



Your views on NHS Dental Services in Rutland

March 2022





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Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has made access to NHS dental care more difficult across the county as dentists have reduced their activities to control the spread of infection. To understand peoples' recent experiences of accessing NHS dental care in Rutland, Healthwatch used an online quick poll to seek a snapshot of service-user opinions. This report details the responses received and shows that the respondents feel the provision of NHS dental care is inadequate and fails to meet their needs and expectations.

Key Findings

- There were many comments from people saying they had no option but to use unaffordable or expensive private dental care. Some dentists told patients they were accepting only private patients for urgent or emergency cases
- 26% of respondents said that no one in their household regularly visits a dentist
- 41% of respondents who do not regularly see an NHS dentist have tried to join an NHS dental 'list' within the last year
- 62% of respondents who regularly see an NHS dentist travel 10 miles or less
- There were many mentions of appointment delays, excessive waiting and appointment cancellations
- 12 people said it was 'impossible' or 'almost impossible' to access NHS dental care in Rutland
- The scarcity of NHS dental care is impacting the oral health of Rutland residents
- There were 14 positive comments about NHS dental care

Background

Nationally access to NHS dental services has been reported as difficult with variations across regions (see, for example, NHSE 2014¹, Healthwatch England 2016². National Audit Office 2020³). NHS dental services have been further constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic with initially, all dental services except emergency care, being suspended in March 2020. Since the first lock-down, NHS dentists have cautiously 'opened up' and are now required to achieve 85% of their pre-pandemic activity for 100% pre-pandemic reimbursement. This reduced capacity has been attributed to the infection risks to staff

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2014/02/improve-dental-cta/>

² https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/sites/healthwatch.co.uk/files/access_to_nhs_dental_services_-_what_people_told_local_healthwatch_0.pdf

³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Dentistry-in-England.pdf>



and patients from aerosol-generating procedures, such as extractions and/or the use of high-speed drills. Dentists have had to allow for ‘downtime’ in their treatment rooms between clients and considerable backlogs are widespread. Appointments for routine dental care remain limited or delayed.

In January 2021, the Government injected 50 million pounds into NHS dental services to support the creation of 350,000 more appointments. Plans for service recovery include encouraging weekend access; assistance with surgery ventilation; dedicated NHS111 slots for vulnerable groups and new senior management recruitment. Income protection for dentists, introduced during the pandemic, will cease in April 2022.

An additional problem for the public is that, unlike GP services, patients are not registered with a particular dentist⁴. They are only considered patients of a dental practice during an ongoing course of treatment or for repairs or replacements of that treatment. Despite this, practices seem to have a list of patients they are in contact with, and the public may assume they are registered with a practice that they have previously attended.

The situation in Rutland

It is estimated that the pandemic measures affected 126,000 people across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, with the loss of 300,000 units of dental activity⁵. Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) wanted to explore the provision of NHS dental services in our locality and the impact of the pandemic on Rutland residents.

To understand the context, Healthwatch Rutland contacted all the dental practices in the area in January 2022; the picture was particularly bleak with only one practice accepting children as NHS patients and one practice adding adults to a waiting list. In March 2022 the situation is a little brighter; out of the 7 dental practices in Rutland JDRM dental care in Oakham is accepting children and adults on the NHS. No other practices are accepting NHS patients.

⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/how-to-find-an-nhs-dentist/>

⁵ See NHSE/I (2021) *Update paper on NHS services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland*, presented to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16/11/2021. Retrieved from: <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=420&MId=11047&Ver=4>



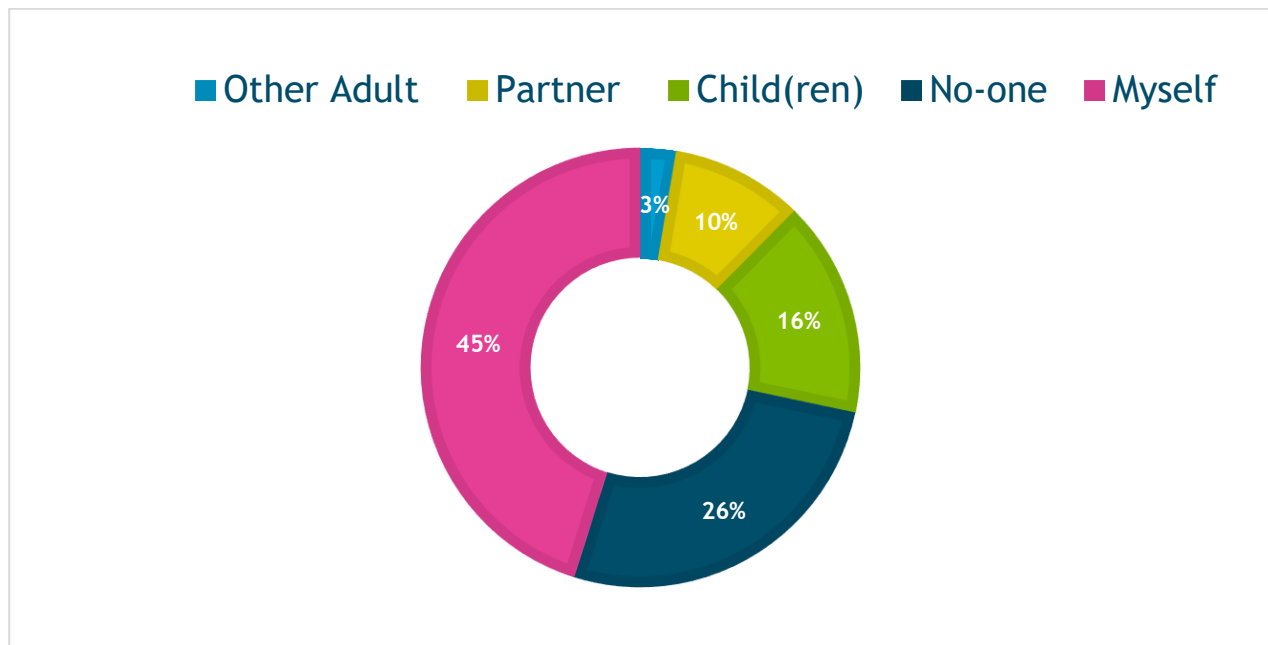
Method

Through the use of a quick poll, we sought to quickly obtain a snapshot of what Rutland people were experiencing when trying to access NHS dental care to understand if Rutland's experiences reflected the situation across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland as described above. The quick poll was designed to be completed in a couple of minutes and was digitally delivered; it asked 3 multi-choice questions and one open-ended question requiring a free text response (See appendix 1). The responses to the multi-choice questions are provided and the free-text responses were thematically organised. The poll ran throughout February 2022 and received 113 responses.

It should be noted that this format of quick response poll is designed as a 'temperature check' of service-user experiences and does not collect information about the demography of respondents, nor does it seek to be encompassing of all ages and accessibilities etc. The results are therefore not inclusive and representative of the whole Rutland population.

What people told us

Question 1. Who in your household regularly sees an NHS dentist?



The NHSE/I (National Health Service England/Improvement) paper presented to The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Commission in November 2021⁶ suggests that approximately 50% of the population regularly see an NHS

⁶ Paper can be viewed at:

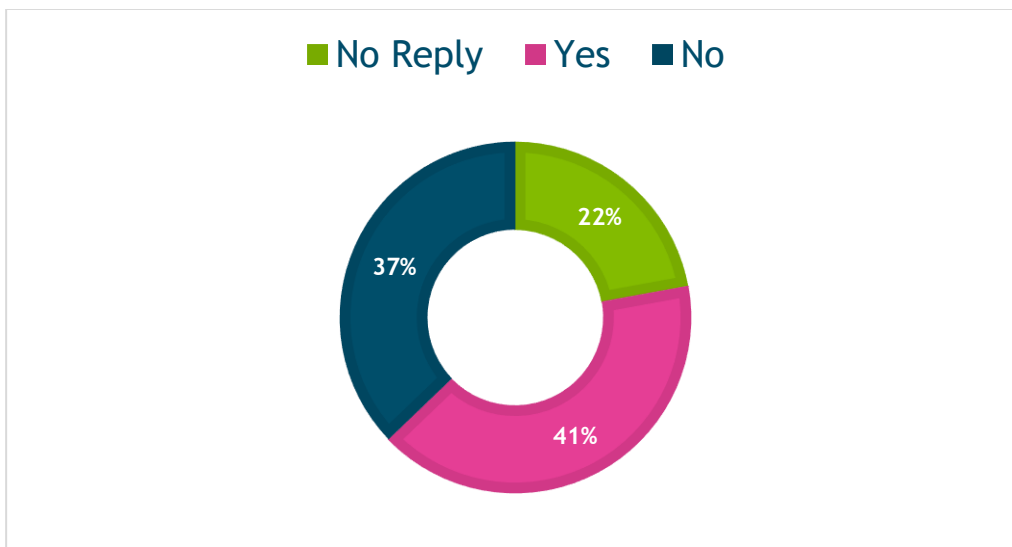
<https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/documents/g11062/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2016-Nov-2021%2017.30%20Leicester%20Leicestershire%20and%20Rutland%20Joint%20Health%20.pdf?T=10>



dentist. The results above demonstrate that 45% (51 people) of respondents to the Rutland poll say they regularly see an NHS dentist. 26% (30 people) said that no one in the household regularly sees an NHS dentist.

Question 2. If you do not regularly see an NHS dentist, have you or members of your household tried to join an NHS dentist's list in the last 12 months?

Although we understand that people are only registered with a dentist for a course of treatment, we are aware that most people see themselves as on a practice's 'patient list' so we asked the question above and received the following replies:



46 people (41%) of those who responded had tried to join an NHS dentist's list in the past 12 months:

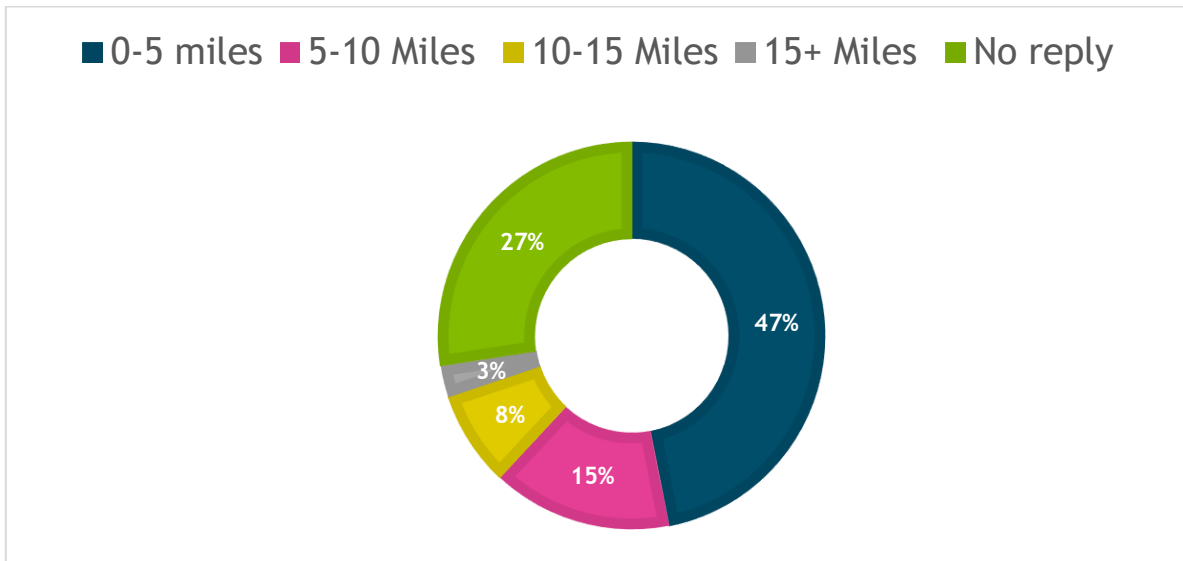
“Unable to get registered with an NHS dentist.”

“I have tried Oakham, Melton and Grantham and have not been able to find an NHS dentist.”

“Not been able to! No appointments are available. No NHS spaces.”



Question 3. If you are registered with an NHS dentist, approximately how far do you travel to the practice?



62% of Rutland people see a dentist within 10 miles of their home. 11% of people travelled more than 10 miles. Some of the responses however were from people who said they use a private dentist, but it is interesting to see how far people are travelling for their care.

We frequently hear about the travel and transport difficulties that Rutland people have when accessing health care. The comments section of the poll demonstrates that this is a problem regarding dental care also.

“I am registered with a practice in Spalding so have to travel a 50-mile round trip. I tried to register with a practice in Oakham and was told their waiting list for NHS patients is at least 18 months.”

“I moved 10 months ago. I’ve called all the local dentists for myself, and they are not taking on NHS patients. I struggle to pay those charges, no chance of going private. My son is still with his dentist which is 35 miles away.”

Question 4. Please tell us about your experiences of accessing NHS dental care in the past 12 months.

The comments made were thematically organised:



Patients feeling ‘pushed’ into private care:

Many people told us they could not access an NHS dentist and had no option but to seek private care. Others said they could not afford the private fees.

“The NHS dentist keeps pushing for patients to take out their private healthcare plan.”



“I was unable to book an NHS appointment with any dentist in my area (Oakham) I was told they are not taking on any new patients, unless I go private then an immediate appointment was offered to me.”

“I feel we are having our right to NHS treatment ignored.”

“The dentist is trying to become private and on checking the tooth the dentist said root canal treatment would solve the problem. However, I was then offered 2 private root canal procedures at £400+ and then £700+ and was then given the 3rd option of a removal covered by the NHS band 2, they would not offer me root canal work on the NHS.”

The NHS operates a national tariff system with 3 bands of treatment. The charge increases as treatment becomes more complex. The cost for NHS root canal treatment falls into band 2 at a cost of £65.20 to the patient⁷.



‘Impossible’ to get an NHS appointment:

12 of the comments mentioned the impossibility of being able to access NHS dental care in Rutland:

“Impossible to access NHS dental care in Rutland.”

“We can’t find a dentist; we have tried 4 different counties and they all have long waiting lists.”

“Rutland has a serious lack of GPs and Dentists. Rutland pets have more services locally than humans!”



Delays to service:

18 respondents told us about long waits to see an NHS dentist and 14 people said their appointments had been cancelled:

“I have not been able to get an appointment during covid, I’m now having to wait until summer 2022...Have been given appointments but had them cancelled.”

⁷ <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/how-much-will-i-pay-for-nhs-dental-treatment/>



“I’ve had several appointments cancelled by the dentist, so no one gets seen at the appropriate time intervals... We’ve had to go to the orthodontist in Leicester meaning missed school. It’s already two years behind when he should have started treatment. They have also now cancelled the appointment to get started. It’s very frustrating.”



Access for children:

Children should be able to access free dental treatment to establish good routines of oral health throughout life. In Rutland, the rate of decay is higher in children than the national average, which makes local limitations in accessing NHS dental services, especially worrying.

	Percentage of 5 year olds with experiences of decay (2019)
Rutland	25.3%
Leicestershire	18.2%
England	23.4%

Table 1: Comparing the dental health of 5 year old children in Rutland with Leicestershire and the national average in 2019 (Source: Public Health England 2020⁸)

“It is impossible to register with any NHS dentists locally. Also, I have a baby that I can’t register.”

“It’s impossible, even for children where the adult pays privately, it’s ridiculous.”

“Although my children (and myself) do see an NHS dentist, I’ve just received a letter from our dentist practice advising me they are going private and if we wish to continue as patients, I have to pay five pounds fifty per month per child and nearly sixteen pounds per month for myself.”

Some people did comment that their children were able to receive NHS dental care from a private dentist:

“My children are registered with a private dentist that takes NHS children. They have been seen regularly for the last 8 years.”

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873492/NDEP_for_England_OH_Survey_5yr_2019_v1.0.pdf



Emergency Care:

Respondents spoke of difficulties in accessing urgent and emergency NHS dental care:

“No NHS or private dentists were taking new patients when I looked 12 months ago. I had to go out of county... No one would even take an emergency case.”

“My daughter has had to pay private fees [in an emergency] and that left her going without food.”

In an urgent or emergency situation, people are advised to contact local dentists during normal opening hours. During out of hours or when unable to get an NHS appointment, patients are advised to contact NHS111. An NHSE/I Stakeholder Briefing received by Healthwatch Rutland in November 2021 states:

‘Patients should not be pressured into private care where they wish to have treatment on the NHS and it should not be the case that someone is unable to get an urgent NHS appointment where practices can offer routine private check-ups... Should patients experience any further difficulties, or wish to make a complaint, they can do so via contacting the NHS England Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 22 33 or www.England.NHS.uk/contact-us/ for further assistance.’



Affordability:

Rutland is one of the least deprived local authority areas in England but financial inequalities still exist and some people told us they cannot afford dental care:

“Although I’m registered with my local dentist, I cannot afford to use them even with NHS rates and as my husband works, we’re deemed to earn too much.”

“[Dental work is] impossible to afford as we are both Pensioners. I have very few teeth left and desperately need Dentures, but they are totally unaffordable, due to our financial situation I haven’t even tried to see a Dentist in the last few years.”

The UK cost of living crisis has the potential to create more inequalities in dental care.

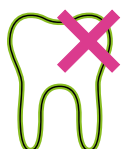


Increasing difficulties for those with additional needs:

The problems faced by patients are made worse for those who have additional needs or phobias when continuity of care and more time per appointment may be needed.

“Two of my children are now struggling to access our dentist due to their disabilities and additional needs and I worry we will be discharged if they are unable to manage the environment of our usual dentist anymore.”

“As a nervous patient who hates the dentist, I felt like my dentist was rushing and going so fast I couldn’t feel comfortable. She told me I need some extractions, but she wasn’t about to take my teeth out and I would have to go to Leicester to have the work done. This is not possible.... I need to feel comfortable with the dentist to let them do anything without me going into full-blown panic mode.”



Increased oral health issues because of delays:

Patients are experiencing complications because they are not receiving timely or preventative care.

“I had to get my wisdom tooth out. I was in so much pain as it kept getting infected. I got an appointment straight away, but they said to get it out I would have to wait up to 18 months??”

“I have been grinding my teeth... I have now had a nightguard made but, in the meantime, my front teeth have been ground down and my lower gums are receding. If I had been able to get and not have my appointments cancelled, my teeth and gums would be in better condition.”



Satisfied with NHS service

Out of the 113 people who responded to the poll, there were 14 positive comments about NHS dental care.

“Excellent service from JDRM Oakham.”

“No Problems.”

“Brilliant service at Market Place Dental Practice in Uppingham. I can always get in and be seen on the NHS without waiting. My children also go here.”



“I was seen the day after phoning with a lost filling. Excellent service at JDRM in Oakham.”

“Checkups on time. The staff are very helpful and friendly. Can't fault it!”

Conclusion

This quick poll has highlighted the lack of access to NHS dental care in Rutland. The delays enforced by the pandemic are well understood but the issues of dentists increasingly moving away from NHS work and turning to private practice are not. The respondents of our quick poll have demonstrated that the public urgently needs an overhaul of NHS dentistry services to create a fairer, more affordable and accessible service for all ages. Without the adequate provision of NHS dental care, people are enduring pain and deteriorating oral health.

Healthwatch Rutland, therefore, calls for an urgent response from dental commissioners to:

- rapidly build capacity in general dental practice through contract reform to enable the profession to take on NHS contracts which will offer improved access and reduce delays to care for all ages
- define a clearer pathway into local urgent and emergency NHS dental care that is effectively communicated to patients

Next steps

Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) is coordinating a meeting with colleagues across East Midlands Healthwatch, commissioners from NHSE/I and Local Dental Networks. The objective is to understand more about:

- how the short term additional urgent treatment funding announced by the Government in January is being deployed across East Midlands dental services
- dental contract and workforce issues that are encouraging dentists to hand back NHS contracts
- longer-term plans to tackle the treatment backlog and reinstatement of regular appointments

HWR will also highlight the high numbers of public complaints around access.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who completed our quick poll and promoted it.



Appendix 1:

Quick Poll Questions

- 1 Who in your household regularly sees an NHS dentist?
- 2 If you do not regularly see an NHS dentist, have you or members of your household tried to join an NHS dentist's list in the last 12 months?
- 3 If you are registered with an NHS dentist, approximately how far do you travel to the practice?
- 4 Please tell us about your experiences of accessing NHS dental care in the last 12 months.



Appendix 2:

Background research

This background research was conducted in January & February 2022 to set the context for current Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) engagement work on people’s experiences of access to NHS dental services in the county.

1. NHS Dentistry in Rutland during the pandemic

Unlike GP services, patients are not registered with a particular dental practice. They are only considered patients of a dental practice during an ongoing course of treatment or for repairs or replacements of that treatment. Despite this, dental practices sometimes have a list of ‘their’ patients or people might ‘associate themselves with a particular practice (NHSE/I 2021)⁸.

Pre-pandemic statistics providing a snapshot for the dental health of the Rutland population are:

Adults 2018

	Percentage with active tooth decay	Percentage with fillings
Rutland	12.5%	89.3%
England	26.8%	90.2%

Table 1: Comparing Rutland adults’ dental health with the national average in 2018. Source: *Oral health survey of adults attending general dental practices 2018*⁹

Children 2019

	Prevalence of experience of decay	The proportion with active decay	Proportion with experience of extraction
Rutland	25.3%	24.6%	0.8%
England	23.4%	20.4%	2.2%

⁸ NHSE/I (2021) *Update paper on NHS services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland*, presented to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16/11/2021. Retrieved from: <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=420&MId=11047&Ver=4>

⁹ Public Health England (2018) *Oral health survey of adults attending general dental practices 2018*. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891208/AiP_survey_for_England_2018.pdf



Table 2: Comparing Rutland children’s dental health with the national average in 2019.

Source: Public Health England (2020) *Rutland Oral Health Profile*¹⁰ (private communication).

Whereas adults in Rutland had better than average dental health in England, children suffered a slightly higher than average incidence of decay. Dental health figures since the pandemic onset are not readily accessible on the Internet

2. NHS dental practice activities in England

The *Update paper on NHS services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland* (NHSE/I 2021)¹¹ presented to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Commission in November 2021 provides a detailed timeline, summarised below, of NHS dental service provision during the pandemic:

Period	Dentists’ activity
23 rd March 2020	All routine dental services in England ordered to close
April 2020	Urgent Dental Centres Commissioned
July 2020	All NHS dental practices are expected to be open
Jan-March 2021	All NHS practices to deliver 45% of pre-pandemic activity to receive 100% of pre-pandemic pay
April-Sept 2021	All NHS practices to deliver 60% of pre-pandemic activity for 100% of pre-pandemic pay
Oct-Dec 2021	All NHS dentists to deliver 65% of pre-pandemic activity for 100% of pre-pandemic pay

Table 3: Timeline of dental activity during the pandemic. Source: *Update paper on NHS services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland* (NHSE/I 2021).

To mitigate COVID-19 infection risks, dental practices have had to allow ‘downtime’ in their treatment rooms between any aerosol-generating procedures, such as extractions and/or the use of high-speed drills. This limits the number of Units of Activities they can perform.

By November 2021 there had been a total loss of 300,000 Units of Dental Activity during the pandemic. Considerable backlogs are widespread and appointments for routine check-ups remain limited. It is estimated that this has affected 126,000 people across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Plans for service recovery include encouraging weekend access; assistance with surgery ventilation; dedicated NHS 111 slots for vulnerable groups; new senior management recruitment.

¹⁰ Public Health England (2020) *Rutland Oral Health Profile*¹⁰ (received by Healthwatch Rutland as private communication)

¹¹ NHSE/I (2021) *Update paper on NHS services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland*, presented to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16/11/2021. Retrieved from: <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=420&MId=11047&Ver=4>



On 22/12/2021, NHSE/I wrote to all NHS dentists stipulating that¹²:

- Performance should increase to 85% of pre-pandemic activity for 100% payment.
- Dentists should plan on the basis that income protection will be withdrawn in April 2022
- Dentists must maintain a list of ‘short notice cancellations’ and pro-actively contact other patients to offer these cancelled appointments.
- Must update their dental profiles in the Directory of Services to make it easier for people to find a dentist.
- Patients must be prioritised according to clinical need and/or their inclusion in ‘priority groups’ and **not** by pre-existing relationships with a dental practice and their presence on any dental practice business list.

NHSE/I noted that the Omicron COVID-19 variant was predicted to cause a surge in cases in England and acknowledged the situation would be monitored. Nevertheless, the British Dental Association¹³ ‘condemned the government’s decision’ as ‘unrealistic’ in expecting an increased level of activity from 65% to 85% of 100% pre- pandemic activity.

3. Urgent and emergency dental care

Dental conditions are considered urgent if there is likely to be a resulting deterioration in oral or physical health, a continuation of pain or risk of further complications. There are 3 defined elements of urgent need:

1. **For routine dental problems** - Provide self-help advice. Provide access to an appropriate service within 7 days if required. Advise patients to call back if their condition deteriorates.
2. **For urgent dental conditions** - Provide self-help advice and treat the patient within 24 hours. Advise patients to call back if their condition deteriorates.
3. **For dental emergencies** - contact a clinician within 60 minutes and subsequent treatment within a timescale that is appropriate to the severity of the condition.

Patients should attempt to access urgent NHS dental care by approaching a dental practice during working hours or by contacting NHS111.

An NHSE/I Stakeholder Briefing received by Healthwatch Rutland in November 2021 states:

*‘Patients should not be pressured into private care where they wish to have treatment on the NHS and it should not be the case that someone is unable to get an urgent NHS appointment where a practice can offer routine private check-ups.... **Should patients experience any further difficulties, or wish to make a complaint, they can do so via contacting the NHS England Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 22 33 or [www. England.NHS.uk/contact-us/](http://www.England.NHS.uk/contact-us/) for further assistance.***

¹² Retrieved from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2021/12/C1462-key-steps-in-2022-to-deliver-for-patients-in-NHS-dentistry-december-2021.pdf>

¹³ British Dental Association (23rd December 2021) *Live updates: Coronavirus and dentistry*. Retrieved from: <https://bda.org/advice/Coronavirus/Pages/latest-updates.aspx>



4. Orthodontic care

NHS orthodontic providers were, from October 2021-December 2021, required to provide 85% of pre-pandemic activity for 100% of pre-pandemic pay (NHSE/I 2021), increasing to 90% from January 2022 (British Dental Association 2021¹⁴). However, the NHSE/I Stakeholder Briefing (November 2021) informs there are long waiting lists to commence treatment, with urgent referrals being prioritised. Patients who have been referred for orthodontic treatment before their 18th birthday will remain eligible for NHS treatment even if this is not started until after their 18th birthday.

5. National Healthwatch England representation to Government

In December 2021, Healthwatch England, drawing on patient experiences across all local Healthwatch regions, called on the Government and NHS England to speed up dental contract reform and provide significant and sustained funding to tackle the underlying problems of dental access and affordability:

[Recovery of NHS dental care too slow to help thousands left in pain](#) (December 2021)

In response the Government announced in January 2022, a cash injection of £50 million to provide an additional 350,000 urgent NHS dental appointments by the end of April 2022: [NHS England > Hundreds of thousands more dental appointments to help the recovery of services](#)

6. NHSE/I Dental Commissioning

HWR has reached out to the new Senior Commissioning Manager for Dental Services in the Midlands to reopen dialogue regarding dental issues in Rutland. Regular dialogues had lapsed due to the previous Commissioner moving roles. We have requested clarity about how the additional Government funding will be spent in Rutland and what outcomes and improvements are expected.

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¹⁴ British Dental Association (23rd December 2021) *Live updates: Coronavirus and dentistry*. Retrieved from: <https://bda.org/advice/Coronavirus/Pages/latest-updates.aspx>



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Contact us

Address: Healthwatch Rutland
The King Centre
Main Road
Barleythorpe
Oakham
Rutland
LE15 7WD

Phone: 01573 720381

Email: info@healthwatchrutland.co.uk

Website: www.healthwatchrutland.co.uk

Facebook: [healthwatchrutland](https://www.facebook.com/healthwatchrutland)

Twitter: [@HWRutland](https://twitter.com/HWRutland)



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