



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is no accident. They're committed to championing people's voices and empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views and experiences are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our chair

Over the past year Healthwatch South Tyneside has made key contributions to issues around healthcare both locally and nationally, raising concerns and getting key information from our local community.

We have strived to ensure that the voices of people in hard-to-reach communities have been heard and worked hard to make sure that Healthwatch is visible and proactive.

There has been some fantastic collaboration by the Healthwatch North East and North Cumbria network on projects such as the regional dental survey and the Women's Health report for North East and North Cumbria ICB and the North East Ambulance Service survey.

We have been delighted to play our part, contributing hundreds of survey returns and valuable face-to-face feedback with hard-to-reach groups – as seen with the Crest focus group which provided input from the minority ethnic community for the Women's Health report.

Both NENC ICB and South Tyneside Council have stressed the positive impact of our work during 2024-25 on service planning.

NENC ICB said the insights within our report on access to mental health services for older people "will be utilised to shape how we transform services to ensure that our older residents receive holistic equitable care".

It is equally pleasing to see the positive impact that Healthwatch can have on individuals through signposting and information, as evidenced by the lady we helped after her distressing experience following breast cancer surgery.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, our priority areas will include reviews of mental health services for both adults and young people and Pharmacy First.



'The Director of Adult Social Services and Commissioning at South Tyneside Council said our detailed research on the experience of people receiving home care services and the views of those managing and delivering home care to them had provided "valuable insights" and "identified areas for ongoing improvement".'



John Lowther, Chair of Healthwatch South Tyneside

About us

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

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We supported more than 1,100 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ three staff and our work is supported by seven volunteers.

Reaching out:



More than 1,100 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

More than 12,500 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as accessing NHS dentists and how to report issues with their care.

Making a difference to care:



We published four reports about the improvements people would like to see in dentistry, access to GPs, home care and trans access to GPs.

Our most popular report was Help to Live at Home, in which we interviewed more than 200 users of home care services as well as care staff and managers.

Health and care that works for you:



Our seven volunteers contributed 270 hours of their time supporting our staff team to carry out a range of activities including Enter and View visits, public consultation events and meetings.

We employ one full-time and two part-time members of staff.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in South Tyneside. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We met 30 dental patients, heard from 215 people in an online survey and spoke to four practice managers as part of a collaborative project with the regional Healthwatch network and NENC ICB.



The Lodge care home pledged a number of improvements for residents after recommendations following a HWST Enter and View visit and report.



Summer

Our annual report featured our reports on South Tyneside Community Musculoskeletal Service, NHS podiatry clinics and elderly in-patient wards at South Tyneside District Hospital.



During summer 2024 we interviewed 200 users of home care services and the managers and staff of four providers as part of the research for our Help to Live at Home report.



Autumn

NENC ICB wanted to know if older people experienced ageist attitudes and assumptions about their mental health by GPs and asked HWST to gather insights.



HWST was chosen by Healthwatch England to take part in nationwide survey work into issues faced by trans people when accessing non-transition related healthcare.



Winter

HWST made a series of recommendations to South Tyneside Council in our Help to Live at Home report, after hearing from users of home care services and managers and staff of the four providers.



Responding to the nationwide consultation as part of the 10 Year Health Plan for England, HWST made a series of recommendations on communication, collaboration, built-in patient education and funding for GP 'ward rounds' in care homes.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of dental care, women's health and emergency care were heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at North East and North Cumbria ICS.

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

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



We formed a network of 14 local Healthwatch groups to improve health and care services both regionally and nationally. Funding from our Integrated Care Board helped us build strong, meaningful relationships within this network, consistently adding value to the design of health & care services. We have representatives from our network on local and regional strategic boards which have robust reporting structures that support coordinated and effective engagement with our communities. Our collaborative approach is recognised nationally as best practice.

The big conversation: Women's Health



We spoke to nearly 4,500 people and held six focus groups with women who face extra health challenges. We wanted to understand what matters most to them and their priorities. These included: mental health and wellbeing; healthy ageing and long-term conditions; menopause, perimenopause, and hormone replacement therapy; screening services; and menstrual and gynaecological health. We're now working with our partners to create a "Woman's Promise". This will help women, health professionals and others understand and support women's health needs and rights.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



To showcase the work carried out by the NENC Healthwatch network, all 14 local Healthwatch came together at an event in Newcastle in March 2025. Speakers included Deputy Chief Executive of Healthwatch England Chris McCann, Chief Corporate Services Officer at NENC ICB Claire Riley OBE and Sir Pali Hungin, a non-executive member of the NENC ICB Board. As we move forward, we're committed to strengthening our partnerships with other local Healthwatch teams—because when we raise voices together, we're louder, clearer, and more powerful. By working as one, we can escalate the issues that matter most and push for change that benefits communities across our region.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in South Tyneside this year:

Ethnic minority focus group on women's health

Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.



We met women from the Compact for Race Equality in South Tyneside (Crest) as part of the evidence for the NENC ICB report on Women's Health. The issues raised by a minority ethnic focus group were around language and ensuring it can be understood along with an interpreter where necessary. Women also wanted to be able to request a female health professional.

Public meet health and social care leaders direct

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.



Health and social care leaders answered questions direct from members of the public about key services at a special open event. The public meeting in February 2025, arranged by HWST, provided direct access to directors of urgent care in the community, mental health services and adult social services. Each presentation was followed by a Q&A session, giving an opportunity to ask questions.

Improving access to healthcare for older people

Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.



NENC ICB asked HWST through its work on the Living Well Alliance framework to gather insights into the care experiences of older people. We provided an insight into the way older people feel about ageist attitudes and assumptions about their mental health, including calls for longer, face-to-face GP appointment times and concerns about confidentiality, the use of technology and lack of continuity of care.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Listening to your experiences

People receiving home care tell us what they think about the service

Help to Live at Home is one of the four key priorities in Healthwatch South Tyneside's 2024–26 Operational Plan.

We wanted to understand how the introduction of four zones within the local authority area – each served by a home care provider – was meeting the needs of our community.

What did we do?

We surveyed 200 people receiving home care services – 50 in each zone, asking questions ranging from care worker timekeeping to the quality of care, time allocated to visits and how easy it is to contact the care agency. We also surveyed 13 care workers and interviewed managers from all four agencies.

Key things we heard:



85%

of people receiving home care services said they were always treated with kindness, dignity and respect

37%

said they always had the same carers

48%

said their carer always arrived on time

We found people using home care services in South Tyneside clearly hugely value their carers, but we made a series of recommendations in areas including the care plan for each person receiving home care, timekeeping and communication.

What difference did this make?

"The work Healthwatch have undertaken with people who draw upon care and support and the adult social care workforce employed within Help to Live at Home has provided valuable insights into the experiences of people using our services, helping us to build upon the positive aspects of the service but also identify areas for ongoing improvement."

Vicki Pattinson

Director of Adult Social Services and Commissioning, South Tyneside Council

Listening to your experiences

Report provides prescription for dental reform

Dentistry was made the number one priority in Healthwatch South Tyneside's Operational Plan following a substantial increase in the number of people contacting us about problems with access NHS dental care.

We spoke to dental patients at eight different groups we attend, contacted 16 dental practices and took part in a regional NENC ICB survey, contributing 215 responses.

Key things we heard:



10%

...of patients we spoke to had been unable to register with an NHS dentist

33%

...of patients who were registered with an NHS dentist were pleased with the service

Key findings by NENC Healthwatch included 75% of NHS practices (216 of 287) contacted said they offered no NHS appointments. But one third (93 of 287) offered a private appointment, with initial consultation costs ranging from £49 to £120 with any treatment incurring additional cost.

What difference did this make?

The collaborative research by the Healthwatch network in the North-East and North Cumbria contributed to the evidence bank Healthwatch England has been gathering to support its ongoing campaign to improve access to NHS dentistry.

Your feedback

"The care that my uncle is receiving is lovely. Although busy, nurses make time to talk and, more importantly, to listen."

Relative of patient, South Tyneside District Hospital

"The paramedic (Rafal), who came to assess my eight-year-old son was an absolute credit to the NHS. He was such a calming and professional influence in a such a distressing situation."

Parent of patient, North East Ambulance Service

"Staff are very caring and the doctors are very informative, taking their time to explain the procedures."

Patient, South Tyneside District Hospital



Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of South Tyneside. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Ensuring the views of the minority ethnic community was included as part of the evidence for the NENC ICB report on Women's Health by holding a focus group with Crest (Compact for Race Equality South Tyneside), pictured below.
- Groups we meet regularly include Action Station, which supports the most disadvantaged residents in South Tyneside.
- All our reports are shared with South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board, NENC ICB and Healthwatch England.



Longer appointments and more attentive GPs needed, say older patients

Older people called for longer, face-to-face GP appointment times to discuss their mental health in a survey by Healthwatch South Tyneside.

Our engagement team spoke to 123 patients aged 65+ in 12 healthcare settings and also found they had concerns about confidentiality, the use of technology and lack of continuity of care.

What difference did this make?

"The insights within the report will be utilised to shape how we transform services to ensure that our older residents receive holistic equitable care. We will continue to work collaboratively with Healthwatch to ensure that the findings of the engagement inform the next phase of addressing these important issues."

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Healthwatch looks into transphobia claims over access to GPs

Healthwatch South Tyneside was asked by Healthwatch England to survey trans people about their experiences accessing non-transition related healthcare.

The research followed TransActual's Trans Lives survey in 2021 in which 14% of respondents said they were refused GP care on account of being trans on at least one occasion, 70% experienced transphobia when accessing non-transition related healthcare and 57% reported avoiding going to the doctor when unwell.

We contacted Waythrough, which supports young LGBT+ people aged 11-25 and their families in County Durham, Sunderland and South Tyneside. Healthwatch also identified ten local LGBT+ support groups who we approached and asked to share information about the research project with their members.

What difference did this make?

We are awaiting the publication of the Healthwatch England report, due in July 2025, so the impact of the research is not yet known. Healthwatch South Tyneside was one of a number of local Healthwatch across England invited to take part and had 11 survey respondents aged from under-18 to over-75.

Information and signposting

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 people in South Tyneside have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Healthwatch offers advice after breast cancer surgery goes wrong

Julie, from Jarrow, came to Healthwatch South Tyneside for advice after her breast cancer surgery went wrong.

She had been diagnosed with breast cancer in March 2023 at Gateshead's QE Hospital and three months later had an operation to remove tissue and insert an implant.

However, Julie's skin started to turn black and she feared sepsis could set in.

After redressing of the wound a second procedure to remove the implant and put in a breast expander was carried out in August 2023. Unfortunately, this was rejected by the body, her skin filled with fluid and Julie was told a full mastectomy was needed.

The scar cannot be reduced and is above the breast which makes it difficult to cover up, particularly in the warmer months, which has left Julie feeling heartbroken, impacting on her mental health.

When she got in touch with Healthwatch South Tyneside, staff gave her contact details for the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and completed a referral form to Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICA) for her.

Julie was contacted immediately by ICA, who were able to act on her behalf.

In June 2025 she contacted HWST to confirm a date had been scheduled for early July for reconstruction surgery by the lead plastic surgeon at the RVI in Newcastle and thanked us for listening and being supportive.



"Thank you for your patience, support and understanding.
You were amazing."

Julie, from Jarrow

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 270 hours to support our work this year. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Helped facilitate focus groups with hard-to-reach sections of the community
- Attended our monthly engagement events at healthcare venues to meet patients
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

Nafizah Ahmed left the Healthwatch South Tyneside Board in May 2025 after eight years as a volunteer with us. 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. A Newcastle University graduate, Nafizah recently left a Primary Care role to join the Care Quality Commission and moved to Newcastle with her new husband. Nafizah has been a huge asset to Healthwatch and the wider healthcare sector and we wish her well.



Nafizah

Arthur McKean has been a keen volunteer with Healthwatch South Tyneside since our launch in 2013 and spoke passionately about his role at the Healthwatch 10th anniversary celebration at the Riverside Stadium in Middlesbrough in 2023. During 2024-25 his work has included inspecting four wards and sampling food at South Tyneside District Hospital, as well as his role as Vice Chair of the HWST Board. Arthur said: "I enjoy working with Healthwatch very much. I like the social aspect and the contact with members of the public. I feel valued."



Arthur

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£126,770	Expenditure on pay	£60,095
Additional income	£10,850	Non-pay expenditure	Nil
		Office and management fee	£59,350
Total income	£137,620	Total expenditure	£119,445

Additional income is broken down into:

- £5,000 North East Ambulance Service - work on the regional survey
- £1,000 Care Quality Commission - trans GP access survey work
- £400 NHS - submission for the NHS 10 Year Plan

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

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

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Regional dental survey	£3,500
Women's Health local engagement and focus group	£950

Finance and future priorities

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 2024–26 are:

1. Adult and young people's mental health (work starts autumn 2025)
2. Pharmacy First (work started spring 2025)
3. Care in the community (work completed spring 2025)



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 voluntarily 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 2024/25, the Board met four times and made decisions on our strategic priorities and related matters such as how research was to be conducted for Help to Live at Home, staff recruitment and management of finances.

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 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended 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.

Statutory statements

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 the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were 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.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented on the South Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chair John Lowther. During 2024/25 John has effectively carried out this role by attending five meetings and a strategy development session, feeding into the meetings with a partner update and liaising with the board in relation to reports and proposals from other attendees.

John has also attended 12 South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust Patient Experience Group meetings, the Healthwatch National Convention, NENC Healthwatch Network Operating Group meetings and the Healthwatch Chairs meetings.

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

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
The Lodge Care Home, South Shields	South Tyneside Council requested an unannounced visit focusing on personal care, choices, enough staff and response times.	We wrote a report with recommendations and made a safeguarding referral to South Tyneside Safeguarding Team regarding concerns around one resident.
The Lodge Care Home, South Shields	Two visits were made during spring 2024, with a follow-up visit six months later.	

2024 – 2025 outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Dentistry report	215 completed surveys for NENC ICB. Four dental practice managers were interviewed and feedback was shared with ICB.
Older People's Mental Health report	Our engagement team spoke to 123 patients aged 65+ in 12 healthcare settings and found they wanted longer appointment times and had concerns about confidentiality, the use of technology and lack of continuity of care.
Help to Live at Home report	We heard from 200 people using home care services, 13 care staff and four care managers and shared our findings with commissioners at South Tyneside Council.
North East Ambulance Service survey	We promoted the regional NEAS survey, contributing 6% of the 1,085 survey responses.

Your feedback

"Reception staff were very helpful; I was advised I would get a call back from Dr Cordner which I did. Dr Cordner was really helpful, could see how stressed and anxious I was about my condition and he fast tracked me for a MRI scan, blood tests etc. He also reviewed my medication which I had previously been prescribed and gave me the correct medication. He said he was taking a 'bells and whistles' approach. Very confident in what he has done; made me feel a lot happier."
Patient, Mayfield Medical Centre

"I have several chronic, complex health conditions. I get a great service from my hospital consultants, GP, local pharmacy and dentist. They all work together to help me manage my many symptoms as best as I can day to day."
South Tyneside patient

"My pharmacy is great and a vital link in my healthcare chain."
South Tyneside pharmacy user



People with learning disabilities, autism and complex care needs will be able to live more independently after the completion of 21 new supported living homes in Jarrow and Hebburn by a partnership between South Tyneside Council and Karbon Homes. Photo: Helen Smith Photography.

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