

Committee minutes – Public

16th July 2025 – 2 pm to 3:30pm

Hybrid: at the Boardroom (Gateshead Leisure Centre) in person and online via Zoom

Committee members present.

Michael Brown – Chair	(MB)	(in person)
Peter Wilson	(PW)	(in person)
Lyn Boyle	(LB)	Online (via Zoom)
Alan Guest	(AG)	Online (Via zoom)
Privilege Garaba	(PG)	Online (via Zoom)

In attendance

Yvonne Probert	(YP)	CEO (in person)
Avish Johnson	(AJ)	Business Support Officer (in person)
Bob Gaffney	(BG)	Observer (in person)
Gordon Wallace	(GW)	Observer (in person)

1. Welcome and introductions.

- 1.1. MB welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.
- 1.2. Bob Gaffney was introduced and welcomed to the meeting as an observer.

2. Apologies for absence.

Mairi Cox (MC), Semande Ayihonbe (SA), Izzy Gray (IG), Shamshad Shah (SS), Gillian Hindson (GH), Courtney Peel (CP), Afsana Begum (AB) and Jack Tinkler (JT) gave apologies for the meeting.

3. Minutes of previous meeting/matters arising.

- 3.1. All agreed to continue to review the website and send any feedback to the Communications Officer.
- 3.2. AG is in discussion with AB regarding the Autism topic and AG will act as the Project Sponsor for the Autism work. Also the Gateshead Council's Autism Strategic Board is yet to be formed, and AG will be a member once established.

- 3.3. Stakeholder Survey details of organisations contacted have been circulated after the last meeting. YP confirmed that the number of responses has been better than in previous years.
- 3.4. PW will be joining the team on the Enter & View visit, which is scheduled to take place next week. This had been on hold due to an outbreak of sickness at the centre.
- 3.5. ICB projects are joint initiatives; therefore, Healthwatch Newcastle was mentioned in the project report previously shared.
- 3.6. The minutes from the Committee meeting held on 13 May 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Electronic Decisions

- 4.1. The Annual Report was signed off electronically and has now been published.
- 4.2. The majority of the committee agreed to sign the open letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in response to the closure of Healthwatch.

5. Chair – Verbal update

- 5.1. The NHS 10-Year Plan and the Dash Review have now been published. The main points of discussion were hospital-to-community care, analogue-to-digital transition (with a focus on the NHS App), and shifting from sickness to prevention.
- 5.2. Healthwatch England is to be closed and staff transferred to the Care Quality Commission (CQC). However, local Healthwatch organisations will undergo major changes. According to the update, social care functions of local Healthwatch will be transferred to the Local Authority and healthcare functions to the Integrated Care Board (ICB).
- 5.3. The Care Act of 2012 and 2022 would need to be updated/renewed to incorporate changes to Healthwatch and this is not expected to happen until at least October 2026.
- 5.4. Local Healthwatch will continue with business as usual until the changes are implemented and more clarity is provided regarding the process and future direction.
- 5.5. MB emphasised the importance of local Healthwatch continuing to maintain high quality and standards, building strong networks, and strengthening relationships with the NENC ICB. This will help enhance the reputation of the network of the 14 local Healthwatch to be a delivery partner should the NENC ICB decide to contract healthcare functions externally.

- 5.6. As civil servants, Healthwatch England staff do not have the right to object to the closure decision. However, they have offered their support to local Healthwatch teams during this difficult period.
- 5.7. The committee discussed the need for and the importance of an independent voice. They expressed concern that the changes may silence public opinion on health and social care services.
- 5.8. The 151 local Healthwatch are creating a national petition about the closure.
- 5.9. MB and YP confirmed they will continue to share updates and progress as and when they are received.
- 5.10. The commissioners have confirmed that the contract will be honoured until the end of the financial year (31st March 2026).
- 5.11. The committee offered their support to the staff present and wider team during this uncertain and challenging time.
- 5.12. The committee also noted the lack of detail in the Dash Review and expressed disappointment in how the information was shared with both Healthwatch and the public.
- 5.13. YP noted that Healthwatch Gateshead is currently in the first year of a contract extension, with a second-year extension expected to follow, which would have placed Healthwatch Gateshead under contract until March 2027.
- 5.14. YP also confirmed that activities such as signposting, drop-in sessions, Enter & View visits and strategy discussions with the system partners will continue. However, emerging priorities for next year (2026/27) and the resulting research projects are to be put on hold.
- 5.15. The current priorities and their research project will continue. The reports are expected to be completed on or before 31 March 2026.
- 5.16. YP assured the committee that Tell Us North CIC, the holding company for Healthwatch Gateshead, has sufficient reserves to continue operating for a minimum of three months.

6. CEO Update

- 6.1. The Quarter 1 Monitoring Return (April to June 2025) will be published shortly.
- 6.2. Drop-in activities, as well as information and signposting, have continued to grow as usual.
- 6.3. Lauren Whitfield at Gateshead Council has been confirmed as the commissioning officer for Healthwatch Gateshead.
- 6.4. The Annual Joint Meeting is scheduled to be held on 16 September from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Recovery College Collective in Newcastle.

- 6.5. YP suggested that instead of discussion emerging priorities at the Annual Joint Meeting as usual that we debate the future of the independent voice in health and social care services. After discussion the following topic was suggested "what should an independent voice look like in the new model? And what needs to be retained from the existing Healthwatch functions?"
- 6.6. Priority setting will not be included in the agenda, as this work will be put on hold.
- 6.7. The committee agreed on the proposed agenda topics.

15:00 PG left the meeting

7. Project Update

YP presented the project update in AB's absence.

- 7.1. Dementia Care and Unpaid Caregivers – The project scoping document had been shared and agreed with the committee electronically after the last meeting. The Research and Engagement Team has developed a list of potential questions to ask unpaid caregivers via telephone or in-person interviews. YP clarified that the research focuses on the support provided to carers and unpaid carers looking after individuals with dementia, not on the individuals with dementia themselves.

Action – Question 9 to be amended to an open question, allowing respondents to list the types of support they are aware of, in order to identify any gaps.

Action – Follow-up questions to be included where necessary to gather additional information.

Action – YP to share feedback with AB on the proposed changes.

- 7.2. Autism and ADHD– The project scoping document is currently in development. The Research and Engagement Team continues to meet with partners to gather local data and identify key issues and concerns.
- 7.3. Physiotherapy– The Research and Engagement Team is continuing to scope the research area and are arranging meetings with partners to collect local data and identify key issues and concerns.
- 7.4. Enter & View: Residential Care – A second venue has been scoped for the next Enter & View visit.
- 7.5. Youthwatch – A provisional workshop is planned for a young carers' panel in collaboration with Caregivers Connected Gateshead. The date is scheduled for September and the team continues to explore other opportunities for the Summer/Autumn period.

- 7.6. Safeguarding Board – Gateshead Council has delayed scoping this due to internal work capacity. Further information from partners is awaited.
- 7.7. ICB Regional Projects – No new projects have been initiated; however, reports are awaited on completed engagement projects.

8. Locality working update

YP presented the Locality update in JT's absence.

- 8.1. The Information & Signposting, and Engagement Activity Reports were presented. It was noted that these activities are continuing as part of our business-as-usual approach.

Action – The committee suggested that this report be displayed with accompanying statistics at the Annual Joint Meeting (AJM) to demonstrate impact.

9. Finance Update

- 9.1. There was nothing to report. Expenses and income are as expected.

10. Staff Satisfaction Survey.

- 10.1. The team provided positive feedback and expressed that they are happy to work for Healthwatch Gateshead. The overall response was mostly positive.
- 10.2. MB expressed appreciation to YP for her leadership, which contributed to the positive feedback.
- 10.3. YP thanked MB and she added that this survey was before the Healthwatch England closure news which has obviously had an impact of staff morale.

11. Standing Items

- 11.1. Nothing to report regarding Safeguarding, Health and Safety, or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 11.2. A Freedom of Information request has been received by Healthwatch Gateshead regarding a patient complaint case (Subject Access Request and FOI for personal data and related correspondence, dated 27/06/25). The team is working on preparing a response, which will be completed within the statutory deadline.

12. Any other business

- 12.1. Location for future meetings was discussed and the committee suggested having one consistent meeting venue close to Gateshead Central. From the

choices provided by AJ, the committee agreed on Citizens Advice as the preferred location.

Action – AJ to book the venue.

13. Date and time of next meeting.

13.1. Tuesday 24th September 2025 – 2 pm.