



“Your Views Count”

**What the residents of South Tyneside
told us about services during
Covid-19**

October 2020 - April 2021

Contents

- Healthwatch - who we are and what we do.....3
- Context.....4
- Summary.....5-6
- What we did.....7
- Contact details.....8

Healthwatch South Tyneside - who we are, what we do

Healthwatch South Tyneside is one of 148 local Healthwatch organisations across England launched in April 2013 to give users of health and social care services a powerful voice.

As set out in the Health and Social Care Act of 2012, Healthwatch South Tyneside has the following statutory activities:

- Promoting and supporting the involvement of local people in the commissioning, the provision and scrutiny of local care services.
- Enabling local people to monitor the standard of provision of local care services and whether and how local care services could and ought to be improved.
- Obtaining the views of local people regarding their need for, and experiences of, local care services and importantly to make these views known.
- Making reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved. These should be directed to commissioners and providers of care services and people responsible for managing or scrutinising local care services and shared with Healthwatch England.
- Providing advice and information about access to local care services so choices can be made about local care services.
- Formulating views on the standard of provision and whether and how the local care services could and ought to be improved; and sharing these views with Healthwatch England.
- Making recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the Care Quality Commission to conduct special reviews or investigations (or, where the circumstances justify doing so, making such recommendations direct to the CQC); and to make recommendations to Healthwatch England to publish reports about issues.
- Providing Healthwatch England with the intelligence and insight it needs to enable it to perform effectively.

As an independent Community Interest Company (CIC), it is your dedicated consumer champion, working with users of local National Health Service (NHS) and social care services to hear about your experiences identify any issues or problems and helps generate improvements.

Healthwatch South Tyneside has the right to enter and view services; can influence how services are set up and commissioned by having a seat on the local Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB); and provide information, advice, and support about local services.

It also produces reports which influence the way services are designed and delivered and can share information and recommendations to Healthwatch England (HWE) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Context

Following our “Hard to Reach” project funded by the National Lottery in 2020 we created excellent links with hard to reach groups in South Tyneside and when Covid-19 hit it was vital that we maintained those links and kept engaging with the community during the pandemic.

Healthwatch South Tyneside staff and volunteers attended monthly virtual coffee mornings and group meetings to gather the views of patients and residents about health and social care services and any barriers they may have faced during Covid-19.

During **October 2020 to April 2021** we attended the following groups to gather residents’ views:

- New Hope North East (a BAME support group)
- Alzheimer’s Society
- SENDIASS Parent Group
- South Tyneside Arthritis Support Group
- Your Voice Counts
- Woman’s Health in South Tyneside
- Apna Ghar.

On arrival at each session, we explained the role of Healthwatch South Tyneside and had informal discussions about each attendee’s experience around health and social care and advised that the feedback would be used to improve services across South Tyneside.

Summary

Here are some of the common themes from the information you gave us:

- Information for those with learning disabilities was sometimes difficult to find in South Tyneside about Covid-19 and other related issues and many were supported with this by Your Voice Counts and The Let's Talk Team.
- Obtaining SEND support during Covid-19 has been difficult, with many young people not being supported in education, and access to respite support has not been available with no alternative offered.
- GP access has been difficult in some areas, with feedback including being unable to get through on telephone lines to make appointments or the use of online forms for triage or appointments. If patients have disabilities or learning disabilities, many have needed support to do this; the process needs to be made easier for these patients.
- Some patients did have difficulty booking their Covid-19 vaccine with appointments being booked too far away from home, but once they received appointments at Flagg Court the experience was very positive with excellent organisation and the hygiene was excellent.
- Patients raised the difficulty of opening appointment letters online, they either do not open at all or it is too difficult for those who cannot manage with technology. Those who are visually impaired were receiving letters in small print, rather than large, even when their GP was aware that the patient was visually impaired.
- It was felt that more respite for both adult carers and young people with SEND was needed during Covid-19.
- Wait times for GP appointments were in some cases longer than six weeks. Patients unable to speak with their GP without online triage or detailed confidential information having to be passed through reception area.
- Adult mental health community support has been good virtually which is positive, but there are concerns around those most vulnerable who are not online.
- Getting crisis support has been a challenge for those working with vulnerable groups or those in need of mental health and social care crisis support, particularly during Covid-19 when it has been most needed.

- For some there has been limited access to whole NHS systems, limited treatments despite being encouraged to seek support from GP services.
- One patient stated “when contacting the surgery on a pay as you go mobile (as this is the only phone I have) the recorded message before connecting to the receptionist before being answered is far too long. I had to make two phone calls at a cost of £2.10 and £3.00 without success. That price is totally unacceptable. And I complained about this to the medical secretary at the surgery. The people that need help can't get it because of the cost!”
- Some patients felt “being asked to send photos is often impractical and should not take the place of a face-to-face consultation”.
- Many people do not have access to the technology or the skills to send information into a GP surgery and this has caused some digital exclusion and if such systems are to remain in place as we move out of Covid-19 alternative clear pathways for patients should be offered.
- Use of video and calling appointments is a positive addition and should continue to be offered if a patient request this but not to replace face to face consultations.
- During Covid 19 some patients felt “so much stress being caused by the current systems that conditions are being exacerbated” and a patient stated “*it can sometimes feel like a postcode lottery*”.
- Very happy with service of Covid vaccination - efficient, relatively easy to use when organised by GPs.

What we did

1. Referred patients to services that can support them such as NHS advocacy service and other local Healthwatch services, and highlighted issues with NHS, CCG, and social care partners to ensure improvements are made.
2. Ensured the information has been shared with key SEND teams to directly address issues raised and continued to work in close partnership on the improvement of SEND services and health and social care.
3. Passed feedback to local GP services and mental health services of suggested improvements.
4. Arranged to attend groups on a regular/monthly basis, if requested, to enable Healthwatch South Tyneside to be more responsive to patients and residents with any issues/concerns they may be having in relation to health and social care.
5. Will send the local feedback to Healthwatch England to ensure local trends can be addressed as a national picture.

Our next steps

We will continue to engage with community groups, patients and residents in South Tyneside to ensure patients are given the opportunity to have their voices heard and services continue to improve as we recover from Covid-19.

Contact details:

Healthwatch South Tyneside
Hebburn Central
Glen Street
Hebburn
NE31 1AB

Tel: 0191 4897952

E: info@healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk

W: healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk

tw: @HWSouthTyneside

fb: facebook.com/HWSouthTyneside