

Championing what matters to you

Annual report 2021–2022



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Message from our Chair

Reflecting on the past year I realise how much we have continued to learn, develop and respond flexibly to the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We've seen first-hand how the Gateshead health and care system maintained its response, keeping people and communities in Gateshead as safe as possible and focusing on those facing the greatest inequalities. We are proud to be part of the system particularly working in partnership with the Health and Wellbeing Board.



Throughout the year we have taken opportunities to meet people in real life when that's been safe to do. This was mostly carrying out work on one of our priority areas 'Gateshead resilient communities: reflections on the impact of COVID-19' where we talked to people from the Dunston and Teams and Birtley wards (see page 8). When restrictions meant we couldn't do face-to-face engagement we used different methods to ensure we hear from local people – our social media platforms, email and telephone. We also promoted our surveys. However, we know that our experience is similar to others and that people are experiencing a degree of survey fatigue. Being able to do more of our 'out and about' work in recent months has been great.

In addition to resilient communities, the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee prioritised working with refugee and asylum seeker communities. We initially focused on access to GP services, however, we were quickly able to respond to feedback from the community that their priorities were different. We flexed our approach to build relationships and this work continues into the coming year. Working with other organisations has increased our reach into communities and we appreciate the support of leaders and community organisations in helping us to engage with people. Our work has been well received and our work with refugees and asylum seekers has fed into the Community Mental Health Transformation workshop and the Pharmacy Needs Assessment steering group.

In addition to these local priorities, we have worked with our colleagues from other regional Healthwatch. We sat on the working group responsible for developing a regional approach to engaging with the Northeast North Cumbria Integrated Care System. We also worked with eight local Healthwatch to research the experiences of dental services for people in Gateshead, adding this to the collective findings. Dentistry has been identified as an issue for Healthwatch England nationally, so it's been positive to contribute to the broader picture.

I end with a 'thank you' to members of the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee, to our dedicated volunteers and staff and to the people of Gateshead who have taken the time to share their experiences of health and social care services with us. This, and our promise to keep challenging ourselves to do even more to hear from all communities, means we face the coming year with confidence that we will make a difference here in our place.

We are committed to continuing to work closely with the Gateshead system, the council, health and social care, voluntary and community sector partners, and particularly with the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Board. Together we will continue to make a difference and work on tackling the health and other inequalities which have been further exposed and worsened during the pandemic.



Michael Brown
Healthwatch Gateshead Chair



"The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities."

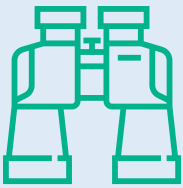
Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Gateshead is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other 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 to provide practical services, support, and advice to help that happen well.



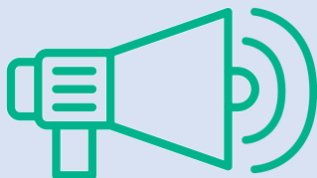
Our values

- 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 and community sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people

Reaching out



500 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

20,414 people

accessed our advice and information via our helpline, website, social media and information videos.

Making a difference to care



We published

5 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Gateshead resilient communities

which explores how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the health and wellbeing of the people of Gateshead.

Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

9

outstanding volunteers, who gave up **10** days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021–2022 we received

£140,250

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

7 staff

who contribute to the delivery of Healthwatch Gateshead.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022

Spring

We worked with Newcastle Gateshead CCG to discuss our January 2020 report 'Don't box me in' and the resulting CCG action plan to make services young people friendly.



We held an online focus group with members of Arthritis Care in Gateshead to discuss their experiences of GPs, dentists, hospitals, pharmacies and opticians.



Summer

We reflected on our PPG awards work and sought views from practices we were already engaged with on how this could evolve over the next 12 months.



We supported the #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people come forward to tell Healthwatch about issues.



Autumn

We reported on our resilient communities work looking at how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the health and wellbeing of people in Gateshead and how different people and communities responded.



We shared our findings with NHS England after reporting some patients were unable to find an NHS dentist.



Winter

We promoted Healthwatch England priorities around the Accessible Information Standard. We engaged with people to complete the survey and shared information with the public and with services.



Throughout the year we have continued to share up-to-date information about COVID-19 measures and the vaccine roll out.



Listening to your experiences

Services can't make 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 feedback to services to help them improve.

Dental services in Gateshead

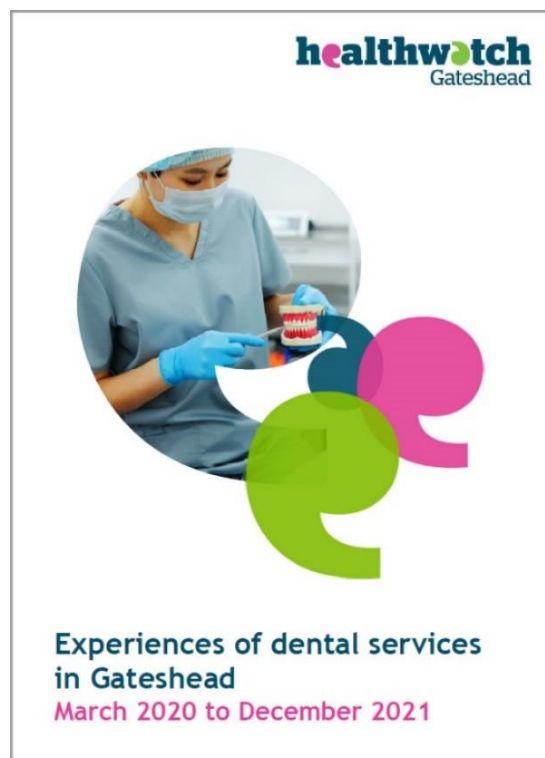
In October 2021, the 13 local Healthwatch in the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS) area came together to discuss working together to better understand people's experiences of dentistry services. We wanted to understand any access barriers and inequalities relating to the availability of NHS dentistry.

The background to this work included an increase in feedback about dentistry within the NENC ICS local Healthwatch network and evidence emerging nationally that there were issues around access and provision. The aim was to achieve the following:

- Gather evidence to help us to identify and understand issues.
- Share our findings at a local, regional and national level.
- Influence and inform decision-making in the commissioning and provision of dentistry services.
- Improve information for patients and members of the public.
- Strengthen joint working between the NENC ICS local Healthwatch network.

An online questionnaire specifically aimed at those requiring dental services in Gateshead was launched in late November 2021 and closed in early January 2022. This method was chosen because of the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and new guidance from the government.

The questionnaire was promoted across all social media platforms, in our newsletter, at meetings and with partners. We contacted 16 dental practices, which were picked at random and covered the whole of Gateshead. This included Crawcrook and Chopwell in the west, Felling and Leam Lane in the east, as well as central Gateshead and immediate surrounding areas such as Dunston, Low Fell and Felling.



In total, 147 respondents in Gateshead shared their experiences of dental services between March 2020 and December 2021. Using all available knowledge and the insight of wider Healthwatch Gateshead information, we formulated a view and made four key recommendations:

- Make information simple and available.
- Improve the process for patient registration.
- Improve NHS patient access.
- Review affordability in line with cost-of-living increases.



Some of the feedback we received suggested the following:

“Letting people know which dental practices were taking on new patients (seems very little done to advertise this).”

“Better information on finding local NHS dentist.”

“There should be one clear place the public could go to that was friendly, knowledgeable and understanding (that could give choices of what services, even emergencies and when you could go).”

A dental care myth-buster document was also created published on our website and distributed to various statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations.

Read the report on our website at <https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>.

Resilient communities in Gateshead

As part of an annual priority-setting process during spring 2021, the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee chose the theme of 'resilient communities' as an area to focus on during 2021—2022.

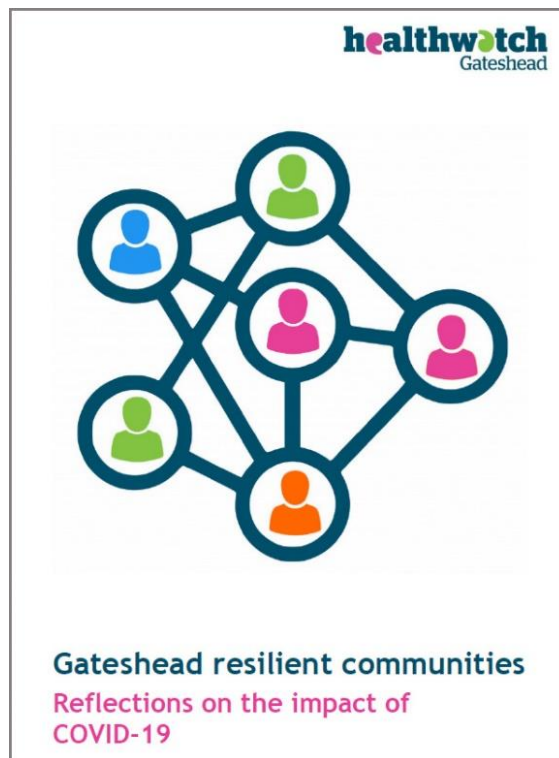
We wanted to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the health and wellbeing of the people of Gateshead. How did different people and communities respond? What can we learn to help support resilient, healthy, thriving communities in the future? During autumn 2021, we visited several community and public venues in Birtley, Dunston and Teams and spoke to 131 people. We wanted to know what really 'worked' for people and understand why it worked.

Three main issues came up and form the basis of the recommendations in our report:

- The importance of social contact — family and friends provided the most support, and community centres and local charities were also important in helping people get through the pandemic.
- Access to services — primary health care services remained open during the pandemic but were delivered differently. However, many survey respondents believed services were inaccessible, and some new parents felt the absence of face-to-face meetings with midwives and health visitors, for example.
- The positive impact of getting outdoors — activities such as gardening, walking, cycling and dog walking were all seen as having a significant positive effect on those who could participate.

The impact of the pandemic was not equal. Some people in our communities were further disadvantaged as systemic issues have increased vulnerability.

Read the 'Gateshead resilient communities' report on our website at <https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>.



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 identifying an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.



This year we helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information on COVID-19.
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust.
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme.
- Helping people to access the services they need.

Navigating the NHS continuing healthcare system

Mrs X contacted us to say that her husband was in a care home and his dementia and other health issues had deteriorated. She thought her husband needed nursing care and wanted help to arrange this and understand NHS continuing healthcare (CHC).

We advised Mrs X on the CHC process and also contacted Gateshead Council's Adult Social Care, which looked into the case. A new assessment was needed, and we liaised with Adult Social Care to help Mrs X understand why there was a delay with this.

We supported Mrs X throughout the process as communication had been difficult for her due to the number of agencies involved in the case. We met with Mrs X on several occasions to support her to identify the information she needed and understanding the process to request a social care reassessment. We liaised with the care home manager about how best to keep Mrs X involved in her husband's care needs.

Building relationships with the Jewish community

Many people in the Orthodox Jewish community in Gateshead do not interact with the wider world through digital means. This means that organisations that rely on technology or digital promotion do not usually have reach within this community.

It is a growing population and tends to have high numbers of children per family. Baby and child loss is a very difficult subject for all communities and is often rarely spoken about. There are very few non-religious avenues available for support and understanding. A Jewish community-led event around the subject held several years ago remains the highest attended event they have held and demonstrated an appetite for discussions about what can be a difficult and somewhat taboo subject.

Healthwatch Gateshead introduced Labriut Healthy Living Centre and 4Louis. 4Louis provides many hospitals throughout the UK with memory boxes that are given to people who lose a child as well as training on bereavement support to midwives and nurses. They actively seek to tailor boxes to different faiths and communities.

This created a new working relationship and a wider understanding of the services available in the area for the Jewish community. This relationship may give rise to the development of a memory box that could aid many of those affected in the community in coming to terms with coping and understanding a loss. 4Louis already have boxes at the QE Gateshead, which is the preferred hospital in the area for the Jewish community.

Contact us to get the information you need



If you have a query about a health and social care service or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. We're here for you.

w: <https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>

t: 0808 801 0382

e: info@healthwatchgateshead.co.uk

Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Took part in six volunteer catch-up sessions.
- Took part in a stroke awareness workshop facilitated by one of our volunteers.
- Helped lead an online discussion on our 'tell us your story' campaign.
- Co-created a survey on loneliness and social isolation in young people.

Freda

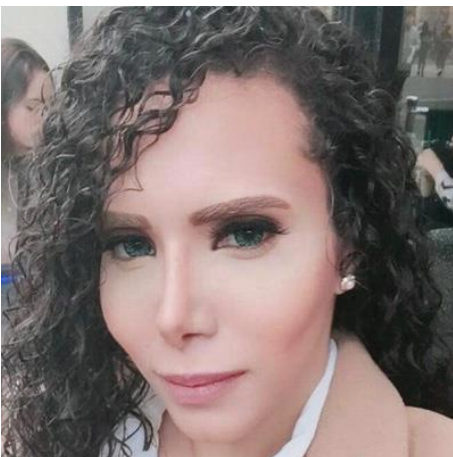


I started volunteering with Healthwatch as I have a long-standing interest in health matters. My son is a doctor, so I have been around medical people for several years as well as having been a patient at the Queen Elizabeth hospital myself on occasions.

I live close to the Queen Elizabeth so when they asked for a Healthwatch volunteer to join their PLACE team (Patient-Led Assessment of the Clinical Environment) it seemed an ideal opportunity for me to become involved. I was already a founder member of Stomamates support group so knew the hospital and some of the staff already.

My last PLACE visit was in February 2020 then I went away for two months to visit my son and family in New Zealand. Once I eventually got back to the UK the country was in lockdown and PLACE visits have yet to be reinstated so, to date, I have not been able to contribute to Healthwatch, but I look forward to these visits being restarted.

Randa



I started volunteering with Healthwatch to support their mission in improving health and social care services.

Healthwatch has a diverse set of tasks, and I can assist in a variety of ways. I believe Healthwatch can significantly contribute to the overall well-being of society. Therefore, together we can serve as friends, brokers, and advocates to guarantee that healthcare professionals maintain high standards, and that the individuals they care for are aware of their rights and resources.

There are numerous advantages to volunteering with Healthwatch. It helped me gain confidence and meet new people while learning new skills. The most essential thing is knowing that the time and effort I put into volunteering has a direct good influence on someone gives me immense satisfaction.

The most memorable work with Healthwatch was when I helped in translating documents so the team can reach out to Arabic-speaking communities. Surprisingly, this role assisted me in finding a new passion that I had not previously recognised in myself, which paved the way for gaining a career as a freelance interpreter with some well-known global organisations a year later.

Alan



Well, 2021 turned out much like 2020. Most of my work for Healthwatch Gateshead has been done electronically, occasionally catching up by Zoom – although we did have a face-to-face get together (sorry, work meeting!) towards Christmas.

But in saying that, there were a few highlights of which I'll pick out three I'm particularly proud of. If people would remember the 12 June 2021 for one reason, it could well be watching with alarmed helplessness, the collapse of Christian Eriksen who experienced a sudden cardiac arrest during the Denmark v Finland match part of the Euro 2020 tournament. A few days later, I was asked if I was interested in doing some e-training in dealing with Sudden Cardiac Arrest (including using a defibrillator) through UK Coaching. Hopefully, I won't need to use it, but if the time does come, I hope I'll remember the right thing to do.

The next thing was practically a follow-on from an article I wrote for the newsletter about my own experience of being diagnosed with autism in November 2020 (which led to being interviewed on Radio Newcastle). To mark my first 'aut-versary' it was suggested that I do a video with Keiron Rose (The Autistic Advocate) and Kerrie Highcock from the Northeast Autism Society to discuss the experience of getting a late diagnosis and how an individual can identify themselves as autistic.

The final thing was taking part in a photo shoot illustrating a 'Healthwatch urges patients to order repeat prescriptions in time for Christmas' article, which involved me standing outside my local pharmacist as well as posing with the pharmacist inside.

Finances 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.

Income	
Funding received from local authority	£140,250
Additional funding	£0
Total income	£140,250

Outgoings	
Staff costs	£79,505
Operational costs	£21,300
Support and administration	£14,720
Total expenditure	£115,525

Transition from priority working to a programme of work for 2022–2023

As part of our learning from the pandemic, we are looking to enable our staff, volunteers and work to become more flexible in approach. We believe transitioning from our annual priority-setting style of working to a more flexible programme of work is the best way to do this. We will review this programme every six months and set themes based on feedback, learning and understanding of the needs of our community similar to how we have done previously with priorities.

We are currently in a period of extended engagement to inform the early theme setting process.

Next steps

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard. We aim to get a better understanding of who we are not hearing from, both from our own listening and the listening of the systems we engage and contribute to.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard and decision-makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that's because of where you live, income or race.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Gateshead, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS
Organisation holding the Healthwatch Gateshead contract:

Tell Us North CIC (company number 10394966), MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS

Email: info@tellusnorth.org.uk

Healthwatch Gateshead uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

Share your views with us



If you have a query about a health and social care service or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch Gateshead is here for you.

w: <https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>

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The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and laypeople in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Committee consists of six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. The Committee ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. During 2021–2022 the Committee met five times and made decisions on matters such as agreeing on annual priorities and changing the way of working to a programme of work style model.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have revisited our priority setting process and how we decide on our priorities, we gather information and evidence from several sources. The main source is our engagement with people (public, patients, service users, stakeholders) through:

- Feedback and issues raised through our general work and engagement.
- Feedback and issues raised through our online feedback centre.
- Information from Committee members and our volunteers.
- Information and feedback from voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Information from the local authority and other local health and social care providers and commissioners and from horizon-scanning activities of issues at a national level.
- Healthwatch England data which includes Care Quality Commission findings.

When we are considering our priorities, we take into account the fit with our role as a local Healthwatch, the kind of work that will be involved and if we have the skills and resources to deliver, the likelihood that we can make a difference, have an impact and will add value. Also, if there are opportunities for us to work collaboratively with others.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight into their experiences of health and care services. During 2020—2021 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums and provided virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and social care decision-makers. This year we have done this by working with partner organisations in Gateshead to ensure that we can share the views of under-represented groups so that services can be accessible for all.

Key community partners over the past year included:

- Peace of Mind – support for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Tyneside Women’s Health – support for women’s mental health.
- Leam Lane Community Centre and Gateshead Carers – unpaid carers.
- The Lawnmowers – adults with learning differences.

Our feedback centre makes it quick and easy to leave feedback about local health or social care organisations. Our website is regularly updated with accurate COVID-19 information, and we send out a monthly newsletter with local news and support. We also attend regular virtual Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group meetings and community and voluntary sector organisations network groups such as Connected Voice and Haref (Health and Racial Equality Forum) where attendees can get Healthwatch updates and share information about their work.

This year it is more important than ever that we hear from everyone in our community, including people who may be heard from less often. Our staff and volunteers identify what matters most to people by going out into the community and visiting services to get public feedback on their experiences, through stalls, focus groups and other engagement methods. We then work collaboratively with our health and social care partners to ensure their services are the best they can be. We play an important role in bringing together those who commission services, those who deliver services and the people who use services. Our work makes a difference, in shaping health and social care across Gateshead and nationally, influencing policy at the highest levels.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website at <https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>.

Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers responded to requests for information or recommendations, except for 13 dentists who did not provide us information for our dentistry work due to time constraints.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Gateshead is represented on the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Board by Healthwatch Gateshead Chief Executive Siobhan O'Neill and Chair Michael Brown.

During 2021–2022 our representatives have effectively carried out this role by attending the meetings and contributing to the strategic direction of the board through its health and wellbeing strategy. We provide insight to contribute to the aim of building a thorough understanding of the needs of the local community, agree priorities and ensure patients and the public have more choice and experience better services in the future.



Volunteer with us

Help us make a difference in Gateshead.
Find out about the opportunities we have for you at
<https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>

Thank you

Thank you to everyone that is helping us put people at the heart of care, including:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- All of our amazing staff and volunteers.
- The organisations that have contributed to our work.
- Our partners and stakeholders

Age UK Gateshead

Albert Kennedy Trust

Alzheimer's Society

Arthritis Care

Asthma + Lung UK

Becoming Visible

Cancer Research

Care Quality Commission

Carers Trust

Changing Lives

Children Northeast

Children's Health Services 0–19

Comfrey Project

Connected Voice

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Deaflink

Diabetes UK Gateshead Group

Disability North

Edberts House

Elders Council

Gateshead Arthritis Group

Citizens Advice Gateshead

Gateshead Carers

Gateshead College

Gateshead Council

Gateshead Council Public Health Department – MECC network

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust

Gateshead Housing Company

Gateshead Job Centre

Gateshead Libraries

Gateshead Older People's Assembly

Gateshead Primary Care Networks

Gateshead Stroke Association

Gateshead Young Women

Gateshead Youth Council
GEM Arts
Haref
Healthwatch England
Interskills Exchange
Involve Northeast
Josephine and Jack Project
Journey Enterprises
Labriut Healthy Living Centre
The Lawnmowers
Making Changes Northeast
Mental Health Matters
Moving On Tyne and Wear
NHS England
NHS Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group
Northeast Ambulance Service
Northeast Sikh Service
Northeast Young Dads and Lads
Northern Cancer Voices
Northumbria Blood Bikes
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
Peace of Mind
Primary Care Networks in Newcastle and GP Practice Managers
PROPS Northeast
PRS café, MEA House
Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland
ReCoCo
Regional Refugee Forum
Scouts Association
Skills for Work Gateshead
St Oswald's Hospice
Sunderland People First
Tyneside and Northumberland MIND
Veterans at Ease
VONNE
Walking with the Wounded Northeast
Youth Focus Northeast



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