

Transforming dental services in Bedfordshire

Background

Dental services in Bedfordshire are based on historical arrangements which have evolved into a patchwork of uncoordinated services. These services include dental practices and Out of Hours rotas.

In May 2013 one of the dental providers died and his 3 dental practices were transferred to the care of his Estate pending a procurement exercise. Similarly in Leighton Buzzard a contract was ended and caretaking arrangements were put into place.

The following table shows the locations and numbers of patients served by the 4 practices.

Practice Location	No of patients (approx.)
Leagrave Sedation Clinic, Dunstable Rd, Luton	7,585
Leagrave Dental Practice, Marsh Road, Luton	5,600
Darrell House, West Street, Dunstable	2,602
Leighton Buzzard Dental Centre, North Street, Leighton Buzzard	3,675

Outside normal working hours there is a mixture of telephone advice, surgery appointments and drop-in sessions that operate on weekday evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays accessed through 111. During the last year 947 patients have accessed these services across Bedfordshire.

The case for change

The procurement exercise gave us the opportunity to consider how we could make dental services easier to access for all patients regardless of whether they want regular services or urgent care.

Feedback from 111 and from our own experience indicates that patients have found the arrangements for urgent care confusing. This appears to be backed up by a recent public survey in Bedfordshire which revealed that 70% would attend an A&E Department or Urgent Care Centre if their dentist was closed.

Funding from the current dental services plus additional investment from NHS England would allow more patients to be seen in dental services across a wider area.

The Leighton Buzzard practice is being reprocured on a “like for like” basis as there would otherwise be insufficient capacity within the area. The position in Dunstable is different as existing practices already have enough capacity to accommodate more patients.

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The Vision for Bedfordshire

The proposed model is to provide both routine and urgent care services within two 8-8 Centres in the main towns of Bedford and Luton. The centres would deliver NHS dental care between 8.00am and 8.00pm, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. They would cater for people who prefer to see a dentist only when they are in pain and facilitate the pathway to routine care where this can be achieved.

The Centres act as referral points for hospitals, GP urgent care centres and signposting services. They have standardised and evidence based processes which ensure people in pain are not turned away. They are reliable and dependable. Each Centre would provide services for around 10,000 patients a year.

The model has already operated successfully in Northamptonshire for several years and is now being duplicated in other areas across the country.

In addition to the two 8-8 centres the proposal would keep normal dental practices in or close to Marsh Road, Luton and Leighton Buzzard, serving at least the current 9,275 patients.

It is proposed that patients of Darrell House, Dunstable practice be dispersed to their choice of any of the remaining 6 practices in Dunstable (all of whom have capacity) or to one of the the 8-8 Centres.

Patients affected by the change

The current patients of the Leagrave, Marsh Road and Leighton Buzzard practices may be affected by this change in that the outcome of the tendering process is not yet known and the location will depend on the premises identified by the winning bidder. NHS England will ensure that the premises will be suitable for purpose, within a relatively short distance of current premises and that patients will be advised about their options.

Patients who use Out of Hours services will be directed to use either the Bedford or Luton service, depending on their preference. Patients who attend other practices across Bedfordshire will also be able to attend the centres when their surgeries are closed. This simplifies the pathway so that other providers and signposting services are able to direct patients to the right place first time.

Patients of the Darrell House, Dunstable practice will be affected as they will need to find a new practice. They will all be advised in writing of their options and the Dunstable practice will work with patients to reassure them that their care will continue albeit in another practice.

Service enhancement and benefits for patients

The new service configurations will provide the following benefits for patients:-

- Guaranteed NHS care to any person who wants it

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- Improved opening times at all of the new practices
- 7 day access to dental care across Bedfordshire
- Specified quality standards in respect of infection control, customer care, managing anxiety, social, economic and environmental values and sustainability
- Services designed around individual patient needs (all bidders have been provided with population profiles)
- More capacity across Bedfordshire to see more patients
- Specific requirements to accommodate people who are vulnerable or have protected characteristics
- Premises will be required to be clean, welcoming, accessible and comfortable.

Engagement and consultation

At an early stage we conducted patient surveys in shopping centres in Luton and Bedford and a survey of the patients of the Leighton Buzzard practice. We took on board the results of the survey and designed the model and service specification to take into account:-

- Patients who prefer to see a dentist only when they have toothache
- What patients describe as a “good” dentist
- Why some people avoid going to the dentist
- The times people want to visit a dentist
- How services are advertised, etc.

A summary of the survey results is shown at Appendix 1.

Having analysed the survey results and developed the service model we have begun working through our communications plan and have met with the following organisations and groups:

- Luton Clinical Commissioning Group
- Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Local Dental Committee
- Current contract holders
- Public Health England
- Internal experts within the fields of quality, information governance, finance and HR.
- Clinical advisers

Political sensitivities

Further engagement is planned, particularly in Dunstable where patients may perceive a reduction of services in their community. We will ensure that all patients are able to access local NHS dental services should they so wish.

Financial considerations

NHS England is working within a defined budget envelope and would expect to achieve improved quality and capacity through this exercise.

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Impact

The 111 service will be able to clearly signpost patients to the correct service and, building on our experiences in Northamptonshire, the higher visibility of the 8-8s will improve uptake of dental services, particularly for those people with urgent care needs. This will therefore result in fewer people attending GP Out of Hours services and hospitals.

It is also expected that other dental practices in Bedfordshire will develop a relationship with the 8-8 Centres as providers of Out of Hours care for their own patients.

We expect bidders to look to the local community to employ staff as part of their social, economic and environmental policies. We would also seek assurances that the location of premises would be accessible by public transport and take account of local guided buses or park and ride schemes.

Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality and Health Inequalities Analysis was undertaken in December 2014. The risk of discriminatory practice was determined to be low.

Closing Remarks

NHS England would like to invite comment and support for the proposal to maintain and improve NHS dental services within Bedfordshire.

Comments can be sent to the following e mail address:

susan.cavill@ardengemcsu.nhs.uk

Closing date: 19 June 2015

Thank you on behalf of the Dental and Optometry Team, NHS England (Central Midlands).

Jane Bailey/Diane Fenton
May 2014