

Response to recommendations made in the Reading LINK's 'Final Report on Access to NHS Dentistry' (January 2011)

1. Review of decision to only commission new services for areas where there is no current provision

The report on PCT options for commissioning new Dental services was considered at the PCT Directors' meeting on 12th July 2010 and a number of options for the expansion of services were presented. This was following a review of the Dental Access target for the PCT in the light of the GP Survey which highlighted the likely demand for services. The survey indicated that the likely demand for services was between 45% and 61% of the population. The meeting was asked to consider four options:

1. To commission all seven schemes deemed to be above the line in terms of the procurement "Value For Money" scores
2. To commission five schemes with the new practices to be in the three areas with very low levels of NHS provision at the moment and the two in town centres of Reading and Newbury
3. To commission three schemes with the new practices to be in the three areas with very low levels of NHS provision at the moment
4. To commission no further schemes

The Directors decided to pursue the third option, which would support the PCT to achieve 51% access, compared to 43.5% access achieved at the point the report was considered. The reasons for the decision were as follows:

- The financial environment was considerably more challenging for the NHS compared to the start of the procurement process. Any decisions made had to balance both the potential risks for the NHS Berkshire West's (the PCT) financial position if it chose to significantly expand provision in a short period of time, and the added risk of poor take up of the services if there was an over-expansion of services.
- Fast expansion and poor uptake would mean NHSBW having to recover monies from underperforming contracts. The PCT had received intelligence from other parts of the country that some new practices had failed to attract the planned number of patients.
- The GP survey provided a wide range of likely demand for services. The PCT therefore had to make a decision against some very uncertain activity forecasts. The Directors believed that this required the PCT to be cautious in its view of the likely growth in patients accessing NHS services and prioritised which schemes should be pursued at this stage.

It was agreed that priority should be given to areas where there is currently no local access for people aged over 18 years of age and the procurement of new

services in Earley, Finchampstead and Pangbourne was supported. This decision was made in the context of having to submit a proposed target to the Department of Health (DH) for sign-off.

The figure of 51% access level was subsequently agreed by the Department of Health. New practices have now opened in Earley and Pangbourne with the Finchampstead practice due to open in early 2011/12. The PCT is not only looking to increase provision through the procurement of the above new practices, it has also agreed to commission additional activity from a number of practices in each of the local authority areas.

The PCT has recently adopted a policy, which will enable it to commission additional activity by converting non-recurring Units of Dental Activity (UDAs) to recurring and by converting Dental Access Centre activity to routine UDAs, whilst ensuring practices continue to meet their contractual responsibilities to provide urgent access. For 2011/12, the PCT has approached practices about providing an additional 37,000 UDAs, with nearly 50% of this activity being proposed for Reading.

2. Equality Impact Assessment

Equity of access underpinned the PCT decision to procure additional activity. Our assessment of equality of access to NHS Dentistry in Berkshire West areas highlighted the fact that levels of provision were much lower in the local authority areas of Wokingham and West Berkshire than in Reading. However, the challenge for some parts of Reading is to improve take up of services.

The table below confirms the relatively high levels of activity commissioned in Reading (which would support patient access of about 62.5%; whereas Wokingham would achieve about 32%; *divide UDAs commissioned by 2.6 to achieve patient numbers*).

In 2009/10, the PCT commissioned services in the local authority areas as follows:

Area	Population	UDAs commissioned	UDAs per resident	UDAs delivered	% achieved
Reading	143,744	233,523	1.62	202,523	86.8%
West Berkshire	150,684	156,899	1.04	149,132	95%
Wokingham	156,619	130,845	0.84	119,194	91.1%
Total	451,047	521,627	1.16	471,080	90.3%

The PCT decision to pursue three schemes meant that an extra 28,000 UDAs would be commissioned in the Wokingham area and 14,000 in West Berkshire. However, it should also be noted that Pangbourne is geographically close to Reading and that the new practice in Earley is about 200 yards from the Reading Borough boundary and will provide local access for people living in East Reading.

3. Low levels of provision in Reading South and West of Reading (South)

The PCT does not support the contention that there are low levels of provision in the Reading South and West of Reading (South) areas.

When the PCT commenced the procurement we assessed levels of access to NHS dentistry for people living in the Reading East and South areas (wards of Whitley, Park, Church, Redlands) and identified patients to be in receipt of 0.74 UDAs per resident (39,184 patients living in these wards with the provision 29,015 UDAs from two practices within the Reading Borough borders). In 2011/12, this will increase to 0.78 UDAs per patient.

The PCT did propose to commission a new practice for the South Reading area. However, the application to provide a new practice was not deemed to be of sufficiently high quality to achieve PCT support.

Additionally, as a result of the procurements carried out in 2009 and 2010, new practices have opened in the neighbouring wards Shinfield (RG2) and Earley (RG6). These practices provide local access for people living in the wards described above and mean that nearly 60,000 UDAs (1.53 per person) will be commissioned for people living in the RG2 and RG6 areas. Both practices have done much to raise awareness and promote access to their services.

However, the Social Marketing project carried out across the SHA indicated that access in South Reading may remain an issue as it indicated that in more deprived areas there are greater challenges in terms of getting patients to attend the dentist. To implement the research outcomes, the PCT is focusing on the RG2 and RG6 areas to review access to NHS Dentistry in terms of where residents do access their dental services and to then work with local healthcare professionals to encourage access if low take up is confirmed to be an issue.

There is a full NHS practice in Theale, which has a small contract. The new practice in Pangbourne is less than four miles from Theale and recently advised the PCT that it has seen a number of patients from the Theale area.

4. Increasing funding for NHS Dentistry

The PCT has increased the levels of funding to support access to NHS Dentistry since the Dental Access Programme commenced in March 2009. The funds will increase further in 2011/12 to reflect the full year effect of increases made during 2010/11; the new practice to open in Finchampstead and the additional activity to be commissioned from local practices. The PCT plans to increase the level of expenditure on dental services by 4.5% in 2011/12 in a year when all other budgets will achieve much smaller uplifts.

The level of funding being made available is designed to support the PCT in achieving its target of 51% access. More than 22,000 new patients have accessed NHS care in the area, an increase of more than 12% since March 2009. This means that access levels have increased from just over 40% in March 2009 to 44.5% in February 2011. The PCT is absolutely focused on achieving its access target of 51% of patients seeing an NHS Dentist within a 24 month period by 31st March 2013.

The funding decisions are also being made in the context of the overall approach being pursued by the PCT to ensure that it retains its cautious approach to the use of public funds in this challenging financial environment.

5. Social Marketing campaign

The Social Marketing project recently completed across South Central SHA indicated that there were two key groups to target in terms of improved access to services. There are people whose dentist has gone private, but they would like to transfer back to the NHS if the opportunity arose and people who have not been to any dentist over the previous two years. Based on an ICM survey carried out in 2009, they represent about 25% of the population. Information about how to access services is crucial for the former group and much more focused work is required for the latter to encourage them to use Dental services.

The PCT has already completed Phase 1 of its general “Dental Communications campaign”, which we believe has been helpful in achieving the growth in patients attending over the last two years. Phase 2 commenced in mid March 2011 to coincide with the opening of the new two new practices and plans to expand capacity further in 2011/12.

Following the social marketing research, the more focused work as described in Section 3 above, has started with the priority areas now identified and data being collected about access. The work with providers in these areas will start in the new financial year.