



**LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY
2022**

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 7(3) and
(5)**

The following questions are to be put to the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1. Question by Mr Stuart Bray CC:

It has come to my attention that some dental practices are removing patients from their list when those patients have not attended the practice for some time without informing the patient that they have been removed. Please can you confirm whether this is official policy across all dental practices, the reasoning for not informing patients that they have been removed, and how many patients in Leicestershire have been affected by this policy.

Reply by the Chairman:

I have sought answers to your questions from NHS England who are responsible for the provision of dental services in Leicestershire. They have provided me with the following response:

Dental practice registration was abolished with the introduction of the new contract in 2006, however most practices continue to hold practice lists and recall their regular cohort of patients.

People with open courses of treatment are practice patients during the duration of their treatment, however once complete; apart from repairs and replacements, the practice has no ongoing responsibility. People often associate themselves with dental practices. Many dental practices may refer to having a patient list or taking on new patients, however there is no registration in the same way as for GP practices and patients are theoretically free to attend any dental practice that will accept them. As a result it is not a contractual requirement for NHS dental practices to notify patients, or NHS England and Improvement, that a patient or patients has/have been 'removed', however it would be courtesy to notify patients of this.

Patients wishing to find an NHS dentist can visit the NHS website (www.nhs.uk). It is the responsibility of each individual dental practice to ensure that their entry is kept up-to-date, however as this is not a

contractual requirement many practices neglect to do so. Recognising the effect of this to patients (particularly in light of the pandemic) when they are seeking to source NHS dentistry, NHSE/I is presently working on redesigning the NHS website and has emphasised the need for providers to keep their entries up to date by way of formal letters to all practices from both the Office of the Chief Dental Officer for England, the Local Dental Network Chair, Public Health England and has been supported by a ministerial letter from Jo Churchill MP.

2. Question by Mr Stuart Bray CC:

I am also aware that many dental practices in Leicestershire are not accepting new NHS patients and only private appointments are available. How many dental practices in Leicestershire are taking on new NHS patients and how widespread are these practices across Leicestershire? Please can you break these figures down into localities.

Reply by the Chairman:

NHS England have provided me with the following response:

Prior to the pandemic, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) Midlands East conducted a monthly Dental Access Survey to establish which practices are currently taking on new NHS patients.

Following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS dental practices are working at a much lower capacity as they are following infection prevention control guidance, as per the national guidelines set by Public Health England, to ensure the safety of both our clinical colleagues and patients. Measures are in place to mitigate increased risk of infection, in line with the guidance from Public Health England. As a result, patients may experience a delay in accessing routine NHS appointments.

Due to the restricted capacity, there is still limited availability of routine care and the focus remains on urgent care and access to treatment for vulnerable patients, rather than providing routine check-ups. This has resulted in a significant decrease in access for both adults and particularly children. This can mean that even patients who (before the pandemic) would regularly attend a dental practice, are currently only able to be seen in practice if they meet the criteria for safely accessing an urgent face to face appointment.

The impact of the above restrictions upon practices and the need to prioritise urgent cases and vulnerable groups dictates that practice capacity can fluctuate on a daily basis. This renders the ability to provide a list of practices currently able to provide appointments for 'new' NHS patients extremely difficult. We advise patients to engage with dental providers (as per the Accessing Dental Care section in the report to the Joint HOSC in November 2021:

<https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/documents/s126151/NHSEI%20-%20Update%20on%20Dental%20Services%20in%20Leicestershire%20V2.pdf>), as this remains the optimum means of accessing dental care at this time.

To support the recovery and restoration of dental services, NHSE/I has commissioned additional initiatives across the Midlands to attempt to mitigate the detrimental impact upon dental access and the limitations upon providers in delivering maximum numbers of appointments which can be located within the paper submitted to the November 2021 Joint HOSC.

This page is intentionally left blank