



Dame Rachel de Souza
Children's Commissioner for England
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Chief Executive

Plymouth City Council
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Via e-mail

23 June 2021

My ref: TL/RH

Dear Dame Rachel

On Monday 14 June 2021, a Motion on Notice was passed by Plymouth City Council, instructing me to write to you to ask for immediate action to address the dental health needs of all Plymouth residents.

The issue of poor dental health has been of considerable concern to the Council, as evidenced by the issue being discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board, Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee and at a specific Dental Scrutiny Select Committee.

Plymouth City Council's Public Health Department have prepared an Oral Health Needs Assessment; this report included information on poor dental health in adults and children, as well as the unacceptably high number of residents on the NHS dental waiting list.

This highlighted that;

- Over 11,000 adults and over 3,000 children were on the dental waiting list in Plymouth as of 1 October 2019 and this has now risen even further. People living in the most deprived areas of Plymouth are twice as likely to be on this waiting list as people in the least deprived areas.
- Over 20,000 enquiries were made for urgent dental care appointments in 2018/19. The number of enquiries from people living in the highest deprivation group was almost treble that for the lowest deprivation group.
- In Plymouth 623 children aged 16 years and under had a total of 3,557 teeth removed under General Anaesthetic in 2018/19, reflecting not just considerable dental pain, but also a huge use of NHS resources for a fully preventable disease.
- Dental practices report difficulties in recruiting dentists and providing the amount of NHS dental care they have been commissioned by NHS England to deliver. In 2017/18, the shortfall in delivery was over 20% of nearly 400,000 units of dental activity (UDAs) commissioned. It is estimated that 27,000 additional patients would have been able to access an NHS dentist in Plymouth if the full activity level had been reached.

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NHS England has produced a South West Dental Needs Assessment report but it fails to address the issues that both the Dental Scrutiny Select Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board identified in March this year, as evidenced by the Oral Health Needs Assessment.

Plymouth City Council has been proactive at identifying ways forward, working with the Peninsula Dental School of the University of Plymouth. Innovative solutions have been proposed to NHS England, which would provide dental students with the skills needed to manage and run a practice to help meet the gap in provision, whilst developing their dentistry experience; however, NHS England have not agreed to commission this.

Plymouth City Council asks for immediate action to address the dental health needs of all Plymouth residents.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Lee', with a small dot at the end.

Tracey Lee
Chief Executive
Plymouth City Council

Cc Rachel Pearce, NHSE