

Mental Health needs – scoping paper

The issue: Among Gateshead's Care and Health System's responses to Covid 19 was setting up a 24/7 crisis contact line. Another initiative, highlighted in a Local Government Association good practice case study about Gateshead's Covid response, was contacting everyone on the mental health waiting list at least once every four weeks. Should someone's condition deteriorate, they were given access to a duty social worker or the crisis line.

Voluntary sector organisations in Gateshead that continued to provide support during the pandemic have spoken about a worsening of mental health among their beneficiaries and service users. While it is difficult to offer any definitive figure this what appear to be significant number who have experienced increased anxiety, depression or other symptoms and for whom voluntary sector services were a consistent source of support.

In considering the sub-themes:

Carers

Gateshead Carers tell us that carers are caring for longer; that 60% of people in Gateshead will become an unpaid carer at some point in their lives and that 42% of women and 38% of men say their mental health has suffered as a result of their caring role. During the pandemic, carers became more isolated as support networks disappeared. Few carers were able to secure respite either for themselves or for who they were providing care for. Unpaid Carers were the focus of national and local campaigns to register with their GP to ensure they receive a covid vaccination. The campaign has raised awareness of unpaid carers but in 2019 NICE introduced the Carer Quality Standards to increase recognition of unpaid carers among GPs'. Gateshead Carers began working with GP practices to implement the Quality Standards. The pandemic however pushed back implementation and perhaps awareness of the standards and Healthwatch may wish to work with Gateshead Carers to 'audit' use of the Quality Standards on the basis that increased awareness will benefit carers physical and mental wellbeing

Post Covid-19 mental health needs

"Covid 19 does not strike at random; mortality is much higher in elderly people, poorer groups and ethnic minorities... its economic effect is also unevenly distributed". During the first lockdown, Tyneside Women's Health made regular phone calls to 600+ women who regularly use its services, prioritising women known to self-harm or to be at risk of suicide. As covid measures have steadily eased Tyneside Women's Health hear a mixture of optimism and anxiety at the prospect of life returning to 'normal' after so many months of isolation. A similar mixture of vaccine optimism and anxiety is heard from other Gateshead charities. We are Rise, funded by Sport England and working across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, is seeking to improve mental health through increased physical activity, whether formal exercise or simply walking more. We are Rise is setting up regional mental health networks and attempting to gain 'a granular' understanding of the people and environment it is working within.

Mental Health Transformation

One of Gateshead Care and Health System six transformation programmes is Community Mental Health and Delivering Together'. While Gateshead's direction of travel is welcome, frustration about the slow pace of change can be heard from stakeholders. Newcastle Gateshead CCG's original decision to change how adult mental health services are delivered dates back to 2016, coming after two years of wide-ranging public engagement. Mental health has been a priority area for Tyne & Wear Citizen's since its launch. A Citizen's Commission on Mental Health which conducted a listening campaign and producing a report, Living Well, based on findings. Tyne & Wear Citizen's. is campaigning to have counsellors available in schools and has established a new task group asking what happens to people while on waiting list for mental health support?

Pros and cons of us undertaking this work

Pros:

- Demand for mental health services is expected to significantly increase as a result of Covid placing a spotlight on those services; it makes strategic sense for Healthwatch to prioritise an assessment of those services
- Developing a series of working partnerships will generate more qualitative and quantitative grassroots data than Healthwatch has the capacity to generate alone
- Healthwatch increases its profile and strengthens relationships with organisations operating at frontline and strategic levels.

Cons:

- Partnerships themselves can take a great deal of time and results are not always concrete or fruitful
- At a time when large sums are being invested into mental health services (£500m) and Gateshead Care and Health System seeks to work with partners, Healthwatch risks being seen as an unhelpful voice, carping from the side lines

What we are seeking to achieve (goal)

Engage in some form of partnership working with a variety of organisations, to benefits from the expertise and/or additional capacity/resources they have in order to create an evidence base that demonstrates what mental health services are like for residents in Gateshead.

What changes we want to see (outcomes)

More robust user voice that is able to that is able to influence and shape planning and decision making about mental health services

Type of work (research / task & finish / exploration) and what we will do in each (activities)
In each case, the initial step is meeting and discussing how to work effectively with a series of partners: Gateshead Carers; Tyne & Wear Citizen's; We are Rise. The outcome of these discussions is difficult to second guess but is likely to result in task and finish or research work.

Resources required / available

The principal resource required is likely to be staff time

For Carers audit, co-designing audit with Gateshead carers, promoting audit and analysing results (May to July carry audit/survey – July to August analysis and publishing of results)

Participation in mental health regional network (May – initial meeting)

Liaison with Tyne and Wear Citizen's new mental health group (May – initial meetings)

Who to collaborate with

Gateshead Carers; Tyne and Wear Citizen's; We are Rise; Healthwatch Newcastle might also undertake work in this area that will usefully contribute to these outcomes

Impact and how we will demonstrate this

The impact of working with Gateshead Carers on auditing and promoting Carers Quality Standards, could be significant if it leads to GP's embedding use of the Standards and improving services for unpaid carers (which could be demonstrated through Gateshead Carers regular carer surveys). Impact of working with Tyne & Wear Citizen's and We are Rise is likely to be harder to demonstrate, given the size of the issues at hand

Recommendations for committee

Agree to an initial set of meetings with organisations listed to explore options for joint/partnership arrangements