

## **Healthwatch Barnet Dental Report Refresh – Initial Findings**

### **January 2016**

#### **Introduction**

In December 2014/January 2015 Healthwatch Barnet carried out some mystery shopping to investigate the availability of NHS dentistry in Barnet, following complaints from residents that they could not find an NHS dentist. At that time we contacted 50 dental practices in Barnet to ask if they were able to offer an NHS appointment to new adult and child patients. (We also investigated how costs were publicised and the use of treatment plans) We found that 53% of practices we contacted were unable to offer an adult NHS appointment, and 47% a child's NHS appointment.

NHS England were not available to comment on these findings at the time, but have since had discussions with Healthwatch Barnet and feel that there is sufficient NHS dentistry available in the borough and not all NHS funding is used up in this area. They suggested that if we researched the practices which are funded/contracted to offer NHS dentistry we would find that it is readily available. Therefore we decided to look at the position within this group of practices to explore how many were able to offer NHS appointments to the local population.

#### **Methodology**

NHS England provided a list of Dentists in Barnet who are contracted to provide NHS dentistry care in the Borough. The list contained 53 practices who offer dental check-ups and treatment. (as opposed to orthodontist/specialist services.)

The Healthwatch volunteers therefore contacted the 53 practices as mystery shoppers by phone. We asked each practice a small number of standard questions requesting an appointment for a new adult NHS patient, and new child NHS patients. We also asked when the next appointment would be available. All calls were made in late December/early January. We contacted more than half of the practices on two occasions to ensure that we got the consistent responses from practices.

#### **Results**

36% (19 practices) said they could not currently offer adults an NHS appointment.

25% (13 practices) could not currently offer children an NHS appointment.

The majority of practices who were able to offer appointments for NHS treatment could do so within 2 weeks, and many before this. 5 practices told us that they have used up their full allocation of NHS appointments for this year and they may be able to offer an appointment in March/April when they

received their new allowance. 4 practices told us they would accept patients who were in receipt of benefits, but not NHS patients not on benefits.

## **Conclusions**

From the initial results that we have collated, we are concerned that a significant proportion of dentists in Barnet who are contracted to provide NHS appointments are not able to do so at this time. This means it is particularly difficult to access NHS dentistry in Barnet which reflects the picture that we are told exists by residents.

Further analysis of these results will be undertaken, but to enable a snapshot of the position to be available we have only to date looked at the overall outcome of the 3 questions asked.

## **Acknowledgements**

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