



# Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch South Tyneside annual report 2025/26

# Contents

A message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Our year in numbers	5
A year of making a difference	6
Working together for change	7
Making a difference in the community	8
Listening to your experiences	9
Hearing from all communities	13
Information and signposting	15
Showcasing volunteer impact	17
Finance and future priorities	19
Statutory statements	21



**Operations Manager**  
Sheila Scott

“

“I’d like to thank every service user and their relatives and friends as well as healthcare staff who have helped Healthwatch over the past 12 months to carry out our work.

“It has probably been our busiest ever year, with projects including young people’s mental health, in-patient hospital discharge, specialist home care, alcoholism intervention and pharmacy services.

“We’ve reached and engaged more people than ever via survey work, visits to care facilities and through our website and social media channels. Positive feedback from commissioners and service managers on our reports has been really appreciated by the team.”

# A message from our chair

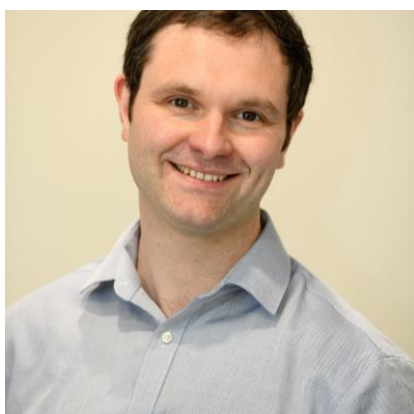
**In a year of major change for the healthcare sector following the launch of the Government's 10 Year Health Plan, Healthwatch South Tyneside has supported local service commissioners with a wide range of insightful research.**

We have reached a record number of people through community engagement activities, surveys, Enter and View visits and our website and social media channels.

A real emphasis has been given to accessing hard-to-reach groups with our work on young people's mental health services, Alcohol Brief Intervention, hospital discharge, specialist care home provision and support for Healthwatch England's research on trans and non-binary people's experiences with GPs.

This has given service leads real insight into the experiences and feelings of service users and shone a light on key issues, highlighting many areas for improvement.

The regional network has collaborated well in key areas such as GP access and palliative and end-of-life care to inform the NENC Integrated Care Board's service planning. As we enter the final year of Healthwatch we can be proud of our many achievements over the last 12 months.



**Chair,  
Healthwatch South  
Tyneside**  
John Lowther



*A heartfelt thank you to the hard working and dedicated Healthwatch operational team, Sheila and Bev, who routinely go the extra mile to support the delivery of effective health and social care services, and to our volunteer board for their unwavering commitment to Healthwatch as a community service.*

# 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

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **1,500** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed three staff and our work was supported by five volunteers.



## Reaching out:

**1,425** people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**151** people came to us for clear advice and information via email, telephone and face-to-face, **13,931** people visited our website and we reached **19,515** Facebook accounts.



## Championing your voice:

We published **14** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like young people's mental health, specialist care homes and Pharmacy First.

Our most popular report was Help to Live at Home, which provided feedback from home care staff and service users and recommended improvements.



## Statutory funding:

We're funded by South Tyneside Council. In 2025/26 we received £126,770, which is the same as last year.

# 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 helped promote the online consultation to inform the development of a Men's Health Strategy for England in April.



We attended the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Steering Group meetings during the Spring to agree engagement activities with pharmacies and patients.



## Summer

We published our report 'Pharmacy First: Patient, pharmacy and GP practice feedback', which reviewed the impact of the service in South Tyneside, in August.



In September we promoted the rollout of Martha's Rule, giving patients, families, carers and staff 24/7 access to a rapid review from a separate care team if they are worried about a person's condition.



## Autumn

Our Alcohol Brief Intervention report was published in October, which looked at South Tyneside's record for having the second highest number of alcohol-related deaths in England.



In November we promoted the launch of two new Urgent Dental Access Centres opened in South Shields and Jarrow as part of a new regional network launched by NE & North Cumbria ICB.



## Winter

In March we published our report on Young People's Mental Health, which recommended a major reduction in waiting times for initial consultations and diagnosis and improved promotion of services.



In April we published eight individual reports on specialist care homes and a main 'It's My Home' summary report following visits to all homes to interview residents, their families and staff.



# Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in the North East and North Cumbria are heard at the Integrated Care System level, and they influence decisions made about services at North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board.

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



## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch

During 2025–2026, the Healthwatch North East and North Cumbria network brought together insight from local communities to inform decision making across health and care. Working as a coordinated network of 14 local Healthwatch, we supported the system to understand what people experience in real life. What works, what doesn't, and what needs to change.



## Joint projects

Healthwatch NENC supported the rollout of Modern General Practice Access across all 14 local areas. Working with NENC ICB, we also supported work to understand whether information about winter care and pharmacy services was clear and useful. Healthwatch NENC also supported system-led engagement to inform future palliative and end-of-life care planning across the region and submitted a joint response to a national consultation on developing NHS Online.



## Case study: dentistry - making a difference

People told Healthwatch they were struggling to access NHS dental care and didn't know where to go for urgent help. Healthwatch brought these experiences directly into system discussions. At ICB Board level, leaders confirmed that progress in dentistry would not have been possible without Healthwatch's involvement. This has led to clearer urgent dental pathways, online booking for urgent care, and improved access across the region.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

# Making a difference in the community

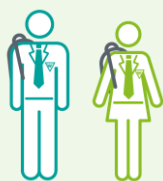
We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in South Tyneside this year:



## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

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

We heard from 29 relatives of hospital in-patients about the care and support they would like to see in place to enable them to return home rather than going into a care home. Recommendations in our 'Guiding You Home' report - which included a communication protocol prior to discharge, information pack for next-of-kin and briefing for home care providers - were all accepted by the Programme Director.



## Getting services to involve the public

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

More than 50 young people completed our survey on mental health services, providing a real insight to commissioners about the impact long lead-in times for support were having. Many respondents singled out one service (SURT) for praise. They also called for improved promotion of the available mental health support for young people.



## Improving care over time

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

We selected Pharmacy First as one of four priority areas in our Operational Plan 2024-26. We wanted to see how the service was progressing in gradually attracting more people away from over-burdened GP practices and into community pharmacies for advice, NHS-funded treatment for minor illnesses or repeat prescriptions. We heard from patients, pharmacies and GPs. The Local Pharmaceutical Committee agreed with our call for extra publicity for the service.

# 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 the South Tyneside 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.



# It's My Home: specialist care home visits

**Healthwatch was commissioned by the Quality Team at South Tyneside Council to obtain general feedback from residents at specialist care homes and their relatives/friends.**

The Quality Team wanted to have a good understanding of how people were treated and whether they felt they are living a good quality of life.

## What did we do

We drafted surveys for residents and also for relatives/friends, asking if they were treated well, if they felt safe living there, if they were happy with the care they received, what activities they liked to do, if they were involved in their care planning and if there were any changes they would like to make to their care. We visited all eight care homes to meet residents and staff.

## Key statistics



8

**care homes specialising in a range of learning and physical disabilities were visited**

51

**residents and relatives/friends took part in the surveys**

140

**people live in specialist care homes in South Tyneside**

We found the vast majority of residents and relatives/friends were very happy with the care they received from hard-working and caring staff. Recommendations in individual reports include improved communication with residents, a little more warmth in the décor and ensuring where possible residents have a full understanding of their care plan.

## What difference did this make?

*"We greatly appreciate the significant work undertaken by Healthwatch South Tyneside in compiling this report and capturing the lived experiences of people receiving care. We value the valuable insight this report provides."*

Vicki Pattinson, Director of Adult Social Services and Commissioning, STC

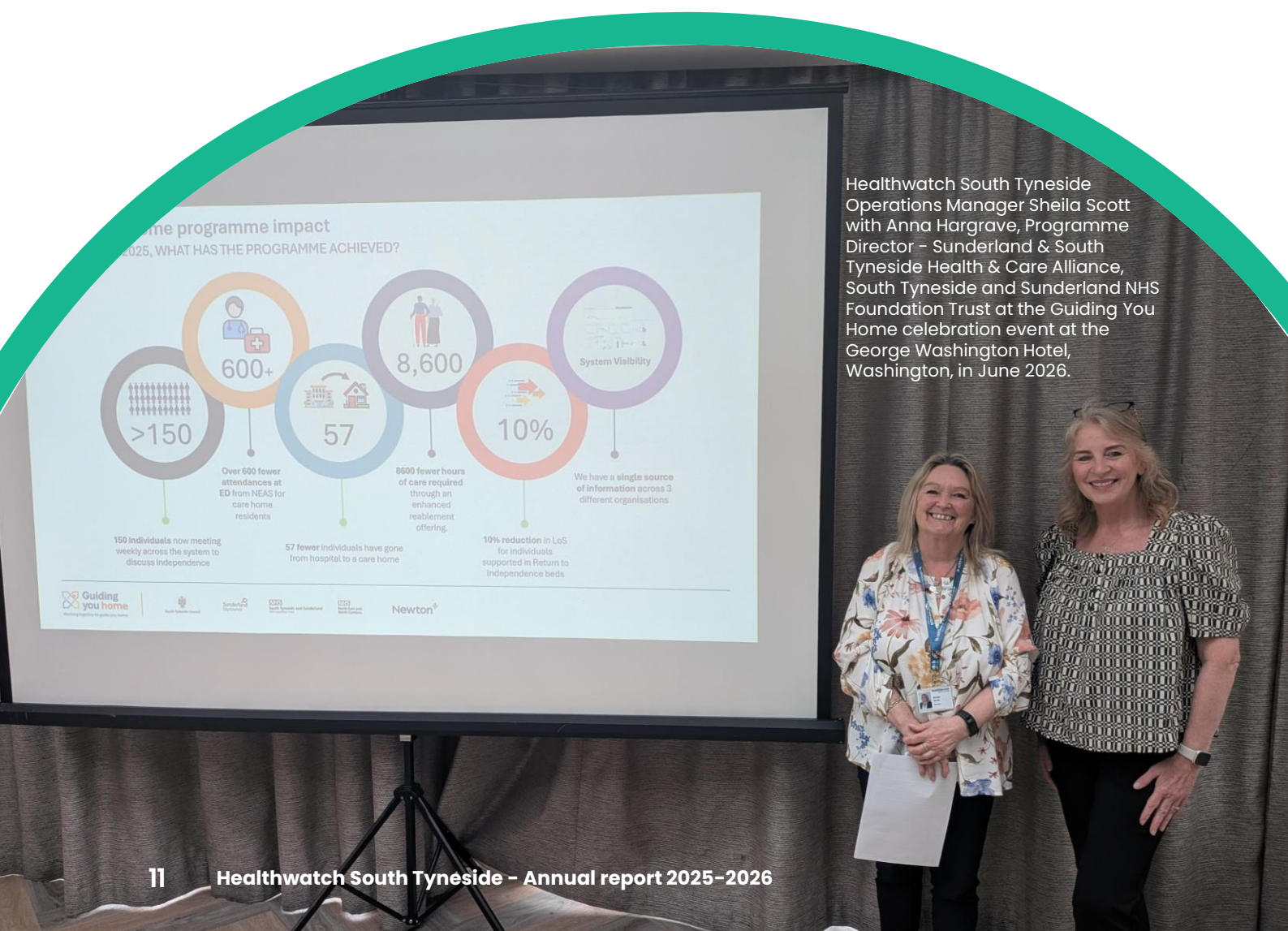
# Guiding You Home: hospital discharge arrangements

**Health and social care leaders in South Tyneside want to improve the outcomes of people discharged from hospital by promoting 'home first' as the priority and launched the 'Guiding You Home' programme to speed up hospital discharge.**

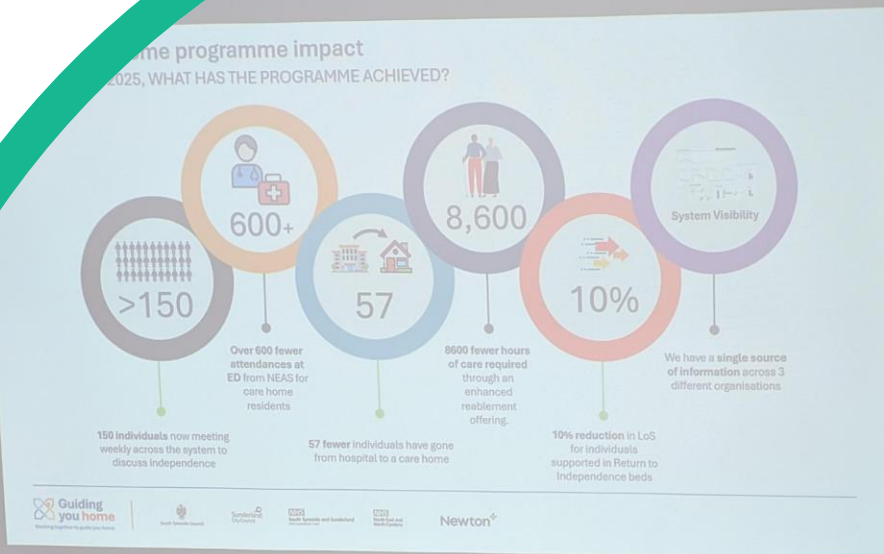
We heard from 29 relatives of hospital in-patients about the care and support they would like to see in place to enable them to return home rather than going into a care home.

Recommendations in our 'Guiding You Home' report – which included a communication protocol prior to discharge, information pack for next-of-kin and briefing for home care providers – were all accepted by Programme Director Anna Hargrave.

She said: *"Thank you Sheila and the Healthwatch team for completing an excellent piece of work to help inform the next steps of the Guiding You Home programme. The information gained is very valuable and we are in agreement with your recommendations. I look forward to working with you on the implementation of the changes needed and going forward as part of Guiding You Home."*



Healthwatch South Tyneside Operations Manager Sheila Scott with Anna Hargrave, Programme Director – Sunderland & South Tyneside Health & Care Alliance, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust at the Guiding You Home celebration event at the George Washington Hotel, Washington, in June 2026.



# Young people waiting up to two years for mental health support

**We called for waiting times for initial mental health consultations and diagnosis for young people in the borough to be reduced significantly in a report published in March 2026.**

Latest figures show the number of new under-18 referrals to secondary mental health services in the borough is significantly higher than the national rate at 15,685 per 100,000 and increasing.

## Key statistics



**53**

**young people took part in our online survey and told us their experiences of mental health services.**



**62%**

**more young people were referred to secondary mental health services than the national average**



“Why does everything take so long? We need help when it’s in front of us – not in a year or two.” (Survey respondent)

We had reports of waiting times for initial consultations and diagnosis from six months to two years and there was significant demand for one-to-one sessions. We concluded that increased signposting to other appropriate services may help.

## What difference did this make?

Our report provided first-hand feedback from a traditionally hard-to-reach group about the impact long waits for referrals to mental health services had on them. The survey responses also gave an insight into how young people felt they were treated by health professionals. A number of positive comments about the Stopping Unsafe Relationships Together (SURT) service could offer potential for shared best practice for service commissioners.

# 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:

- Obtaining feedback on mental health services from more than 50 young people.
- Attending 21 diverse groups and speaking to 310 people as part of our annual Have Your Say exercise.
- Supporting Healthwatch England with its research on trans and non-binary people's experiences with GPs.



Healthwatch attended the launch of ACTS Men's Space, a project supporting men's mental health in South Tyneside, at the Hedworth Hall in April 2026.

# Alcohol Brief Intervention

**South Tyneside has the highest number of alcohol-related deaths in the North-East and the second highest in England.**

Prevention and early intervention of alcohol misuse by healthcare staff is among the key priorities in the borough's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.

We developed a survey with South Tyneside Council's Public Health Team and our engagement team visited nine community groups and engaged with 64 people to help them to better understand residents' experiences of Alcohol Brief Intervention.

## What difference did this make?

It appeared that questions about alcohol consumption have become routine during general health checks, with more than four-fifths of respondents asked by a health professional about their alcohol intake. The Public Health Team said the insights gathered will inform a broader initiative focused on strengthening a system-wide approach to Alcohol Identification and Brief Advice.

# Have Your Say

**Our annual Have Your Say report collates feedback from nearly 450 people from a wide cross-sector of the borough.**

To generate a strong response rate to our questionnaire, we visited 21 groups including Apna Ghar, Chilln 'n' Spilln, Family Hubs, Naafi Break and Your Voice Counts, speaking to more than 300 people. We also obtained over 120 pieces of feedback recorded on our database via telephone, email and website forms.

## What difference did this make?

A clear message emerged from the survey returns - 45 per cent of the comments made were about GP services including difficulty making and securing appointments and waiting times. The second most commented on area was hospital care, including inpatient, outpatient and A&E, with 59 comments - accounting for just under a third of all feedback, which was mainly positive. Dental care was the third most commented on service, with almost all feedback referring to the difficulty accessing NHS dental services. Our report and findings were shared with local health and social care commissioners to inform future service planning.

# Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year 15,500 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services via our website, telephone, email and face-to-face. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

## 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



## Relief after dental treatment secured

**A South Shields woman with a bleeding disorder turned to Healthwatch when she was unable to secure a dental appointment after losing a large filling.**

After three months on a waiting list and numerous attempts to contact the Community Dental Service without success, the lady's husband asked for our help.

Manager Sheila Scott was able to confirm an appointment had just been booked for her at the outpatients' department at South Tyneside Hospital.

The lady's grateful husband said: "Healthwatch South Tyneside has been a valuable resource on a number of occasions when I have not been able to acquire answers elsewhere.

"It has an 'overarching' health role and there will be a serious community deficit when it is disbanded. My special thanks to Sheila Scott for her help and follow-up approach."



"Healthwatch South Tyneside has been a valuable resource on a number of occasions when I have not been able to acquire answers elsewhere."

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## ICB responds to audiology complaints

**Audiology patients were able to change the venue for their appointments in South Tyneside after Healthwatch intervened on behalf of patients.**

We received a number of complaints about Scrivens audiology at Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre, including a lady whose husband had ongoing issues including the audiologist not being there when she should and wrong tubes being sent out. They wanted to attend Palmer Community Hospital in Jarrow instead.

Operations Manager Sheila Scott referred the complaints to a Programme Lead at NENC ICB who agreed the pathway could be changed for the patients who preferred to attend Palmer Community Hospital.

An ICB spokesperson said: "I do hope this helps to ease any inconvenience or distress they may have experienced and thank you again for bringing this to our attention."

# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 221 hours to support our work. 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:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



# 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.



**John Lowther,  
Chair**

**John Lowther** has been Chair of Healthwatch South Tyneside since 2023. As well as chairing quarterly board meetings, he represents Healthwatch regularly at a wide range of events and meetings.

Principal Lawyer in a leading law firm specialising in medical litigation, Vice President of the North of England Medicolegal Society and joint Group Coordinator of APIL, John is passionate about healthcare.

He said: "Chairing Healthwatch is a privilege. It's a pleasure to support the work of the operational team in their efforts to listen to people's experience, gather important information and drive positive change."

**Arthur McKean** has been a care worker for 30 years, working in nursing homes, domiciliary care, supported living and residential and nursing homes.

He has been a keen volunteer with Healthwatch South Tyneside since our launch in 2013 and brings a health and social care worker's view to the role, as well as insights on what needs to be achieved to improve standards both for clients and staff in homes.

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 McKean,  
Vice-Chair**

Two Board members left Healthwatch South Tyneside during 2025/26. Barbara Tennet resigned on December 1, 2025 and Angela Fahey on January 12, 2026. We'd like to thank both Barbara and Angela for their dedicated service on the Board during their term of office.

# At the heart of what we do



**Carl Buckley,**  
Board member

**Carl Buckley** lives and works in South Tyneside and has run Boldon-based marketing consultancy Urban River since 2003. Originally working in finance, he has significant experience providing consultancy support to the public sector and is an active governor at two local schools.

Carl said: "I was approached to join the Board following successful work with Healthwatch on the development of a new website, a role to which I could not turn down. It presents a great opportunity to support the delivery of a more effective range of health services within the borough, which is a key driver as to why I am involved."

**Tracey Grainger** has been a voluntary Board Member of Healthwatch South Tyneside since 2021. She is passionate about supporting local communities by championing the need for high-quality care and ensuring the voices of local people inform Board decisions. Tracey brings valuable national NHS experience from her role as a Director of Improvement supporting challenged healthcare providers.

Tracey said: "Listening to local people is fundamental of meaningful improvement. At some point, all of us will rely on health and care services – either for ourselves or those we love. By staying connected to the realities of local people's experiences, we can help shape services that truly meet the needs of our communities, now and in the future."



**Tracey Grainger,**  
Board Member and  
HR portfolio holder

## 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](https://healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk)



0191 489 7952



[info@healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from South Tyneside Council 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	£72,933
Additional income	£4,750	Non-pay expenditure	NIL
		Office and management fee	£51,128
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£131,520</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£124,061</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

- £4,650 received from NENC ICB for NENC HW Network joint activities
- £100 donation

## 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
NENC HW Network joint work	£4,000
Winter pressures/pharmacy comms	£350
PCARP	£300


# Finance and future priorities

**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 priorities for 2026–27 are adult mental health and hospital discharge.**

More information can be found in our Operational Plan 2026–27 on our website at [healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk/what-we-do/current-priorities](https://healthwatchsouthtyneside.co.uk/what-we-do/current-priorities).



The lung cancer screening team at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.

# 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 four members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities (six at the start of the year).

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as the Operational Plan 2026-27 priorities and managing the winding down process prior to closure of Healthwatch. 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 2025/26, 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 one commissioner who did not respond to requests for feedback following the publication of our report about Young People's Mental Health services. 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 insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, 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 and 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 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting each of our reports to the Board. He has also attended 20 meetings including the Patient Experience Group, NENC South Tyneside Alliance, regional Healthwatch and Healthwatch South Tyneside Board.

Healthwatch South Tyneside is represented at the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board by Christopher Akers-Belcher (Regional Co-ordinator for the Healthwatch Network), and at sub-regional level within the network by Gail McGee (Central Area Co-ordinator).

# Statutory statements

## Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Belgrave Terrace	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
Dean View Villas	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
Deneside Court	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
Fairholme	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
Harmony House	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
McAnany Avenue	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
North View	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.
Wallace Mews	Commissioned by South Tyneside Council's Quality Team	Wrote a report with recommendations.

# Statutory statements

## 2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Pharmacy First	Produced report with recommendations
Alcohol Brief Intervention	Produced report with recommendations
Guiding You Home	Produced report with recommendations
Have Your Say	Produced report with recommendations
Young People’s Mental Health	Produced report with recommendations
It’s My Home	Produced nine reports with observations and recommendations



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



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South Tyneside Healthwatch CIC  
Company number 10083989