

**February 2023**

Dear Colleague

**Stakeholder Briefing  
Access to NHS dental services (Darlington)**

We are writing to advise you that the provider of the NHS dental service in Firthmoor Community Centre, Burnside Road, Darlington DL1 4SU has given notice to terminate their NHS contract and that the practice will formally close on 31 March 2023.

We appreciate that the loss of NHS dental care provision at Firthmoor Community Centre will be of concern and acknowledge the impact this may have on access to NHS dental care which we appreciate is already challenging due to the dental workforce and recruitment challenges that dental practices are facing.

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. 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 formal procurement to try to secure a new dental service.

We will be working with the provider to ensure that patients who have accessed NHS dental care at the practice are advised of our plans as outlined above and to provide reassurance that we are exploring all options to secure short-term solutions to improve access for patients in Darlington.

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 advise that patients do contact them if they have an urgent dental problem. It is important that when they ring the practice, they fully explain the nature of their dental problem so that the urgency of their 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 they 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 of need for a dental check-up is determined by an individual's oral health - if teeth and gums are healthy, attendance may not be required as often, and this could be up to two years for those with good oral health.

I hope that you find this information in this letter/email helpful. We will be in touch when we have a further update.