

26th February 2025

Manuela Perteghella MP
Member of Parliament for Stratford-on-Avon
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: MP00636

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

Dear Manuela Perteghella MP

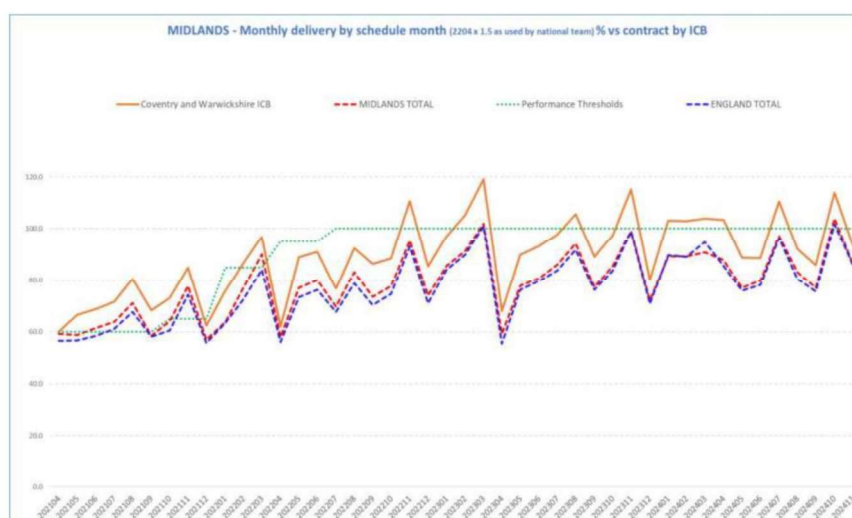
Thank you for your letter received by NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board (ICB). Although I appreciate that you covered this topic in your meeting with Phil Johns last week, I wanted to also provide a written response to you on the matters discussed and that you raised in your letter.

It is recognised that access to NHS dental care has been challenged nationally and locally over recent years. However, we wish to reassure you NHS Coventry and Warwickshire ICB are committed to ensuring that patients have access to NHS dental services in the county and determined to do all we can to ensure easy access to high-quality dental care for our patients.

As you are aware, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) are now the responsible commissioners for NHS Dental services. Although NHS Coventry and Warwickshire ICB are responsible for commissioning all NHS general dental services, there are the limitations of the current national contract which may impact on the level of local flexibility which can be applied. It is also to be noted, unlike NHS general medical services, patients are not registered with an NHS dentist and activity is not funded nationally to commission for the whole population.

Restoration and recovery of NHS dental services since the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled dental practices to deliver increasing levels of dental activity. The enabling of such measures has resulted in practices within NHS Coventry and Warwickshire ICB to restore contracted activity delivery in line with pre-pandemic levels. Whilst the outcome of returning activity delivery to pre-pandemic levels is good news, the impact on any surplus funds available for local investment through the underspend of dental contracts is limited due to dental budget being allocated to practices already delivering their annual contractual target.

The graph below demonstrates activity delivery within Coventry and Warwickshire compared to Midlands region and England.



Underspends against our ring-fenced budget

NHS England each month monitor ICBs dental spend against the dental ring-fenced budget allocation via national returns. The ICB is amongst the highest performer in the West Midlands in terms of delivery against contracted Units of Dental Activity (UDA) and also in terms of the average price paid per UDA. Like all others in the region, Coventry and Warwickshire ICB underspent against the dental ringfence in 2023/24, although it should be noted that we were the lowest at 3.8% compared to the West Midlands average of 9.9%. No underspends were carried over for reinvestment from 2023/24 as ICBs were directed to utilise funds to support system deficits.

Any underspends prior to this were before the ICB took on delegated responsibility for dental budgets are therefore unable to provide further clarity on this and would need to refer you to NHS England if you need further information.

Transforming the NHS Dental contract at a national level

Currently, work is underway nationally to transform the NHS Dental contract with the aim of ensuring patients most in need can access NHS dentistry. Following the first reforms to the dental contract announced in July 2022, a joint NHS and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry [Our plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry) has been published. This plan is an important next step in improving patient access to NHS dental care.

Measures include:

- NHS dentists given a 'new patient' payment of between £15-£50 (depending on treatment need) to treat patients who have not seen an NHS dentist in two years or more. This started from March 2024 and is time limited to end of financial year 2024/2025.
- targeted funding to encourage dentists to work in areas which historically have been difficult to recruit to
- a further increase in the minimum indicative UDA value from the £23 announced in July 2022 to £28 from April 2024
- improving access in underserved areas through the use of dental vans

In addition to these activities, the plan announced a range of government-delivered public health initiatives to improve the oral health of children and recommits to the workforce growth and development outlined in the Long-Term Workforce Plan.

A [framework](#) was published by NHS England on the opportunities for flexible commissioning in primary care dentistry which provided an outline to ICBs of the legal requirements of the national dental contractual framework whilst highlighting the key considerations associated with procuring additional and further services which were previously termed 'flexible commissioning'. Currently, work is underway within Coventry and Warwickshire inviting incumbent dental providers to submit localised flexible commissioning proposals. Proposals will be evaluated in respect of improving access to dental services, improving health outcomes reducing health inequalities.

It is the expectation that further national contract reforms will be announced in 2025/26. At present, guidance is awaited regarding implementing the new government's manifesto pledge of an additional 700,000 urgent care appointments to improve dental access nationally.

Working locally to deliver change

In addition to the work being undertaken nationally to reform dental services, we recognise the importance of understanding the need of the local population. To enable robust commissioning plans, Dental Public Health Consultants have developed a Dental Services Equity Audit (DSEA) for Coventry and Warwickshire. This audit will help to inform future dental commissioning plans going forward where funding is available through prioritisation placement of resources within the ICB.

Over the last 2 years we have demonstrated our assurance to improve access to services by committing non-recurrent investment through localised dental access initiatives during 2023/24 and 2024/25 with consideration of further investment for the remainder of this financial year. These investments include:

- **Dental Recruitment Incentive Scheme (DRIS)** - The aim of the scheme is to offer a financial incentive to attract dentists to commit to work in parts of the country that are struggling to attract workforce through the usual recruitment routes. The scheme is designed to encourage relocation to these areas, attract new workforce to the NHS, and retain those who might otherwise have left the service. An expression of interest exercise has taken place, inviting applications from incumbent providers within Coventry and Warwickshire to participate. The maximum allocation of four applications have been approved in line with the DSEA for progression of provider recruitment with the incentive ('golden hello') payment of £20,000.
- **Community Dental Service (CDS) Support Practices** - The aim of the scheme is to improve access to care for children particularly for those at high risk of dental disease by securing additional capacity in CDS Support Practices. These practices will provide certain aspects of Level 1 services for patients referred into CDS, who have been assessed as not requiring a high degree of specialist treatment. An expression of interest exercise was undertaken, inviting applications from incumbent providers within Coventry and Warwickshire to participate. 5 practices were approved to deliver services for this scheme.
- **Additional Urgent Care Provision** – In addition to access to urgent dental care in practices where capacity permits, 4 practices have been specially commissioned to deliver additional in hours urgent care appointments. Access to urgent care services is via NHS111 where advice and clinical triage is provided.

As an ICB we recognise the fundamental importance of prevention initiatives linked to improving oral health and reducing oral health inequalities. Within Coventry and Warwickshire, a wide range of preventative interventions continue to take place to improve oral health outcomes led by the local authorities.

This covers the three stages of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and a range of interventions, for example, behaviour changes that support oral health (for example, diet modification, improving oral hygiene, supporting people to stop smoking, and reducing harmful alcohol consumption).

At present we are awaiting NHS England 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance which will identify dental planning and objectives for the ICB. In the absence of this, we are continuing to plan and work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure we are in a position to meet objectives and delivery of services for our local population.

I hope that you find this information is helpful and provides clarity on the points you have raised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Danielle', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Danielle Oum
Chair