

NHS Dentistry in Rutland

Briefing Paper April 2024

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List of Acronyms used

BDA	British Dental Association
HOSC	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
HWR	Healthwatch Rutland
ICB	Integrated Care Board
LLR	Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
NHS	National Health Service
NHSE	National Health Service England
UDA	Unit of Dental Activity

NHS Dentistry in Rutland: April 2024

1. Background

1.1 NHS dental care, free for everyone at the point of clinical need, was introduced in 1948. Charges for adult NHS dental patients, as a contribution towards costs, were introduced in 1952 ¹.

1.2 There remain no NHS charges for people who:

- Are under 18 or under 19 if in full time education
- Are pregnant or have had a baby within last 12 months
- Have treatments carried out in a hospital
- Receive low-income benefits or are under 20 and a dependent relative of someone receiving low-income benefits ²

1.3 Frequent contract reforms over the years have resulted mostly in lowered income from the NHS for dentistry and/or increased dissatisfaction for dentists, most of whom are considered as private contractors and not NHS employees. Dentists began to move towards providing private practice; resulting increasingly in the provision of less NHS dental care ¹.

1.4 The 2006 contract introduced 3 different charging bands based on the 'Units of Dental Activity' (UDAs) needed. Irrespective of the number of UDAs in each band, remuneration was the same. Registration with a dentist ends once a course of treatment is completed. NHS Dentists are paid monthly according to their estimated annual UDAs. Large over- or under-achievement incurs a financial penalty. Consequently, more dentists turned to private practice despite initiatives, contract reforms and incentive schemes. Access to NHS dental care became more difficult ¹.

2. NHS Dentistry and the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 Most dental activity was halted in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dentists were permitted to give advice and prescribe painkillers or antibiotics over the telephone. Emergency dental hubs were introduced.

2.2 April 2020. Dentists were required to install infection prevention and control measures into their practices. Costs and availability of equipment were problematic for dentists ³.

2.3 July 2020. All NHS dentists were expected to have re-opened and be providing face-to-face services with infection control measures in place. Those unable to meet infection control measures would be supported to open as soon as possible ⁴. Over the following two years NHS dentists were expected to incrementally increase their levels of dental activity; to achieve 100% of pre-pandemic contracted activity by Quarter 2 2022/2023 ⁵.

2.4 July 2023 The House of Commons Select Committee report on dentistry cited the British Dental Association (BDA): Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, 3000 dentists were no longer providing NHS dental care, 45% of High Street dentists had reduced their NHS work and 75% were considering reducing NHS care in the forthcoming year ⁶.

2.5 The pandemic created a large backlog in oral healthcare need across the country. No Government incentives to address this need were taken up by Rutland dentists.

2.6 March 2024 An informational report^a prepared for the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes the following data which compares the number of patients accessing NHS dentistry across the regions in July–December 2019 (pre-pandemic) and July–December 2022 (*see footnote a*) ⁷.

^a Table and data used with the kind consent of the Chief Executive of LLR ICB

Local Authority District	Group	Population accessing NHS dentistry	Total pop'n	Access rate July-Dec 2022	Access rate July-Dec 2019	Current comparison to National Average
NW Leics	All	31,208	104,706	29.81%	36.11%	Higher
Charnwood	All	48,075	183,978	26.13%	32.88%	Higher
Hinckley & Bosworth	All	33,628	113,640	29.59%	38.88%	Higher
Melton	All	11,504	51,751	22.23%	27.51%	Lower
Rutland	All	7,577	41,050	18.46%	29.06%	Lower
Harborough	All	30,075	97,631	30.80%	37.73%	Higher
Oadby & Wigston	All	18,630	57,753	32.26%	37.97%	Higher
Blaby	All	32,342	102,933	31.42%	38.83%	Higher
Leicester	All	89,925	368,569	24.40%	30.14%	Higher

Table 1 Report to LLR Joint HOSC 27/3/2024 to demonstrate pre- and post-pandemic NHS dental access across the Integrated Care System

From the table, it is possible to see a decreased percentage of the LLR population accessing NHS dentistry since before the pandemic across all areas.

Only Rutland and Melton are showing current below national average access rates.

The access rate for Rutland residents had dropped from 29.06% of the population pre-pandemic to 18.46% July-December 2022 – a drop of 10.6% and the largest in LLR.

3. Comparing Rutland NHS dental care statistics with Leicester, Leicestershire and England

The percentages of adults accessing NHS dentistry in England, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland in the previous 24 months to 30/6/2023 were compared in order to understand whether Rutland people were using NHS dental care more or less than other areas.

The percentages of children accessing NHS dentistry in the previous 12 months to 30/6/2023 were similarly compared. The results are shown in the following two tables:

3.1 Adults

	England	Leicester	Leicestershire	Rutland
Adult population	44,456,850	269,967	569,742	32,626
No. of adults seen previous 24 months	18,111,609	127,597	227,903	11,935
Percentage adults seen previous 24 months	41%	47%	40%	37%

Table 2 Comparing the number and percentage of Rutland adults accessing NHS dental care in the previous 24 months to 30/6/2023 with England, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. *Source: NHS Digital*⁸

3.2 Children

	England	Leicester	Leicestershire	Rutland
Children population	12,093,285	84,069	143,343	7,850
Children seen previous 12 months	6,372,892	61,360	77,044	4,658
Percentage of children see previous 12 months	53%	73%	54%	59%

Table 3 Comparing the number and percentage of Rutland children accessing NHS dental care in the previous 12 months to 30/6/2023 with England, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. *Source: NHS Digital*⁸

3.3 It should be noted that the adults' figures are counted across 24 months whereas the children's figures refer to a 12 months' period. The adult figures therefore reflect the COVID-19 restrictions still in place up to Quarter 1 2022/2023.

3.4 Only 37% of Rutland adults had accessed NHS dental care in the 24 months up to 30/6/2023 compared with the England percentage of 41%, Leicester City 47% and Leicestershire 40%.

3.5 More Leicester residents are accessing NHS dentistry than Leicestershire and Rutland residents and the whole population of England.

4. Healthwatch Rutland Quick Polls 2022 and 2023

4.1 Quick polls usually consist of 3 or 4 multiple choice questions with a space for free text responses. The number of responses is variable with no collection of demographic

data. The results therefore are not statistically significant but they do provide a snapshot of how Rutland people experience a specific health and care service.

4.2 Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) quick polls are promoted on the HWR website, by newsletters, through social media and at outreach sessions. They can be completed online and by hard copy.

4.3 Rutland residents have been telling HWR about their difficulties in accessing NHS dental care for several years and, just as pandemic restrictions were finally released in the summer of 2022, a large dental practice in Oakham handed back its NHS contract. This has exacerbated the problem (see footnote ^b).

4.4 HWR has run two quick polls to assess patient sentiment: February 2022 and October 2023. The questions asked were slightly different and, although not providing a direct numerical comparison, the inferences are very similar and show little improvement in access to NHS dental care in Rutland.

4.5 Quick poll findings:

2022 (113 responses)	2023 (123 responses)
Financial Comments	
Many people said they felt pushed to use unaffordable or expensive private dental care	Many people said they felt pushed to use unaffordable or expensive private dental care
	People are having to forgo treatment or borrow money for dental care when they see a private dentist
	Many said they could not afford private dental care for themselves or for their children.
	Several people said they felt that private dentists were encouraging them to spend more than necessary
Availability of appointments	
41% of respondents who do not regularly see a dentist had tried to join a dental list within the last year	80% of respondents said they had tried to get an NHS appointment in the last 12 months

^b Since the October 2023 quick poll closed, an NHS orthodontic contract in Uppingham has been handed back

12 (11%) people said it was impossible or almost impossible to see a dentist in Rutland	
	59% said they could not get an NHS appointment. 6% waited for more than 6 months for their NHS appointment. 4.1% waited 1 week or less
Some dentists told patients they were only accepting private patients for urgent or emergency care	People spoke about not being able to get an NHS appointment, even for urgent or emergency care
	71% of appointments were for a routine check-up, 40% for routine care and 11% for urgent care
There were many mentions of appointment delays, excessive waiting and appointment cancellations	
Travelling to the dental appointments	
62% of respondents who regularly see a dentist travel 10 miles or less	86% travelled 10 miles or less to see a dentist
Impacts of difficult access	
26% of respondents said no one in their household regularly saw a dentist	
The scarcity of dental health is impacting the oral health of Rutland residents	
	People entitled to free NHS care are not receiving it
There were increasing difficulties for those with additional needs	
Positive comments	
There were 14 positive comments about NHS dental care	There were 12 positive comments about NHS dental care

Table 3 the snap shot' of Rutland dental care provided by HWR quick polls, 2022 ⁹ & 2023 ¹⁰ (results published 2024)

The 2023 quick poll demonstrates:

- Continuing difficulty in accessing NHS dental care for Rutland people
- The lack of affordability for private health care is resulting in people either incurring debt or forgoing necessary treatment
- People who are entitled to free NHS dental care are not receiving it; for example pregnant women



Me and my family were part of an NHS dental practice pre-COVID-19 and then, approximately 2 years ago, we were informed that our dentist is no longer NHS and is private only. We have not been able to find an NHS dentist for our family and cannot afford private dental care. Our children have not visited a dentist since pre-COVID-19¹



5. Healthwatch Rutland: highlighting the difficulties

5.1 A frequent response to HWR concerns from commissioning teams has been that the difficulties in accessing NHS dental care experienced in Rutland is a 'national issue' due to flaws in the NHS dental contracts.

5.2 From 1/4/2023 commissioning of Rutland NHS dental care is the responsibility of the LLR Integrated Care Board (ICB) which plans the strategic direction. Nottinghamshire ICB now hosts the dental commissioning team on behalf of East Midlands ICBs (formerly hosted by NHSE). This team continues to deliver day-to-day oversight of contracts with dental practices.

5.3 The two quick poll reports have been made publicly available on the HWR website and shared with stakeholders.

5.4 Representations about difficulties Rutland people experience in accessing NHS dental care have been made by HWR to:

- Local Dental Network
- NHSE Dental Commissioning team (pre delegation to ICB in April 2023)
- Rutland County Council Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee

- Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board
- The Rutland Integrated Delivery Group
- The LLR Integrated Care Board
- LLR Integrated Care Board subgroup Health Equity Committee
- LLR Joint HOSC
- Alicia Kearns MP

5.3 HWR continues to highlight the situation and make representations for better NHS dental services in Rutland.

6. What next?

6.1 In February 2024 the Government announced plans to create up to 2.5 million additional NHS dental appointments in England; including up to 1.5 million extra treatments with a focus on improving oral health in children.

6.2 The plan ¹² includes:

- £15–£50 (depending on treatment required) new patient bonus, time limited for 13 months, for people who have not been seen by an NHS dentist for two years or more
- A 'smile for life' programme offering advice for oral health improvements via family hubs, nurseries and schools
- Increased minimum UDA payments to dentists from £23 to £28, from April 2024
- A £20k 'golden hello' payment, phased over 3 years, for 240 dentists to work in under-served areas
- Information about dentists taking on new patients on the NHS App and website and a marketing campaign to encourage people to make appointments
- Mobile dental vans to reach people in isolated rural and coastal communities
- Further contract reforms and better skill mix within dental practices
- Subject to consultation, water fluoridation for up to 1.6 million more people initially across the North East
- Ringfence NHS budgets so ICBs will be able to improve dental access, taking into account local demographics such as ageing in coastal communities
- Expanding dental training places by 40% by 2031/2032 as part of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan

- Better support for newly qualified dentists to work in the NHS and consultation about whether they should be required to work in the NHS for a period of time following qualification

6.3 HWR has extrapolated the main points from this plan to understand how much or little impact this might have on access to NHS dental services in Rutland:

Recovery plan	When	Where	Potential Rutland Impact
£15-£50 new patient bonus	1/3/2024 – 31/3/2025	National	Yes – if local dentists are willing to take on new NHS patients
Mobile Vans	Later this year	Targeted rural and coastal areas Including: Devon, Somerset, Suffolk, Lincs, Cambs, Dorset, Cornwall, N Yorks, Northants	No
'Golden Hello' for 240 dentists	Later this year	Locations to be decided	?
Minimum UDA uplift	1/4/24	National	?
Oral health via a) Family hubs b) Schools and nurseries	Not specified	a) Hubs are funded in 75 areas but not Rutland b) Underserved areas where dental health is worse	?
Funding ICBs to reflect demographics	Later this year		?
Water fluoridation	Starting this year	North East England	No

Table 4 HWR analysis: How the 2024 Dental Reform plan might impact on Rutland

6.4 The House of Commons *Ninth report of session 2022-23 NHS Dentistry (2023)* ⁶ is summarised with little reassurance: 'The Government has begun to act [.....] Nevertheless, even with fundamental reform of the contract, we are concerned that this will be too little too late for those dentists who have left the NHS.' (p3)

7. Conclusion

Over the years the access to NHS dental care has deteriorated across the country as dentists, dissatisfied with the NHS contracts, have moved into private practice. Post-pandemic incentives for dentists to expand NHS dental services have not been taken up in Rutland. This has resulted in Rutland adults having poorer access to NHS dentistry than the England average and their counterparts in the LLR Integrated Care System.

HWR has been highlighting ongoing difficult dental access for many years, but these concerns have been dismissed as a 'national problem' with the contract.

Private dental health care is expensive and unaffordable for many people, with those Rutland residents entitled to free NHS dental care unable to access it. HWR has received reports of people not able to access dental care, even in cases of urgency or emergency. People who can afford private dental care are experiencing pressure to spend more than they feel necessary.

The February 2024 Government Plan for Dental Reform has some positive attributes but, so far, only the 13-month new patient bonus is certain to apply to Rutland (subject to dentists willing to take on NHS patients), where only 37% of the adult population have accessed NHS care in the two years up to 30/6/2023. In continuing to press for better access to NHS dentistry for Rutland people, we therefore ask:

1. That the LLR Integrated Care Board, with thorough public engagement, develops a robust Place-based plan for improving NHS dentistry in Rutland in order to remove this dental health inequity.
2. Similarly, that the Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board works with dental commissioners to ensure that Rutland benefits from the improvement actions in the 2024 Government's Dental Recovery Plan. At the time of writing there is some doubt about how many of these actions will be applicable in Rutland.

8. Afterword: response from LLR ICB

Following receipt of a courtesy draft of the paper, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board responded immediately to the Healthwatch Rutland call for a robust place-based plan with public engagement. Dr Caroline Trevithick, Chief Executive of the LLR ICB wrote:

“Thank you for sharing the NHS Dentistry in Rutland Briefing Paper and for giving us the opportunity to respond to its contents. I’d like to reassure you that the Leicester Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB) takes seriously all concerns that have been raised by Healthwatch Rutland in relation to access to NHS dentistry.

There are a number of points raised within the paper that I’d like to comment on as outlined below.

I am aware that this paper builds on the NHS Dentistry in Rutland Report published in January 2024 where the findings from the two quick polls undertaken in 2022 and 2023 were captured and it is also in response to the publication of the national Dental Recovery Plan published in February 2024.

In paragraph 5.1 problems with the national dental contract have been cited. This is part of the cause of ongoing issues that we are having with access to NHS dentistry, hence the pledge within the Dental Recovery Plan to revisit it to ensure that it is fit for purpose. With regard to representations (5.4), in addition to the Leicester Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee meeting mentioned within the paper, I am aware that a meeting was held with the ICB and the East Midlands Primary Care Team with Healthwatch Rutland on 29th February to discuss the dental recovery plan and next steps. A further meeting was also held with Healthwatch Rutland and the ICB on 8th March where there were further discussions.

What next?

- The initiatives contained within the dental recovery plan are being included as part of the development of the LLR ICBs dental commissioning intentions for 2024/25*
- 6.3 – Rutland impact. The Leicester Leicestershire and Rutland Oral Health Needs Assessment, which is due end of May 2024, will be instrumental in identifying where there are pockets of need and how best to plug those gaps. This will also inform the content of the LLR ICB Dental Access Plan which is linked to our 5-Year Plan*
- Water fluoridation is being considered across LLR in the context of national pilots.*

Finally, with regard to the two recommendations as outlined on page 12 of the paper, the first is already being addressed as set out above. The ICB will provide the Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board with reports as requested to update on the second recommendation. I hope that you will consider the points raised above prior to the publication of the paper.

If you would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact [the ICB Senior Planning Manager].”

We thank the ICB for the quick response and acknowledge the work they plan to do once the Oral Health Needs Assessment is available. The challenge from Healthwatch Rutland to commissioners remains that a robust place-based plan with public engagement be developed urgently. The situation must move rapidly from planning to the introduction of the real improvements in access to NHS dentistry that Rutland people desperately need.

9. References

¹ Brocklehurst P, Birch S, McDonald R, et al. *Determining the optimal model for role substitution in NHS dental services in the UK: a mixed-methods study*. Southampton (UK): NIHR Journals Library; 2016 Jul. (Health Services and Delivery Research, No. 4.22.) Chapter 2, Organisation of NHS dentistry in primary care. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK378807/>

² *Who is entitled to free NHS treatment in England* NHS England retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/who-is-entitled-to-free-nhs-dental-treatment-in-england/> (15/3/2024)

³ Care Quality Commission. *COVID-19 Insight 10: Dental access during the pandemic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-reports/covid-19-insight-10-dental-access-during-pandemic>

⁴ NHS England and Improvement (November 2021) *Update paper on NHS Dental Services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland*. Paper presented to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Accessed at: <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/documents/g12045/Public%20reports%20pack%20Monday%2027-Jun-2022%2017.30%20Leicester%20Leicestershire%20and%20Rutland%20Joint%20Health%20S.pdf?T=10>

⁵ NHS England/Improvement (27/6/2022) *Appendix C Dental Services Update Report to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Scrutiny Committee* accessed at:

⁶ Health and Social Care Committee (2023) *Ninth report of session 2022-23 NHS Dentistry* House of Commons Retrieved from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmhealth/964/report.html#heading_2 (15/3/2024)

⁷ Chief Strategy Officer (2024) *Access to dental services for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland* Paper for information submitted to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting on 27/3/2024

⁸ NHS Digital (24/8/2023) *NHS dental statistics for England 2022-2023, Annual report* Retrieved 15/3/2024 from <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics/2022-23-annual-report>

⁹ Healthwatch Rutland (2022) *Your views on NHS dental services in Rutland* <https://www.healthwatchrutland.co.uk/sites/healthwatchrutland.co.uk/files/Your%20views%20on%20NHS%20dental%20services%20in%20Rutland%20Final.pdf>

¹⁰ Healthwatch Rutland (2024) *NHS dentistry in Rutland* <https://www.healthwatchrutland.co.uk/sites/healthwatchrutland.co.uk/files/NHS%20Dentistry%20in%20Rutland%202023.pdf>

¹¹ Healthwatch Rutland (2024) *NHS dentistry in Rutland: Quick poll response from a member of the public*

¹² Department of Health and Social Care (February 2024) *Policy Paper. Faster, simpler and fairer. our plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry* NHS England. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry/faster-simpler-and-fairer-our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry> (15/3/2024)



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