

TITLE OF REPORT: Healthwatch Gateshead Update**REPORT OF: Siobhan O'Neil, CEO, Healthwatch Gateshead**

Summary

This report provides the Care, Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the range of work being carried out by Healthwatch Gateshead

Background

This is an update report for members of the Committee on the work of Healthwatch Gateshead.

We are beginning to report using the domains within the Healthwatch England (HWE) Quality Framework. This tool has been developed to support local Healthwatch to take stock and make improvements and to help local councils in their commissioning and monitoring of Healthwatch. The domains are:

- Leadership and decision-making
- People
- Sustainability and resilience
- Collaboration
- Engagement, Involvement & Reach
- Influence & Impact

Leadership and decision-making

Over the past 18 – 24 months our goals and work priorities have, like everyone else's, had to flex and respond to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our priority projects for 2020-21 were stopped and we took on the Healthwatch England priorities designed to support local and national responses to the pandemic, examples include:

- Communicating key messages to the public including on the Covid regulations and restrictions, how to stay safe and the vaccination programme.

- Information gathering including taking part in Healthwatch England's national survey 'Because We All Care.'
- Signposting to other services including to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), Independent Complaints Advocacy (ICA) and Connected Voice Advocacy.
- Troubleshooting, supporting local people with simpler issues relating to their health and social care needs.

As the pandemic entered its second year, we revisited our process for agreeing work priorities, scoping several themes before Healthwatch Gateshead Committee members agreed on the following areas of work for 2021-22:

- Resilient Communities – working to better understand how the Covid pandemic has impacted on health and wellbeing.
- Refugee and Asylum Seekers – Health and Social Care priorities of people within this community.

There is more detail on these in section Engagement, Involvement and Reach below. In addition to these priorities our Committee members agreed that some resource and capacity should be kept in reserve to ensure that we could remain responsive and flexible to local need.

People

Our dedicated staff and volunteers are fundamental to us delivering an effective Healthwatch service. Since we last presented, we have seen several changes; a new CEO joined in late 2020, some longstanding members of staff have moved on, new staff and associates have come on board, and we have seen changes in our committee too.

We have had success in recruiting new Committee members, and we will continue to strengthen our governance further. We will be working in partnership with 'The Experience Bank' to help us to realise this ambition.

Everyone has continued to be adaptive, responding to the changing guidance and working to ensure that we continue to deliver our service and ensuring that people using health and social care services have a meaningful voice.

This includes our volunteers who quickly adapted to virtual working and supported us to deliver befriending calls, in collaboration with Mental Health Concern and Age UK Gateshead.

Sustainability and Resilience

The way we deliver our work has adapted over the past year, with some change, such as moving away from 'in person' activities, forced upon us as we have responded to the pandemic.

Other changes have been intentional and strategic. The Tell Us North Board, the delivery vehicle for this contract and Healthwatch Gateshead Committee undertook a strategic review last year, taking stock, and deciding what we need to do now and over the next 12-24 months. This resulted in Tell Us North reaffirming its vision:

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

And its mission, which is 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.

We continue to build on this work and have reviewed our model aligning this with the HWE Quality Framework. Also, reviewing our staffing structure which will take shape over the coming months.

The principles underpinning all this work are to enable us to deliver a great Healthwatch service for people and communities in Gateshead.

Collaboration

We value working in partnership, we know we can only deliver well by working effectively with and through others. This includes Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, other Healthwatch and statutory partners. Some examples of this include:

- Supporting the Gateshead Public Health budget consultation in early 2021 by designing a focus group guide based on the ‘Staying Well: Your Health and Wellbeing’ survey developed by Gateshead Council. This was shared with VCSE organisations who we have regularly worked with, along with other supporting documents and a small incentive to support involvement. The results of the work were shared with the public health team to support future planning and engagement activity.
- Sharing information in new ways and working in partnership to deliver a series of service awareness videos which are promoted and available across our social media platforms. Some examples of these are:
 - The Josephine and Jack Project who work with adults and young people with a learning disability
 - Veterans at Ease a charity supporting former and serving military personnel and people in ‘blue light’ services and their families in North East England with stress-related issues.
 - We are working now on an autism awareness video in partnership with the North East Autism Society and The Autistic Advocate. This work has been led by one of our volunteers who received an autism diagnosis later in life.

Our place is Gateshead, and our main focus is on the local experience of health and social care service design and implementation across the borough.

We are also attuned to the other geographies in which we work.

This includes recognizing the benefits of working in partnership with other local Healthwatch.

A practical example of this is the current work we are doing around access to dentistry services in partnership with our Healthwatch colleagues in Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees. This collaborative approach will provide a local perspective that we can share with partners here in Gateshead.

The local and regional perspective will also be shared with Healthwatch England who have been raising issues at a national level around accessibility and affordability and the need for a recovery plan that makes NHS dentistry a viable option for everyone who needs it. Dentistry remains one of the key issues that Healthwatch England have asked us to tell them about.

We are a member of the regional Healthwatch working group set up in response to the development of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS). This is looking at:

- Developing the network of thirteen local Healthwatch within the NENC ICS, to ensure that people's experiences of health and social care services are shared and that where appropriate work is coordinated across the wider system.
- Negotiating with the NENC ICS on representation and involvement of Healthwatch in governance arrangements.
- Developing working agreements at sub regional levels to support collaboration at this level. An agreement between Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, and Northumberland has already been agreed.

There is appreciation at a national level that these are new ways of working and that our ICS has the largest footprint. In recognition of this HWE with funding from NHSE&I are providing tailored support to a group of six Healthwatch networks and this includes ours. This work is ongoing.

Engagement, Involvement and Reach

Engagement, Involvement and Reach activities form the main statutory functions of Healthwatch Gateshead, how we reach out to local people and communities, gather views, and provide advice and information. It is through delivery of this work that we are effectively collaborating, an independent partner within systems, influencing, and having an impact on health and social care services.

We have had to rely heavily on digital engagement over the past 18-24 months as opportunities for in person work have been limited by the pandemic. Despite these limitations, we have maintained our connections with

communities and amplified the voice and experiences of users of health and social care services. Notable achievements include these below.

During 2020:

- Gateshead GP Patients Survey, The impact of COVID-19.
This work was undertaken in collaboration with CBC Health GP Federation who commissioned us to survey GP patients to understand the impact on patients of the changes in support to patients during the early stages of the pandemic. The work had a short turnaround time to enable GP practices to gain rapid insight into patient experiences and we were happy with the number of respondents: 204 over a two week period.
- Eight ways to make a difference Children and young people's mental health services (April 2020).
As a result of this work Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (NGCCG) developed an action plan based on our findings. Including: sharing information on KOOTH¹ (with schools, primary care partners and via the Local Offer) and improving information about young people's mental health services on the NGCCG website

During 2021:

- Children and young people's access to health services in Gateshead and Newcastle
This work built on our earlier research into children and young people's access to health services with a focus on qualitative insight. Using online focus groups, one-to-one phone calls, email, text, and WhatsApp to engage with young people, their parents, and carers. We gathered 73 experiences which were analysed to identify themes and written up into a report that was shared with local commissioners and service providers. The results also helped Children North East inform future planning for the North East and Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network.

Current and future work:

- Resilient Communities
The theme of resilient communities was chosen as a priority area by members of the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee in May 2021. The focus of the work was to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on the health and wellbeing of people in Gateshead. How different people and communities responded and what can be learned from those responses to help us to build more resilient, healthy communities in the future. During conversations between Healthwatch Gateshead and Gateshead Council's Neighbourhood Management

¹ Kooth is an online counselling and support service available to young people aged 11-18, and to young people in Looked After Care until they are 25 years old.

Team, it was agreed that the work would focus on two areas: Dunston and Teams Ward and Birtley Ward. These wards are of a similar size and have very different populations. The research and analysis have been completed and the report is currently being quality assured by a volunteer committee member. Once this is complete the report will be published and shared with partners.

- **Refugee and Asylum Seeker work**
This theme was prioritised by the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee with a phased approach being taken. We recognise that we are not experts in this area and have partnered with other organisations with greater experience, connections, and reach into this community. This includes Peace of Mind and The Comfrey Project who are supporting us to capture the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers and identify the issues that are most important to them. It is likely that this work will inform and influence the NGCCG's newly commissioned migrant health initiative. We will report on the work at the end of this financial year and the committee will decide on further work in this space as part of their decision-making on our future work programme.
- **Neighbourhood Work**
We are interested in exploring ways in which we can understand what people's views and experiences are at a more local level, using a Primary Care Network footprint. We want to do commit to this over the longer term, moving beyond simply annual priorities, to understand people's experiences as health and social care are further integrated and looking for opportunities to collaborate with others and to innovate. We are prepared to commit resource to this work and want to talk to potential partners.

Influence and Impact

This focusses on the difference that we make. We do this by supporting individuals with a specific issue, as in these two case studies:

Accessing dentistry for Patient A, a wheelchair user:

Patient A contacted Healthwatch Gateshead for help in finding a dentist that was accessible to them. They had already searched for a dentist and had made an appointment with a practice who had advised they were accessible. Their experience on the day was not positive: the front door was difficult to use, the consultation room was small with limited space for manoeuvring their wheelchair and the dental chair was difficult to get into, resulting in pain in the following days.

We investigated other dental services in her area, eventually making a referral to the Community Dental Service which has specialised equipment to support people with disabilities to receive their dental

treatment. This includes hoists, transfer aids and a wheelchair recliner.

Patient A was able to receive the dental treatment she needed, was made aware of an alternative service, and told us:

“Thanks for the information. I wish it was made more readily available so everyone could see, and not have to go out their way to find it or worse not get any treatment at all as they don’t know where to go. Thanks for your time.”

Delays in surgery - Local resident B

We were contacted by the parents of a young person who had been waiting for surgery for a year and when the scheduled appointments had been made these were cancelled twice. They were in contact with a range of professionals and wanted our help to join things up, get information and a positive outcome for their child. They also raised concerns about the impact of this on their other child.

After contacting the RVI and speaking to mum we were able to establish that they now had a named contact at the hospital who was now supporting them through the process. Also, that the operation had been rescheduled.

We were able to offer advice and information on local and national groups that support parents and families of disabled children and young people:

- Gateshead Parent Carer Forum - a local group of parents and carers who aim to make sure services meet the needs of disabled children.
- Sibs – a national charity for brothers and sisters of disabled children and adults.
- Contact – for families with disabled children
- Local online peer support groups

The parents told us: “Thank you. You are the first service who has acknowledged our concerns for our other daughter, and we thank you for this.”

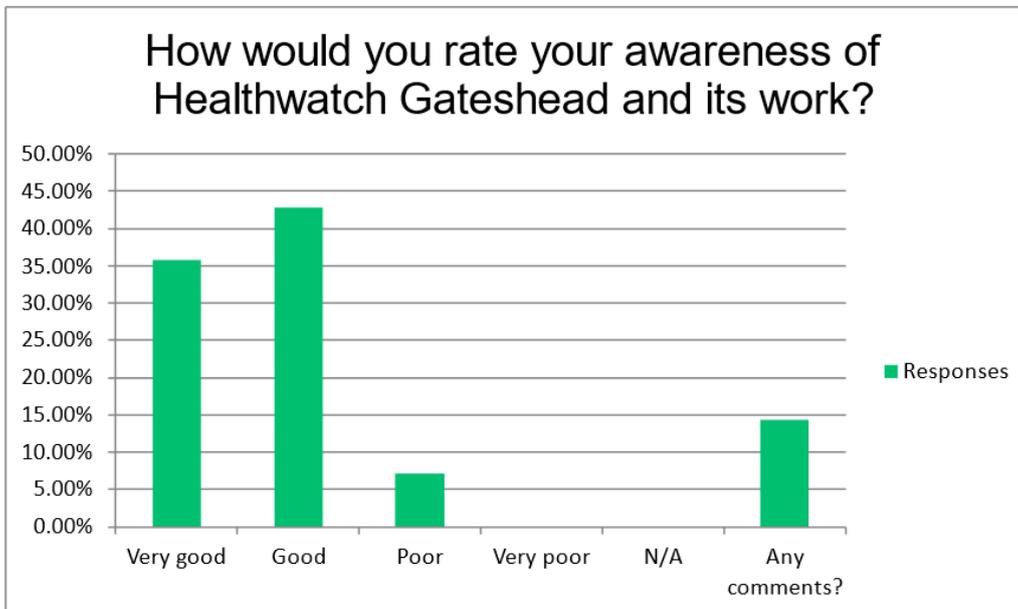
We also make a difference through reaching out to local people and communities, gathering experiences and views on health and social care services, and feeding these into partners within the Gateshead system. We seek to use our insight gained from:

- Word on the street conversations
- Our Feedback Centre

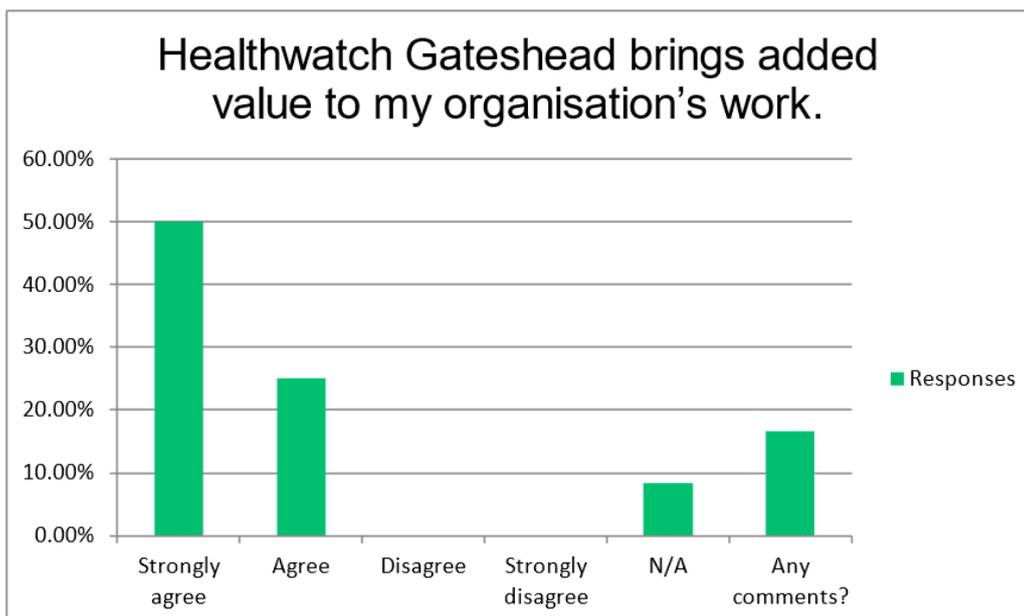
- Engagement or involvement activities that may be general or theme specific. For example, our general health and social care survey or our focus groups on young people’s experiences of accessing health care.
- Information and advice requests from members of the public

Combining this intelligence with our overview of what is happening across the health and social care system to form an independent view that is shared, valued and influential.

We check how we are doing in several ways including an annual stakeholder survey. Early analysis of this year’s survey shows that most people / organisations who responded are aware of our work but that we have some work to do.



Respondents also told us that we add value to their organisations work.



We are continuing our analysis of the feedback and are committed to building on what we learn.

The Healthwatch remit is broad, and we prioritise how best to use our resources keeping in mind that health and wellbeing are not equal. We recognise and are mindful in our decision-making that culture, location, wealth, education, discrimination, and other factors can lead to worse health & social care outcomes for some people and communities.

We attend meetings where we can add value, including

- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Safeguarding Adult's Board
- Primary Care commissioning meetings
- Care Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- NGCCG Involvement meetings
- Regional Healthwatch lead officer meeting
- HW NE volunteer coordinator meeting
- NEAS Healthwatch Forum
- Child be Healthy Partnership

We receive the papers for the Gateshead Cares System Board, have contributed to the digital work and are helping frame support in the co-production of an improved outcome initiative for autistic people in adult social care.

Looking Ahead and next steps

We will continue to build on the relationships that we have within Gateshead, focusing on local people and communities, while working with others to amplify users' voice and experiences.

We want to improve, while simultaneously continuing to deliver a great Healthwatch service. Getting the basics right but testing and experimenting with exciting new approaches. We do not always get things right, but we are committed to learning.

Finally, we will support the Healthwatch Gateshead tender process and are dedicated to continuing our work. We will submit a strong bid which demonstrates our commitment to people and communities across Gateshead.

Recommendations

The OSC is asked to:-

- i) Note the information provided.

