

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

18 OCTOBER 2023

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Committee:

NHS Dentistry

Dentists across the town are stopping providing NHS dental care. For example Castle Hill Dental will not offer any NHS treatment after September. The nearest available dentist taking on NHS patients is now in Thatcham. What can the Council do to support the provision of NHS dental care in Reading?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor McEwan, the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY 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 dental care 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 dental care 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.

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QUESTION 2 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Education Transport Policy for over 16s

The Brighter Futures for Children educational transport policy for over 16s states that transport will only be provided to settings that are attended for more than 500 hours per year. A subset of the SEND pupil population are recommended to attend educational settings for less than 500 hours per year, and cannot access public transport. For these children, their places are funded but their transport is not, which seems inconsistent, and puts at risk their only contact with the world outside their home. What is the review process for the transport policy? And can the rationale behind the 500 hour limit be explained so that alternatives may be suggested that keep the original purpose while accommodating a broader range of need?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor McEwan, the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor McEwan, Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health:

The Brighter Futures for Children Educational Transport Policy is informed by statutory guidance and places an emphasis on developing independence for learners over 16, in preparation for adulthood. Maximising the opportunities for young people to learn to travel independently, using public transport, is an important priority.

Less than 500 hours per year education equates to less than 2.9 hours education per day; and there are very few pupils where less than 2 hours of education per day could be deemed to be the best offer. Statutory guidance is clear that we should maximise the access to pupils to education and enable them wherever possible to access their statutory entitlement to education employment and training. We aim to achieve this by creatively considering education and training options to accommodate the broadest range of needs, as well as maximising the benefits of for example e learning where this is suitable for pupils.

Funding from HM Government for post 16 transport assistance provision was withdrawn from Local Authorities and given to the individual schools and colleges – and parents can apply to these for Bursary Funding. The Transport team will provide advice and guidance in this regard.

A particular area of focus previously reported to ACE Committee is tackling the underlying issues children are facing with increased anxiety following the pandemic period, with the high prevalence of children experiencing emotionally based school avoidance. The solutions for these children is not to accept a limited number of hours of access to education, but to continue the work being led by our emotionally based school avoidance service to integrate children back into education.

We will be bringing forward to the next ACE committee proposals to consult on the School Travel policy, but nationally there are significant challenges in funding the growing demand for transport assistance; the emphasis will therefore continue to be on maximising access to education and maximising the benefits of independent travel for Reading young people.