

The value of listening

Healthwatch Gateshead
Annual Report 2023–2024



healthwatch
Gateshead

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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Chair

This year, Healthwatch Gateshead has focused on reaching out further to people in their communities to support them and hear their views. This has allowed us to signpost more people to the organisations that can help them and advocate for their needs.

This report is the perfect opportunity to reflect on the last year, looking back at what we have accomplished and what we hope to achieve next year.

Our Annual Survey told us that you have had mostly positive experiences of hospital services, pharmacies, social care, mental health care and urgent primary care. You also told us about your concerns, which included access to GPs as a major topic. Meanwhile, the last Annual Joint Meeting established women's health, adult social care, digital inclusion and underrepresented communities as areas of focus for us.

We have worked to build and strengthen connections with groups whose voices aren't usually heard in order to better reflect the diversity of our population. This has included new strategic links with the organisations already active within these communities.

It was clear that research and outreach would be vital to meet these priorities, so we increased our presence in communities across Gateshead, and continue to do so. This ensures we are well-positioned to hear from the public and give support where it is needed.

These efforts have allowed us to conduct surveys, publish reports and deliver insights to other organisations ranging from individual service providers all the way up to our strategic partners. Pharmacy provision, GP services and cost-of-living pressures are important to our residents, and we have worked hard to pass your views on to decision makers.

Michael Brown



"I'd like to thank every one of our stakeholders, partners, volunteers and staff – our Engagement Officers especially – for everything you've done in support of our mission. Every week you're out there, helping people break down barriers to allow them access to good quality health and social care, and making the system work better for everyone."

Michael Brown, Chair of Healthwatch Gateshead

About us

Healthwatch Gateshead is your local health and social care champion.

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

Our vision

We believe that users' views can improve health and social care services.



Our mission

To demonstrate how user views can improve services in health and social care, and provide practical services, support and advice.



Our values are:

- **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.



Year in review

Reaching out:

2,560 people

shared their experiences with us through research. This allowed us to produce reports, raise awareness of issues and improve services.

1,070 people

engaged with us at 51 outreach sessions and events

111 people

came directly to us for advice and information



Making a difference to care:

We published 6 reports

on the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services:

- You and your pharmacy – Provision in Gateshead
- Outer West Gateshead – the user voice on GP services in Crawcrook, Rowland's Gill, Grange Road and Blaydon practices
- Impact of winter pressures and the cost-of-living 2022/23 in Newcastle and Gateshead
- Loneliness in the retirement age population of Newcastle and Gateshead
- North East Ambulance Services – experiences in Newcastle and Gateshead
- Dentistry in Newcastle and Gateshead



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

10 talented volunteers

In 2023 - 24 we received

£140,250

From Gateshead City Council,
the same as the previous year.








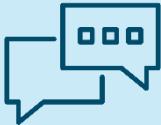
We currently employ

5 hard-working staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We engaged with people across Gateshead to report their experiences of using local pharmacies.</p>	 <p>We hosted free online forums on dementia support, brain health and advocacy.</p>
Summer	 <p>We delivered an interactive presentation to primary care staff, sharing Healthwatch insights and hearing their stories.</p>	 <p>We attended Northern Pride, providing helpful resources and hearing from the LGBTQIA+ community.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We developed a survey asking for service users' views of their GP practices in the Outer West area of Gateshead.</p>	 <p>By mapping out key community locations, we built a new network of local connections and partnerships.</p>
Winter	 <p>We assisted with the regional Healthwatch project to understand residents' dental experiences in 2023.</p>	 <p>We established regular drop-in sessions across Gateshead in locations including Teams, Blaydon, Birtley and Deckham.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Gateshead influence decisions made about services at the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

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

A collaborative Network of Local Healthwatch



Together, all 14 Local Healthwatch formed a Network which enables us to work together both regionally and area-wide. We appointed co-ordinators to facilitate engagement projects and the gathering of region-wide public feedback. Our board representative also ensures that the public voice is heard at ICS level, influencing decision making across the North East and North Cumbria.

Understanding the public view of Dentistry services

The Healthwatch Network was commissioned to carry out public engagement about dentistry, to help inform Integrated Care Board (ICB) decisions around improvements to services. We carried out extensive public engagement across the region, including surveys and mystery shopper exercises, gathering 3500 responses. We will be reporting our recommendations to the ICB in 2024-25.



Making health research more relevant



In February 2024 we were asked to support the ICB and partners in a Be Part Of Research Project. Healthwatch were funded to ask local communities about their level of interest in taking part in NHS and health research, and any barriers they faced. Our feedback will help future research to capture more diverse experiences, and so better reflect our communities.

Involvement Strategy review

The Integrated Care Board wanted to review their 'Communities and People Involvement and Engagement Framework 2022-23' a year on from publication. Our Network was commissioned to speak to underrepresented groups across the region, gathering valuable insights and making recommendations to the ICB about their public engagement strategy.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make the right improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Your views on patient booking systems

Healthwatch Gateshead was asked to investigate potential issues across a group of GPs in the Outer West area of Gateshead, after feedback from the public received by local councillors and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

We designed a survey in collaboration with the ICB, focusing on three main areas: ease of booking appointments, appointment waiting times and public perception. 2,283 people responded to the survey, representing 15.7% of the total eligible population.

53.1%

of respondents were 'satisfied' or better with their experience of booking an appointment with their practice, while 32.7% were 'dissatisfied' or worse.



What did we learn?

- We found that 77.3% of respondents booked their appointments via phone call, with the second most popular method being visiting the practice directly (12.7%).
- 59.2% of respondents reported receiving an appointment within a week at most, with 61% of respondents being 'satisfied' or better with their waiting time. 32.7% were 'dissatisfied' or worse.
- Positive feedback focused on friendliness and approachability of staff. Negative feedback focused on the booking system, the number of available appointments and a perceived lack of continuing care.

What were our recommendations?

- Ensure that patients who use the booking system are aware of who they are seeing and what form the appointment will take.
- Explore how post-appointment communications are managed to reduce the need for patients to make follow-up enquiries.
- Indicate to telephone users their position in the call queue system to improve the experience of telephone booking.

Many of the reported issues are ones that are prevalent nationwide. However, we believe that the systems that impact these issues can be improved on a practice-by-practice basis.

Putting Healthwatch where the people are

We are always working to be a well-known point of contact about health and social care, visible and approachable by residents in all parts of Gateshead.

- We began by mapping important community locations across all five neighbourhoods: Central, East, Inner West, Outer West and South Gateshead.
- Next, we contacted promising venues for engagement and outreach, including family hubs, village halls, libraries and community centres.
- After several positive discussions, our engagement team set up **7 regular drop-in sessions** across Gateshead, advertised with the help of these community venues.

What difference did this make?

From Blaydon Library in the Outer West to Felling Community Hub in the East and Birtley Hub in the South, we are now more integrated than before into local communities. This allowed us to spread the word – this is who we are, and this is where you can find us in your community!

In just a short space of time our team has become a part of local networks; supporting individuals, presenting information at community meetings and making Healthwatch Gateshead more approachable to the public.

We haven't stopped there. This approach has allowed us to forge new connections with partner organisations and community leaders, and strengthen existing ones. We will continue to position Healthwatch Gateshead where we can be seen and heard, so we can build trusting relationships, share useful information and hear the public's views on health and social care.



“People come to me seeking advice because they know I am in a Patient Participation Group. Knowing about Healthwatch gives me an extra ‘tool’ to help signpost them, which can sometimes save a GP appointment.”

– Public feedback received at a GP Surgery in Gateshead

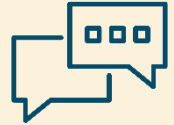
Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Forging new partnerships

Working with groups like Dementia Support Gateshead and the Heads of Patient Experience network (HOPE) allows us to do more, and better inform the people we work with about the support networks available to them.

Through networking events such as Service User Forums for the Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, we not only formed new links with other organisations – we also helped them form links with each other.



Humanising health and social care

Communication is difficult, but Healthwatch Gateshead can help.

Grace* spoke to us at an event. She felt unhappy and treated like 'another number' after a negative experience at a breast cancer screening session. We were able to set up a conversation between Grace and a radiographer from the screening unit; she felt heard, and action began to make sure her experience wasn't repeated.

*This name has been changed



Building new connections with Gateshead's Orthodox Jewish community

The Jewish Community Council of Gateshead (JCCG) represents the third largest Orthodox Jewish community in the UK. In 2023, we reached out to learn more about how this community engages with health and social care.

Through training by the JCCG and ongoing communication, we are working to better understand the health inequalities faced by the Jewish community, and what kinds of health communications have the most positive impact.





Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and that services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Building connections with groups and individuals who are less often heard from.
- Reaching out by visiting venues where communities gather and have discussions.
- Developing stronger relationships with a wider network of local partners.

Amplifying our underrepresented communities

We worked with The Comfrey Project to help their users' voices be heard and influence decisions that affect their care.

Refugees and asylum seekers are one of the groups most severely affected by health and social care inequality in the UK. The Comfrey Project provides for people fleeing conflict and persecution to receive support and find a community.

The Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the North East and North Cumbria wanted to understand how to improve health and social care services based on their views, and that's where we came in.

So what did we do?

Healthwatch Gateshead facilitated a focus group with the people supported by The Comfrey Project, giving each participant a chance to speak. We asked them if they thought there were enough opportunities to have their say about the NHS, and what they thought of the ICB's priorities.

This was our second focus group of this kind, in which we formed a link between high-level decision makers and underrepresented communities in Gateshead.

Teams Life Centre share their views

Health literacy can be a key barrier to accessing care, and low health literacy can make it harder to communicate your needs. We visited a local activity centre to find out how this impacts our population.

We identified Teams as an area with high levels of health inequalities. This means residents face strong barriers to education, employment, housing and health. We visited Teams Life Centre to ask the public about their engagement with health research.

We asked participants:

- What does health research mean to you?
- Have you ever been involved in research before?
- If so, were there any problems and what was good about it?
- What would help you to get involved in research?

By working with Teams Life Centre, we passed on valuable insights to the ICB about health-literacy related barriers to research and engagement. This included potential ways to overcome these barriers.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. 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 we've helped people by:

- Raising awareness of services in the local area through our online forums.
- Signposting people to information and advice through our website, email & telephone lines.
- Using our connections within the health and social care system to resolve specific issues.
- Increasing our presence within local communities, giving people the chance to share their experiences face-to-face.

Navigating transport challenges together

We are proud of our ability to ‘bridge the gap’ and work together with other services to help patients access care.

Healthwatch Gateshead helped Alex* in navigating support services to receive their Disability Bus Pass. Alex is partially sighted and speaks English as an additional language, so they experienced several accessibility barriers in the application process.

We worked with Alex’s support worker to find the correct information and ensure their needs were quickly met. They required input from several service providers to make their application, and we were able to help them find what they needed and move forward.

*This name has been changed

Many people like Alex are entitled to additional support but face barriers when trying to access it, or may not be aware that this support exists. By working with individuals and their existing care networks, Healthwatch Gateshead contributes to reducing health and social care inequalities.

New resources about dental appointments

Healthwatch Gateshead receives many questions about dental appointments, so our team created some helpful guidance.

‘How can I get an appointment with a dentist?’, ‘Why are there no appointments anytime soon in my local area?’ – these are common questions that our team are asked. We routinely help people find their next steps towards accessing dental care, either by providing useful information or contacting services with enquiries on their behalf.

We noticed this recurring theme of confusion around dental appointments, and took action by creating a step-by-step guide with helpful links, designed to be easy to follow. After sharing this resource with the public and other organisations, we received positive feedback from people who said the process had been ‘de-mystified’ for them.

...and we aren’t stopping there!

We recognise the value of quick and useful guides that are easy to share, and easy to save for later. We’ve identified several other topics for us to investigate and produce informative resources in the coming year. These include outpatient care, advocacy services, mental health, prescription charges and optical appointments.



Volunteering

We're supported by amazing volunteers, and thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote Healthwatch Gateshead and what we have to offer.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Supported Youthwatch activities to better understand the views of 16–25-year-olds.
- Gathered up-to-date information on changes to services, such as whether NHS dental appointments were available at a practice.



"I began volunteering with Healthwatch Gateshead shortly after retiring from my job in social care. I was still passionate about supporting people with their mental health and wellbeing, so I got involved! I saw it as a great opportunity to meet people and provide a worthwhile service.

Kay Parker –
Healthwatch
Gateshead

Every year since then, I have taken part in PLACE (Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment) and worked with the local NHS Foundation Trust. I had to slow down my volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic, but still found ways to support by promoting online surveys.

Most recently, I met with Nadeem from Healthwatch Gateshead at Blaydon Library during a community drop-in session. We talked about the health and dental care surveys Healthwatch was doing, and how by promoting them online and providing physical copies, I could help many more peoples' voices to be heard."



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Gateshead Council	£140,250	Expenditure on pay	£103,223
ICB	£10,564	Non-pay expenditure	£3,175
		Office and management fees	£27,995
Total income	£150,814	Total expenditure	£134,393

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society across the whole of Gateshead, so that those in power hear the views and experiences of underrepresented communities.

We will also work together with partners to help develop a culture where, at every level, providers strive to listen and learn from service users to make health and social care better.

Our top priorities for the next year are:

1. Autism and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
2. Dementia Care Services
3. Mental Health and Mental Health Crisis Services
4. Residential Care Homes
5. Physiotherapy

Healthwatch Gateshead will also continue keep a watching brief on national issues from the 2023/24 period, including Pharmacy, Dentistry and GP access.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Gateshead is administered by Tell Us North CIC
Milburn House, Suite E11, Dean Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 1LE
Company Number: 10394966
Email: info@tellusnorth.org.uk

Healthwatch Gateshead 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

The Tell Us North board consists of 5 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities across Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle. Healthwatch Gateshead also has its own volunteer committee, also consisting of 5 members. These groups ensure that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met 4 times, while the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee met 6 times, making decisions on matters such as making responses on the local Quality Accounts, defining research projects and identifying underrepresented communities who we could target to hear more from them about their experiences of health and social care service.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. Our committee meetings and the Annual Joint Meeting between Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle are open to the public, and the minutes for each meeting are made available on our website.

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 2023/24, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending 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, provide copies to partner organisations and make print copies available in public places such as local libraries and community centres.

Responses to recommendations

This year there were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations. We undertook no Enter and View Visits.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

We have taken insights and experiences to decision-makers in North East and North Cumbria including the Care Quality Commission, Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust, Gateshead Adult Social Care and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). We also share out data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives


Healthwatch Gateshead is formally represented by the CEO of Tell Us North CIC or the Chair of the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee on:

- Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Board
- Gateshead Adults Safeguarding Board
- Gateshead City Council Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Gateshead Integrated Care Board (ICB) Sub-Committee



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