

Healthwatch South Tyneside Operational Plan

2024 to 2026

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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 2024 to March 2026

Our focus over the next two years is to help reduce health and care inequalities by making sure the voice of patients is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers faced by our local communities, 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 2024 – 2026 are:

1. **Adult mental health**
2. **Young people's mental health**
3. **Pharmacy First**
4. **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.

In addition to the above, we have been approached by the **North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board** (NENC ICB) to support their priorities alongside the local Healthwatch in our neighbouring local authorities. We are supportive of this approach and have committed to working collaboratively with local Healthwatch and the NENC ICB where it aligns with our work plan.

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 and enable health and social care planners to know what matters most to our communities. 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 currently hold regular information stalls at Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre, South Tyneside General Hospital and Palmers Hospital. They are becoming increasingly popular with those in our local communities who share their health and care experiences with us. We will build on these existing information gathering tools and create new opportunities including focus groups, surveys, and attending local community events, to reach as many of our communities as we can.

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.

We will promote the voice of local communities at decision making level sharing individual experiences and patient stories as well as collective views.

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 to underpin our goals.

Key priority 1: Adult mental health

Feedback through community engagement and our signposting and information work highlights two key areas of concern for those seeking mental health support:

- The length of time they need to wait to start receiving mental health support.
- What they can do while they are waiting.

GOAL: To highlight community concerns with decision makers who can effect change and educate our local communities around existing self-help approaches including self-referral.

During 2024 / 2026 we will take the following steps

- Arrange focus groups to clearly understand the issues and needs of our communities.
- Review the accessibility pathways of asking for support for those in our communities who are not confident in using technology.
- Promote awareness amongst our communities of their rights when accessing mental health support (for example the right to change a counsellor if the patient feels the allocated counsellor is not a suitable match to their needs).
- Review the focus on mental health by clinicians where a patient has attended for a physical complaint.
- Develop recommendations and collaborate with the local authority commissioning team to improve the experience of adult mental health support.

Key areas of focus

Hear from 'seldom heard' communities: We will prioritise gaining insights from groups to identify gaps in data and knowledge and understand the barriers that prevent people from being heard.

Work in partnership: Engage and build relationships with community groups to understand their challenges and share what is available to the community to help the service users navigate the system.

Key priority 2: Young people's mental health

The services and support available to young people (for the purposes of this report young people includes those up to 25 years old) in South Tyneside was a key aspect of feedback from our information stalls in 2023.

GOAL: Helping young people to access the help they need: where they can go and the support they can expect to receive.

During 2024 / 2026 we will take the following steps

- Develop links with organisations that work with young people – both voluntary and statutory services.
- Create a survey and make it available online and accessible via a QR code to gather feedback from young people.
- Engage young people directly and via existing organisations.
- Work with the Youth Health Ambassadors and the Young Peoples Parliament.

Key areas of focus

Hear from 'seldom heard' communities: We acknowledge and accept that our existing engagement methods may not appeal to younger people who may be more tech savvy or attend different venues. We will ensure our interactions with organisations who work with young people create an exciting environment in which young people feel valued and confident to share their thoughts and experiences with us.

Work in partnership: We will develop partnership working with youth organisations such as the Young Health Ambassadors and the Young Peoples Parliament to support our work with young people.

Key priority 3: Pharmacy First

The Pharmacy First service enables patients to be referred into community pharmacy for a minor illness or an urgent repeat medicine supply. It launched on 31st January 2024 and enables community pharmacies to complete episodes of care for seven common conditions following defined clinical pathways.

GOAL: To understand how well this change to service delivery is working and support communication to our communities to ensure they are getting the best service available.

During 2024 / 2026 we will take the following steps

- Create a survey to understand:
 - The experiences of those who have used the new service.
 - The impact upon pharmacies.
 - The impact upon general practice.
- Obtain feedback from those needing prescriptions, especially those who face challenges in their daily environment such as those with a disability or lack of access to their own transport.
- Visit pharmacies and review how they are approaching and delivering the new service including promotion of the service to those who may need it.
- Promote through our existing information stalls as well as focus groups to gather feedback from our communities.

Key areas of focus

Hear from 'seldom heard' communities: We will prioritise gaining insights from community groups to identify gaps in data and knowledge and understand the barriers that prevent people from being heard. The elderly and those with a disability are two potential areas of focus.

Work in partnership: We will collaborate with the 'A Better You' network and South Tyneside's Local Pharmacy Network to aid our understanding of the impact on health care professionals and the services they are delivering.

Key priority 4: Care in the community

Care in the community was a key priority in our 2023 / 2024 operational plan. We have made good inroads in approaching this work, and to ensure we maintain the focus and collaboration such an important piece of work warrants, we will continue working on this priority over the coming months.

We are contacting 200 users of home care services to conduct a survey over the phone or arrange its completion online or via post. Questions range from timekeeping to the quality of care and treatment, time allocated to visits, how easy it is to contact the care agency and details of any issues experienced.

Further details can be found on our website here:

<https://www.healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk/?s=care&all=1>

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

During 2024 / 2026 we will take the following steps

- Understand how the Care Academy in South Tyneside meets the needs of our communities.
- Meet with the four operators who provide care in the community and provide a survey for the care workers to complete.
- 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.
- Analyse the survey findings and produce a report for South Tyneside Council with recommendations based on any common issues raised by service users.

Key area 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.



healthwatch

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