

Paper 3

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Councillor Gale Waller
Chair, Rutland Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17 June 2022

NHS dentistry in Rutland

Dear Councillor Waller

As you are aware, Healthwatch Rutland has been keeping a watching brief on the provision of NHS dental services in Rutland for some time. This prompted a quick poll in January 2022 to understand the public's experiences of accessing and receiving NHS dental care in Rutland. The poll highlighted the challenges people in Rutland face, with many unable to access NHS dentistry and equally unable to pay for private care and we shared the results widely.

On June 7th 2022 we contacted all Rutland dental practices to ask for the availability of NHS planned and urgent appointments. We were dismayed to hear that no Rutland dental practice was taking on adult patients on the NHS. The best advice we received was to ring NHS111 and be prepared to travel for up to 2 hours for urgent care. One private practice is also not taking on new patients at all because they are at capacity. One practice said they have a 'small contract' for NHS care for children but there is a waiting list, and another practice offers NHS orthodontics for children.

The current national financial crisis means that many people are not able to afford private dental care if they need it. Children's dental health, already poorer than the national average pre COVID-19 for under 5's, will further deteriorate and those entitled to free dental care cannot access it.

We know that poor dental health can lead to very serious complications including oral cancer and infection leading to sepsis in addition to the more obvious, but equally distressing, pain, poor diet, teeth misalignment and loss of self-esteem. There are also potential links to heart attacks, dementia and strokes.

Therefore, the Healthwatch Rutland Board requests that the Rutland Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee schedules an agenda item for external scrutiny of NHS Dental provision in Rutland as a matter of urgency. We ask the Committee to highlight the grave public concern about the lack of NHS dental care in Rutland and to challenge commissioners to urgently bring forward plans for improving the situation.

As we spoke about briefly earlier in the year, I will be happy to present the findings of our quick poll and the results of the recent ring around conducted by Healthwatch Rutland at your Scrutiny meeting, if you wish.

Yours Sincerely

J Underwood

Dr Janet Underwood PhD

Chair, Healthwatch Rutland