

NHS England – North East and North Cumbria
Access to NHS dental services (Darlington)
(FEBRUARY 2023)

You may be aware the current NHS dental service at Firthmoor Community Centre has handed back its NHS contract and will not be continuing to provide NHS dental services after the end of March 2023. This note sets out what we will be doing to replace the capacity and appointments provided as quickly as possible

We appreciate that the loss of NHS dental care provision at Firthmoor Community Centre will be of concern to you. Please be assured that it is our intention to replace the lost capacity as quickly as possible. We have written to NHS dental providers within the surrounding area to see if they are able to take on any additional activity and provide more appointments. We believe that this is the quickest way to replace the capacity that is currently commissioned from the Burgess and Hyder dental practice in Firthmoor. If this does not prove to be successful, the next steps would be to urgently go out to a formal procurement to try to secure a new dental service.

In the interim we are also exploring options to secure short-term solutions to improve access for patients. Some of the work that has been undertaken to date includes:

- Offering additional funding to dental providers who have the workforce and surgery capacity to deliver additional clinical sessions above their contracted levels, prioritising patients who have an urgent dental treatment need.
- Incentives offered to all NHS dental practices to prioritise patients not seen in the practice within the last 12/24 months who require urgent dental care.
- Additional funding has been made available to increase access to clinical triage via NHS 111 and the out of hours dental treatment services.
- Darlington has been identified as a priority area for our recently launched workforce recruitment and retention initiatives which includes:
 - Supporting practices to attract dentists by offering the dentist a financial incentive payment if they come to work in the area for a minimum of 2/3 years.
 - We are currently advertising within the British Dental Journal to attract overseas dentists and to support them through the process of getting onto the National Dental Performers List which is requirement to enable them to provide NHS dental care.
 - Offering NHS dental providers, a flexible commissioning approach that provides a training grant to support the employment of overseas dentists.
- We are also engaging with Health Education England to explore what other opportunities there may be to improve the recruitment, retention, and training of dentists.

It is important to note that unlike General Medical Practice there is no formal registration within dentistry – patients can contact any practice to seek care. A list of NHS dental practices is available on the NHS.uk website <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

NHS dental providers are being reminded of their responsibility to keep the information on this website updated and whilst it may currently indicate practices are not taking on any patients, we would still advise that you ring them if you have an urgent dental problem. When you ring, please fully explain the nature of your dental problems so that the urgency of your treatment need can be determined. If the practice is unable to offer an appointment because their NHS urgent access slots have already been taken up, we would advise that you ring NHS 111. The NHS 111 Health Advisor will undertake a telephone triage and where the dental need is deemed to be clinically urgent, advice and support will be offered.

The frequency in which you need to attend a dentist for a check-up is based on your oral health – if your teeth and gums are healthy, you may not need to attend as often, and this could be up to two years for those with good oral health.

We hope you find this information useful, and we will be in touch when we have a further update.