5.3.6.1 Contract Reform (Page 77)

The need for reform of General Dental Services has been recognised for some time and the challenges faced today reinforce the urgency of that reform. The Department's Health and Social Care NI Three-Year plan includes a commitment to develop an Action Plan and programme of work for the reform of General Dental Services by March 2027.

Work is underway to develop and appraise options aimed at improving access to care, supporting the sustainability of dental practices and ensuring that General Dental Services are fit for purpose and responsive to future population needs. This includes consideration of the future scope of services, contractual arrangements, workforce development and the role of prevention in improving oral health outcomes.

The Department continues to engage with the dental profession and other stakeholders to inform the development of reform proposals. This engagement will continue as options are developed and assessed.

The long-term vision remains a sustainable and resilient Health Service dental system that provides access to care for those who need it most, supports a motivated and retained workforce and delivers value for public money.

5.3.6.2 Cost of Service Review (Page 78)

The General Dental Services Cost of Service Review was commissioned in December 2024 to provide an independent assessment of the costs associated with delivering Health Service dentistry in Northern Ireland. In parallel, a GDS Reform Advisory Group was established to support consideration of the future direction of General Dental Services.

The Review was published by the Department of Health on 16 September 2026 and provides important evidence regarding the sustainability of Health Service dentistry in Northern Ireland. The findings highlight a significant disparity between current remuneration arrangements and the estimated costs of delivering Health Service dental care, raising concerns regarding the longterm sustainability of existing arrangements.

In publishing the Review, the Minister of Health accepted the findings and committed to taking forward work to identify practical and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing Health Service dentistry. Work is underway to develop and appraise options aimed at improving access to care, supporting the sustainability of dental practices and addressing the challenges identified by the Review.

The British Dental Association has been invited to contribute to the development and appraisal of reform options arising from the Review. The Department's ability to respond immediately to the findings of the Review is constrained by the current financial position facing both the Department and the wider Executive. The funding implications associated with fully addressing the gap identified by the Review are substantial and must be considered alongside competing pressures across Health and Social Care.

Notwithstanding these constraints, work to develop and appraise reform options is continuing so that the Department is well placed to take decisions on the future of General Dental Services as the financial position becomes clearer.