

Supplementary briefing for KCC HOSC meeting 26th March 2010 - Dentistry

Context in West Kent

Particular factors relating to the population in West Kent have guided our investment in NHS dentistry

- There is generally low tooth decay in the population
- Most people have very good outcomes relating to their dental health care
- Many have chosen private dentistry in preference to NHS dentistry

This has meant we have not required the same level of NHS dental provision as some of our neighbouring PCTs.

NHS West Kent commissioned a MORI survey in 2009, which highlighted a number of issues relating to dentistry in West Kent. Key findings were as follows:

- 66 per cent of people polled were happy not to be registered with an NHS dentist, or content to use a private dentist
- 10 per cent of those polled reported they were struggling to find an NHS dentist

This shows that although a majority of people were happy with their access to dentistry, whether they preferred to use an NHS or private dentist, a significant number wished to have better access to NHS dentistry.

The current situation in West Kent

The current financial climate has meant that although many people do not wish to use an NHS dentist, an increasing number of people have sought NHS dentistry. As a result in 2009 NHS West Kent announced an £2.7 million investment to increase access in areas with lower cover. This has led to new dental surgeries in Tonbridge, Maidstone and Malling, and existing dentists seeing more NHS patients in Tunbridge Wells and Dartford & Gravesham.

There have also been further contracts awarded for orthodontic treatment.

The latest performance data shows an increase in the number of patients who have seen an NHS dentist in the last two years. In the last quarter, the figures were 5,000 up on previous quarter. This shows that access has improved, and that that more people than previously want to access NHS dentistry

Given the changing circumstances, we want to ensure that we have made an adequate investment in NHS dentistry and that there is sufficient cover. We are therefore carrying out needs assessment to ascertain if we need to make further investment, and if so where in West Kent it is most needed.