

CABINET

24 MAY 2024

REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A.13 SCRUTINY OF IMPROVING ACCESS TO NHS DENTISTRY FOR RESIDENTS IN TENDRING

(Report prepared by Keith Durran)

BACKGROUND

The Committee discussed the delegation of dental service commissioning to the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) by NHS England on April 1, 2023. This move aimed to address longstanding issues surrounding NHS dental access, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial burden on the NHS due to oral diseases amounted to £3.4 billion annually, underscoring the urgency of improving dental care provision.

Concerns were raised about the significant pain endured by individuals with dental issues, leading some to resort to extreme measures such as DIY dentistry or excessive use of painkillers like paracetamol. This not only strained urgent care services but also had broader societal impacts, including increased pressure on the healthcare system, reduced productivity due to absenteeism from work, and financial costs to employers.

The Committee outlined the commissioning structure for NHS dental services in Suffolk and North East Essex, highlighting the use of Courses of Treatment (CoT) and Units of Dental Activity (UDA) to reimburse dentists. Criticism was directed at the 2006 NHS dental contract, which paid dentists per course of treatment rather than per item, potentially disincentivising comprehensive care. Efforts were underway to reform the dental system, with objectives including improving oral health outcomes, enhancing patient access, and ensuring affordability within NHS resources.

Regarding dental fees, the Committee detailed the three-band fixed charge primary care treatment package for adult patients, with exemptions for certain categories such as those under 18, pregnant women, and individuals receiving low-income benefits. Despite these provisions, there was a downward trend in the utilization of free NHS dental care in Essex between 2017/18 and 2021/22. Poor oral health was identified as a significant issue in the region, impacting overall health, quality of life, and placing additional strain on healthcare services.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That Cabinet receives this report and thereby is made aware of the actions of the Suffolk and North Essex Integrated Care Board to improve provision to support good oral health in the Tendring District and to endorse the partnership links between the Council and the SNEE ICB to ensure the needs of local residents for good NHS Dental Services are best catered for through the ICB's commissioning.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENT(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

The response of the Partnerships Portfolio Holder will be tabled at the meeting, if it is not circulated beforehand.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET:

That the recommendations made by the Community Leadership Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted and that the response of the Partnerships Portfolio Holder thereto be endorsed.