

The value of listening

Healthwatch South Tyneside
Annual Report 2023–2024



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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Chair

I'd like to start with a big thank you to all the staff and volunteers at Healthwatch and our partners who do so much in our communities.

The past year has seen Healthwatch South Tyneside further cement its position as the organisation healthcare commissioners and providers turn to when evaluating the experience of the patients they serve.

During 2023/24 this has included attendance at South Tyneside Community Musculoskeletal Service (MSK) clinics and visits to hospital wards at South Tyneside District Hospital to speak to patients and their relatives as well as staff.

We also attended NHS podiatry clinics to gauge the views of patients about proposed changes to the service, including the introduction of a single provider and a reduction in the number of locations.

It has been rewarding for our staff and volunteers to read the detailed responses from North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, which commissioned the podiatry research, and Connect Health which invited Healthwatch to interview MSK patients.

These clearly demonstrate the impact of our work on service planning and delivery to patients. But equally, we have made a big difference to individual people's lives.

Healthwatch was asked by South Tyneside Council to carry out an unannounced Enter and View visit to a South Shields care home which not only led to a series of recommendations to the provider, but resulted in a resident being moved to a more appropriate setting after her family expressed concerns about her care and after we made a safeguarding referral to the local authority.

We have also made great efforts to reach seldom heard groups. Staff and volunteers spoke to more than 200 people from groups we are least likely to be contacted by or ordinarily hear from in our annual Have Your Say survey and nearly 300 comments were recorded.

With an increasing focus on collaborative work, we also contributed 215 responses and valuable feedback by practice managers to the regionwide dental survey by NENC ICB.

Looking ahead to 2024/25, our priority areas will include reviews of mental health services for both adults and young people, Pharmacy First and the completion of our research into home care services.



"It has been rewarding for our staff and volunteers to read the detailed responses from North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, which commissioned the podiatry research, and Connect Health which invited Healthwatch to interview MSK patients. These clearly demonstrate the impact of our work on service planning and delivery to patients."

John Lowther, Chair – Healthwatch South Tyneside



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:

1,076 people

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

6,600 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost-of-living crisis via our website and we reached 26,000 people via our social media channels.



Making a difference to care:

We published

eight reports

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

Our most popular report was

Have Your Say

which highlighted the struggles people face with communication from healthcare providers.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

eight

outstanding volunteers who gave up 120 hours to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.
In 2023 - 24 we received

£121,895

which is 6% more than the previous year.



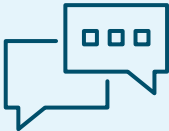





We currently employ

three staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We drew attention to the number of children and adults in the NE on waiting lists for autism assessments more than doubling in the previous 18 months.</p>	 <p>We threw our weight behind a national smoking cessation campaign which featured a former smoker from South Tyneside diagnosed with laryngeal cancer aged 48.</p>
Summer	 <p>We surveyed 89 podiatry patients about proposed changes to the service in South Tyneside to inform a report published in the autumn.</p>	 <p>We highlighted the annual report on NHS Dental Statistics for England and encouraged local patients to tell us about their experiences accessing services in South Tyneside.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We called for clarity on proposed changes to podiatry services in South Tyneside after a survey of patients revealed concerns about ongoing care.</p>	 <p>We made a series of recommendations to local NHS Trust leaders to further improve elderly in-patient care at South Tyneside District Hospital after visits to two wards to meet staff, patients and their families.</p>
Winter	 <p>Providers of South Tyneside Musculoskeletal Service pledged to make further improvements in response to patient feedback obtained by Healthwatch.</p>	 <p>We spoke to more than 200 people in our annual Have Your Say survey and problems with communication from healthcare providers came out as the biggest issue.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in the North East and North Cumbria influence decisions made about services at North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across North East and North Cumbria to achieve:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatches

All 14 local Healthwatches were involved in the formation of a network which enables us to work together, both on a regional and an area basis. Through funding from the Integrated Care Board we appointed co-ordinators to facilitate engagement projects and the gathering of region-wide public feedback; our Board representative ensures that the public voice is heard at ICS level, influencing decision making across the whole of the North East and North Cumbria.

Understanding the public view of dentistry services

At the end of 2023-24, the Healthwatch Network was commissioned to carry out public engagement about dentistry, to help inform the Integrated Care Board's decisions around improvements to services. Healthwatch carried out extensive public engagement across the region, including surveys and mystery shopper exercises – we gathered over 3,500 responses to our general survey alone. Our list of recommendations will form part of our report to the ICB in early 2024-25.



Making health research more relevant

In February 2024, the Healthwatch Network was asked to support the ICB and partners in a Be Part Of Research Project (known as REN 3). Healthwatch were funded to speak to local communities to understand the level of interest in, and barriers to, taking part in NHS and health research. Our feedback will help the Research Engagement Network encourage more diverse participation, so their research better reflects our communities.

Involvement Strategy review

The NENC Integrated Care Board wanted to review their 'Communities and People Involvement and Engagement Framework 2022-23' a year on from publication. The Healthwatch Network was commissioned to speak to seldom heard groups across the region to get their views on what an Involvement Strategy should include. We gathered valuable insight and made recommendations to the ICB about improvements to their strategy and public engagement processes.





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.

Improving the experience of elderly in-patients

Last year, we recommended a number of changes to improve the experience of elderly in-patients at South Tyneside District Hospital.

Healthwatch visited two wards on six occasions in August and September 2023 at the request of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust as part a review of The Older People's Improvement Collaborative (TOPIC) programme.

The initiative aims to improve the care and experience of older patients in hospital and attract more nurses to work in this field of care.

108

patients, relatives and staff took part in our survey



What did we learn?

- Patients and relatives were very positive overall but suggested a number of areas where changes would improve the patient experience.
- A common theme in comments by the 25 STDH staff who took part was their desire to have more time to spend with patients.

What difference did this make?

- As a result of the feedback we obtained, Healthwatch has made a series of recommendations to South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.
- They included suggested changes to arrangements for bathing, nutrition and hydration, hand hygiene and placement of patients within wards.
- Specific recommendations included: increasing opportunities for showering or bathing; simplifying menu choice cards; making handwipes available to every patient; considering the impact on patients of the choice of location of their bed (eg side rooms).
- The Trust has agreed to discuss our report at The Older People's Improvement Collaborative (TOPIC) Steering Group and to feedback resulting actions.



"Being a busy GP surgery in Jarrow, we have been contacted by Healthwatch South Tyneside on several occasions. This interaction can help us understand from a patient's perspective and offers feedback on our services and to help resolve any issues that a person may have that could range from access to medication queries. Healthwatch is a great service for the people of South Tyneside as they work as a mediator to get the best result."

Joanne Scott, Operations Manager – Mayfield Medical Group

MSK service provider plans changes after report

Providers of South Tyneside Community Musculoskeletal Service have responded positively to patient feedback in a Healthwatch report.

Our staff and volunteers were invited by Connect Health to attend MSK clinics at Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre on two days in January and February 2024 and at Flagg Court Health Centre for an afternoon in January.

Patients were asked if they would be willing to complete a short, written questionnaire to provide direct feedback on their own experience of the care they have received, and more than 30 patients agreed.

We reported our findings from users of the service, which were generally very positive. Patients we spoke to found it a very good service, with insightful, informative, caring, empathetic and easy to understand clinicians who listen to their patients in relaxed, informative and friendly appointments.

There were a few issues and suggestions for improvements raised relating to mobility/access and the registration procedure on arrival at Cleadon Park PCC.

Connect Health has written to Healthwatch in response to our report, acknowledging that 'overall, the service users who responded were happy with the service and quality of care they received'. But they said they were taking action in the areas patients wanted to see improvements.

What difference did this make?

Connect Health has pledged to make the following changes in response to our report:

- Liaising with Cleadon Park PCC estates team to ensure clear signage and correct amount of blue badge parking spaces.
- Helping patients to find their way to appointments at Cleadon Park via clear communication from staff when booking appointments.
- Improving public knowledge of the ability to self-refer to our service when needed.

Connect Health said: "This report has highlighted some areas that we can improve on and actions that we can take...We would like to thank the friendly and professional staff that work for Healthwatch that helped to interview our service users and put together the excellent quality report that they produced."



"Healthwatch has provided tangible advice and feedback which we have been able to use to guide our quality improvement projects and make adjustments to help improve our service and the experience our service users receive."

Connect Health

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

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

Patient feedback influences changes to podiatry service

Commissioners of podiatry services have committed to amend the service specification for a future provider in response to concerns raised by users.

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board said it was making a number of changes after fears from some of the 89 patients surveyed about the potential impact on travel, continuity of care (including change of staff), waiting times and quality following a move to a single provider.

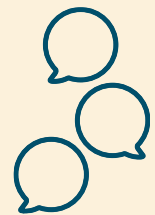
The ICB said the procurement will include detailed testing around transport and travel infrastructure, continuity of care and prioritising appointments for those most in need.



Care home urged to improve communication with relatives

One of the recommendations we made to The Lodge Care Home after two Enter and View visits was to agree a new process with family members to ensure they are kept up to date in future.

The move is needed to minimise the chance of relatives being unaware of medications prescribed, and actions taken where medical support is needed. We recommended communication pathways were established between the care home and family members so that both parties understand their role.



Improving mental health care over time

We have again made mental health one of our top priorities for next year.

Previous projects we have carried out included commissioning research in 2021 into the impacts of Covid-19 on mental health and a campaign by our Young Healthwatch volunteers which engaged 275 children aged eight to 18 to complete a survey about mental health services for young people.

In October 2023 Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said mental healthcare in England had become "a national emergency", with "overwhelmed" services unable to cope with a big post-Covid surge in people needing help.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



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:

- Speaking to more than 200 people from groups we are least likely to be contacted by.
- Running a monthly drop-in stall at community venues including Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre.
- Using sponsored social media posts to promote surveys and other research to reach a wider audience.
- Providing detailed research reports with recommendations to healthcare commissioners and providers.

Communication the main issue for patients

We spoke to more than 200 people from groups we are least likely to be contacted by or ordinarily hear from in our annual Have Your Say survey.

Healthwatch staff and volunteers visited eight organisations and attended 11 different groups, including Apna Ghar, South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service (STARS), Happy at Home, Naffi Break (veterans' group), South Tyneside Asylum Seekers and Refugee Church Help (STARCH), St Hilda's Drop-In and Vision & Hearing Support.

All participants completed a written questionnaire asking questions about their recent experiences of health and social care in South Tyneside. Nearly 300 comments were recorded.

The key services raised by participants included GPs, hospital inpatient and outpatient, mental health and dentistry.

Other services highlighted included speech and language, health visiting, leaving prison, transport (including wheelchair taxis/transport and ambulance), opticians, mental healthcare and advocacy, neurology, occupational therapy, district nurses and translation.

A lot of comments were made about communication relating to different services. People felt communication of information from GPs, hospitals and mental health services around results of investigations, what care is planned for them and information around wait times was lacking.

Interpreting services appear not to be being utilised within general practice and (not so much) in the hospital. Information from GPs and hospitals is often in a format that can make interpreting letters/texts/appointments etc. difficult.

Recommendations shared with health and social care commissioners to assist future service planning included:

- Consider methods to better communicate information around results of investigations and planned care with patients
- Greater use of interpreting services
- Improve communication from GP practices, especially around test results
- Consider the location a patient is being asked to travel to for tests; a taxi may be unaffordable
- Greater communication of the availability of mental health support (including Crisis) and therapies in the community whilst awaiting allocation of CPN or other therapeutic interventions
- Clear upfront explanation of private dental costs.





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, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Arranging appointments for Covid-19 booster jabs.
- Advising a children's services professional how she could obtain an Ofsted Health Declaration Form needed for a job application for a senior position in a children's home.
- Signposting ACTS for an older person looking for gentle exercise.
- Providing information on how to make a complaint about SEND school transport.

Grandmother relocated after care concerns

A grandmother-of-seven was relocated to a nursing home with the support of Healthwatch after her family raised concerns about her care.

The family of Agnes Mayne, 88, asked for our help after feeling the issues they were highlighting to staff at The Lodge Residential Care Home in South Shields about personal hygiene and comfort were not being acted on. Healthwatch staff, who were undertaking an Enter and View visit, advised how they could alert social services and provided a list of nursing homes in the borough.

We also made a safeguarding referral to South Tyneside Council and issued a report with a series of recommendations to the provider Marton Care Homes Ltd around communication with relatives of residents, staff training and activities for residents with more complex needs.

Healthwatch spoke to 21 residents and 13 family members during two visits requested by the local authority. Our report stresses that the majority of residents and relatives questioned were positive about their needs being met and quality of life.

"The Healthwatch team was outstanding and we were able to raise all the concerns we had. They guided us with the protocols to have mam moved to a nursing home which would be more suitable for her care. Healthwatch manager Sheila has been an enormous help and support to our family. I am happy to report mam is now very comfortable in her new home and we as a family can relax knowing she is getting the care she should."

Amanda Mayne (daughter-in-law) and Katrina McGuinness (daughter)

Practice apologises after prescription delay

Michael Murray turned to Healthwatch South Tyneside after a mix-up left him without pain meds after being discharged from hospital following surgery.

The 58-year-old, from Hebburn, had been admitted for a procedure to remove an HTO plate from his knee. Post-op, he was advised by his consultant that he needed pain medication but would first have to see his GP. The consultant wrote to his GP, advising there were three options of meds to choose from.

Michael was then incorrectly told by The Glen Medical Centre that a pharmacist needed to prescribe the medication. He had to chase up the practice several times to get a GP appointment ten days later to obtain his pain meds.

After inadvertently not requesting a review appointment via econsult two weeks on, Michael ran out of meds when the prescription was signed off three days late.

Healthwatch contacted the Practice Manager on Michael's behalf and she has apologised for the initial error in referring him to the pharmacist and for the delay in his repeat prescription.

Healthwatch South Tyneside regularly intervenes on behalf of patients who contact us with issues accessing healthcare.

- Last year we were contacted more than 125 times for advice and support.
- If you need help, contact us at info@healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk or call 0191 489 7952.



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:

- Assisted staff with two Enter and View visits to a South Shields care home.
- Visited two elderly in-patient wards at South Tyneside District Hospital to survey staff, patients and relatives for our TOPIC report.
- Met patients at podiatry clinics to obtain views on proposed changes to the service.
- Visited musculoskeletal clinics to gain feedback from patients on their care via a survey.



"I enjoy volunteer work with Healthwatch as I know I am working as part of a caring team.

"The work we undertake always contributes to improving local health services for local people.

"Getting out and about and meeting and talking to people is an enjoyable part of volunteering. This provides great opportunities to gain knowledge of patients' experiences of health care first-hand.

"The main thing I get out of volunteering for Healthwatch is a real sense of satisfaction knowing the patients' voice is being heard and is an integral part of ongoing healthcare improvements."



Margaret Bell –
Volunteer



"As someone interested in health and social issues, I saw first-hand the important part Healthwatch plays and became a board member in 2022.

"For me it's all about the ability for us to influence the health agenda and ultimate service delivery for the local borough.

"Through setting key objectives across a range of health areas and sectors of society, as volunteers we can make a direct impact upon the overall service delivery.

"We stand in the middle listening to both the public and service providers with the opportunity to influence a better overall healthcare for South Tyneside."



Carl Buckley –
Board member

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



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.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£121,895	Expenditure on pay	£71,760
Additional income	£3,275	Non-pay expenditure	£24,156
		Office and management fees	£30,360
Total income	£125,170	Total expenditure	£126,276

Additional income is broken down by:

- £1,875 received from NENC ICS (core funding agreement).
- £650 received from the local ICS for joint work on the dentistry general population agreement.
- £750 funding received from NHS NENC ICB for the podiatry engagement work.

ICS funding

Healthwatch across the North East and North Cumbria also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Core ICS Funding Agreement	£1,875
Joint work, dentistry engagement	£650
Podiatry engagement (NHS NENC ICB)	£750

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next two years are:

1. Adult mental health
2. Youth mental health
3. Pharmacy First.





Statutory statements

**Healthwatch South Tyneside, Unit 7, Witney Way,
Boldon Business Park, Boldon Colliery, NE35 9PE.**

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

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as agreeing the research activity around the MSK and podiatry services and setting our priorities for 2024/25. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

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 can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form 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 social media channels and share with Healthnet, A Better U Champions Network, South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board, South Tyneside Alliance Executive Committee and other statutory partners.

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

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.

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

Enter and view

This year, we made two unannounced Enter and View visits to a care home. We made three recommendations and a safeguarding referral as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
The Lodge Residential Care Home, South Shields	Requested by local authority	We wrote a report with three recommendations around communication with family members, staff training and activities. We also made a safeguarding referral to the local authority safeguarding team regarding concerns about one resident.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented on the South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chair John Lowther. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending three meetings, feeding into the meeting with a partner update and liaising with the board in relation to reports and proposals from other attendees. When John was unable to attend in person, he provided written submissions by way of updates on our work.

Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented on the Central Integrated Care Partnership by Gail McGee, Central Area Co-Ordinator for the Healthwatch Network, and at the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board by Christopher Akers-Belcher, Regional Co-Ordinator for the Healthwatch Network.


2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Patient survey for NENC ICB to inform podiatry service review	NENC ICB made changes to the podiatry service procurement brief in response to patient feedback obtained
Patient survey for Connect Health which provides the musculoskeletal service in South Tyneside	Connect Health agreed to make improvements to provision for disabled parking, signposting on arrival and raising awareness of self-referral in response to our report.
Have Your Say annual survey	We spoke to more than 200 people from seldom heard groups and obtained more than 300 pieces of feedback on healthcare services which were fed back to commissioners.
Regional dentistry survey on behalf of NENC ICS	We contributed 215 survey responses and obtained direct feedback from practice staff after contacting 16 dental practices.
Elderly in-patient care/experience, nutrition and patient property boxes	We conducted three pieces of research on behalf of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, visiting wards at STDH, and produced reports on each with valuable feedback and recommendations.

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