

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

June 2020

Title:	Challenges in accessing dental care during COVID-19		
Open Report	For Information		
Wards Affected: ALL	Key Decision: No		
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Sponsor: Nathan Singleton, CEO, LifeLine Community Projects			
Summary The report presents the experiences of local people accessing dental services during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21. It is an independent evaluation of the experiences of people using the services in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and responses from dental practices during the pandemic. Recommendations for improvements and developments form part of the report.			
Recommendations The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the findings in the report• note the recommendations in the report• consider the wider impact on health and care services			
Reasons for report To highlight to the Board the experiences of local residents accessing dental care services.			

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 COVID-19 has meant that local health and care services have had to change the way they deliver services and in most cases the number of patients they see to ensure they are COVID secure and following guidance. This has affected access to a number of services.

1.2 In Barking and Dagenham, one of the main concerns raised by local residents has been access to emergency and non-emergency dental care. Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham received a number of calls from individuals which resulted in the team looking further into the matter.

- 1.3 Access to dental care has also been identified as a national concern by Healthwatch England. A meeting has been set up between London Healthwatches, Healthwatch England and the commissioners of dental care (NHS England)

2. Key findings

- 2.1 Findings within the report show that dental practices offering both NHS and private services declined to offer appointments to NHS patients, however appointments were available for those willing to pay for a private service.
- 2.2 Residents expressed concerns to Healthwatch as for many the cost of private dental care is not an affordable option. This highlights the inequality in getting access to good quality dental care in Barking and Dagenham. Although good public health focuses on prevention, locally, residents are having problems with getting an appointment.
- 2.3 Residents found themselves being referred from dental practices to other local dental practices to be told there were no appointments available. In some cases, individuals were unable to access emergency appointments due to delays and demand. People shared their stories with Healthwatch and said they have experienced pain and discomfort as a result.
- 2.4 Although patients are directed to NHS 111, this service is for urgent appointments. By local access being so limited there is a risk we will see a greater economic impact on local NHS services and a lack of a preventative approach to dental care.
- 2.5 Healthwatch are still receiving a number of calls from local people, who are struggling to access dental care.
- 2.6 Local people need to be able to access both routine and urgent dental care in a timely manner, which is also affordable in a tough economic climate. This will support and prevent other parts of the local health economy having to pick up the care and higher costs of other health risks caused by poor dental health. Without improved access to NHS dental care, not only do people in the borough risk facing far greater dental problems in the future, but it also puts more pressure on already overstretched hospital and GP services. Untreated dental problems can lead to pain, infection, and the risk of long-term harm.
- 2.7 This is a national issue, which is being looked at by Healthwatch England and NHS England.

3. Consultations (list if any)

- 3.1 Local residents were consulted for feedback.
- 3.2 NHS England have been sent the full report and were asked to respond to the recommendations.
- 3.3 Barking and Dagenham CCG have been sent the report.

List any appendices

Access to Dental Care Report

List any background papers used in preparing the report

NONE

NOTE ON KEY DECISIONS

By law, councils have to publish a document detailing “Key Decisions” that are to be taken by the Cabinet, Health and Wellbeing Board, or other committees / persons / bodies that have executive functions.

The document, known as the Forward Plan, is required to be published 28 days before the date that the decisions are to be made. Key decisions are defined as:

- (i) Those that form the **Council’s budgetary and policy framework** (this is explained in more detail in the Council’s Constitution)*
- (ii) Those that involve ‘**significant**’ spending or savings*
- (iii) Those that have a **significant effect on the community***

*In relation to (ii) above, Barking and Dagenham’s **definition of ‘significant’ is spending or savings of £200,000 or more that is not already provided for in the Council’s Budget** (the setting of the Budget is itself a Key Decision).*

*In relation to (iii) above, Barking and Dagenham has also extended this **definition** so that it relates to **any decision** that is likely to have a **significant impact on one or more ward** (the legislation refers to this aspect only being relevant where the impact is likely to be on two or more wards).*

*As part of the Council’s commitment to open government it has extended the scope of this document (Forward Plan) so that it **includes all known issues, not just “Key Decisions”**, that are due to be considered by the decision-making body as far ahead as possible.*