

NHS dental services in Devon

Stakeholder briefing

February 2026

Introduction

NHS Devon works with the NHS England, local dental and oral healthcare professionals and other integrated care boards (ICBs) to develop and implement a local dental recovery plan.

The plan sets out to address the issues facing the sector and improve access to dental services for local people.

Several measures are in place across the region to increase dental access for patients:

- Commissioning additional urgent dental care appointments that people can access by calling NHS 111
- Commissioning ‘stabilisation sessions’ across Devon
- Commissioning additional children’s orthodontic capacity in Devon
- Working collaboratively with the local authority Public Health teams to commission oral health improvement initiatives
- Supervised toothbrushing programmes in schools

Key priorities for NHS dental services in Devon

<p>Upcoming dental contract reform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the upcoming dental contract reform can be found later in this briefing. A video is also available from the LDC federation here.
<p>Provision of additional urgent care dental appointments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise and support the NHS dental workforce and increase urgent care dental activity, enabling Devon to achieve the national target of 24,269 additional urgent care appointments above our calculated baseline for 2025/26 • Increase the recruitment and retention of the South West and Devon dental workforce • Support access to urgent care provision through 111 • NHS Devon’s current procurement for new dental contracts across the county mandates a 30% portion of new provider’s activity as urgent care. These contracts and the resulting services are expected to be in place no later than May 2026 and will contribute significantly to urgent dental care delivery in 2026/27. • Over December and January NHS Devon launched the “Give a Smile for Christmas” campaign over the festive period, appealing to local NHS dental providers to offer additional sessions of urgent dental care.

Improvements to Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new dental education practice has opened in Plymouth's city centre, funded by University of Plymouth. The facility aims to deliver up to 12,000 dental appointments per year.
Commission further stabilisation sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have secured longer-term contracts for stabilisation sessions following an 'expression of interest' process with existing providers. This new service model has been received positively by providers, with 31 contracts for 2025/26.
Commission access for vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Public Health to expand access for people experiencing homelessness and asylum seekers • Procurement of new NHS dental contracts around Devon, encouraging providers to address the needs of vulnerable populations as part of their service offer.
Procurement of lost activity (UDA and UOA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of NHS orthodontic services in North Devon and Torridge now completed to replace services in these areas following a provider exiting the market in 2024. This new service is expected to go live March 2026. • NHS Devon and NHS Cornwall joint lotted procurement for new dental practices across the counties is in process. Deadline for bid submissions passed on 28 October 2025. Evaluation concluded in mid-November following bid compliance checks. • Moderation is scheduled between mid-January and early February 2026. • The team aim to publish an award notice in February 2026 with service commencement not later than May 2026. This procurement is funded from NHS Devon's ringfenced dental budget. • NHS Devon has 4 lots within the procurement as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lot 1 – Plymouth South and West (£2,160,000/annum) ○ Lot 2 – Torquay and Paignton (£1,320,000/annum) ○ Lot 3 – Barnstaple, Bideford and Ilfracombe (£880,000/annum) ○ Lot 4 – Barnstaple, Exeter, Torbay and Plymouth – Out of Hours (£657,972/annum) • Devon lots have a combined value of £5,017,972/annum. Devon's share of the procurement has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a potential 7-year contract value of £35,125,804 ○ a potential 9-year contract value of £45,161,748.
Paediatric dentistry review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are currently reviewing the provision of paediatric dental services across primary, community, and secondary care to understand current capacity, pathways, and opportunities for improvement. • Having implemented First Dental Steps and an expanded Supervised Toothbrushing scheme, a focus on understanding innovative service opportunities will guide commissioning decisions

National NHS dental contract reform

From April 2026, the national NHS dental contract is being reformed to make NHS dentistry more sustainable and rewarding for practices.

These changes are an important and positive step and mean improved payment and claiming options to support patients with urgent care or in higher needs groups, measures to financially support and embed quality improvement, and proposals to enable all members of the dental team to be better able to contribute to NHS treatment.

Some of the benefits for practices include:

- Payments for urgent care will rise by 76%, with upfront funding to help manage capacity.
- Practices will also be able to claim higher fees for three new complex care pathways, ensuring better support for patients with high needs.
- Additional payments for denture work, new options for fluoride varnish and fissure sealants, and funded annual appraisals for clinicians will further boost income and flexibility.
- A new Quality Improvement scheme offers £3,400 per year for participating practices, while tariff-based payments create fairer remuneration.

Access to an NHS dentist

Patients are not registered with a dentist in the same way they are with a GP, and individuals can access services at a dental practice located in any area if the practice is accepting new patients.

Advice for people who need support accessing a dentist is:

- If you need urgent dental care, contact 111
- To find an NHS dentist taking on new patients, visit the NHS webpage [Find a Dentist](#)
- A detailed FAQ is available on our website [here](#).

Additional urgent care dental appointments

Local plans

There is a national request to increase the number of urgent dental care appointments by 24,269 in Devon (by March 2026).

NHS Devon has collaborated with all seven ICBs across the region to develop a model to engage current providers in increasing uptake of urgent care activity within their current contracts.

A regional model of paying an enhanced rate to dental providers delivering these additional appointments was agreed and went live in 2025. Providers are now paid an increased level of financial support beyond the standard contract value, in recognition of the additional activity expected.

NHS Devon was the first ICB in the region to undertake an expression of interest process with our current providers, ensuring these additional appointments would be available to patients at the earliest possible opportunity.

NHS Devon is also in the process of exploring wider procurement opportunities and will continue to explore all avenues of increasing this activity throughout 2025/26 to ensure delivery of the target.

NHS Devon's [upcoming procurement](#), in collaboration with NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, aims to secure contracts across areas of Devon experiencing greatest need and will include a significant prescribed amount of urgent dental care as part of the contract.

A national urgent dental care incentive scheme launched on 25 September 2025 and runs until 31 March 2026. The scheme aims to incentivise dental contractors and their oral healthcare teams to provide more urgent care to patients in 2025/26.

Market engagement and procurement

Community Dental Service (CDS) procurement

Specialist community dental services are available for people who may not be able to attend a general dental practice. These include people with various mental, medical and physical needs – for instance:

- Children with extensive untreated tooth decay who are particularly anxious
- Children in foster homes or residential care, or on the 'at risk' register
- People with physical or learning disabilities, medical conditions or mental health problems
- Children referred for specific treatment
- Adults with complex needs who have difficulty accessing general dental services, including adults with moderate and severe learning and physical disabilities
- Housebound and homeless people.

In Devon this service is provided by the [Salaried Dental Service](#) (Exeter), [Plymouth Community Dental Service](#) and [Torbay Community Dental Service](#).

A review of community dental services in Devon is a key priority for the ICB in 2025/26 and the procurement process for these contracts is progressing.

North Devon orthodontic procurement

The procurement for the provision of NHS orthodontic services in North Devon and Torridge is now complete following a tender process in April 2025.

Service mobilisation is underway with the preferred bidder, with the new service due to go live in March 2026.

NHS Devon is working with the provider to prepare messaging for local people ahead of the service launch.

Media, campaigns and communication

Media: University of Plymouth invest in multi-million pound student dental clinic to tackle waiting lists

A multi-million pound dental clinic has opened in [Plymouth](#) city centre, offering more than 12,000 appointments every year.

The facility, which is on New George Street, opened to patients on Monday 9 February. Under supervision, final year dental students from the [University of Plymouth](#) will treat both urgent and non-urgent cases.

The £5 million state-of-the-art facility is run by the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise, a subsidiary of the University of Plymouth.

Campaign: Urgent dental appointments

NHS Devon is undertaking a new campaign in 2026 to promote people calling 111 to [book a dental appointment](#) if they have an urgent need, supporting the roll out of 700,000 extra urgent dental appointments across the country.

The campaign focuses on the need for urgent dental care, particularly for people who aren't registered with an NHS dentist.

People are being advised if they develop an urgent dental issue and don't have a regular dentist, call NHS 111 or visit NHS 111 online for an assessment by a clinician, to get to the right treatment.

Examples of urgent or emergency needs include:

- Swelling or infections in the face or mouth that are getting worse (but not affecting breathing)
- Severe dental or facial pain that can't be eased with normal painkillers
- Broken or badly moved teeth after an accident
- Knocked-out baby teeth
- Facial injuries that may need a hospital check
- Bleeding in the mouth that you cannot stop
- Gum or mouth infections

The campaign is supported by [social media](#) and a [dedicated dental health webpage](#) hosted on the One Devon website is the main hub of information.

Campaign: Devon dentists expand urgent care over the festive period

Several dental practices across Devon provided extra urgent dental care over the 2025 festive period through the NHS Devon [Give a Smile for Christmas](#) initiative.

The scheme helped people get emergency dental treatment at a time when access is usually very limited, including patients who are not registered with a dentist and those referred through NHS 111.

Give a Smile for Christmas encouraged dental practices across the county to pledge additional urgent dental care sessions during the festive period.

With many practices closed over Christmas and New Year, a number of local dental practices stepped forward to offer extra appointments for patients who needed urgent help.

As a result, **61 people were seen over four days** during the festive period, helping to relieve pain, manage infections and prevent dental problems from getting worse.

Recruitment incentives

Summary of 'golden hello' initiative

NHS England published guidance last year [for dentists who are interested in securing 'golden hello' funding](#) to support their recruitment efforts.

The scheme aims to encourage dentists to relocate to areas that have historically struggled to recruit, attract new workforce to the NHS and retain those who might have otherwise moved into private practice. A 'golden hello' of £20,000 is offered per dentist, with payments phased over three years.

In Devon, the ICB invested £327,000 into the 'golden hello' scheme in 2024/25 and awarded a range of dental practices the ability to offer this incentive payment to fill 25 vacant posts across Devon, 5 of which have now been successfully recruited to. A total of 20 practices across Devon are currently approved to participate in the scheme.

A national evaluation of the scheme is due to take place in 2025/26.

Devon Workforce Working Group

A Devon Dental Workforce Group has been established. This system-wide group aims to support the NHS dental workforce in the county to develop skills, engage with NHS services and improve recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals within NHS dentistry, whilst the long-term central dental reform is undertaken by the government.

Oral health schemes

Successful expansion of Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme

NHS Devon successfully completed the expansion of the Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme in April 2025.

This programme gives children time and supervision to brush their own teeth at nursery and reception class, making brushing part of children's everyday routine and helping to protect their teeth from decay.

The scheme was initially targeted at areas where children are at increased risk of developing tooth decay, such as in areas of highest deprivation. However, this has now been rolled out to all early years nursery or reception class settings across Devon.

First Dental Steps initiative

First Dental Steps (FDS) is a multi-stranded oral health improvement intervention embedded in the Healthy Child Programme. It is delivered by health visiting teams (HVTs) in collaboration with local community dental services (CDS).

The FDS initiative has four principal components:

- Oral health champion training for health visiting teams
- Distribution of oral health packs to high-risk children
- Establishing a referral pathway to CDSs for children deemed at risk of developing decay
- Development of a data capture template to collate key oral health information within HVT clinical software systems.

The initiative was originally piloted and lead by the NHS England Regional Public Health Team in collaboration with local authority public health teams and is being continued and funded by NHS Devon for 2025/26. Work is underway to extend provision of the service through to 2028/29.