

Overview of meeting Maree Todd MSP

Following on from discussions on our WhatsApp LDC forum, Eddie Bateman (Chair ADC) contacted Maree Todd to set up a meeting as a constituent. He invited John Barry (Chair LDC) to join the meeting also as a constituent so that we could introduce ourselves and highlight pertinent dental issues to her as constituency MSP and then to build a relationship as minister with responsibility for Dentistry (among other responsibilities). A meeting was arranged by ZOOM on Friday 4th June 21 at 1 pm.

We canvassed all members who are on the LDC to raise issues they felt needed aired and several issues were raised by members which highlights the power of unity within the profession. Eddie and John had a Zoom for an hour on Thursday evening prior and we laid out how we felt the meeting should go and what issues we would raise so the following is how the meeting went.

The meeting started on the dot of 1 and Eddie began by thanking her for the meeting and congratulating her on her reelection and also on her ministerial appointment. He then went on to introduce himself and give background to his practice, his experience as VT trainer and then his position as ADC chair. JB then did the same explaining his background as practice owner in the past, VT trainer and HDP and Dental Business background and now chair of LDC.

She asked what she could do for us as constituents, so Eddie began by highlighting the issue of man power crisis in the highlands even before COVID now made worse and we then highlighted the effect the whole thing is having on access and demand.

In no exact order we highlighted the following which we had noted.

Access

Recruitment

The effect the above was having on unmet need and then the

Remuneration system which is no longer fit for purpose

Totally inadequate communication from SG via CDO. JB did highlight that there is zero confidence in the CDO as he tells us nothing of any note and decisions and announcements are unilateral and not discussed with the profession which is leading to the dissatisfaction last seen in 1992 which led to mass deregistration in the highlands and 15 to 20 years of very poor access and unmet need.

At this stage she got a bit concerned that we were getting too political as she was talking to us on her own without officials and to go further with this she needed to be in her capacity as minister not just MSP which is fair but she agreed to listen, so we went on and discussed

Remote and rural incentives being inadequate to attract up here.

Better use of the health Sciences building as a hub to attract.

Rural fellowships disappearing.

VT incentives

The COVID top up disappearing if a Dentist leaves thereby disadvantaging the practice hugely. (She certainly was interested in finding out more as she did not understand this, and we committed to

writing to her formally about this as ADC and LDC chairs so hopefully we may be able to get this unjust situation rectified.

We raised spiralling costs and below inflation pay rises meaning dentists in Scotland had a real terms decrease of 30% in the decade prior to COVID happening.

EB raised the situation with new lists getting the VT salary as top up, meaning those that left VT getting 50% of VT salary, and can earn more working in a shop. CDO criticising principals for taking 50% of this shows a lack of understanding of how dental practices work- principals need to pay staff, materials, other overheads.

We discussed the use of PPE and lack of guidance and funding on ventilation and she noted we were getting free PPE and EB pointed out that the very wearing of this is creating issues as much more difficult and tiring to work and hard to achieve quality. JB pointed out that we are the only country in Europe adopting this stance and also fallow time. She was clear that we are not doing well citing the First minister yesterday not ruling out a third lockdown because of new variants. She was at pains to point out that they are really worried about this and are working very hard to find answers and discussed the fear that some variants are test escaping meaning are not picked up on tests.

We pointed out that PPE and Fallow time is hampering any growth, and this led on to discussion about SDR being unfit for purpose with a capped budget. JB told her that the FM announcing free NHS dentistry had really upset the profession as there had been no discussion with BDA and that it was nonsensical. She was quite adamant that she felt dentistry should be free at the point of need like all other medicine which led to a debate on that could only happen if it was funded properly like medical which seemingly has an unlimited budget. She said medicine has a capped budget and JB said obviously that is not true as COVID has cost billions with no capping at all. She had to concede that. JB told her that the way out would be free at the point of need for all up to 18 years to give them a chance to learn diet and hygiene and have any interventions and then after that offer core pain relief and plastic no frills. We feel that lodged in her consciousness.

We pointed out that GMPs currently earn 30% more than average dental associate and this has been a disparity which has widened since 80s when we were pretty similar. JB pointed out we work a lot harder with far more pressure than GMPs!

We pointed out finally that if she does not get a grip of this fast and make real changes in agreement with the profession i.e., real dentists (we offered to be a real sounding board who will tell her what is actually happening on the ground as we have the ears of colleagues) that she would be getting her mailbox full of constituents who cannot find a dentist. JB told her clearly what happened in 1992 after the 8th July fee cut and how we de-registered 10s of thousands so we could survive and keep our businesses. Both EB and JB offered her to come and see our practices and talk further officially about these issues.

We found her open and receptive and feel she heard a lot of things she did not know. EB and JB will have that letter on her desk by Monday and we will keep trying to get heard to make life better. We feel we achieved more than our CDO has done in years, but time will tell.

She thanked us both and said she had no doubt we would tell her the truth about the reality of real life as a Dentist.

EB/JB

Sat 5th June 21