

Healthwatch South Tyneside Operational Plan

2023 to 2024

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Introduction

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 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 (how we approach our work)

- **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.

Our key priorities for April 2023 to March 2024

COVID-19 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 is because of where they live, their income or their 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 services, and report back to those who commission and deliver services with feedback and recommendations.

Our top priorities for 2023 – 2024 are:

1. **Dentistry.**
2. **GP access.**
3. **Care in the community.**

Our central aims remain:

- Making a difference in our communities.

- Involving our communities to have their say about the health and care services available to them.
- Focusing on those within our communities who can feel overlooked and not engaged in provision of health and care services.

Our next steps

Involving local people in the debate around future and existing health and social care provision will help ensure their voices are heard. This will enable health and social care planners know what matters to people most. Everyone should have the opportunity to share their views to improve care, particularly people who are seldom heard. We will focus our time and resources on ensuring that we amplify these voices and reduce the barriers people face being heard.



We will also ensure we report back to local people. We will track and assess progress throughout the year and keep our local residents up to date via communications on our website, social media, and our newsletter due to be launched later 2023.

To enable us to promote the voice of local communities at decision making level, we will use different methods of engagement with our local communities including holding focus groups for each of our key priorities. We appreciate the importance of individual experiences and patient stories as well as collective views.

Through surveys, focus groups, and coming to local community events, we aim to increase engagement with local people on health and care services.

We will also consider the national status for each of our proposed priorities, including the work and focus of Healthwatch England, and ensure any recommendations are in context with the national picture.

We will continue to support people to have their say, provide a high-quality service, and support professionals to act on what people tell us. To do so, we will involve our volunteers, including our Young Healthwatch cohort to underpin our goals in 2023 to 2024.

 **The important work of our volunteers has helped us to understand the priorities that will make a difference to our communities. We would like to thank our Healthwatch South Tyneside volunteer teams for their contribution to the Operational Plan 2023-24 and their continued commitment and support that will benefit us all.** 

- **Sheila Scott, Lead Officer** -

Key priority 1: Dentistry

Feedback from communities in South Tyneside suggests the following areas remain a concern in terms of available dental services:

- Unable to register as an NHS patient with dental practices in South Tyneside.
- Websites of dental practices are out of date. For instance, some say they are accepting NHS patients, but are not.
- Inadequate advice provided to those seeking help, particularly with regard to emergency appointments and 111 services.
- Capacity within the dental system to cope with demand, resulting in long lead times for patients to be seen.
- Prioritisation of emergency work, and the status of prevention work, for example, current six-monthly check-up levels versus pre COVID-19 levels.

GOAL: To understand the challenges facing dental practices and raise awareness of available services to local residents and share the concerns of local residents with dental practices to encourage service improvement.

During 2023 / 2024 we will take the following steps

- Work with the Dental Association and approach local dental practices and talk to them about how they are finding the current situation, based on, but not limited to the areas raised above. We will look to identify areas where improved communication to the public will be of benefit to the experience of those needing dental care.
- Approach communities within South Tyneside with a questionnaire and follow up focus groups, to assess the alignment or gaps between the perception of the service providers and the experiences of those who need to use the services.
- Report our findings with recommendations to those who can influence service delivery.

Key areas of focus

Hear from 'seldom heard' communities: We will prioritise gaining insights from these groups to identify gaps in data and knowledge and understand the barriers that prevent people from being heard. The homeless, those families most affected by the cost-of-living crisis and Black and Minority Ethnic communities in South Tyneside will be receiving our attention here.

Work in partnership: We will develop specific partnerships with the appropriate Public Health team, and also voluntary organisations that have close links with communities of interest through HealthNet.

Key priority 2: GP access

One of our key priorities in 2022 was access to GPs. Our report is due to be published shortly and can be accessed on our website <https://www.healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk/>. The report provides insight into the current status of GP access in South Tyneside and has identified areas that continue to attract our attention.

GOAL: To maintain focus on key areas of concern arising from the results of the Healthwatch South Tyneside GP Access report.


During 2023 / 2024 we will take the following steps

- Use the results of the Healthwatch South Tyneside GP Access Report to understand what areas would benefit from more in-depth insight.
- Highlight which is considered the best surgery from patient feedback and understand what is working with the aim of sharing best practice. Also identify 'hot spots' where there is a common concern.
- Consider what we can do locally in terms of public education. Whilst we acknowledge this as a national responsibility, we will seek to identify local behaviours which could lead to improved service availability.
- Develop surveys and focus groups to ensure public involvement.
- Report our findings with recommendations to those who can influence service delivery.

Key areas of focus

Hear from 'seldom heard' communities: COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on certain communities in South Tyneside. We will prioritise gaining insights from these groups to identify gaps in data and knowledge and understand the barriers that prevent people from being heard. The homeless community and the elderly are two potential areas of focus.

Work in partnership: We will develop partnership working with South Tyneside Health Collaboration (STHC) to support further survey work which may be needed. STHC manage the Primary Care Networks (PCN).

 **Working with our volunteers, partnerships and communities to deliver our priorities will be invaluable to create equitable health and care services for all. Listening to both our service users and providers will offer a great opportunity to make developments that can support access to services for everyone.**

- **Arthur McKean, Interim Chair** -



Key priority 3: Care in the community

The provision of Care in the Community has changed in South Tyneside, following the introduction of four zones within the local authority area.

Our focus is in two areas:

- Do carers visit when they say they will, or is the service user often left waiting for them or seen inappropriately early?
- What is the current status on staffing? Are staff still leaving the service in unmanageably high numbers?

GOAL: To understand how the service is working with the new four zone framework and meeting the needs of those who need care in the community.

During 2023 / 2024 we will take the following steps

- Understand how the newly established Care Academy in South Tyneside meets the needs of our communities.
- Approach care providers and talk to them about how they are finding the new framework.
- In collaboration with South Tyneside Social Services, approach those who need care in the community, to assess the alignment or gaps between the perception of the service providers and the experiences of those who need to use the services, through a survey.
- Report our findings with recommendations to those who can influence service delivery.

Key areas of focus

Work in partnership: We will develop specific partnerships with Social Services. There is an accepted challenge of contacting service users who by definition are predominantly unable to leave their homes independently. Partnership working will be critical in overcoming this obstacle and enabling contact through surveys and other agreed means. There is also a possibility of utilising the GP text message service to promote our work which will be explored.

Young carers: Our Young Healthwatch team will be important in helping us to understand how young people in a caring role for parents, guardians or family members are supported through systems such as care in the community.



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