

Members of the Committee are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report
- Give overall strategic permission to the Healthwatch Gateshead staff team to prioritise:
 - Information giving
 - Signposting to support and services
 - Troubleshooting, low-level advocacy etc.
 - Supporting the local communities
- Give authority to the Interim Operations Manager, with the team, to determine when to expand focus into active engagement and seeking feedback

Introduction

In January 2020, the committee selected five potential priorities for 2020-21:

- Interpreting services
- Risk of falls
- Standards of care in residential settings
- Supporting young people who are facing gender identity issues
- Use of pharmacies

The team then actively promoted public involvement in helping to priorities these via social media and outreach stalls and our Champions took hard copies of the priority survey to the groups they are involved with and encouraged people to complete them. This resulted in 96 response from the public. This is significantly down on previous years, however, our work was restricted to social media from early March due to coronavirus.

The results of the public prioritisation are as follows:

	Score
Risk of falls	3.46
Standards of care in residential settings	3.89
Use of pharmacies	2.91
Interpreting services	2.46
Supporting young people who are facing gender issues	2.30

Current situation

Since these priorities were set, the whole environment we operate and live in has changed. As a team, we had been discussing what our work would consist of during the pandemic period and this was supported by a message from Sir Robert Francis, Chair of Healthwatch England, on 24 March 2020. During this time our roles are clearly to:

- Prioritise the wellbeing of the public, volunteers and staff. This means that any kind of face to face engagement, public meetings or Enter and View activity should not take place.
- Focus on supporting the health and care system to get clear and accurate information and advice out to communities
- Support the wider community - in agreement with our commissioner

Healthwatch England have also asked us to:

- Gather feedback and the views of people about their needs and experiences in relation to COVID-19 and other services where it relates to patient safety. We should aim to share this with key stakeholders as soon as possible to inform plans as they unfold.
- Use our experience in engagement to ensure that seldom-heard groups are not overlooked.

The themes of the COVID-19 related calls that we get are being reported to Healthwatch England so that they can determine national themes and we are also sharing these with key stakeholders as soon as possible.

Recommendation

In the light of our thinking as a team, and the direction given by Healthwatch England, we propose that we pause our previous priority setting process. We believe that our priorities should be:

- **Information giving** - communicating key messages to the public. These will relate to how to stay safe and well, how to get help if and when required, how to support others etc. Most of this will be via electronic/social media and our radio show
- **Signposting** - supporting people to get the help that they need in response to enquiries via the phone, email, website and social media
- **Troubleshooting** - helping people who are not getting the response they need for
- **Supporting the local communities** - working with others within the voluntary and community sector, health and the local authority to support the wider community. This will primarily be via befriending calls but could cover a range of other activities determined by the team and community need

Whilst initial focus will be on these priorities, we will inevitably continue to get information and feedback about people's experiences of services. We propose that the team, under Cynthia's guidance, will determine when things have 'settled' and there are opportunities for more engagement and seeking feedback. At this point, some of the capacity of the team will pivot to enable this element to be increased.

Once the pandemic period has passed, we will revisit longer term priorities however, at the moment, we believe that it would be sensible to consider these as an opportunity to reflect and learn from the pandemic response. It may be possible to use our earlier priority setting work to shape the focus or framework for this, but it is inadvisable to tie us into any commitment around that at the moment.