

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

17 OCTOBER 2023

From Kate Nikulina

We Need More NHS Dentists in Reading

Reading is a dental desert. Too many Reading residents can't get an NHS dentist.

People are left in pain or if they can afford it having to pay a large private dental bill in a cost of living crisis. Children and others entitled to free dental care aren't able to get it.

This Conservative government has been asleep at the wheel over NHS dentistry.

We want Reading Council to lobby the Integrated Care Board, government and come up with a plan to tackle the dental desert that Reading has become.

RESPONSE by Councillor McEwan (Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health):

The subject dentistry is of real concern to councillors and officers. The available data shows that there is indeed a clear need for the prevention of poor oral health and improved access to dental care in Reading. We all understand the importance of easy access to treatment when we need it especially if we are in pain. We also recognise there are many people in Reading who have trouble in gaining access to a dentist.

It is important to recognise the role of the council and our relation to the commissioning of dentalcare services.

As part of the integrated care system the council has a prevention role in the promotion of good oral health which prevents the need for emergency dental care. We do this through our public health offer to the system which ensures that the commissioning of dental services is informed by oral health needs assessment and meets the needs of local people. Production of a refreshed oral health strategy commenced in 2019 and this work will be resumed as the local public health system is restructured.

Meanwhile we continue to collaborate with our NHS commissioning partners and to carry out our preventative work by using the ring-fenced public health grant mandate services to promote good oral health through the health visitors and schools nursing contract and through tooth brushing packs for children centres and nurseries.

We have recently received a report from the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board commissioners that set out the current challenges facing the commissioners of dentalcare and dental practitioners as they manage the recovery from the pandemic, the surging demand for their services and a complex payment system which is discouraging to those considering entering as a dentist into the national health service. Much of this is beyond the powers of the council to affect directly. The Council will continue to work with the Integrated Care Board to ensure dentistry provision is targeted based on the needs of our residents within the remit of our role.