

Scarborough NHS Public Engagement – 27th September 2021

NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) requested Healthwatch North Yorkshire's (HWNY) help in conducting public engagement as part of the procurement of NHS dentistry in the Scarborough area, following the recent closure of services in the area.

Three focus groups were held during June 2021 and a survey was hosted on HWNY's website between 29th June and 6th July. Questions were developed in collaboration between NHSE&I and HWNY, and were used across both the focus groups and the survey. Thirteen members of the public attended the focus groups, and we received 197 valid responses to the survey (one blank, and 4 duplicate submissions). In addition, we received three email contributions to the survey.

The results demonstrate a strong desire for NHS dentistry in the area. Respondents made it clear that they wanted accessible, affordable, friendly, and regular dentistry. Questions about preferred opening times indicated a desire for services available outside working hours. And location needs tended towards local services, or those located in central locations accessible by public transport or with parking available.

The caveat to these points, however, is that a sentiment running through the answers was a desire for there to be "any" NHS dentistry.

What does good NHS dentistry look like?

The focus group discussions said that a good NHS dentist would be one which is friendly, proactive, able to get an appointment when needed, gives them confidence they're having the right work done, makes them comfortable and helps overcome anxiety (good communication).

They also said they want NHS dentistry to be preventative, not just being seen when things go wrong, ensuring a continuity of care. Additionally, it was raised that it would be good for NHS dentists to be a referral service where appropriate, and that staff should have an attitude of wanting to help patients.

The focus groups also raised issues with NHS dentistry at the current time. One response was that 'to be able to see a dentist at all would be a good start'. There were concerns that the increase of new homes in the area would create further difficulty in being able to access an NHS dentist. Another concern was around the impact a lack of access has on people's employability and mental health, and potential life-long impact for children.

This was reinforced by the survey results. We received 146 responses which said a good NHS dentist would be one that is available (106) or pointed towards the current lack of NHS dentists locally (40). Other themes included having regular dentist/appointments (30), professional service (29), local (27), can get an appointment quickly (27), affordable (18), and staff are polite/friendly (11).

Where would you prefer NHS dentistry to be located?

The 'where?' question varied within the focus groups: with arguments put forward for centrally in Scarborough, in local areas, or simply 'anywhere' within Scarborough.

The latter was born from a situation of desperation for participants, mainly from not having an NHS dentist currently. One participant told us they are currently travelling over four hours to see their current dentist. It was argued anywhere with public transport and/or car parking

would be suitable. In one focus group, participants said a reasonable travel distance would be 20 minutes, and up to one hour at the most.

Scarborough centre was seen as a good location given its central location within the local transport network. The hospital was also raised for this reason. Eastfield was mentioned as a second preference as it has recently lost a service and the population is growing.

However, it was highlighted that it would be good to have multiple NHS dentists around Scarborough borough. As one participant said: "Where you live is where you want treatment." We were also told that people were not happy to travel to areas they do not live in. Poor public transport was raised as an issue, and that for those with mobility problems dental services need to be local.

In the survey, Scarborough was suggested 121 times, followed by Eastfield (63), an unspecified "local" (30), and "anywhere" (12) – areas such as Filey, Osgodby, and Crossgates were mentioned fewer than 10 times each. The need for public transport and parking were mentioned 16 times each.

What opening times would you like?

As with location, there was much variation in responses to preferred opening times. There was a range of responses on how late evening opening should be, with suggestions of until 6pm, 7pm and 8pm. Saturday mornings received positive responses. In the focus groups 'shifted' hours were suggested, such as normal hours Tuesday-Saturday, or one or two evenings a week.

The survey results are more ambiguous. 113 respondents gave a preference for evening opening (closing after 5pm), 76 for early morning opening (before 9am), 9am to 5pm was the preference for 40 respondents, whilst 31 said they wanted 'any'. Of note, within the early and late openings, 45 stated 8am to 6pm.

Participants at the focus groups generally liked the suggestion of evening and weekend opening. Shift working and being a parent were given as reasons they would like greater variety of opening times. Scarborough's position as a tourist town was mentioned, suggesting that this impact on demand for services should be taken into consideration.

Six survey respondents mentioned 'out of hours' without stating a preference for mornings, evenings, or weekends, 12 wanted weekend coverage, eight said six days, and seven days was wanted by four respondents.

Anything else you'd like to mention?

The focus group participants told us they would like enough service to cover the whole population, to be able to find out what is actually available, and it being available to all. This was the most common feature within the survey responses, with 130 responses stating there are not enough NHS dentists.

The focus group respondents were confused as to why this was still a problem, as it has been for a long time, even before the pandemic, and they said they wanted it rectified; a sentiment running through the survey results.

The focus group respondents also said it was frustrating that it takes so long to get registered with a dentist, especially if you need to move regularly for work. One participant said it made them feel like a failure as a parent when school forms ask about a dentist for their child and they have not been able to get them registered and seen. Twenty-one survey

respondents highlighted their children or other family members have no access to an NHS dentist.

Why dentists do not come to work in the area was raised. It was suggested the hostile environment for EU workers could be a factor as they had been working at the previous Eastfield site. Also raised was a query if a local dental school could be set up to train more dentists. Ten survey responses felt the area is underserved, and nine said they were in need of treatment, with 18 saying they have not been seen by a dentist in a long time.

Response from NHS England and NHS Improvement

NHSE&I value all the efforts of those who took the time to be involved in the Robin Hood's Bay and Scarborough surveys and focus groups and have taken the views and wishes into consideration for the future commissioning of services in these areas. Temporary provision has already been established in the Eastfield Ward of Scarborough whilst the wider procurement exercise is underway and the specifications for both areas are currently being finalised, taking on board the feedback received from this work.