

Dental access for adults and children in Devon

September 2023

Background

NHS Devon Integrated Care Board has delegated responsibility for the commissioning of dental services across England, having taken over from NHS England in April 2023. To maintain subject matter expertise, the seven ICBs in the South West agreed to support a Collaborative Commissioning Hub, whose role is to run all operational services for dental, ophthalmic and pharmacy services.

Dental services are provided in Devon in three settings:

1. Primary care – often referred to as ‘high street practices for general care’ and ‘high street practices for orthodontics’.
2. Secondary care – located in hospitals
3. Community services – incorporating special care – often referred to as special care.

NHS Dentistry is not funded and commissioned in the same way as general practice, which is free at the point of access, for all. NHS dentistry is not funded for the whole population. The budget we receive approximately covers access to dentistry for half of the population.

A web page with further dental information is available on the One Devon website:
<https://onedevon.org.uk/our-work/services-and-support/nhs-dental-care/>

Primary care (high street dentistry)

The dental practices are themselves independent businesses, operating under contracts with NHS England, with many also offering private dentistry. All contract-holders employ their own staff and provide their own premises. The only premises cost currently reimbursed is a proportion of business rates. The amount refunded depends on a declaration of income derived from NHS services versus private.

Domiciliary treatment is provided by a small number of contractors for people who are unable to leave their home to attend a dental appointment, either for physical and/or mental health reasons. This includes people in care homes.

Dental contracts are commissioned in units of dental activity (UDAs) or units of orthodontic activity (UOA). The table below sets out treatment bands and their UDA equivalent.

Band	Treatment covered	Number of UDAs
1	Examination, diagnosis (including x-rays), advice on how to prevent future problems, a scale and polish if clinically needed, and preventative care such as the application of fluoride varnish or fissure sealant if appropriate.	1
2	Everything listed in Band 1 above, plus any further treatment such as fillings, root canal work, removal of teeth but not more complex items covered by Band 3.	3/5/7
3	Everything listed in Bands 1 and 2 above, plus crowns, dentures, bridges, and other laboratory work.	12
4	Emergency care in a primary care NHS dental practice such as pain relief or a temporary filling.	1.2

In April 2022 the national Chief Dental Officer confirmed contracts will continue to be in place for 100% of normal volumes. It will continue to be a requirement that all NHS-funded capacity is used to deliver the maximum possible volume of safe care for patients, with ongoing contractual protection for practices unable to deliver their full contractual activity between April and June 2022.

During this period, practices were asked to deliver at least 95% of contracted UDAs. Orthodontic practices were asked to return to normal contracting volumes (100%) for this same period. From 1 July 2022 onwards, all contracting volumes returned to 100%. The minimum threshold to avoid clawback for the 2022/23 year has been reduced to 90% from 96% for one year only.

Access rates to high street dentistry

Over recent years there has been a decrease in the number of patients in Devon who have been able to access an NHS dentist.

(Details taken from National Dental Statistics 2022 – 2023 published August 2023 [see here](#))

- The total number of adults receiving NHS dental care in the previous 24 months in Devon is 369,393
- The total number of children receiving NHS dental care in the previous 12 months in Devon is 108,898
- The access rate for the adult population of Devon 934,831 is 39.5%
- The access rate for the child population of Devon 214,451 is 50.8%
- The access rate for adult population of the South West 4,263,479 is 39.6%
- The access rate for child population of the South West 1,034,257 is 53.4%

Commissioned dental activity

As of June 2023, NHS England has 159 contracts in place across Devon providing a mixture of mandatory dental service, orthodontic dental services and specialist dental services

Category	Number of Contracts
UDA Only	132
UOA Only	13
Total number of contracted UOA's annually	83,830
Total number of contracted UDA's annually	1,742,046

UDA activity performance

Average regional Devon delivery for the previous three months has been 51% of the unadjusted threshold. June activity is reported as 61%.

UOA activity performance

Average regional Devon delivery for the previous three months has been 80% of the unadjusted threshold. July activity is reported as 73%.

New procurements

NHS England recently procured additional primary care dental capacity to replace lost capacity resulting from practices handing back all or part of their contracts (mainly due to difficulties in attracting new staff and other resource implications). 17,000 additional UDAs are being procured in the EX1 post code area and the contract as recently been awarded. The service includes the provision of urgent care and delivery of the Chief Dental Officers initiative called 'Starting Well Core'. Since opening, this practice has accepted patients directly from the Devon and Cornwall waiting list.

The following contracts were not awarded following phase 1 of the procurement exercise:

- 4,500 UDA's in the EX39 post code area
- 3,000 UDA's in the EX32 post code area
- 8,000 UDA's in the TQ13 post code area

A further phase of procurements is currently in the process of being planned. The procurement is expected:

- To increase access to dental services for those patients who do not currently have a dentist
- To provide Mandatory Dental Services to the cohort of patients who do not currently have a dentist.
- To improve the oral health of patients treated.

Foundation dentists

From October 2023, it is anticipated that 21 Foundation Dentists (FDs) will be working in practices across the county. Each FD delivers approximately 1,875 UDAs per annum, which equates to approximately 13,750 patients. During the Covid restrictions the activity undertaken by Foundation Dentists has been included in the practices UDA achievement targets. In normal circumstances is it provided in addition.

The Peninsula Dental School's education facilities in Plymouth and Exeter also provide one-off courses of treatment to patients who do not have an NHS dentist. These patients are accepted for care based on a set of eligibility criteria. Treatment is provided free of charge by dental students under supervision (term time only).

Devon and Cornwall Dental Helpline

A unique dedicated helpline was developed for Devon and Cornwall to:

- assist patients in finding an NHS dentist for routine care.
- arrange urgent NHS dental treatment for people who do not have a dentist.
- help commissioners identify and respond to variations in demand.

Practices are encouraged to point prospective new patients towards the helpline, so they can be added to a central waiting list rather than being taken on directly. As a result, people are sometimes incorrectly under the impression that no practices are taking on new NHS patients. Instead, patients are allocated in batches as capacity becomes available, so those who have waited longest are prioritised. People who are prepared to travel further are likely to be found a place sooner than those who are not.

It is important to note:

- Many people will be under the care of a private dentist or another NHS dentist, even while registering with the helpline to find a place.
- Some people will have found an NHS dentist but not informed the helpline.
- Some people will have left the area but not informed the helpline.

As part of the South West Dental Reform Programme, a review of people looking for a routine dentist is being conducted to ensure the list is up to date and identify priority patients and children to assess and treat.

As at the end of June 2023 there are 58,991 patients on the Devon waiting list. Adults make up 47,463 of this number and children make up 11,528.

NB: These numbers are not validated and may include patients that have moved out of the area, have found an NHS dentist, deceased, etc. Plans to validate and cleanse this waiting list are being actioned along with a review.

The Access Dental Helpline also manages out of hours appointments for urgent care. They allocate appointments at the weekends and on bank holidays from clinics in Plymouth, Newton Abbot, Exeter and Barnstaple. NHS Devon ICB has recently

agreed an uplift in the helpline contract in reflection of the enhanced numbers of patients seeking advice and care.

NHS Devon will be working with NHS Cornwall to review the future viability of a central waiting list, with the aim of moving local dentists holding lists as in the rest of the country.

Orthodontics

A procurement exercise to secure new contracts was completed in 2019 enabling an increase in the number of local dental practices beginning to provide the service by extending their opening hours.

Due to the pandemic, between 8 June and 31 December 2020, practices were expected to achieve 20% of their usual patient volume, based on their previous year's delivery. This increased to 70% for 1 January to 31 March 2021 of their normal annual target (pro-rata). From 1 April to 30 September 2021, practices were expected to deliver 80% of their normal annual target (pro-rata); increasing to 85% between 1 October to 31 December 2021. Between January to March 2022 the minimum target was increase to 90% of normal activity. Since April 2022 orthodontic practices have returned to delivering the normal (100%) commissioned activity levels.

Urgent dental care

Plymouth Community Dental Service provides and manages in-hours appointments for patients with an urgent dental need who do not have access to an NHS dentist for patients in Plymouth.

Torbay Community Dental Service offer the same service for patients in the Torbay area and the Dental Helpline manages the booking of appointments which are provided in practices throughout the rest of Devon. This service is for patients in need of relief from acute dental pain, acute infection, and bleeding or trauma.

Access to urgent dental care would normally be expected to be available within 24 hours of someone contacting the service. Appointments are provided at a range of sites across Devon.

Only those people with a significant dental emergency, such as rapid facial swelling, uncontrolled bleeding or facial trauma, would be expected to be treated at accident and emergency departments.

The Dental Helpline also manages out of hours appointments for the whole of Devon. They provide appointments at the weekends and Bank Holidays in clinics across the county.

The South West dental commissioning team have recently launched an initiative to increase the number of urgent care treatment slots by asking practices to provide additional urgent care sessions.

Workforce

The key issue affecting access to NHS dentistry is workforce. A shortage of dentists in Devon affects the ability of high street practices to deliver their contracts. The reasons for this are not different to those affecting other sectors of the health and social care system. Devon is viewed as a lifestyle choice by both the medical and dental profession and younger clinical professionals tend to favour larger cities with greater transport links and more training opportunities.

Foundation dentists, who are undergoing further training for a year after graduation, tend to relocate at the end of their foundation year, moving elsewhere to follow training pathways or to take hospital-based jobs.

It is difficult to determine why established dentists leave. Anecdotally, factors include the challenges of working in NHS practices that are experiencing high demand from patients and the opportunities in private care.

Improving access to primary care for people in Devon

NHS Devon is seeking to increase access to NHS dental services by:

- Innovation in commissioning to make contracts more attractive to an associate or dentist with additional skills.
- Working with dental providers to explore what more can be done to maximise contracts.
- Reinvesting funding that has not been spent on meeting contracted activity levels in dental activity elsewhere (dependent on the availability of workforce to deliver activity).
- Ensuring as places become available, they are allocated to those patients who are on the helpline's list.
- Ensuring we commission dental services to meet those areas of demand within available resources by resourcing a Local Dental Network and a number of Managed Clinical Networks for dentistry through which we work with dentists, public health and the dental school to develop referral pathways and increase dental capacity.
- Rebasing contract activity to allow for reinvestment. Any schemes will take into account national initiatives and regional difficulties, e.g. increasing urgent care sessions for patients who do not have a routine dentist.

2. Secondary care provision

In Devon, NHS England contracts with Royal Devon University Healthcare, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust and University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust to provide secondary care including oral surgery, restorative dentistry and orthodontic treatments.

Secondary care has been impacted greatly by the pandemic as services initially ceased to allow additional capacity to treat covid patients in hospitals. All services have now been resumed, but in some cases the frequency of clinics has been

reduced due to capacity at the hospital sites. This has led to an increase in waiting list sizes for some treatments.

The Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) in Devon has produced elective recovery plans and the funding available (elective recovery fund) is being used to procure additional capacity. The Getting it Right First Time (GIRFT) programme is also underway in the South West, looking at oral and maxillofacial surgery pathways to improve flow of patients, ensure more equitable access to treatment alongside and better outcomes.

3. Community Services

Plymouth Community Dental Service (Livewell Southwest), Royal Devon University Healthcare, Torbay Community Dental Service (Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust) are commissioned by NHS England to provide a range of community services. They each operate from a range of sites across Devon.

Special care dentistry is concerned with the improvement of the oral health of individuals and groups in society who have a physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, medical, emotional or social impairment or disability; or, more often, a combination of these factors.

Special care dental services provide urgent care, check-ups, and treatment. In Devon, the service also provides oral surgery and general anaesthetic for patients who cannot be treated by local anaesthetic.

Special care dental providers are currently experiencing difficulties in recruiting to specialist posts. Measures are in place, supported by the Special Care Managed Clinical Network, to secure additional specialists while longer term solutions are developed.

Other community services are:

- Children's general anaesthetic
- Adult general anaesthetic
- Orthodontics (complementing high street orthodontics)

Community dental providers, including Plymouth Community Dental Service (Livewell Southwest), Royal Devon University Healthcare, Torbay Community Dental Service (Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust), were rapidly reassigned as Urgent Dental Care Centres when the pandemic started in March 2020 to ensure that patients with urgent dental needs were able to be seen and treated at a time when all other dental providers were only able to provide telephone advice and antibiotics. Although they have now resumed their normal service provision, they are still covering some urgent care provision for non-registered patients as demand for this service is still high.

Local authorities are the lead commissioner of oral health promotion programmes to improve the health of the local population as part of their statutory responsibilities. Oral health promotion in Devon is delivered via the community dental provider and consists of oral health education and fluoride varnish application.

4. Dental Reform Strategy for the South West

The South West Dental Reform Programme was established in 2020 to improve access to oral health services, develop workforce initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of the dental workforce, and improve the oral health of the population.

The programme is run by NHS England, alongside NHS Devon and local authority public health teams. They bring together the NHS England Collaborative Commissioning Hub and Transformation Team with key stakeholders with responsibility for oral health in the region (*UK Health Security Agency and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities*, Health Education England, Local Dental Committees, the Local Dental Network, and Integrated Care System (ICS) representatives) as well as public and patient voice partners. The purpose of the programme is to inform a plan for the future of NHS dental services and oral health improvement in the South West.

An [Oral Health Needs Assessment \(OHNA\)](#) was commissioned and published in 2021 and the Dental Reform Programme team held a workshop with more than 150 delegates from the dental profession, Healthwatch, Health Education England, Overview and Scrutiny Committee members and regional and national NHS colleagues. Dental case studies were considered, and discussions held about what works well, what opportunities could be explored, what barriers there are currently and how we overcome them. A report summarising the event outputs and recommendations is available [here](#).

A further prioritisation session based on the workshop findings was held. In addition, three programme working groups have been established with strategic objectives. These are highlighted below.

5. Programme objectives

The programme has three key objectives covering access, workforce and oral health.

Dental reform programme objectives

1. To increase access to dentistry using findings from the Oral Health Needs Assessment, by designing an evidence-based programme plan weighted towards those who are most vulnerable or live in areas of greatest need, including in secure settings
2. To work with strategic partners to build training and dental role opportunities, and a clinical workforce strategy, which makes the South West the best place to live and work in dentistry in the country
3. To improve oral health of those with health inequalities, targeting those who are vulnerable or live in areas of greatest need in each system, including within secure settings.

6. Programme commitments

Underpinning these key objectives are a series of nine core and two enabling commitments.

Programme commitments

Access

1. Increase access to dental services ensuring a focus on targeting those in greatest need in each system (as identified in the Oral Health Needs Assessment)
2. Strengthen and broaden dental provision using the range of tools available to regional teams including through national dental contract reform, such as flexible commissioning to support dental recovery following the pandemic and use of the wider dental team for service delivery
3. Strengthen relationships between the dental team and networks within the seven SW integrated care systems and their Primary Care Networks (PCN)s, using the roadmap to build a tailored plan for each system and ensure dental services are integrated and a key part of primary care service delivery and improvement

Workforce

4. Work with partners to develop a sustainable dental workforce for the SW
5. Identify the current workforce and focus on specific vacancy 'hotspots' in the region to create a sustainable workforce for the future
6. Embed education, training and support within the programme and commissioning activities to ensure the dental team have development opportunities
7. Develop a programme of flexible and extended training opportunities across dental care in the region to help retain people in the region in the next five years to improve access and treatment outcomes for the population.

Oral health improvement

8. Work with health inequalities leads, local authority oral health improvement leads, the dental team and key partners to improve access to oral health improvement advice and interventions for those in greatest need in each system
9. Increase access to dental services by supporting commissioners to target those in greatest need in each system (as identified in the Oral Health Needs Assessment)

The programme has two further cross-cutting commitments on digital and data:

Cross-cutting commitments

Digital

10. Develop a digital dental referral programme to use technology to make dental referrals between primary, community and secondary care more efficient, resilient and sustainable, and improve patient and staff experience in the South West.

Data

11. Develop a baseline dataset with which to measure progress and success, using a range of data, information, intelligence and maps