

Oral health and dental access

NHS Devon ICB & Torbay Public Health update - December 25

Setting the scene

Public Health has the **mandatory duty for oral health** in the population across the life course. Since July 2023, the responsibility for **dental commissioning and delivery** has moved to the ICB - presenting an opportunity for joint improvement and delivery.

Children with dental problems may have poorer diets due to dental pain, have higher levels of school absenteeism, as well as impaired concentration due to pain and interrupted sleep. Severely decayed teeth will often require extraction under general anaesthetic, exposing children to low but significant risk. Extractions in early years may also require follow-up procedures including orthodontics.

Reduced dental access, coupled with poor oral hygiene manifests in higher rates of life course dental caries and extractions especially on those resident in areas of inequality. Residents unable to afford private care or unable to travel to dentists accepting new patients are often those worse affected.



Local update – latest Torbay statistics

Statistic	Detail
Admissions to hospital and extractions under GA in 0-19s in Torbay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2023-24 Hospital admissions for tooth decay in 0-19 years: 617 per 100K population (England 229, Southwest 261). Hospital admissions for tooth decay (0-19) are defined as finished consultant episodes with tooth extractions. The majority of the 170 extraction cases are within the 5-9 age group – this is reflected in the focus of mitigating programmes.• 3.35% increase on 21-22, though this is a reduction in the previous annual increase rate (6.8%). Torbay remains the highest in the Southwest, though our overall % increase is lower than the Southwest and presents a positive direction of travel.• Torbay extractions have remained largely static but the reduction in the England value has increased Torbay's outlier status.• Expectations re the impact of our mitigating programmes need to be realistic. There is little evidence to draw on to help with expectation, though Child Smile Scotland with its programme of community and clinical interventions has adopted a 20-year model starting in 2003, seeing a 9% increase in children living in deprived areas with no obvious decay over 10 years.• Not all extractions in children and young people take place under GA within the hospital setting. Some are completed under sedation and local anaesthetic in NHS Community Dentistry (Castle Circus Health Centre) and more in high street dental settings. Work is underway to establish how many take place in the former to complement the hospital data and help establish an estimation of the true burden of disease in our most disadvantaged populations in Torbay.
Dental caries in 5-Year-olds in Torbay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 2024 Epidemiological Survey shows a worsening situation: 26.4% of the school sample (217 pupils) showing evidence of decay. Torbay is an outlier and is worse than the SW (19.7) and England (22.4) values. This marks an increase on the 2022 value (21.3) but is lower than 2020 (28%). Of the 19 Torbay schools sampled all were in Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) areas 1-7, with 59% in IMD 1-3 (most deprived).
Oral cancers in adults (18+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mortality rate from oral cancer (21-22) 5.4 per 100,000 (27 cases). This is <u>similar to England</u> (4.7). Rates rose to 7.7 in 2014-16 but have been decreasing since then. Oral cancer is more common in men and deprived groups. Southwest 4.3, Plymouth 6.5 (highest in Southwest), Devon 4.4.• Oral cancer registrations (21-22) 17.9 per 100,000 (84 cases). This is <u>worse than England</u> (15.6). Southwest 15, Plymouth 19.1 (highest in Southwest), Devon 15.6

National update

“The Government’s ambition remains to fundamentally reform the dental contract. We developed this package of proposals to address some of the real and pressing issues that dentists and dental teams are experiencing.”

- The national consultation regarding NHS dental care was open for 6 weeks and closed on 19 August 2025.
- The Southwest had higher than average submissions compared to the rest of the country.
- It is anticipated that they will introduce appropriate changes for April 2026.



National update

- Overview of items being consulted on:
 - Mandate a proportion of dental contract capacity to be unscheduled (urgent) care
 - supported by new payment arrangements
 - Improved payments to support care for patients with significant dental decay and/or significant gum disease
 - Create a new course of treatment for the application of fluoride varnish on children, without a full dental check-up and which can be applied by extended duty dental nurses (EDDNs) between full check-ups

National update

- Incentivise greater use of preventative sealants on high-risk children's permanent teeth by increasing payment to band 2 (from band 1)
- Introduce increased payment for denture modifications, relining and repairs, which can prevent most costly treatments for patients
- Options to support reducing clinically unnecessary check-ups
- Introduce funded quality-improvement activities for practices
- Provide practices with funding for annual appraisals
- Develop minimum terms of engagement set out in an NHS model contract for dental associates
- [Consultation document website](#)

Local update

Recovery Plan

25/26 priority	Detail
Oral Health improvement initiatives	<p>A suite of oral health initiatives are now available in Devon through a collaborative ICB and joint local authority approach. We have attempted to turn the challenge of limited NHS dental capacity into an opportunity by repurposing the associated underspend to commission a programme of initiatives to improve oral health in children. Accordingly, NHS Devon has committed £900k per annum, for 3 years, (total £2.7m) to fund a series of mitigating oral health programmes. Current programmes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Dental Steps (1-2 yrs). This programme trains health visitors and midwives to give oral health care advice to families with children under two and supply free oral health care packs (toothbrushes and toothpaste). Children at high risk of decay are identified and referred directly to Community Dental teams for further help if required.• Big Brush Club (supervised toothbrushing programme for 3-5yrs). This important programmes trains reception school and nursery staff to increase daily brushing via supervised activity - making brushing part of children's everyday routine and helping to protect their teeth from decay. The Big Brush Club has been extended to provide an offer to 100% of schools and nurseries in Torbay. At present, the programme is achieving a 90% uptake in schools and 75% in nurseries. Reasons for non-take-up include space, teaching capacity and a multiplicity of interventions. The programme provider, At Home Dental and Public Health work with settings to attempt to resolve such issues.• Open Wide Step Inside (6-7 yrs). Year 2 children in primary schools across Torbay have been part of this programme where the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE), Dental Outreach Team go into schools to deliver 45-minute oral health education lessons. The lesson includes a 15-minute animated film and an interactive session teaching important messages around oral health. The programme is offered to all primary schools in Torbay and is currently achieving a 75% take-up.• Oral Health Workforce Training. A potential new service is being scoped by to design and deliver an evidence-based workforce training offer for non-dental professionals working with both children and adults, including priority populations at higher risk of poor oral health. It will include the distribution of toothbrushing packs. It is likely that a phased approach will be adopted with initial focus on care homes, supported living, domiciliary care and children in care.• Food Banks/Warm Spaces/Night Shelters: A draft advice and guidance leaflet for distribution via food banks and warm spaces has been developed by Public Health. This will cover oral health and dental access for children and adults, as well as warning signs for oral cancer.
Oral Health Strategy	Torbay Council has launched it's Oral Health Framework 2025-30 and Action Plan which can be found HERE

Local update

Recovery Plan

25/26 priority	Detail
Urgent dental care provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remains the team's top commissioning priority due to government's commitment to 700k additional urgent dental care appointments.• Commissioned review of urgent dental care in Q1.• Recently reopened the expression of interest process following additional engagement with Devon Local Dental Committee (LDC) and providers/practitioners.• Devon providers currently at 67% of nationally planned achievement, including baseline activity, for year to date.• Procurement of new dental contracts across Devon include a prescribed 30% activity level of urgent dental care, to contribute towards the target.
Commissioning of further stabilisation sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Longer-term contracts secured for stabilisation sessions, with 34 contracts now being delivered in 2025/26. 5 of these are in the Torbay area, with 3 in Torquay and 2 in Paignton.
Commissioning access for vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration with public health to expand access for these cohorts of patients.• Draft proposal is currently being worked on with the aim of procurements taking place in the new year.• Procurement for new dental contracts across Devon aims to elicit bids with a focus on provision for vulnerable groups through innovative service delivery.
Procurement of lost activity (UDA and UOA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lotted procurement of new dental contracts across Devon include general dental activity.• Torbay lot - contract for an additional 33,000 units of dental activity (UDA) at a contract value of £1,320,000, per annum.• Torbay is also included in the separate out of hours (OOH) lot, with Barnstaple, Exeter and Plymouth aiming to contract for an additional 5,222 OOH appointments.

Local update

2025/26 Progress, successes and achievements

2025/26 workstream	Detail
UDA uplift	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimum rate for a unit of dental activity (UDA) uplifted to £34.66 (incl. 2025/26 Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) uplift) from £28• This is above the nationally mandated rate
Urgent Dental Care (UDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved rate of pay for UDC - top-up to £105/appointment to stimulate the market and drive uptake. One of the most financially attractive UDC schemes in the country.• Series of engagement webinars and events in collaboration with Devon LDC with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding of Devon's UDC scheme to both contract holders and performers.• Six providers signed up across Torbay, offering an additional 8,224 Urgent Care appointments.• Improved national ranking from 41 – 31 (as of Q1 2025 - more recent benchmarking has not yet been made available).• 30% of the activity procured in new contracts for dental provision across Devon (see below) will be mandated as UDC.
Contract management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• £733,937.91 of activity has been released from rebased contracts in Torbay for 2025/26, ensuring that delivery levels are achievable. This has created capacity to procure new activity (see below).
Lotted procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NHS Devon ICB and CIOB ICB joint lotted procurement for new dental practices and related services is in process. Deadline for bid submissions past on 28 October 2025, and evaluation process began mid-November after initial bid compliance checks by CCH.• There is provider interest across all Devon lots.• Torbay included in the Out of Hours (OOH) provision lot – 5,222 OOH appointments valued at £658k.• These new contracts potentially key across multiple priorities including urgent dental care, provision to vulnerable populations and improvement of general access to dental services in Devon.

Local update

2025/26 Progress, successes and achievements

2025/26 workstream	Detail
Vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NHS Devon ICB currently has two services focussing on provision of dental services to people experiencing homelessness, one in both Plymouth and Exeter.• Discussions on-going with public health regarding Devon-wide provision, which may include expansion of existing services and procurement of new services in Torbay with an initial focus on Leonard Stocks Hostel• NHS Devon contracts three providers for provision of dental services to Children in Care across Devon, 1 of which is in Torbay.• Procurement for new dental contracts in Devon includes a focus on vulnerable populations, encouraging innovation in service delivery to these cohorts of patients.• Work ongoing to provide support to other vulnerable groups, with proposals currently under consideration for:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cancer Action Support Practice – whereby participating practices would offer a temporary dental home for patients who have undergone treatment for head and neck cancer.• Bone strengthening medication service pathway proposal for treatment of osteoporosis, cancer and respiratory conditions.• Oral Health Checks for residential Special Educational Settings (SES).
Paediatric dental services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Started work to review paediatric dental services and agree strategic priorities going forward.
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NHS Devon ICB agreed £327,400 for 22 ‘Golden Hello’ applications. Four appointments have been made, with one pending final approval. NHS Devon continues to support this scheme.• Torbay practices have submitted one application, which has been approved.• Identified six initial areas of focus: Recruitment, retention, roles and models of care, wellbeing of staff, training and university places and education support and foundation training• Next meeting on 15 December – looking at activity against those six key themes and how to support the workforce in Devon.

Local update

Dental access

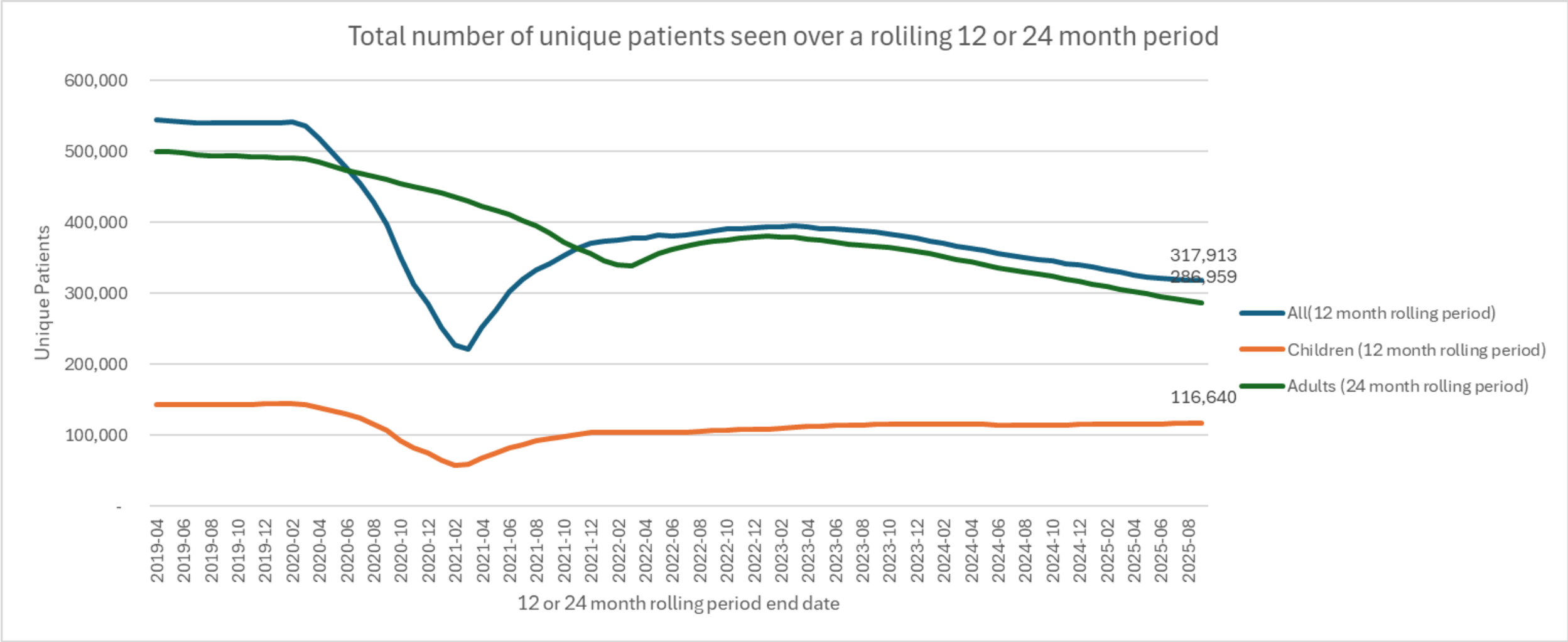
- Devon currently hold **150 NHS dentistry contracts** and **13 orthodontic contracts**.
- The ICB target in the 2025/26 planning indicators for Q1 was 241,819 appointments. NHS Devon dental contracts **delivered 211,977 in Q1 (87.7% of target)**.
- The ICB target in the 2025/26 planning indicators for Q2 is 246,962 appointments, or 82,320 per month. Actual delivered for **August was 67,376 (82% of target)**.
- **NOTE:** August data is yet to be finalised due to the claim window still being open and may increase. There has also been a delay in release of September SW Dental performance dashboard.
- NHS Devon is currently working with NHS England business intelligence colleagues to breakdown dental data by local authorities.



Local update

Dental access

- Most up to date data indicating unique patients seen by a dentist over 12/24 months rolling period is shown below:



Date	ALL – 12M	Child – 12M	Adult – 24M
01/01/2020	541,046	144,442	491,754
01/08/2025	317,913	116,640	286,959

Local update

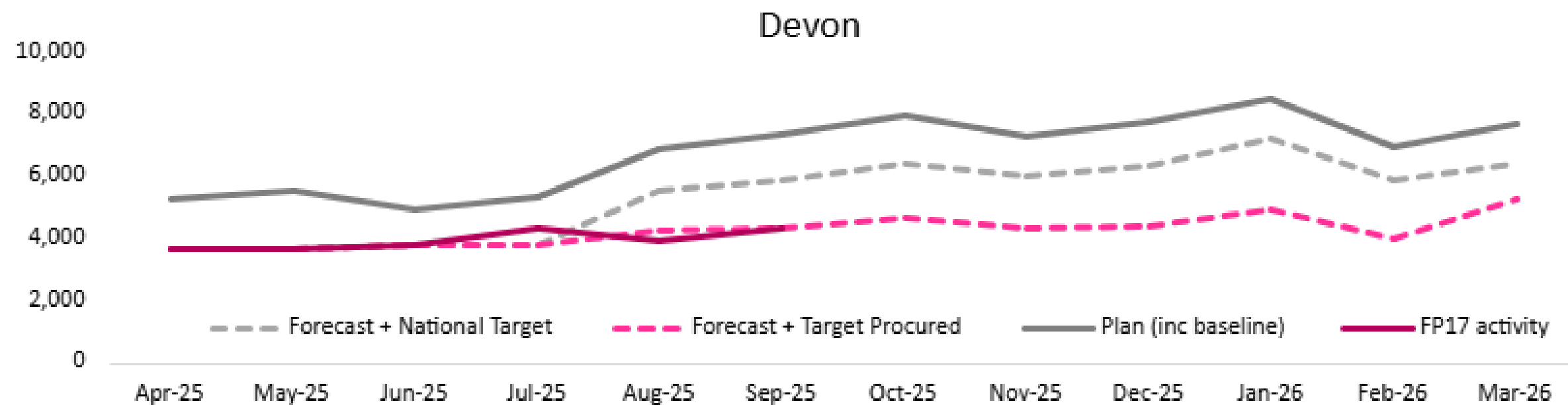
Urgent Dental Care (UDC) – Government mandate

- Main team priority is delivery of 81,705 UDC appointments in 2025/26, representing a **42.3% increase** above when baseline data was collected.
- There had been **continued decline in UDC** delivery over the last five years.
- Since 2019/20 UDC activity has dropped by c.5% per annum on the previous year, until 23/24 which was a 17% drop, followed by a further **decline of c.24%** for 24/25.
- Reversing this trend is top priority and team continue to explore additional commissioning options to run in parallel with its current UDC offer.
- NHS Devon's UDC offer to providers is one of the most attractive in the country. However, the disparity in compensation available to providers between NHS and private treatment remains an issue.

Local update

Urgent Dental Care – Government mandate

- We have **6 providers in Torbay** (19 in total across Devon).
- Lotted procurement of new dental practices across Devon will mandate a percentage of the contracts to be delivered as urgent dental care.
- NHS Devon ICB providers have achieved 67% of their combined target (year to date) for urgent dental care. We are working on breaking this data down to LA level.



- Note that claim window for August and September remain open and claim figures are likely to increase.

Local update

Devon Dental Helpline

Since June 2025, the dental helpline has stopped adding new patients to the NHS dentist 'waiting list'.

Why the change?

- Nationally there is no process for a waiting list for Dental.
- Historically there was a register held across Devon and Cornwall sometimes referred to as a 'waiting list'.
- The list did not provide an accurate reflection of the level of need.
- Many patients had moved, no longer required care, or were duplicated but remained on the list.
- It created unrealistic expectations about timescales and access.
- Patients are not registered with dental practices in the same way as they are GP practices.
- Allocation only provided one course of treatment, not ongoing registration, leading to complaints.
- The process risked increasing health inequalities where those able to travel were more likely to be allocated. It also didn't prioritise clinical need which is standard with most NHS waiting lists.
- Focus resource on improving access to NHS dental services rather than the maintenance of an unvalidated list.
- We will work with our new dental practices during the mobilisation period to offer patients who were added to the list Urgent Dental care or Stabilisation if required.

Advice for patients:

- For urgent dental care: **Call 111**
- To find an NHS dentist: **Visit NHS [Find a Dentist](#) webpage**

Local update

Mouth Cancer

Our ambition is to support improvements in mouth cancer outcomes, while recognising where responsibilities sit across the wider system.

Awareness Campaigns

- There is an annual campaign led by the Oral Health Foundation, [Mouth Cancer Action Month](#), which encourages dental teams to promote prevention and early detection through effective conversations with patients.
- The Dental Public Health team are leading an oral cancer strategy and action plan, an element of which is focused on increasing awareness of preventative advice for head and neck cancer and is being supported by the RCDO and Restorative MCN.

Expand Access to Dental Services

- Devon ICB is addressing the expansion of dental services through procurement processes, workforce engagement, enhanced rates, and targeted support for vulnerable groups. This will help ensure timely access to care for those most at risk.

Comprehensive Training

- Training is not directly within Devon ICB remit, but we note that several events have recently taken place for the dental workforce in Devon, including the Devon LDC Oral Medicine training day on 11th November and the South West regional cancer training for Dental Care Professionals on 6th November.

Streamlined Referral Process

- Work is ongoing to improve referral pathways through the Dental Electronic Referral System (DERS), with Oral Surgery and Urgent Care MCNs engaging closely with Cancer Alliances to ensure timely and efficient referrals.

Recap

- In summary:
 - National dental contract reform – anticipated appropriate changes from April 2026
 - NHS Devon commitment to national urgent dental care (UDC) mandate – main team priority
 - Devon providing one of the most attractive UDC offers in the country – drives uptake and activity
 - Devon were the first movers for enhanced urgent care expressions of interest in the Southwest
 - Upcoming procurement of additional dental activity across Devon – general dental activity, UDC and vulnerable groups are key focusses





Devon

TORBAY COUNCIL

Q&A time