

Report to: **East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**  
Date: **27<sup>th</sup> November 2008**  
By: **Director of Law and Personnel**  
Title of report: **NHS Dentistry in East Sussex**  
Purpose of report: **To consider the latest position on NHS Dentistry in East Sussex**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**HOSC is recommended to:**

- 1. Consider and comment on the update report from the East Sussex Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) (appendix 1)**
  - 2. Agree what further monitoring is required in relation to NHS dentistry.**
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### **1. Introduction**

1.1 HOSC originally identified dentistry as an issue in October 2003, in advance of the introduction of national reforms to NHS dentistry arrangements from April 2006. Full details of the new provisions are available on the Department of Health website dentistry section <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Healthandsocialcaretopics/Dental/index.htm>

1.2 Following the introduction of the reforms, HOSC received updates on the status of access to NHS dentistry in June, September and November 2006, each time expressing some concerns as to whether there was sufficient access to NHS dentistry in East Sussex, particularly for the most vulnerable, and whether health inequalities were being adequately addressed. HOSC also raised concerns about the number of wheelchair accessible dental practices.

### **2. Access to NHS dentistry**

2.1 HOSC last received an update on access to dentistry in November 2007. Jane Hewitt, Dental Services Development Manager, East Sussex PCTs made the following key points:

- 4,000 more NHS dentist patients were treated in the 24 previous months to 31 March 2007.
- 89% of patients in Hastings and Rother PCT indicated the dental appointment was as soon as necessary. The figure in East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT was 87%. 3% of patients in both areas indicated that the appointment should have been much sooner. These results were better than South East Coast area average.
- There had been a decrease in enquiries to Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) from patients seeking a dentist accepting NHS patients.
- Access to NHS dentistry in East Sussex was generally meeting targets. However, East Sussex Downs and Weald dentistry resources were stretched and there would be a need to consider extra capacity in 2008/9.
- Contract disputes had been resolved.
- The budget deficit in 2006/2007 was managed through the contingency fund and overall balance was achieved.

### **3. Special care dental services**

3.1 The Special Care Dental Service provides care in special clinics for patients with particular needs, for example due to a disability, which cannot be met by mainstream dentistry.

3.2 In November 2007, Phil Hamlin, Acting Clinical Director for Community Dental Services and Emergency Dental Services, East Sussex PCTs, updated HOSC on the programme to streamline services by concentrating activity in fewer clinics. The advantage of this was that the use of space and staffing could be maximised to the advantage of patients and the service. HOSC had previously endorsed a proposal to close clinics in Crowborough and Heathfield and to transfer those patients to enhanced Uckfield and Hailsham clinics (subject to consultation with users and transport issues being resolved). This change had been implemented in May 2007.

3.3 A further proposal to merge Seaford clinic with Peacehaven was to be delayed until Special Care Dental Services were fully staffed. It was expected that, subject to consultation, the Seaford clinic would close in late summer 2008 and the patients transferred to Peacehaven.

3.4 HOSC had previously raised concerns about the waiting times for Special Care Dental Services which the Committee considered to be too long. The streamlining of clinics outlined above was expected to help address this. In November 2007 Mr Hamlin reported that recruitment and sickness problems had meant the number of dentists was not up to establishment and that this had affected the service's ability to reduce waiting times. However, he expected staffing to be up to strength by spring 2008 and waiting times were expected to be less than 5 weeks by summer 2008.

#### **4. Themes to explore**

4.1 The attached report from Jane Hewitt (appendix 1) and presentation (appendix 2) provide an update on the areas in which HOSC members have expressed a particular interest, notably:

- Access to general dental services
- Access for wheelchair users
- Special Care Dental Services

4.2 Ms Hewitt's report also gives an overview of the Oral Health Needs Assessment recently commissioned by the East Sussex PCTs. It is considered good practice for the commissioning of dental services by PCTs to be based on such an assessment, which offers a thorough analysis of the dental health needs of the population. This information should allow PCTs as commissioners to adjust their commissioning of services so as to better meet the identified needs.

4.3 The Committee may wish to explore the following areas in questions and discussion:

- The current status of access to NHS Dentistry particularly in East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT area, where capacity issues had previously been identified.
- How the PCTs plan to make use of recent Department of Health guidance which encourages the promotion of NHS dentistry, including use of NHS branding, to make it easier for patients to identify providers of NHS services.
- How the PCTs will be adjusting their commissioning plans as a result of the Oral Health Needs Assessment.
- Whether the PCTs have agreed to fund the commissioning of the number of additional units of dental activity recommended by the Oral Health Needs Assessment.
- The target level of take up of NHS dentistry in each PCT area and how this is determined.

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