

Nottinghamshire County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16th January 2024

1 Background and information

- 1.1 The Nottinghamshire County Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) received a report for the meeting held on 28th March 2023. The report provided information on access to NHS Dental Services with a particular focus on provision and service recovery as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also included oral health improvement initiatives and activities, which is the statutory responsibility of the Local Authority – Nottinghamshire County Council.
- 1.2 The Nottinghamshire County HOSC requested a further briefing update to provide:
 - An update on current NHS dental access position
 - An update on NHS dental access initiatives
- 1.3 Further to the last update in March 2023, the commissioning of all NHS dental services was fully delegated to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) on the 1st April 2023.
- 1.4 A governance structure has been agreed that enables the ICB to set the annual plan and strategic direction of the Dental function and make localised decisions where possible, whilst the current dental commissioning team (who are hosted by Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB on behalf of the 5 ICBs in the East Midlands) are enabled to deliver day to day contracting and commissioning functions. The process has been designed to ensure minimal disruption and smooth transition to support both services and patients.
- 1.5 The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB recognises the importance of understanding the need of the local population. To enable robust commissioning plans to be developed, Dental Public Health Consultants are developing the Oral Health Needs Assessment for Nottinghamshire. This will be completed by March 2024 and will inform future commissioning and procurement plans going forward. The Oral Health Needs Assessment will review the population demographics, population growth, general health, oral health needs, inequalities and make recommendations to the commissioner to support improving access to services to meet the local population need.
- 1.6 An Equality, Health Impact Inequality and Risk Assessment will be undertaken to consider the impact on the population including the protected characteristics, as part of commissioning and procurement plans.

- 1.7 NHS England have advised that planning guidance for 2024-25 will be published in the new calendar year to support ICBs develop their annual plan. It has been confirmed the published 2023-24 priorities and recovery plans on urgent and emergency care, primary care access, elective and cancer care will not fundamentally change for 2024-25. The planning priorities, process, timeline, and performance expectations will be published separately. Whilst waiting for the publication of the planning guidance, the ICB has commenced considerations to develop the proposed annual plan for 2024-25. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB will provide an update to the Nottinghamshire County Health Overview Scrutiny Committee on the 2024-25 annual plan, commissioning intentions and mitigations on identified risks in the new financial year.

2 National NHS dental contract

- 2.1 Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB is responsible for commissioning all NHS dental services including those available on the high street (primary care dental services), specialist dental services in primary care e.g. Intermediate Minor Oral Surgery (IMOS) and Community Dental Services (CDS) as well as from Hospital Trusts. Private dental services are not within the scope of responsibility for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB.
- 2.2 Although Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB is responsible for commissioning all NHS general dental services, there are limitations of the current national contract which impacts on the level of local flexibility which can be applied.
- 2.3 Challenges with access to NHS dental services are fully recognised, with dental access being a key priority for all Integrated Care Boards. The lack of new registrations to NHS dentists is a common challenge across all Regions, with the most critical issue being gaining access to NHS Dentistry, as people are reporting that no dentists are taking on patients.

Challenges include:

Nationally and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB:

- Challenges for NHS Dentistry existed prior to the pandemic.
 - Workforce/Recruitment of Dentists and wider clinical dental team.
 - Access issues.
 - Profession discontent with current contract.
- 2.4 NHS Dental Practices are independent contractors who are having to adjust their work balance to remain viable and thus moving towards more private provision (please see section 3.4 for further information on private dentistry).

- 2.5 Dental practices are responsible for patients who are undergoing dental treatment under their care. All completed courses of treatment within the same treatment band have a 12-month guarantee. This means that repairs and replacements can be replaced within the 12 months as long as it falls within the same band of treatment or lower. Should further treatment be required, this must take place within two months when the course of treatment was completed. After the two months, the practice has no on-going responsibility as the patient would not be deemed as currently undergoing dental treatment under their care.
- 2.6 It is common that people associate themselves with a specific dental practice and are seen as “regular” patients of a dental practice. Many dental practices may refer to having a patient list or taking on new patients, however there is no registration in the same way as for General Medical Practices and patients are theoretically free to attend any dental practice that has capacity to accept them for a course of treatment.
- 2.7 Prior to the pandemic, patients would often make their ‘dental check-up appointments’ at their ‘usual or regular dental practice’. During the pandemic, contractual responsibilities changed, and practices were required to prioritise:
- urgent dental care
 - vulnerable patients (including children)
 - those at higher risk of oral health issues

For many practices, there has not been sufficient capacity to be able to offer routine dental check-up appointments to all those seeking access.

3 NHS Dental Services across Nottinghamshire

3.1 NHS Dental Access - Overall

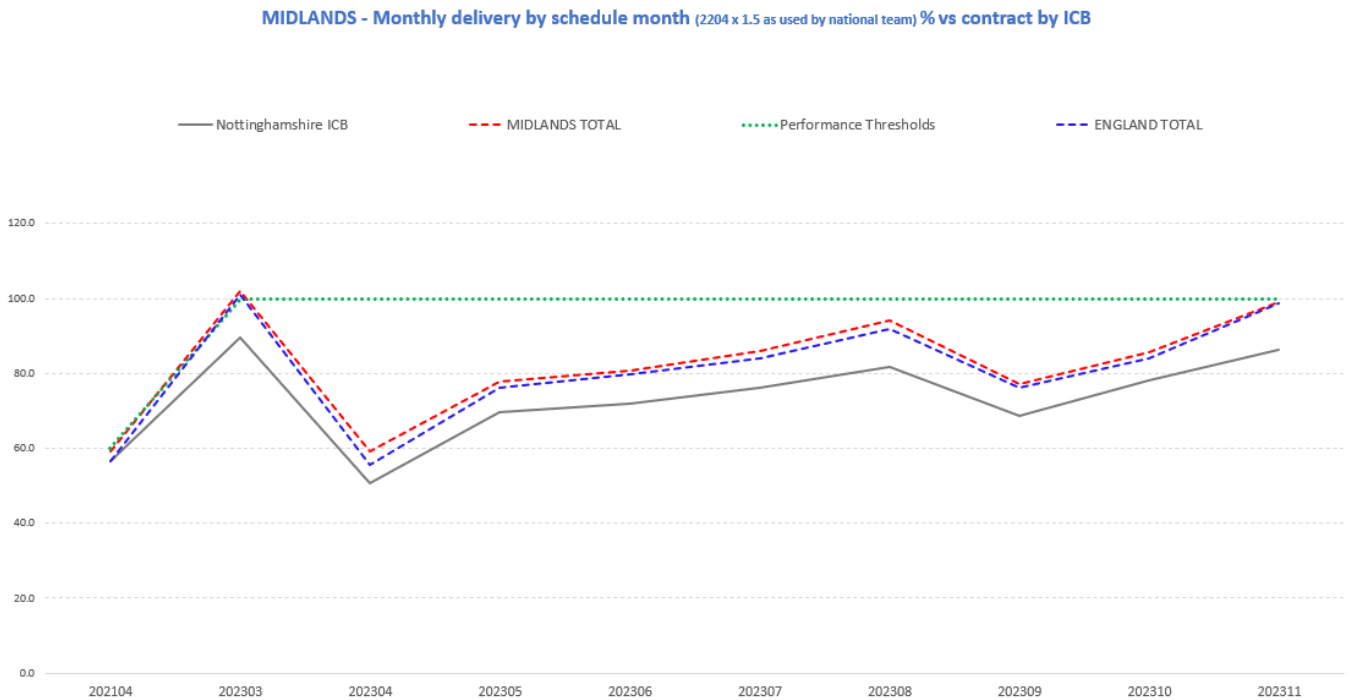
3.1.1 Restoration and recovery of NHS dental services since the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled dental practices to deliver increasing levels of dental activity, however the backlog of NHS dental care which has accumulated during the period where dental services have not operated at full capacity is widely recognised.

3.1.2 Figure 1 below shows a snapshot of the monthly contract delivery since the pandemic (April 2021) in comparison to the data shared at the previous Nottinghamshire County HOSC meeting in March 2023 with monthly activity up to November 2023). The graph indicates dental activity as follows:

Date	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB (%)	Regional Position (%)	England Total Position (%)
April 2021	56.4	59.1	56.5
March 2023	89.7	102	101
November 2023	86.2	99.1	100

It is to note that there have been 2 contract terminations within Nottinghamshire County (Bassetlaw and Newark) since March 2023.

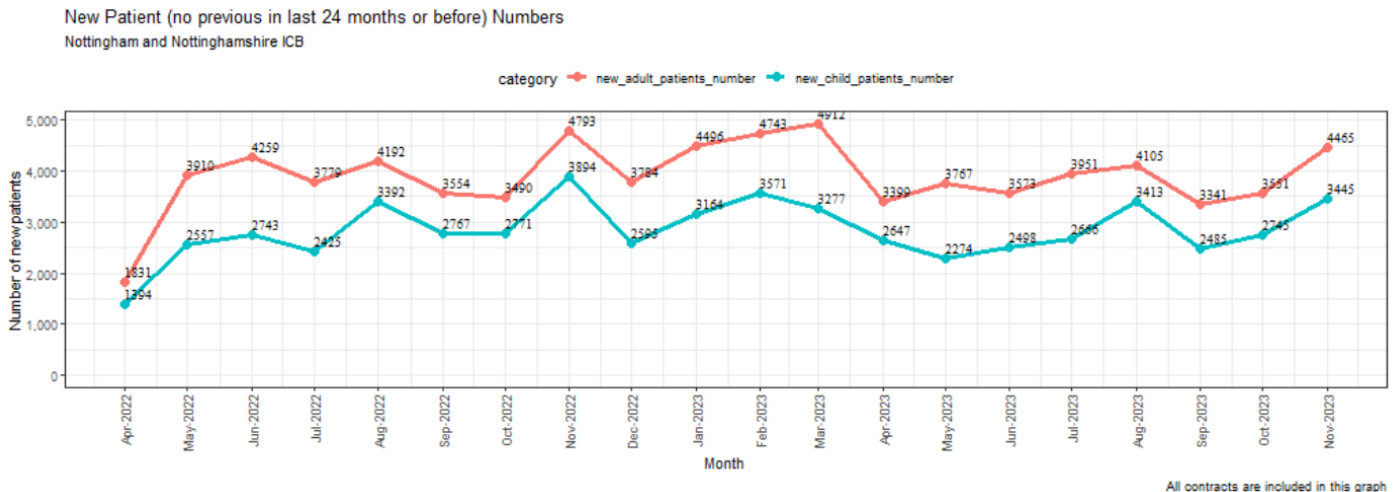
Figure 1 – Delivery trend for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB since the pandemic



3.1.3 It is estimated across the Midlands that around 631,000 appointments have been lost in primary care dentistry since the start of the pandemic (this data is currently not available at a lower level). The effects have been similar in community and hospital care due to restricted capacity from staff absences or re-deployment to support COVID-19 activities.

3.1.4 Figure 2 below shows the count of new patients seen (not been seen previously in the last 24 months) between April 2022 to November 2023 for adults and children in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB (data currently not available at a lower level).

Figure 2 – Number of new patients seen (April 2022 – November 2023)

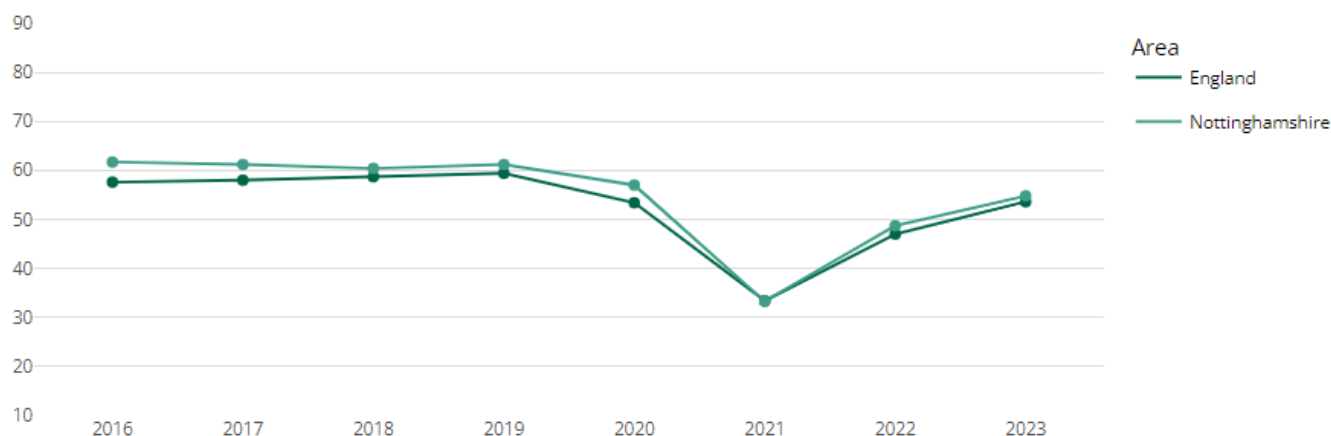


3.2 NHS Dental Access - Children and Young People

3.2.1 It became apparent early in the COVID-19 pandemic that NHS dental access for children and young people had been particularly badly affected. This was both due to dental practices focusing on urgent dental care and on parents being hesitant (or reluctant) to take children to medical and dental appointments – this pattern was consistent across other services too.

3.2.2 Figure 3 on the next page shows the percentage of children and young people seen by a dentist pre and post pandemic (2015-2023) in Nottinghamshire County. The table and chart show data as of June each year. It is to note that the data is published a quarter ahead of activity data to coincide with [NICE guidelines](#) on intervals between oral health reviews.

Figure 3 - Percentage of children and young people seen by a dentist pre and post pandemic (2015-2023) in Nottinghamshire County



Area name	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Nottinghamshire	61.7%	61.2%	60.4%	61.2%	57.0%	33.3%	48.7%	54.8%
East Midlands	58.4%	58.4%	59.0%	60.1%	55.4%	33.8%	47.9%	54.0%
England	57.6%	58.0%	58.7%	59.4%	53.4%	33.4%	47.0%	53.6%

3.3 Secondary Care: Referral to Treat (RTT) and Referrals

3.3.1 The table below shows the latest position of Oral Surgery in September 2023 for Nottinghamshire County and the overall RTT position for the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB. The updated September 2023 RTT position for Oral Surgery within Nottinghamshire County shows that the recovery in respect of the performance against the 18-week standards remains around an average of 45%. The number of 52-week waiters has increased from 61 to 67 patients. The proportion of the total waiting list that has been waiting 52 weeks is at 6%, compared to the regional average at 8%.

3.3.2 Over 104-week and over 78-week waits have remained at 0 in September 2023.

3.3.3 Over 65-week waits have remained the same since the previous month (August 2023). Over 65-weeks wait discussions are being built into the 2023/24 contracting round with assurance that the Trusts Pricing Activity Matrix has sufficient activity to support meeting the target to eliminate over 65 and over 78 week waits by 31 March 2024.

Oral Surgery RTT Data September 2023	% waiting at month end			Over 52 weeks	18+ week backlog	Total Waiting List	% of waiting list that is 52-week waiters	Over 104 weeks	Over 78 weeks	Over 65 weeks
	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23							
Provider										
Sherwood Forest Hospitals FT	55.2%	56.5%	58.0%	67	478	1,138	6%	0	0	22

3.4 Private Dentistry

3.4.1 Private dental services are not within the scope of responsibility for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB, therefore, the ICB are unable to provide any information on activity uptake within the private dentistry sector.

3.4.2 It should be noted that dental practitioners are independent contractors to the NHS and therefore many dental practices operate a mixed private/NHS model of care.

3.4.3 Some patients who have previously accessed dental care privately may now be seeking NHS dental care due to financial problems related to the current economic situation. This may place additional pressure on NHS services at a time when capacity is still constrained. Although these patients are eligible for NHS dental care, they may have difficulty in finding an NHS dental practice with capacity to take them on.

3.4.4 There have been anecdotal reports of some practices reluctance across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire in offering NHS appointments (particularly routine) and instead offering the option to be seen earlier as a private patient. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB do not support any stances of pressuring patients into private dental care. Any such concerns can be raised via a complaint about any specific practice/s by contacting the ICB via email nnicb-nn.patientexperience@nhs.net or telephone 0115 8839570.

3.5 NHS Dental Services Recovery Initiatives

3.5.1 As shared in the previous Nottinghamshire County HOSC March 2023 report; a number of access initiatives (including patient facing) have been undertaken for 2022/23 to support access to NHS dental services within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB (extract available under Appendix I).

3.5.2 Access initiatives continued into 2023/24 from 2022/23 at present are:

- IMOS Waiting List initiatives
 - to support lengthy waiting times that have been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This enables patients to be seen within 6 weeks of referral into the specialist service. As of November 2023,

there were 633 patients accepted onto the IMOS pathway by the Nottinghamshire system providers and 162 (26%) had been waiting over 6 weeks to access treatment. The Nottinghamshire system has the lowest IMOS waiting lists across the East Midlands. As this is a specialist service commissioned on a system area footprint, data for Nottinghamshire County residents is unfortunately not available.

- Support Practices – Community Dental Services
 - To relieve pressure on Community Dental Services by securing additional capacity in child friendly CDS Support Practices, thus freeing up the specially trained staff in the CDS so that they can focus on using the skills to deal with the most complex cases and increase access for children. There is one Provider in Nottinghamshire (Kirkby In Ashfield) providing 2 sessions per week.
- Vulnerable people and SMD groups
 - Delivery of dental treatment and care specifically to individuals who are vulnerable due to multiple deprivation and/or homeless via a mobile dental unit. The service commenced on 1st July 2023. During the period 13th September to 2nd November, 13 sessions have been delivered and 21 people were seen.

3.5.3 Commissioning objectives, priorities, and investment plan for the financial year 2023/24 was shared with all 5 East Midlands ICBs with governance approval granted in August 2023. The recommendations within the investment plan are for patient facing initiatives to improve dental access for all patients including vulnerable groups. Access initiatives include some of the investment schemes detailed within the previous paper plus some new investment schemes (extract available unable Appendix I).

3.5.4 To manage the current challenging financial position, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB are committed to continuing with 2023/24 investment schemes that have already commenced to support with improving access to NHS dental services. In addition, any availability of underspend funding will be reviewed for commissioning of additional NHS dental activity.

3.6 Prevention – Water fluoridation

3.6.1 Over a third (34.2%) of 5-years olds in Nottingham City have visual signs of tooth decay. In Nottinghamshire, while levels of tooth decay in children are better than the England average, almost a fifth of 5-year-olds experience decay.

3.6.2 In 2022, the average number of teeth affected by dental decay amongst 5-year-olds in Nottingham was 1.3 teeth. This is significantly higher than the England average 0.8 teeth. Similarly, over a third of 5-year-olds had visually obvious signs of dental decay (34.2%); significantly worse compared to the England average (23.7%). Overall levels of tooth decay in children in Nottinghamshire are better than the England average, however there are still significant inequalities in oral health outcomes across the county.

- 3.6.3 Water fluoridation schemes involve adding fluoride to community drinking water supplies in areas of low natural fluoride, increasing the level to that known to reduce tooth decay.
- 3.6.4 The findings of the 2014, 2018 and 2022 health monitoring reports are consistent with the view that water fluoridation is an effective and safe public health measure to reduce the prevalence and severity of dental caries and reduce dental health inequalities.
- 3.6.5 The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities compares data on the health of people living in areas of England with varying concentrations of fluoride in their drinking water supply, every 4 years. Along with global studies it confirms that water fluoridation is an effective, safe public health measure that is associated with lower levels of tooth decay amongst 5-year-olds; fewer teeth extractions due to decay; and a reduced tooth decay in adults. It supports previous findings that these benefits are greatest in the most deprived areas, thereby contributing to reducing dental health inequalities.
- 3.6.6 Secretary of State took the decision in January 2020 to centralise water fluoridation functions through the Health and Care Bill which received Royal Assent on 28th April 2022. This will be the first-time central Government has had responsibility for bringing forward new schemes.
- 3.6.7 The Act removes all Local Authority responsibilities for water fluoridation, maintains a duty to consult, and transfers funding responsibilities (for operational costs) to central Government (capital costs remain central Government responsibility). The first public consultation on fluoridation is expected in north east England in 2024.
- 3.6.8 In July 2023, Nottinghamshire County Council Full Council approved a resolution to work with other local councils, the Integrated Care Partnership and water companies to champion the oral health agenda including the expansion of water fluoridation to all parts of Nottinghamshire.

3.7 Commissioning and Procurement Plans

3.7.1 National Dental Contract Reform

The [National dental contract reform](#) changes announced in July 2022 has provided an initial start to the shift in the emphasis of financial rewards and the re-orientation of clinical activity to those patient who need it most, whilst increasing access to NHS dental care.

- 3.7.2 Where changes from the National dental contract reform have made some impact, it is recognised that there is still more work to do. This includes [further change](#) to boost dental workforce and increased access to NHS dentistry which is currently on-going with the Government.

- 3.7.3 A [framework](#) was published on 9th October 2023 by NHS England on the opportunities for flexible commissioning in primary care dentistry which provides an outline to ICBs of the legal requirements of the national dental contractual framework whilst highlighting the key considerations associated with procuring additional and further services which were previously termed 'flexible commissioning'.
- 3.7.4 Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB are currently reviewing this framework, whilst awaiting further supplementary guidance from NHS England. The review of this framework will include working collaboratively with Dental Public Health Consultants and the East Midlands Primary Care Team to determine how best to commission additional NHS dental access within the framework guidance. This review is expected to complete by late Winter 2024.
- 3.7.5 A strategic review of dental access is underway for 2023/24 and the East Midlands Primary Care team have access to a new mapping tool which will help to identify local areas which may have specific issues in order to assist with a more targeted approach in tackling issues identified. This review will additionally include collaborative working with our Consultants in Dental Public Health.
- 3.7.6 This review will also incorporate the findings from a Rapid Oral Health Needs assessment which is currently being developed in conjunction with the Dental Public Health consultant and Local Dental Network (LDN) chair to understand the impact post the pandemic.
- 3.7.7 The review recommendations are expected late March 2024 and will inform the general dental services procurement programme and commissioning requirements for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB. The East Midlands Primary Care Team are working collaboratively with all ICBs within East Midlands to develop a procurement plan for early 2024/25 financial year to support the difficulties in accessing NHS dentistry.
- 3.7.8 Procurement of public sector services are due to change in 2024. The [Provider Selection Regime \(PSR\)](#) regulations will come into force on 1 January 2024. This means that NHS services will be decoupled from the existing Public Sector Procurement Regulations 2015 in favour of a more flexible and pragmatic approach.
- 3.7.9 The PSR is intended to remove unnecessary levels of competitive tendering, removing barriers to integrating care and promote the development of stable collaborations.

4 Supporting Information

- [Appendix 1](#)
Extract from previous Nottinghamshire County HOSC report (March 2023): Access initiatives (including patient facing) undertaken for 2022/23 to support access to NHS dental services within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB.

5 Contact Points

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Appendix 1:

Extract from previous Nottinghamshire County HOSC report (March 2023): Access initiatives (including patient facing) undertaken for 2022/23 to support access to NHS dental services within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB.

2022/23

- Weekend Sessions – General Dental Services
Across the Nottinghamshire system, 2 NHS general dental practices were contracted to provide 140 additional sessions at a cost of £70,000. Out of the 2 practices, 1 practice was within Nottinghamshire County providing 40 additional weekend sessions.
- Dedicated Urgent Care slots during surgery opening hours – General Dental Services
Additional NHS dental capacity has been provided by dental practices on a goodwill gesture in order for NHS 111 to be able to signpost patients who do not have a regular dental practice requiring urgent dental care. Four NHS dental practices across the Nottinghamshire system are taking part providing an extra 39 appointments. Two practices are within Nottinghamshire County offering 25 additional urgent care appointments per week.
- Oral health improvement funding for local authorities
£150,000 recurrent funding for 2 years (21/22 and 22/23) to support oral health improvement initiatives and activities.

The above funding has been jointly allocated between Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils. Agreement on the spending of the funding has been discussed and agreed at the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Oral Health Steering Group to ensure alignment with oral health needs of the area.

- Support Practices - Community Dental Service
Additional funding to re-run the pilot for financial year 2022/23, where 3 practices within Nottinghamshire were approved to provide 6 sessions per week. Two of the three practices are within Nottinghamshire County providing 4 sessions per week.
- Golden Hello Scheme
Additional funding to assist local NHS dental providers in the recruitment and longer-term retention of dentists in targeted areas where the recruitment of additional dentists is most challenging. The overarching aim of the scheme is to increase the number of dentists in targeted areas and ultimately increase local NHS dental access for patients. Under the terms of the scheme, a lump sum Golden Hello payment of up to £15,000 will be available for each eligible new full-time NHS dentist recruited within the target area from non-targeted areas. The targeted area within the Nottinghamshire system is East Bassetlaw. One application for East Bassetlaw was received and approved.

- Waiting list initiative - Intermediate Minor Oral Surgery (IMOS)
Non recurrent investment in 2022/23 was extended to support IMOS providers in reducing waiting times for patients to be seen within 18 weeks of referral into the specialist service. The Nottinghamshire system has one of the lowest IMOS waiting lists for patients waiting over 18 weeks to be treated across the East Midlands due to this no funds were assigned for 2022/23 as funding was targeted at system areas with the longest waits. As this is a specialist service commissioned on a system area footprint, data for Nottinghamshire County residents is unfortunately not available.
- Waiting list initiative – Orthodontic Case Starts
Non recurrent investment in 2022/23 was extended to support lengthy waiting times for orthodontic treatment that have been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 3 providers in Nottinghamshire were approved for this scheme to provide 60 additional case starts. Out of the 60 case starts approved, 30 are in Nottinghamshire County.
- Vulnerable People and SMD Groups
Recurrent investment of £200,000 per annum has been secured to commission an East Midlands pilot scheme for delivery of dental treatment and care specifically to individuals who are vulnerable due to multiple deprivation and/or homeless. The pilot will include mobile dental unit in Nottinghamshire, 12 visits per annum and additional 28 clinical sessions per annum in a primary care setting. The mobile dental unit commenced delivering services with effect from 1st July 2023.
- Flexible Commissioning
Flexible Commissioning aims to refocus a section of existing commissioned activity to increase capacity to deliver specific programmes or incentivise activity. Flexible Commissioning initiatives were developed by Yorkshire and Humber Commissioning Team and took effect from November 2019.

5 general dental practices in Bassetlaw were approved for the scheme. Upon transferring to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire region due to boundary changes, practices were approved for a 1-year extension for the scheme until March 24 in line with Yorkshire & Humber Commissioning Team. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB are currently scoping options for Flexible Commissioning via task and finish group for consideration to widen the scheme across the whole Nottingham and Nottinghamshire system.