

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull's response to NHS England Orthodontics

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull welcome the opportunity to share feedback about NHS England Orthodontics. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care across Birmingham.

We welcome that the Office of the West Midlands is keen to hear feedback on this subject as we have been contacted by patients and their families about all aspects of their orthodontic care during the course of our work.

Accessing NHS Dentistry

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull sought to understand the barriers people have faced accessing NHS Dentistry. Challenges such as lack of access, long waiting times for treatment, lack of information or clarity around NHS dental capacity in Birmingham and Solihull, affordability, and poor access to urgent and emergency dental care are leading some people to:

- Forgo or reduce much needed treatment.
- Access private dental care, which is often not affordable and has left some people in debt.
- Using A & E or frequently calling NHS 111 to access services.

The report [How easy is it access NHS dentistry in Birmingham and Solihull?](#) also portrays an NHS dental system under severe pressure from factors such as increased demand for NHS services, issues with funding and problems recruiting and retaining staff.

Not being able to access a dentist has been one of our most frequent enquiries and is a clear barrier to people accessing orthodontic care.

[Dental practice name] are not taking children NHS patients and only charge private fee that is extortionate. It is a new process implemented this year. £40+ per child per checkup.

We moved to Birmingham in 2020 and have not been able to find a dentist taking on NHS patients even for my son

Been on waiting list for some time now including my two boys

Tried extensively to find local one when previous dentist went private. Many showed NHS signs outside but would not take on NHS patients.

I am contacting you today as I am growing in concern for dental care in my area as I have tried over 12 dentists who are not accepting new patients. I have been added to one wait list, but they mentioned it would be over 9 months to even be



considered. I am in pain and do need to see someone, I go to an orthodontist who mentioned this needs to be ASAP.

Long waits for treatment

We have heard from people across Birmingham and Solihull who have experienced long waits for orthodontic care, including children who are at risk of 'aging out' of receiving care on the NHS.

My daughter waited for three years for her orthodontic treatment. The last appointment was cancelled in March and since then we haven't heard anything from them.

Very slow service and if you are NHS patient you have to wait for months. Dentist is very rude as well

I had braces when I was 13 years of age but due to a medical condition (chronic gastroenteritis) meaning I would vomit constantly, which is not very nice to do with braces in, I was unable to wear them. I was also bullied for having braces and at 13 it was quite hard. I am now 17 and have this condition under control and would like to see if I could get my braces done under the NHS as I'm under the age of 18. My dentist has said that I could not have this under NHS as the waiting list meant I could not be treated because I would be 18+ and I had already had the braces treatment. I would like to know if there is any way I can still have the treatment under NHS orthodontics.

My daughter was referred by her dentist in 2019. She was seen and promised extractions and braces to correct her teeth her jaw doesn't line up she had a tooth coming through the roof of her mouth and lots of overcrowding. I was contacted once through lockdown and asked if I still wanted to be on waiting list which of course I replied yes and since then I've contacted numerous times on the phone and given all kinds of excuses covid staff shortness only taking people off waiting list for braces which she needs. We informed them she was in pain was told they would email consultant and would be contacted back yet we haven't heard. I called again today to explain the tooth through the roof of her mouth is fully grown and she had another coming through side of gum which was giving her pain. I was told she is classed as urgent but they didn't have the staff last year so was put back a year. Now they have staff she will possibly be seen in autumn this year which is another five months away. I was told to contact our own dentist if in pain How is that if she was referred to yourselves in the first place as they can't do the work required? I think it's disgusting to leave my daughter a young girl who's very self-conscious of her teeth and in pain with false promises. No appointment to be seen and most likely won't be contacted anyway!

Absolute joke...after initial appointment with NHS orthodontist my daughter was told she would have a 3 year wait to have braces fitted, I have borrowed money to pay private (at the same orthodontist) when I rang to tell them this they offered an appointment that same day to have the scan & x-ray. How is this allowed to happen?? How can they suddenly get her in straight away & not wait 3 years just because money is now involved?



I have my son and he is waiting for a dentist appointment for braces. He's been waiting 3/4 years. He is 15 years old and needs this.

It has been 3 years my daughter still has her braces on we chase them they don't even care about their patients

Changes to service delivery

We were contacted by two parents in the last year who had children who were waiting for orthodontic care from services that then withdrew from providing them on the NHS. This has led to them experiencing long delays to accessing care.

My daughter was on the waiting list for braces. After 16 months of waiting we were recently informed they won't be starting any new courses of orthodontic treatment due to a resignation. We were told we would be contacted shortly by NHS England with alternative service. It's been almost a month and still haven't heard anything. Very frustrating and more so for a child who has low self-esteem and negative body image. To be further delayed and of course not knowing exactly what is going on as there's been no update is very disappointing. All my daughter's friends have already started their treatments (with different providers) even though they had their assessments at the same/ similar times.

My daughter was referred by our Dentist around July 2020 for braces. We were told to expect a letter in the post, which could take up to 6-8 weeks. I understand there were delays due to Covid19, however, I assumed at least an acknowledgement/ validation letter from the Orthodontic provider would have been a standard protocol. When I didn't hear even after a year, I chased it up with my Dentist who advised me to contact the service provider. In March 2021, I contacted [dental practice] and explained the situation. They then arranged an assessment appointment for my daughter to be seen on [date]. My daughter was assessed to be eligible and qualified for NHS orthodontic treatment.

*On the [date] I received an email from [dental practice] stating:-
I am writing to inform you that our orthodontic specialist Dr [name] is resigning from the NHS and will not be starting any new NHS courses of orthodontic treatment. This is because he will not be able to complete treatments in the limited time he has left with us and transferring your care to another orthodontist mid treatment would not be in your best interests.*

We have discussed matters with [services] who also agree that starting and not completing a course of treatment with the same orthodontist is not a favourable position for patients. Therefore, [services] will be in contact with you shortly and all patients currently on our waiting list will be offered alternative services that we hope will be convenient and acceptable you - please await communication from them.

I contacted [service] on the [date] and asked where exactly this left my daughter. On the [date] I received the following reply:-



"Thank you for contacting [service] and please accept my sincere apologies for the delayed response.

I can confirm that I have been in contact with [services] team, who have advised that if your child is currently undergoing treatment the practice will complete it. Commissioners have not yet selected alternative providers to commence new courses of treatment but are in the process of doing so. The timescale is not clear yet, however if your child had been assessed as meeting the NHS eligibility criteria and would have commenced treatment this year (22/23) we aim to ensure their case is started within this financial year; as it would have been had the provider not terminated its contract. Your child will not be put on the bottom of another waiting list.

If your child is on a longer waiting list, commissioners will advise when arrangements have been made. At present we cannot comment as we need to follow procurement guidance and contracting regulations and do not have any more information to offer. We do appreciate that this is frustrating. It is not anticipated that waiting times will reduce.

The international pandemic has unfortunately had an impact on all health care services including a reduced number of dentists, difficulties in access to dental care and waiting times for orthodontic treatment."

I waited another 4 weeks and emailed [service] again but received no reply, and again on the [date] which also went unanswered.

I also emailed [dental practice] in October, December and last month for an update but just like [service] they simply ignored my messages.

It's now been 5 months and I still have not heard anything further from [service].

All my daughter's friends have already started their treatments, (with different providers) even though they had their assessments at the same/similar times. She is upset and disappointed and feels like she has been forgotten about.

It's quite frustrating not knowing what's happening and being left in limbo.

Concerns about quality of care received

People across Birmingham and Solihull have told us about concerns they have with the quality of the treatments they have received.

I was advised to have braces with them when I originally went in for just 1 composite veneer, I had the braces, and had them taken off, for whatever reason he shaved down some of my teeth (apparently so they would 'fit'). And that was it! I now have a very large gap & a misaligned top row of teeth due to drifting! I was at no point advised to have a retainer which I now know I would need after braces!

I am currently receiving free NHS orthodontist treatment. However, I have been having problems with my orthodontist who I am uncomfortable with. I started my treatment when I was 16 years old[...] and I am now 18. I have been given a removal brace and have had two of my teeth taken out. My treatment isn't progressing as my teeth aren't shifting. Every visit, I told her this and asked when I was going to get braces - I have done all she has asked (have the brace in all times except when brushing teeth). Yet she outwardly denies my efforts and becomes



quite rude even stating if my teeth doesn't move she will cancel my treatment. She has given me lack of information about my treatment and it is only when I ask I get information - which is very vague.

I have been seeing a dentist In Birmingham to have a braces, the last year the doctor I had treatment with left the clinic, and I had to complete with the owner (a dentist) usually he keeps delaying appointments and cancel most, the treatment was really poor last year.

Staff attitudes

We have heard from people about their concerns about the attitudes of staff that they have dealt with when accessing orthodontic care.

Awful experience. Rough doctor and extremely rude.

[...] she is very rude to her assistants and often embarrasses them in front of patients; making us uneasy. Although this is a very brief summary of what I have been going through I hope you could help me change orthodontists. I have been experiencing a lot of distress from this and due to her warning me she will cancel my treatment if my teeth do not move, I have decided to seek help. At first, I didn't want to complain as I thought since I was receiving free NHS treatment I should just deal with it. But overtime I acknowledged that her mistreatment was wrong and it is not normal for an orthodontist to treat patients like this.

My daughter (15) had an appointment today. We were not told what it was for and believed it was a consultation to discuss her options. I was initially not allowed in to the practice. She was told that she was there to have a fixed brace fitted; neither she nor I had agreed to this and there had been no discussion of a treatment plan or of her options. When I was eventually allowed in to talk to the dentist she was very defensive and we left. I will not be taking my daughter back there. It's outrageous that they think they can just act on minors without consent.

I had a severe crossbite, I should have had surgery but only had braces to aesthetically correct my teeth. 4 years later and I suffer jaw pain every day, migraines etc. Horrible experience, rude orthodontist who made crude remarks to the nurse. I was never informed of how my treatment was going.

My dentist is not the best. I broke my braces once accidently and they were not happy. Because of this I've decided to pay privately. The service will be better and quicker.



Caller is upset about the ongoing conduct of the dentist and the lack of professionalism on view.

Dentist has said I cannot go back to sort braces as I had them done in Ethiopia.

Honestly so so disappointed. The dentists are always in a rush and give blunt responses to genuine questions. Barely talk you through your procedure and what to expect

Caller has contacted us about the care their daughter is receiving from their dentist. Caller daughter has ASD and ADHD, as well as an eating disorder. She has had a long standing issue with her dentist insisting that her daughter is not cleaning her teeth properly and looking after her oral health in a way that supports the use of the braces she has fitted. Caller is annoyed at the attitude of the dentist, who she says is showing a lack of concern towards her daughters medical needs due to her behavioural conditions. Caller has also suggested that the rudeness may be a result of them being an Asian family. Caller has said that her dental records have not been kept up to date, and staff seem unaware of her daughters needs upon repeat visits. Caller has asked for complaint information.

Every single time I have went to this dentist I felt very unwelcome and he does not give me any advice for my teeth I just sit in the chair he looks at my teeth and says they're ok when I am so much pain I cannot brush the left molar or eat solid foods on the left side of my mouth I expressed this to him multiple times but he just tells me to brush harder. Now my teeth are visibly decaying they are turning black and my gums have receded so much I feel so helpless every day they are getting progressively worse. I also left this dentist on multiple occasions in tears but today I have had the last straw he told me to "drop the attitude" when I tried so hard to tell him I was in great pain he just shoos me away and tells me there is nothing he can do. How can this be an NHS dentist?? He does not want to help poor people!

Positive experiences

People have also shared with us positive experiences they have had accessing orthodontic care

Always had an excellent experience, the team are very attentive and the results are fantastic, I now have a beautiful smile.

Thank you for giving me a smile I can be proud of! Service was brilliant.

My daughter was referred for her brace and the care she received was fabulous, from start to finish.

She has a beautiful smile now, thanks to orthodontist and his wonderful team!



I was referred from them to the Dental Hospital as I needed braces, I only waited 6 months. They send for regular appointments. They're a good service. They always contact me.

Both my children had very wonky teeth. They now both have beautiful straight teeth thanks to the orthodontics provided by this practice on the NHS. All staff we met were professional, but friendly at the same time and always put them at ease.

We look forward seeing progress in the provision of orthodontic care across the West Midlands.

Yours Sincerely,

Sarah Walmsley

Data & Insight Officer

