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# **Healthwatch South Tyneside Operational Plan**

**2026 to 2027**

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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.

## The abolition of Healthwatch

In July 2025 the Government announced that as part of the NHS Ten Year Plan it would be transferring the work of Healthwatch England to the Department of Health and Social Care and the work of local Healthwatch services to the NHS and local authorities.

The changes will be included in the Health Reform Bill which is anticipated to be introduced to Parliament in early 2026 and enacted in early 2027.

At this stage it is believed that Healthwatch will continue until the end of the 2026/7 financial year until new arrangements are in place to replace its various functions. We have therefore prepared a 12-month operational plan to guide us through this final period of operation.

# Our key priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

Our focus over the next 12 months is to continue 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 undertaking 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 2026 – 2027 are:

1. **Adult mental health**
2. **Hospital Discharge**

## 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 support the priorities of the **North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board** (NENC ICB) alongside the local Healthwatch in our neighbouring local authorities. We are 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.

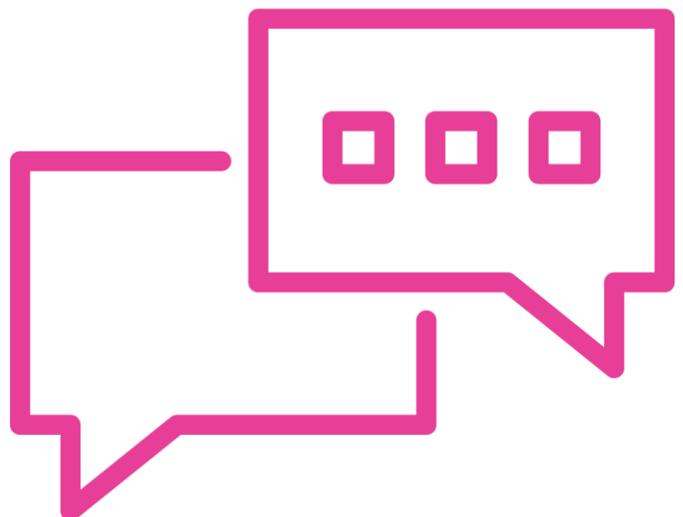
We currently hold regular information stalls at Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre, South Tyneside General Hospital, and Palmers Hospital. They are becoming increasingly popular with those in our local communities who share their health and care experiences with us.

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.



# 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 2026/2027 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).
- 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: Hospital discharge

Healthwatch South Tyneside's engagement with local people has highlighted public concerns in this area including the lack of care plans put in place when needed and a lack of communication with family members.

**GOAL:** Engage with local people to improve the hospital discharge experience within South Tyneside hospital care.

## During 2026 / 2027 we will take the following steps

- Create a survey and make it accessible and available online to gather feedback from those who have experienced the hospital discharge process.
- Identify and arrange visits to focus groups.
- Utilising HWST Enter and View function we will visit hospital wards to speak with patients, family members and carers.
- Arrangements will be made to attend the Discharge Lounge at South Tyneside District Hospital to gather feedback around the discharge process.

## Key areas of focus

**Work with families and carers:** A better patient experience of hospital discharge is paramount in our work. We also acknowledge that for those who need greater support, the input of family and carers will also be key to understanding the gaps and the challenges to overcome in the current system.



# healthwatch

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