

REPORT TO: Health Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 24th September 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Tom Knight – Associate Director of Primary Care (Dental and Community Pharmacy) NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Dental Services - Update

WARD(S): Borough wide

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Health Policy and Performance Board on dental services in Halton, local dental improvement plan progress and the publication of the national dental recovery plan. Access to dental care remains one of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's key priorities.

2. RECOMMENDATION: The Board

1) Note the contents of the report.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Access to NHS dental services is a local, regional, and national issue impacting negatively on patients. Many performers on NHS contracts have switched from providing NHS care to private care resulting in national workforce challenges. This is due to the NHS contract no longer being an attractive option both professionally and financially.

3.2 The NHS contractual payments were agreed in 2006 following a baseline assessment of provision of care over a period of a year. No review has been undertaken and only DDRB uplift annually has been applied (normally around 3%) so effectively given costs of equipment, energy, staff wages etc the contract payments are no longer sustainable for providers, and they can only offer a percentage of the UDA value to a performer (13/14£) this is very low if you compare private remuneration and is not attractive to dentists.

3.3 The NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Dental Improvement Plan 2023/24 was approved in June 2023. Developed to facilitate an increase in access from 2023/24 this led to a number of providers offering urgent care and urgent care plus. In addition, a pathway

was created for looked after children and vulnerable patients such as those receiving cancer treatment.

- 3.4 Running in parallel to the local plan was the requirement for NHS dentists to recover activity to pre COVID levels as detailed in the NHS Operational Plan. Current performance across Cheshire and Merseyside is reported as being at 81.3% Units of Dental Activity delivered against a target of 100%.
- 3.5 Based on regularly reported data collected by the Dental Advice and Triage Helpline the demand for urgent care has increased by approximately 40% since COVID with many patients repeatedly attending. An urgent care appointment is nationally defined as 'to get a person out of pain'.
- 3.6 Working in collaboration the Local Dental Network and Dental Public Health, the dental team created an extension to the urgent care pathway, allowing patients who have attended an urgent care appointment to attend a separately commissioned session where they are offered a full examination and any substantive treatment to get them dentally fit.

4. **Cheshire and Merseyside Dental Improvement Plan 2024-26**

- 4.1 Approved by NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Board on 28 March 2024, the plan builds upon the current programmes in place and aligns to the delivery of the national dental recovery plan published on 4 February 2024 by the previous government.
- 4.2 The local plan utilises the dental underspend available to the ICB up to the value of £9.985 million. £4.8 million was previously approved in June 2023 so the total investment available will be around £14.85 million.
- 4.3 In addition, we hope to maintain and create workforce development opportunities within existing practices and wider within health and social care. We will also be seeking to maximise the opportunity of flexing contracts to take into account the altered contracting mechanisms outlined in the dental recovery plan and previous contract reforms.
- 4.4 The local plan focuses on five key pathways:
 - **Pathway 1** Access to urgent dental care for those in immediate need of support, such as dental pain, or specific medical/statutory requirement.
 - **Pathway 2** Urgent Care Plus - Definitive treatment following urgent care, if required/requested.

- **Pathway 3** Routine care for patients who require a check-up and any follow up care to make sure they are orally fit.
- **Pathway 4** Access for children, with additional preventative/treatment needs.
- **Pathway 5** Access for “cared for” frail vulnerable adults.

- 4.5 Pathways 1, 2 and 3 are now all up and running and work is commencing on 4 and 5 working with the Dental Local professional Network. The information below provides the latest position at the time of writing this report.
- 4.6 **Pathway 1** - there is one Urgent Care Dental Centre (UDC) in Halton. This offers an additional **13** urgent care appointments per month. Appointments are for urgent care and include Clatterbridge/cancer referrals & looked after children’s referrals. Referrals into this service are received via various routes including via the Helpline, Referral Management Service and Commissioners.
- 4.7 **Pathway 2** - Urgent care and substantive treatment appointments. At the time of this report there were **13** additional sessions per month available for Halton residents. Referrals into the service can be via Commissioners, or patients who contact the practice directly. Vulnerable patients should be prioritised as part of this agreement.
- 4.8 **Pathway 3** - Halton also benefits from practices who have signed up to provide routine access for new patients seeking NHS dental treatment. At the time of this report there were **45** additional appointments available per month in Halton for new patients. Appointments must be allocated to new patients (not seen at the practice in the previous 2 years). Practices are expected to deliver a full course of treatment and not just urgent care. Practices can draw down from their waiting list if they hold one, or patients who call. Practices must also link with a local vulnerable group to offer appointments.
- 4.9 To complement existing plans commissioners are developing proof of concept Dental Access and Workforce Development Centres in areas of highest need. It is envisaged that one of these proof-of-concept sites may well be in Halton in the near future.
- 4.10 Commissioners can use national contracting flexibilities and are seeking to find creative solutions. It is envisaged that the centres will provide access for new patients via existing referral routes with a focus on vulnerable groups. The centres will also seek to offer new ways of working for both dentists and the multi-disciplinary team including therapists and dental nurses.

5. **National Dental Recovery Plan**

- 5.1 Published by the previous government in February 2024 the plan aims to make sure everyone who needs to see a dentist, particularly those who have been unable to access care in the past two years, will be able to do so, making access to care faster and fairer.
- 5.2 New Patient Premium - Dentists will be offered a 'bonus' to take on new NHS patients which along with other measures in the plan – will create more than 2.5 million additional appointments in the next year. Patients will be able to see which practices in their area are accepting new patients via the NHS website. Practices are automatically opted into the scheme. Practices can choose to opt out or are opted out by Commissioners if the practice is part of a local scheme or does not hold a GDS contract. There are currently 4 practices in Halton opted into this scheme.
- 5.3 Golden Hello - The plan also offers 'golden hello' cash incentives for dentists to come and work in areas that are under-served. Up to 240 dentists will be offered £20,000 to stay and deliver NHS care for at least three years in areas where recruitment and retention of dentists is difficult. Cheshire and Merseyside has been allocated 7 places on the scheme and following a rigorous process 7 practices have been approved and 1 is in Halton.
- 5.4 It should be noted that in April 2024 as part of the national plan an exercise was undertaken to ensure that all practices received a minimum UDA rate of £28 and this was actioned across Cheshire and Merseyside where applicable.
- 5.5 Commissioners are awaiting further guidance on implementing the new government's manifesto pledges and how this will impact on the schemes referred to above.
- 5.6 Fundamental reform of the national contract remains a key issue in supporting dentistry to deliver NHS services and recover to pre COVID levels.

6. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Access to NHS dental care remains a key issue especially in areas of poor oral health and vulnerable populations. The local dental plan running alongside the national dental recovery aim to deliver improved access and tackle inequalities.

7.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None

8.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES** ([click here for list of priorities](#))

8.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

Oral health and access to NHS dental services are key elements to delivering improved health outcomes.

8.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

Will assist in creating and maintaining a healthier workforce.

8.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

Contributes to the requirement to ensure that in Halton children and young people are safeguarded, healthy and happy, and receive their entitlement of high-quality services that are sensitive to need, inclusive and accessible to all.

8.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

By improving access to dental treatment, the local plan will help to create a healthier community and work to promote well-being, a positive experience of life with good health (not simply an absence of disease) and offer opportunities for people to take responsibility for their health with the necessary support available. There is a focus on vulnerable group and this is considered as part of the commissioning process.

8.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None identified.

8.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None identified.

9. **RISK ANALYSIS**

9.1 None.

10. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

10.1 In light of the COVID-19 pandemic updated local oral health needs assessments have been completed for the 9 Places across Cheshire and Merseyside and will identify the needs of vulnerable groups. The Dental Improvement Plan will be underpinned by the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB Joint Forward Plan in terms of improving population health and tackling health inequalities.

11. **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 No climate change implications identified at this time.

12. **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

12.1 None under the meaning of the Act.