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Ms Danielle Oum
Chair of NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board
Shire Hall
Warwick
CV34 4RL

Our Ref: MP00636

8 January 2025

Re: Ensuring effective use of NHS dental budgets in Coventry and Warwickshire

Dear Ms Oum,

I am writing to seek clarity on the management of NHS dental funding within the Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board, particularly regarding the significant underspend in the dental budget which has been brought to my attention. According to NHS Business Services Authority, during the 2022/23 financial year the total clawback in our ICB area amounted to just over £3.5m.

Given the acute challenges with access to NHS dentistry across our region and in Warwickshire in particular, I am sure you will agree that it is vital to ensure that all allocated funding is used to improve oral health outcomes for local residents. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether these underspent funds have been and remain effectively ringfenced for reinvestment into dentistry. I would also appreciate a detailed explanation of how these clawback monies have been utilized in the last two financial years.

As I'm sure you know, patients in Warwickshire continue to face severe dental access challenges. Just 46% of adults have been seen by an NHS dentist in the last two years, this is 7 percentage points lower than levels recorded in 2019. Shockingly, roughly 18% of children in Warwickshire have dental caries by the time they are five years old – reflecting the poor access to NHS dental services in our area.

To address these disparities, I strongly urge the ICB to ensure all money allocated to dentistry in our area is spent on dentistry, by adopting flexible commissioning approaches. Other areas have demonstrated how clawback funds can be effectively used to commission urgent dental care on a sessional basis, ensuring patients with immediate needs are seen and ending the scandal of DIY dentistry. This approach has been both popular and impactful in the North East and Yorkshire, and I believe it could deliver much-needed improvements in access across Coventry and Warwickshire.

Another crucial measure to stem the exodus of dental practices from the NHS is to increase the minimum Unit of Dental Activity (UDA) value to £35, as Dorset ICB plans to do from April 2024, with many others considering similar measures. According to the BDA, practices with lower UDA values are more likely to under-deliver on their contracts and leave the NHS. Increasing the minimum UDA value locally could be funded from within the existing underspend, and would help ensure the viability of NHS practices in our region and increase contract delivery while we await fundamental contract reform promised by the new Government.

By prioritising these measures, the ICB can not only ensure the effective use of dental funding but also make meaningful progress toward improving oral health outcomes for our residents, particularly in areas like Warwickshire, which are disproportionately affected. I would be grateful for a response outlining the ICB's current position on the issues raised and detailing plans to address the challenges facing NHS dentistry in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely,

Manuela

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Manuela Perteghella'.

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