









Championing what matters to you

**Healthwatch South Tyneside
Annual Report 2021-22**



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Message from our chair

As our healthcare services continued to work under tremendous pressure to both treat in-patients with Covid-19 and tackle a waiting list backlog for other hospital treatment, Healthwatch South Tyneside prioritised research into the impact of the pandemic on borough residents during 2021-22.

We commissioned in-depth online surveys which provided real insight into how Covid-19 and associated social distancing measures had affected our care home staff, residents and their loved ones, and on the overall mental health of people in the borough.

Our findings were shared with commissioners and providers of services, along with a series of recommendations for improvements based on the feedback we received.

After the lifting of lockdown restrictions, we met virtually with groups of users of specific health and social care services to enable us to share the actual experiences of patients and their carers with those planning changes and improvements to services.

They included people with Alzheimer's, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and arthritis – and those representing hard to reach groups such as Apna Ghar and New Hope North East.

Healthwatch has helped members of the public with advice and information on a wide range of issues during the year, from provision for children and young people with SEND to how to arrange home Covid vaccination for a housebound patient.

Other issues raised with us have included problems accessing GP and dental services and medical records, obtaining emergency prescriptions and complaints about treatment by hospital and primary care staff.

With the merger of South Tyneside and Sunderland's NHS health trusts and the five year Path to Excellence transformation programme, it is a time of great change in the organisation and delivery of local healthcare services in the borough.

Path to Excellence is currently reviewing emergency care and acute medicine, emergency surgery and planned operations, planned care and outpatients, and clinical support services.

There are concerns over the future of maternity services, after the midwife-led birthing centre at South Tyneside District Hospital closed in January 2022 due to staffing shortages, meaning all births are currently taking place in Sunderland.

During 2022-23, key priorities for Healthwatch will include waiting lists for procedures, dentistry and method of access to GPs as we continue to ensure the patients' voice is heard and plays a key role in service design.

I'd also like to pay tribute to founding director Dr Shobha Srivastava MBE, who retired from the Healthwatch Board in October 2021 after eight years, and Peter Bower who left at the end of his term of office in March 2022. Your service has been very much appreciated by us all.

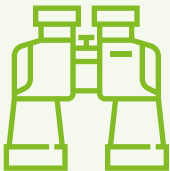
Arthur McKean, Interim Chair



About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch South Tyneside is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch board consisted of six members during 2021-22 who worked on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. The board meets bimonthly, including a public board meeting every four months, to ensure decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities, which are informed by issues raised directly with us by service users making information and signposting enquiries as well as through meetings with local organisations representing a wide range of health and care interests and hard to reach groups.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, via our website and social media channels, we have commissioned research projects and have attended meetings of community groups.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, meeting members of the Apna Ghar Ethnic Women's Centre and ethnic minority support group New Hope North East.

Representation on local committees

Healthwatch South Tyneside is a member of the South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board which our Chair attends, alongside meetings with chairs from Sunderland and Durham Healthwatches and the Chair, Chief and Accountable Officers of South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group. We also attended the following meetings:

Adult and Children's Safeguarding Board

Alliance Executive Committee

Change 4 Life Health and Wellbeing

HealthNet

Live Events held by the Integrated Care Partnership

Local Emergency Department Delivery Board

Local Healthwatch Lead Officers Meeting

National Audit of Care at the End of Life

North East and North Cumbria Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Palliative and End of Life Leader Group

Path to Excellence Communications Task and Finish Group (South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust)

Path to Excellence Stakeholder Advisory Group (South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust)

Patient, Carer and Public Experience Committee

Patient Reference Group

Primary Care Commissioning Committee

Quality Account Stakeholder Group for the Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

South Tyneside and Sunderland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny

South Tyneside Service User and Carer Reference Group

Quarterly meeting with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.



Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people

Reaching out



146

... people shared their experiences of the Covid vaccination process with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.



120

... people came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and Covid-19.



9,176

...visited our website, with more than 55% visiting our news pages.

Making a difference to care



We published...

5 reports

... following surveys and interviews about the Covid vaccination process and the impact of Covid and social distancing on adult mental health, on care home residents and their loved ones, and on access to treatment and other services.



390

... people visited the reports page on our website.

Health and care which works for you

We're lucky to have...

14 outstanding volunteers

... who gave up 32 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

£103,409

...which is the same as the previous year.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring

We commissioned a research consultancy to contact staff and loved ones of residents at all the borough's care homes to understand the impact of Covid-19 on their emotional wellbeing.

We launched a survey of people receiving the Covid vaccine to obtain feedback of their experience to identify issues and suggest improvements.

We supported South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust with a patient survey obtaining feedback on the proposed £36m Eye Hospital on the Riverside Sunderland development.

Summer

We commissioned a research consultancy to conduct a six-week online survey into the impact on mental health of the pandemic, which 196 adult respondents took part in.

We published our Your Views Count report, which detailed feedback on the impact of Covid on access to services and treatment following our attendance at a number of local groups over a six month period.

Autumn

Healthwatch paid tribute to founding director Dr Shobha Srivastava, who retired from our Board after eight years.

Winter

We published the reports following the research carried out by MMC Research & Marketing on the impact of the pandemic on mental health, and by Bluegrass Research on care homes.

Staff and board members completed Healthwatch England's Quality Framework review process, designed to help run an effective local Healthwatch.



Healthwatch Manager Sheila Scott presents leaving gifts to retiring founding director Dr Shobha Srivastava.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve.

Your Views Count

In June 2021 we published our Your Views Count report, which followed six months of virtual meetings with local groups where we talked about the work we do and the support we can offer.

We also wanted to help with any issues that individuals or groups were facing within health and social care, to raise problems to get them resolved or signpost to a service which could help.

We took part in virtual meetings of the following groups: Alzheimer's Society; Apna Ghar; New Hope North East (ethnic minority support group); Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support (SENDIASS) Parent Group; South Tyneside Arthritis Support Group; Woman's Health in South Tyneside; Your Voice Counts.

Issues raised included: difficulty in obtaining SEND support during Covid; GP access difficult

in most areas with appointment waiting times taking up to several weeks; cancer treatment delayed and cases of terminal diagnosis given over the telephone; concerns about mental health support for the most vulnerable who are not online; getting crisis support for those in need of mental health and social care crisis help.

What we did

We referred patients to services that can support them such as the NHS advocacy service, and highlighted issues with NHS, CCG and social care partners to ensure improvements are made.

We also ensured the information was shared with key SEND teams to directly address issues raised, passed feedback to local GP services and mental health services of suggested improvements, and sent the local feedback to Healthwatch England.



The impact of Covid on care homes

The huge emotional and physical impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care home residents, their loved ones and staff was revealed in a report we published in March 2022.

Restricted visiting led to low mood, anxiety and feelings of loneliness, with many residents becoming withdrawn and reducing their food and fluid intake. Many staff also reported reduced mobility and clear signs of depression.

Relatives also suffered greatly from the inability to visit their loved ones, using words such as 'stressful', 'difficult', 'excruciating', 'heart-breaking' and 'devastating' to describe the lockdown periods, with

guilt also a common emotion expressed.

Healthwatch commissioned Gateshead-based market research consultancy Bluegrass Research to carry out online surveys of staff and relatives of residents in South Tyneside's 32 care homes.

Over a three month period, 75 employees from 20 care homes and 81 relatives and friends of residents at 11 homes took part.

More than a third of staff reported residents' emotional wellbeing as being worse than before the pandemic, with two in five staff witnessing a worsening of conditions like Alzheimer's or dementia

which they felt was due to the pandemic.

Half of relatives felt that residents' emotional wellbeing was worse than before the pandemic, citing loneliness, depression or anxiety, while almost one in three noticed a change in eating habits or a deterioration in mobility.

Most relatives agreed with the view expressed by staff that they felt they had tried their best and done a good job, with many sharing their thanks and praise. In some cases, perceived quality of care actually saw an improvement on pre-pandemic levels – a testament to the dedication and efforts of all staff involved.



Mental health service users call for shorter referral waiting times

Users of mental health services in South Tyneside called for shorter waiting times for referral after our survey found many without support or treatment for up to six months.

We commissioned research to establish the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of adults and the services provided in the borough.

Sunderland market research consultancy MMC Research & Marketing carried out a ten-minute online survey which asked a series of questions relating to respondents' mental health and access to services where needed.

Nearly 200 people took part, providing a clear insight into the harmful effects of lockdown and other enforced restrictions on normal life during the pandemic.

Findings included:

- 42% of the respondents felt their mental health had deteriorated during the pandemic due to boredom, isolation/loneliness, fear of catching Covid and anxiety about travelling, shopping and adhering to rules.
- 55% said there had been a negative impact on their diet; either comfort eating or not eating enough.

- 49% reported trouble sleeping.
- 25% had increased alcohol consumption.
- 63% wanted a reduction in waiting time for the Lifecycle service, with 50% waiting one to four months and 17% four to six months to get the help they needed.

Our report, published in March 2022, was shared with Healthwatch England, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and South Tyneside Council.

It had a number of recommendations for improved access to mental health services including: anticipating increased demand for mental health services in the event of a future pandemic and ensuring adequate resources are in place; improving online self-help resources; and reviewing current waiting times for the Lifecycle service.

Patient and public involvement in development of £36m Eye Hospital

Healthwatch South Tyneside supported South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust with its patient and public involvement strategy to encourage patients and the wider public to feedback on its plans for a new Eye Hospital.

This included nine online public engagement events attended by 49 people, 14 focus groups with 71 participants and an online

survey which generated 336 responses – 40 from South Tyneside.

Comments and questions included location, accessibility, parking and the design of the building, with 92% of survey respondents saying the plans were positive and 94% saying they would be happy to use the new Eye Hospital.

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Getting to the heart of the issue

We commissioned local market research experts to conduct in-depth online surveys which provided real insight into the impact of Covid-19 and associated social distancing measures on our care home staff, residents and their loved ones, and on the overall mental health of people in the borough. Our findings were shared with commissioners and providers of services, along with a series of recommendations for improvements based on the feedback we received.

Getting services to involve the public

By meeting with groups of users of specific health and social care services, including people with Alzheimer's, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and arthritis – and those representing hard to reach groups such as Apna Ghar and New Hope North East – we have been able to share the actual experiences of patients and their carers to inform the planning of changes and improvements to services.

Improving care over time

It is a time of great change in the organisation and delivery of local healthcare services in South Tyneside, with the merger of South Tyneside and Sunderland's NHS health trusts and the five year Path to Excellence transformation programme which is currently reviewing emergency care and acute medicine, emergency surgery and planned operations, planned care and outpatients, and clinical support services. Healthwatch will continue to ensure the patients' voice is heard and plays a key role in service design.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

Healthwatch South Tyneside has been contacted by members of the public for advice and information on a wide range of issues during the year, from provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to how to arrange home Covid vaccination for a housebound patient.

This year we helped people by:

- Assisting with problems accessing GP services
- Contacting GP practices and the CCG to highlight issues in obtaining emergency prescriptions
- Helping with problems accessing dental services
- Signposting the Information Commissioners' Office to patients reporting issues accessing medical records
- Signposting the North East NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy to patients complaining about treatment by hospital and primary care staff.

Signposting people who needed additional support

Healthwatch South Tyneside on occasion goes above and beyond its formal remit, in attempting to provide confidential support and free information to health and social care service users and their carers.

One gentleman contacted us on numerous occasions in June and July 2021 in distress shortly before and after the death of his mother aged 89 from cancer.

We contacted several agencies and organisations to obtain the help he needed, including social services, Mental Health Matters, Bliss=Ability, the Carers' Service, Let's Talk and the Crisis Team.

This included help with the care of his mother and subsequent financial support with the funeral arrangements, and concerns he had with his housing and benefits.

Healthwatch highlighted our concerns with the Crisis Team that a lack of joined-up care was exacerbating the gentleman's distress at a very difficult time, and referred complaints he wanted to make about care agencies to the North East NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy.

We also received a complaint from users at local charity New Hope North East alleging lack of support and follow up from the Direct Payment Team, issues with care support for their children and how care and respite funds could be accessed during Covid 19, children/young people being left with no education/provision, and poor support from the Early Help team for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) needs.

The group said they feel the only action that is taken is when Healthwatch has attended

sessions to take matters forward, otherwise being ignored.

We signposted the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) and the Service Manager (Access and Inclusion) at South Tyneside Council to take any complaint forward to.

In another case in February 2022, Healthwatch contacted South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and the Practice Manager at a GP surgery after an elderly female patient reported being very upset following a conversation with a receptionist at the surgery.

The lady called the GP practice after realising she did not have any medication left for her epilepsy and other ailments as her cassette had not been delivered by her local pharmacy, which was closed.

She was very anxious and asked if she could take a taxi to the practice that evening to obtain an emergency prescription, but was told this was not possible and to instead contact the pharmacy the following morning.

Following Healthwatch's intervention, the Practice Manager contacted the patient after listening to a recording of the telephone call and arranged a one-off script and delivery of the medication to her home. It was not possible, however, to meet her request for a spare cassette to ensure she had additional medication in future, as this is not permitted.

In a follow-up email to Healthwatch, the Practice Manager said: "This is clearly a training issue and I can make sure this does not happen again with any patient and educate the staff member involved."

Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Took part in Your Views Count engagement
- Worked on the Sunderland Eye Hospital engagement commission
- Attended two focus groups reviewing the Connect Health musculoskeletal service.

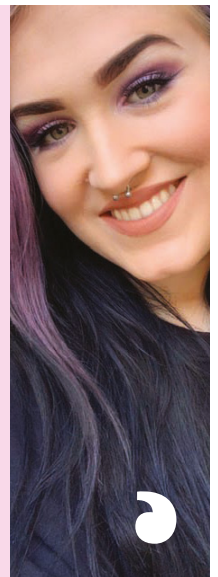
Joy

"Volunteering for Healthwatch has allowed me to still feel that I can have a say in decisions that have been made for the services and choices of health and social care matters. I have found it an enjoyable, interesting and challenging experience and would encourage people who are thinking about helping their community to 'give it a go'."



Jax

"I have been able to use my university experience and psychological knowledge in order to propose ideas and solutions to improve healthcare services, including sexual and mental health, for young people today."



Nafizah

"I like volunteering with Young Healthwatch because I get to work with my fellow volunteers to design and undertake some exciting local healthcare audit projects."



Arthur

"I love to volunteer for Healthwatch so I can make a difference and give something back to the community - no matter how big or small it might be."



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Income

Funding received from local authority

£103,409

Additional funding

£1,400

(New Eye Hospital engagement work – South Tyneside & Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust)

Total income

£104,809

Expenditure

Staff costs

£41,353

Operational costs

£14,241

Support and administration

£19,945

Total expenditure

£75,539

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming year, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure the voice of patients is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers they face, regardless of whether that's because of where they live, their income or race.

We will do this by continuing to undertake detailed research to get to the heart of the issues facing those using local health and care service users, and report back to those who commission and deliver services with feedback and recommendations.

Top three priorities for 2022-23



Waiting lists for procedures



Dentistry



GP access – method of access



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