling the Gaps; Dentistry Services in Oxfordshire 2018’
- ‘Treatment only when needed- Dental Services for Care Home Residents-2018’

Response received by email from NHS England (SE Hampshire and Thames Valley) on 20th August 2019

The response was as follows:

“Since the Healthwatch report into NHS Dental support for care homes was written last year, the Care Quality Commission has produced a report on oral health in care homes; ‘Smiling Matters, oral health in care homes’ (June 2019). The key recommendations are:

1. Raising awareness of the importance of oral health in care homes
2. Care home staff training in oral health
3. Improved guidance to the dental profession on how to care for people in care homes, including advice on charging
4. HEE training updated on how to provide care in care homes, including dementia awareness
5. Improve access to NHS services, both routine and urgent
6. Accessible information to signpost people to NHS services
7. Inclusion of oral health in care homes in NHS Long Term Plan
8. More diverse workforce to support people in care homes
9. Primary Care Networks and local dental networks to meet needs of more vulnerable groups

The report highlights that improving oral health for people in care homes requires input from all the groups working with these patients including:

- Care homes
- Dentists
- NHS
- Local government
- Patients themselves
- Public health

The local office of NHS England is now looking at how it can bring the relevant agencies together to address these recommendations. The response below responds to the recommendations made in the Healthwatch report also covering some of the CQC recommendations.

The Healthwatch report on dentistry in care homes made the following suggestions for improvement:

- Better access to dentists at the care home for residents who cannot easily visit dental surgeries

Care home patients can attend NHS Dentists if they’re able to do so. Patients are not ‘registered’ with dental practices and can attend where they wish. There are 60 NHS practices in Oxfordshire providing dental care to all groups of patients (adults and children). There can be challenges of taking people to surgeries for the care homes. If a
patient is not able to attend an NHS Dentist their care is mainly provided via the Community Dental Service (CDS) on a domiciliary basis but this is quite a limited resource. Dental treatment in the care home setting is not ideal as only a limited range of care can be offered so it is better for care home patients to have treatment in the dental surgery when possible.

The local office review of Community Dental Services is looking at how access for care home patients can be improved with greater partnership working between CDS and High Street Dentists. The local office is currently considering a non-recurrent funding request to pilot enhanced support to care home patients, developing closer links between dental practices and care homes.

The local office is working with the local authority in terms of raising awareness in care homes, staff training and information about local NHS services. In addition newly qualified Dentists are providing training to care home staff in a number of care homes in Oxfordshire.

Nationally, NHS England is looking at support to be provided to care homes by General Medical Practitioners. Pilots will be nationally funded via the GP contract. This will include considering the dental and pharmacy element as part of the overall primary care service. The aim is try to test these approaches in 2020/21 as a pilot for Primary Care Networks (PCNs) with the aim of subsequent roll out in future years.

- Dementia training for dentist treating residents with dementia. This would also improve the experience of people living with dementia in the community. The national Health Education England (HEE) website has been updated to include dementia training for all health professionals. These training materials, eBook and films are the result of quality improvement projects developed in collaboration with our stakeholders to improve person centred care and support the 2020 Dementia Challenge. [https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/dementia-awareness/resources-tier-one-two-three](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/dementia-awareness/resources-tier-one-two-three)

- More information available to care homes about dental services that can be accessed by their residents.

We recognise there might be an issue about knowledge of services in care homes. Information is available on [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk) but not all practices keep it up to date and there is no contractual obligation upon them to do that (this is being considered nationally). As part of joint work with the local authority we will look at whether there are other ways to ensure care homes have up to date information about their local dental practices. In terms of urgent access the local office has got arrangements with 13 dental practices in Oxfordshire to see patients with an urgent dental need on the day. These services are accessed via NHS 111 who then identify the nearest practice for patients identified as having an urgent need.

One of the key areas of concerns for patients is about their exemption status in relation to patient charges. This can be particularly challenging if the patient needs to be seen urgently. If care home staff established the residents’ exemption status on entry to the home this would help with access to dental treatment (also links to bullet point below re ‘Improved information.....’).

The report on access to NHS dentistry ‘Filling the Gaps’ also made the following suggestions:

- Access to NHS dentists whether it is through more appointments, easier physical access to premises, or increased local service can be addressed by
dentists themselves and NHS England Commissioning, working closely with the Oxfordshire Local Dental Committee.

The key challenge facing NHS England is not so much whether there is sufficient resource going into the system, but whether we can use all the monies allocated. The resources allocated to Dental practices are cash limited allocations based on a forecast level of activity. If the required level of activity is not delivered in a financial year the relevant monies are recovered by NHS England and re-used non-recurrently to commission activity elsewhere in the following year. This is done in the Thames Valley area and has helped to achieve on-going improvements in access to NHS Dentistry since 2009. The NHS Dental contract does provide the flexibility to re-allocate under-used resources each year, but not to do this on a recurrent basis. The local office is investigating how this flexibility can be achieved.

All practices should comply with the Equality Act in terms of physical access to care, whether this is through their own premises or arrangements for another premises to be made available to patients.

- Planning for enough dentists in an area of population growth should be addressed by NHS England Commissioning working with local planning authorities. Existing dental practices can contribute to this process by being willing to develop their service offer both in appointments available and location of new / additional practices.

NHS England has identified forecast levels of housing growth in the period up to 2022 for each local authority in the Thames Valley. There are ways to expand provision from current providers that fall within EU procurement legislation with some areas possibly needing the procurement of new services. The means to address this links to the bullet point above.

- Improved information about what is available on the NHS, and the charges, can be addressed by dentists, NHS Choices (now known as NHS.uk), Public Health and through engagement with patient groups

NHS.uk does provide detailed information about NHS Dental patient charges:


We agree that more needs to be done on this to support more vulnerable patients and will follow up with the local authority and other stakeholders on this matter.

- Public awareness of the importance of oral health and the role that a dentist plays in this should be addressed by Public Health Oxfordshire, dentists, NHS England Commissioning, schools, health visitors, Oxfordshire Local Dental Committee.

We agree with this. We believe that joint work with the local authority and in the emerging Primary Care Networks will help improve focus on the importance of good oral health. As part of the national Starting Well programme, NHS England has tested the development of joint services with local authority in Slough to improve the oral health of young children. This has been rolled out to High Wycombe and Oxford. These are NHS England led services in partnership with others who also have a role in raising of the importance of oral health. The local office is looking at how this model can be applied to other patient groups, such as older people."