

Together

**we're making health
and social care better**

Annual Report 2022–23

healthwatch
South Tyneside





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"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from our Chair

After two years when healthcare services were dominated by fighting the pandemic, 2022/23 saw the NHS starting to tackle the resulting backlog of patients waiting for other treatment.

We commissioned market research to find out about patients' experiences of access to – and methods of access to – GPs and how long they were waiting for medical procedures.

Healthwatch attended South Tyneside Community Musculoskeletal Service clinics to survey patients on behalf of service provider Connect Health and provided a report.

We also assisted South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group with the sharing of a survey for young people about their GP experiences and helped South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board promote the Local Pharmaceutical Needs consultation.

Healthwatch has helped members of the public with advice and information on a wide range of issues during the year, from problems accessing NHS dentists to difficulties arranging Covid vaccinations and repeat prescriptions.

Healthwatch also welcomed new Board members Nafizah Ahmed, Carl Buckley, Barbara Tennet and John Lowther, who was elected as the new Chair in May 2023. They bring invaluable experience to the Board from the healthcare, housing, legal, local government and marketing industry sectors. I'd like to thank all Board members, volunteers and staff, as well as the commissioners and providers we have worked with during the year, for their support.

I enjoyed joining colleagues from 14 local Healthwatches for the ten year anniversary celebration at Middlesbrough's Riverside Stadium in March, although I have to confess my presentation to all delegates was a nerve-racking experience!

Looking forward to 2023/24, our Operational Plan has prioritised dentistry, access to GPs and care in the community as key areas of work and we look forward to carrying out research including patient focus groups and practice visits to inform our next round of reports and recommendations.

I'd like to end my introduction with a quote from a member of the public who contacted Healthwatch for help. It's a great reminder of what we are here to do...



I have contacted Healthwatch South Tyneside twice. On both occasions the Manager Sheila Scott provided supportive and effective help by contacting the home visit vaccination team on my behalf and following up to check that we had received a home visit. It is reassuring to know that such help is available.

Doug Keedy



Arthur McKean
Healthwatch South Tyneside
Interim Chair

About us

Healthwatch South Tyneside is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and 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.

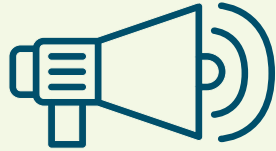


Our values are:

- **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.

Year in review

Reaching out



181 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

5,650 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as access to dentistry and GPs.

Making a difference to care

We published

three reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

GP access/methods of access

which highlighted the struggles people face accessing their GP.



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

six

outstanding volunteers who gave up 105 hours to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

£114,995

which is 5.5% more than the previous year.

We currently employ

three staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year



Assisting South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group to share a survey for young people about their GP experiences.



Helping South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board promote the Local Pharmaceutical Needs consultation.



Promoting the new virtual walk-through films for South Tyneside mental health and sexual health services.



Highlighting a national online survey about mental health difficulties experienced during pregnancy.



Featuring in the South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust's 'Our People Podcast'.



Surveying more than 180 patients about GP access and sending a report with recommendations to clinical leads.



Holding a focus group to find out about patient experiences about waiting times for medical procedures and reporting our findings to commissioners.



Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination programme by promoting booster campaigns for vulnerable groups.

Ten years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Enter and View

We have used our Enter and View powers to carry out both announced and unannounced visits which have included hospital wards, all borough care homes and the Urgent Care Hub at South Tyneside District Hospital.



Respite care

Six new respite care beds were commissioned by South Tyneside Council, enabling carers to have a short break, after we highlighted a shortage in borough care homes for pre-bookable respite care.



Young Healthwatch

Our Young Healthwatch volunteers conducted research into young people's experiences of mental and sexual health services which led to a series of improvements.



Trust waiting times

We held focus groups with patients about their waiting times for medical procedures and found some were turning to private healthcare in despair. Our findings were shared with South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust's Executive Team.



Covid impact on care homes

A survey of 75 staff and 81 relatives/friends of residents uncovered the "devastating" emotional and physical impact of restricted visiting.





Healthwatch Hero



Healthwatch Board member Nafizah Ahmed has been a volunteer in South Tyneside for nearly ten years.

She initially gave up her free time to gain experience in health and social care after leaving school, knowing this was the sector she wanted to work in. This included working in a nursing home, shadowing in local hospitals and supporting a long-term chronic health group at a local women's health centre.

After three years with Women's Health in South Tyneside (WHIST), Nafizah joined Young Healthwatch with the aim of increasing the input of young people in the development of healthcare services.

During her five years with the Young Healthwatch team she played a key role in research projects which helped commissioners of sexual health and mental health services make improvements which young people wanted.

Having graduated from Newcastle University, Nafizah is now a Physician Associate in Primary Care and last year joined the Healthwatch Board. She is a huge asset to Healthwatch and the wider healthcare sector.



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 feed this back to services and help them improve.

GP access

After receiving feedback about difficulty accessing GPs we commissioned market research, including an online survey and follow-up focus group.

Only a third of the 181 patients who took part said they find it easy to make an appointment to see a doctor or nurse in person, while less than half (49%) said when they contacted their GP practice they felt their reason for getting in touch was handled with the appropriate care and attention.

Many survey participants gave examples of GP practice staff lacking in empathy, not listening to their concerns and even rudeness. Eight GP practice patients who had taken part in the ten-minute online survey attended the follow-up focus group to discuss their experiences of GP access.

Our recommendations

Our report to primary care commissioners and practice managers had a series of recommendations which included:



- Improve receptionist/care navigator training.
- More investment in patient access apps and other ways to more easily make non-urgent appointments, request repeat prescriptions and check test results.
- Consider investing in better telephone queue technology.
- Provide more choice and clarity over appointment types.

What difference will this make?

In their response, commissioners said: "The recommendations in the report are very much in line with the PCN plans we have already submitted to the ICB. Clinical directors of all PCNs will be happy to share their relevant plans with Healthwatch when they have been agreed and Healthwatch will be invited to their relevant practice manager meetings accordingly to discuss these plans in the future."



"I've tried ringing and making an appointment for a UTI because I knew the symptoms. I've had it plenty of times before, but the appointments they kept giving me were like two or three weeks down the line. So, I had to call 111 and then get myself checked out at the A&E, and they gave me antibiotics straightaway."

Patient who took part in the GP access survey

Patients turning to private healthcare due to long waits for NHS treatment

Patients in South Tyneside are facing such long waits for NHS treatment some are turning to private healthcare. That was the finding of research by Healthwatch.

Forty per cent of those who had had recent treatment or were on a waiting list faced a wait of at least seven months.

The anxious wait for test results was also highlighted as a major issue by respondents to an online survey and focus group, with practices not routinely contacting patients when results come in.

Our recommendations:

- Communicate more with those experiencing waiting times for procedures with updates on their position/likely time on the waiting list.
- Set expectations for communicating to patients while they are waiting for test results, referrals and treatment with regular updates and the offer of support.
- Improve receptionist/care navigator training to include more empathy towards patients and a higher level of customer service even when phone lines are busy.
- Improve support available whilst waiting for referrals and treatment to help with mental and physical health.

What difference will this make?

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust said Covid-19 had led to increased waiting lists across the country but that the Trust had some of the shortest waiting lists in the region.

The Trust said: “We know we still have lots to do. We are working very hard to reduce our waiting lists even further...We are also working hard to speed up access to diagnostic tests.

“...Any delays in care can have a huge impact on peoples’ lives. We will always try to be open and honest so that people know how long they may have to wait.”

The Trust also highlighted a website where patients can find out average waiting times: myplannedcare.nhs.uk/ney/south-tyneside-sunderland/



It takes a lot for a man to pick up a phone to have a prostate test anyway, so for them to pick up the phone and ask for it to (then) be told we're not actually doing them... one, that's wrong information and two, that – again – is not acceptable when you're talking about rehabilitation for people's health. That shouldn't happen.
Survey respondent

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.



South Tyneside Community Musculoskeletal Service

We were asked by Connect Health which manages this service to survey patients and supply a report with our findings.

Healthwatch attended clinics in South Shields and Hebburn in January 2023 and 12 patients agreed to take part in a written questionnaire.

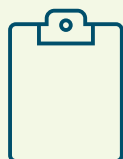
Feedback was very positive, with all respondents saying the service had met their expectations and that sufficient time had been allocated for their appointment. We made recommendations in relation to providing directions for the appointment venue and checking the preferred format for communications.



Improving communication between services and users

In our report on waiting times for NHS treatment we recommended primary care commissioners and GP practice managers gave patients more updates on their position/likely time on the waiting list.

We also urged them to improve receptionist/care navigator training to include more empathy towards patients and a higher level of customer service even when phone lines are busy, and staff are under pressure.



Improving care over time

Throughout our ten years we have consistently encouraged commissioners and providers of healthcare services to consult with their users, both when planning changes and on an ongoing basis.

As our recent reports on GP access and waiting times for procedures clearly demonstrate, patients hugely value the NHS and want it to succeed. They understand the budgetary and staffing pressures services face and the ongoing impact of Covid. Maintaining a genuine dialogue with service users to obtain regular feedback is key.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Commissioning a specialist market research consultancy to carry out online surveys and lead focus groups on GP access and waiting times for NHS treatment.
- Appointing new Board members with expertise in supporting vulnerable people to get access to services, helping women with long term conditions and representing families affected by medical negligence.
- Using a combination of organic and sponsored posts on social media, sharing information with nearly 300 health and social care groups and meeting charities such as Compact for Race Equality in South Tyneside (Crest).



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.

This year we've helped people by:

- Putting them in touch with the Covid vaccination team when they had problems with the NHS booking system.
- Referring 15 patients to the North East NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy (ICA).
- Contacting GP practice managers to address issues with repeat prescriptions.

Helping patients to find dental care

Problems accessing NHS dental services accounted for the majority of calls, emails and messages via our website over the past year.

Common issues raised included misleading information on practice websites about available places for NHS patients and simply not being able to find any dentist taking on new patients. The email below is representative of the cries for help we have been receiving.



Please help me find an NHS dentist. I have had an emergency appointment to see a dentist and they recommended follow up work of a root canal which they couldn't do on the NHS and recommend I go private. I can't sleep with the pain from my tooth. I've struggled for years to get a registered dentist and it seems that my only option to getting healthcare is now similar to ringing mechanics for prices to fix my car. I'm so lost now on what to do; I've now had to pay £148 for an exam and X rays privately. The total bill is another £1,183 which as a part-time student and part-time working is not affordable.

One of many emails we received from dental patients

Healthwatch contacted the Chair of the Northern Region Local Dental Committee including Gateshead and South of Tyne about this specific case, who confirmed there was an issue with NHS dentists not taking on new patients.

Helping residents arrange Covid vaccination

Healthwatch has helped a number of residents having problems arranging Covid vaccination, including people who were housebound.

Those who got in touch included the parent of a 14-year-old girl who could only find a couple of pharmacies offering jabs during school time.

Healthwatch contacted the vaccination team on her behalf and they confirmed there was a shortage of vaccines but were able to get in touch with the parent direct and arrange a vaccination.

Patient left in panic over repeat prescription refusal

Martin Charles was left in a state of panic after a repeat prescription for a high dose anti-depressant and other medication was rejected by his GP practice.

The pharmacy did issue emergency medication and a few days later he received a text for a GP appointment which he attended, only to be told it had been sent by mistake.

Martin, from Hebburn, received an apology in a call from a GP at the practice who said the pharmacy had been advised regarding his repeat prescriptions.

The surgery's operations manager told Healthwatch, who had been contacted by Martin, that his request for medication had been handled badly but they were confident the issues had been addressed.



Healthwatch Operations Manager Sheila Scott and Engagement and Insight Officer Jude Deeks (back left/second left) with Board members.

Volunteering

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

This year our volunteers:

- Gave 105 hours of their time to carry out duties for Healthwatch.
- Undertook Enter and View training, preparing them for a series of planned visits to healthcare settings in 2023/24.
- Completed induction training (new Board members).
- Drafted our 2023/24 Operational Plan, which prioritises dentistry, GP access and care in the community for the following year's work.

Barbara

Board member Barbara Tennet has worked for BT South Tyneside, South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes – all within a customer service capacity.

This experience has provided a good understanding of the landscape of the borough, stakeholders and services available.

She currently works within South Tyneside Council (STC) as a Housing Sustainment and Support Officer, providing support, advice and assistance to former rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness to ensure that they can maintain their tenancies.

Her role requires working in partnership with local charities and services.

Barbara enjoys working in the community at outreach sessions that have been created to ensure those who are most vulnerable have access to services.

She is passionate about ensuring that residents' voices are heard – overcoming barriers that people face and working towards improving services within our borough.

Barbara said: "I Joined Healthwatch as I am extremely passionate about South Tyneside and ensuring residents in our borough have a voice. Within my role at STC I am always thinking about how we can reach those residents who are most vulnerable – those who are homeless/facing homelessness and who are often not registered with a GP/dentist etc.

"Accessing healthcare can be extremely difficult for people who are in this situation and being without a phone/internet access makes engaging with health services almost impossible.

"I am a firm believer that communication is key and I think if we all work together and share our experiences, we can achieve great things. Being part of Healthwatch for me is empowering people to have a say in their healthcare and helping shape future services."



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk



0191 489 7952



info@healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk

Finances 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.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£114,995	Expenditure on pay	£37,889
Additional income	£4,500	Non-pay expenditure	£13,396
		Office and management fee	£25,469
Total income	£119,495	Total expenditure	£76,754

Additional income:

- **£4,500 funding** received from the NHS Integrated Care Board in the North East and North Cumbria to work with the new NHS systems and structures.

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023–24

1. Dentistry
2. Access to GPs
3. Care in the community



Statutory statements

Healthwatch South Tyneside, Hebburn Central,
Glen Street, Hebburn, NE31 1AB.

Healthwatch South Tyneside uses the Healthwatch
Trademark when undertaking our statutory
activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2022/23 the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as commissioning research into GP access and waiting times for NHS procedures and agreeing work on behalf of commissioners and providers of services including South Tyneside Musculoskeletal Service.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

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 using services.

During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible.

We will publish it on our website and share with Healthnet, which has 294 members, South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board, South Tyneside Alliance Executive Committee and other statutory partners.

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board, which receives regular reports from our Chair.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers at North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care Board (see page 22).

We additionally share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented on the South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board by Interim Chair Arthur McKean. During 2022/23 our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting three Healthwatch reports.

Recent funding from the ICB has enabled the Network to formalise working arrangements through our Operational Protocol, so that it can systematically represent the views of service users, families and carers with partners across the Integrated Care System. Local intelligence is collated across each of the four sub-regional areas and shared at Area ICP meetings.

At regional level, the Healthwatch Regional Coordinator represents service-user voice from across the region at the NENC Integrated Care Partnership Strategic meeting, Quality & Safety Committee, Primary Care Strategy & Delivery sub-committee, Healthy & Fairness Advisory Group, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion meetings and System Quality Group meetings.

The network of local Healthwatch has also been commissioned to undertake additional research to ensure local opinions are represented in the ICB's work priorities, including focus groups for the Waiting Well, and consultation around the development of the ICB strategy. Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented on the Integrated Care Partnerships in the Central ICP area of NENC ICS by our Chair. The Regional ICP is attended by Christopher Akers-Belcher, Healthwatch Regional ICB Coordinator. The Integrated Care Board Participant for the network is David Thompson, Chair of Healthwatch Northumberland.



Six rooms have been created in the new ICU at South Tyneside District Hospital

MRI PET-CT CT

Patients are now receiving lifesaving tests and scans at the new £10m Integrated Diagnostic Centre at South Tyneside District Hospital.

2022–2023 Outcomes

Project / activity	Changes made to services
GP access survey	We made a series of recommendations which commissioners said were in line with PCN plans submitted to the ICB.
Waiting times for NHS treatment	South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust thanked Healthwatch for the report, acknowledging the impact of delays in care and highlighted a website where patients can find out average waiting times.
South Tyneside Musculoskeletal Service patient survey	Service provider Connect Health was delighted with the report, which demonstrated broad patient satisfaction, and agreed to consider the recommendations on providing directions to venues and checking patients' preferred communication method.



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