

Committee minutes – Public

4th November 2025 – 2 pm to 3:30pm

Hybrid: Bensham Grove Community Centre in person and online via Zoom

Committee members present.

Bob Gaffney	(BG)	(in person)
Peter Wilson	(PW)	(in person)
Lyn Boyle	(LB)	(in person)

In attendance

Yvonne Probert	(YP)	CEO (in person)
Courtney Peel	(CP)	Business Services Manager (via zoom)
Afsana Begum	(AB)	Research and Engagement Manager (via zoom)
Jack Tinkler	(JT)	Lead Officer (in person)
Avish Johnson	(AJ)	Business Support Officer (in person)

1. Welcome and introductions.

- 1.1. In the absence of MB, PW stood in as Chair and welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2. As there were only 3 members of the committee present, the meeting was not quorate, so it was decided that any decisions made by the meeting would need to be endorsed either electronically or at the next meeting.

2. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Michael Brown – Chair (MB), Alan Guest (AG), Gordon Wallace (GW), Gillian Hindson (GH), Shamshad Shah (SS), Mairi Cox (MC), Privilege Garaba (PG) and Semande Ayihonbe (SA).

3. Minutes of previous meeting/matters arising.

- 3.1. The consolidated report on priorities from the table discussion at the AJM to be discussed as part of the agenda.
- 3.2. The minutes from the Committee meeting held on 24th September 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Electronic Decisions

- 4.1. None.

5. Chair – Verbal update

YP presented on behalf of MB.

- 5.1. Healthwatch England and Department of Health & Social Care meeting feedback:

- 5.1.1. The meeting was attended by representatives from all Healthwatch organisations across England and discussed the following:
- The need for changes to the Care Act and the potential timeline to have a new Act in place following parliamentary procedure.
 - The current Healthwatch contract and funding will continue until March 2026, with a possible extension until March 2027. However, details of the funding for the year 2026–27 are expected to be included in the government's budget due in late November.
 - A Patient Experience Directorate is to be established and will take over the Healthwatch function at the national level; however, there is still no clarification regarding the local level.

It was felt that the meeting did not answer many questions, and further updates will be awaited regarding the future direction of Healthwatch.

- 5.2. The Committee discussed the need to retain the independent voice going forward and how Healthwatch can influence decision-makers on the importance of capturing the local voice in the new model of Healthwatch.
- 5.3. A joint petition by the local Healthwatch across England has been submitted, and updates are awaited.
- 5.4. Gateshead Tackling Poverty Together: is a collaborative strategy to focus on deep rooted poverty issues, and YP asked if Committee members were willing to sign up to this strategy; all were in agreement.

6. CEO Update

- 6.1. Maternity cover for Research and Engagement Manager

Given the current uncertainty with Healthwatch, Tell Us North (TUN) has decided not to recruit externally and instead to backfill this role. As a result, there will be a restructuring of current staff members.

Action – YP to send the new organisational structure to Committee members.

6.2. The volunteering recruitment has been on hold, and YP asked the Committee whether they wish to recruit new volunteers.

6.2.1. A discussion took place regarding the time and investment required for new volunteers, and it was decided to keep this on hold and revisit in January 2026. In the meantime, Committee members and existing volunteers will support the team wherever possible.

Action – Induction pack for Committee members to include details of volunteering opportunities.

Action – Weekly communications to include volunteering opportunities for Committee members.

6.3. A Winter Social Gathering for all Committee members, volunteers, directors and staff will be held on 10th December from 4.30pm to 6.30pm.

6.4. Health and Wellbeing Strategy Review – the Committee agreed accept the offer of a presentation at the January 2026 meeting.

6.5. Quarter 2 monitoring report – has been recently submitted. A named commissioner has now been assigned and is working closely with the Lead Officer on the report.

7. Project Update

7.1. Dementia Care and Unpaid Caregivers – Data analysis is complete, and the draft report is underway, scheduled for completion by the end of November.

7.2. Autism and ADHD – Surveys are now live for data collection. The initial deadline was set for November; however, it is planned to extend for another month, with the report to be completed by early February.

7.3. Physiotherapy – In process of scoping out the project plan.

Action – Committee members interested in being the project sponsor to reach out to JT at the earliest opportunity.

7.4. Enter & View: Residential Care – The report for our second Enter and View venue has been completed and is awaiting publication. A re-visit to Sister Winefred Lavery Centre for the six-month follow-up has also been completed. The next Enter & View venue has been scoped and is scheduled for the end of November.

Action – Committee members who are interested in becoming Authorised Representatives to contact the Enter and View Officer.

7.5. A discussion took place regarding a potential change of topic for Enter & View to explore other areas for future visits. Based on feedback received at drop-ins and events, the Committee decided to include GP practices as an additional stream alongside the existing theme of Residential Care.

7.6. Youthwatch – A workshop is planned at Gateshead College on 2nd December, with a provisional workshop scheduled for early January at the Gateshead SEND Youth Forum. The team continues to scope further opportunities.

7.7. Safeguarding Board – Awaiting updates from Gateshead Council.

Action – AB to send a revised project update report to the Committee.

7.8. Regional projects updates were given including:

- Primary Care Recovery Action Plan (PCARP) – Currently in the engagement phase; the team is promoting the survey and distributing leaflets.
- You and Your General Practice” guidelines and survey – Actively being promoted to the public at community drop-ins.
- The next 18-month project plan is being defined.

7.9. Healthwatch Gateshead – Emerging Priorities for 2026/27

- Hospital: Based on feedback from the table discussions at the Annual Joint Meeting and follow up survey, the Committee decided to examine Accident and Emergency (A&E) usage and explore why people choose A&E as their first point of contact rather than pharmacies or GPs.
- NHS 111: To be co-produced with NEAS.
- The Committee agreed to defer the topics of Social Care and Mental Health for now and revisit them as priorities emerge over time.

Action – JT and AB to explore emerging topics in Social Care and Mental Health.

8. Locality working update

8.1. JT presented the Quarter 2 data and stated that locality working is continuing successfully, with over 60 events held and more than 2,000 people engaged. It was noted that topics such as GP appointments and Autism and ADHD services have been raised frequently.

8.2. JT also mentioned that members of the public have been raising concerns about the potential closure of local Healthwatch and the future of the independent voice. JT noted that the public have expressed appreciation for the work carried out by Healthwatch.

Action – Event plans and drop-in details to be shared in weekly communications so Committee members can join the team where possible.

9. Finance Update

9.1. CP presented the financial report and mentioned that there has been a slight overspend due to expenses related to the Annual Joint Meeting and project surveys are now live, and printing costs have increased slightly.

9.2. There is nothing of concern and income and expenses are as expected.

3:12 CP left the meeting

10. Update from Gateshead Autism Strategy Partnership

10.1. AG had attended the Partnership meeting and shared a report with the committee.

11. Standing Items

AB presented on behalf of CP.

11.1. Nothing to report regarding Safeguarding, Health and Safety, or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

11.2. There is no freedom of information requests.

12. Any other business

12.1. The location for future meetings was discussed, and the Committee suggested exploring venues with good accessibility and closer proximity to the city centre.

Action – AJ to book a suitable venue.

12.2. The Committee extended their best wishes to AB, who is going on maternity leave.

13. Date and time of next meeting.

13.1. Tuesday 6th January 2026 – 2 pm.