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**TITLE OF REPORT: Healthwatch Gateshead Update**

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**Purpose of the Report**

This report provides members of the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the range of work being conducted by Healthwatch Gateshead.

**Background**

This is an update report for members of the Board on work we have been doing since we last presented in October 2020, current challenges, and consideration of our work programme for the coming period.

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**

Throughout 2020 – 2021 we followed the Healthwatch England priorities developed in response to the pandemic these were:

- Communicating key messages to the public
- Information gathering
- Signposting
- Troubleshooting

As the pandemic entered its second year, we revisited and improved our process for agreeing priority themes and projects, adding stakeholder engagement to the consultation on the headline themes. Several potential ideas were scoped in greater detail to enable Healthwatch Gateshead Committee members to decide on their final priorities which were:

- 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 the section on Engagement, Involvement and Reach below. In addition, 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**

Since we last reported to the Board, we have seen several changes in our people. Some longstanding members of staff have moved on, new staff and associates have come on board and there have been 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.

## **Sustainability and Resilience**

Our operating model has adapted over the past year, some change has been 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 and recognise that we can only deliver well by working effectively with and through others. This includes VCSE organisations other Healthwatch and statutory partners and 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.  
As our usual activities were curtailed by the pandemic, we worked in partnership with others to find new ways of sharing information. This included a series of service awareness videos which we are continuing to deliver and are available on our website and social media platforms. Currently we are completing 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. We have also produced video diaries working in

partnership with Skills for Work's young people about their health care experiences.

Our primary focus is on the local experience of service design and implementation, and our place is Gateshead. We are proud of the role we can play in making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives, particularly in amplifying the voice and experiences of those people and communities facing the greatest inequalities.

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.

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

This includes recognizing the benefits of working in partnership with other 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**

These activities form the main statutory functions of Healthwatch Gateshead. This is 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.

As opportunities for in person work have been limited by the pandemic we have had to rely heavily on digital engagement. 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:

- Gateshead GP Patients Survey, The impact of COVID-19 (July 2020). 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 KOOTH<sup>1</sup> (with schools, primary care partners and via the Local Offer and improving information about young people's mental health services on the NGCCG website
- Children and young people's access to health services in Gateshead and Newcastle (Jan 2021).  
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 seventy-three 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.
- Resilient Communities (Jan 2022)  
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 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 (ongoing to March 2022)  
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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

likely that this work will inform and influence the NGCCG's newly commissioned migrant health initiative. We will report on the first phases of this 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.

- Jewish community work (ongoing)  
We now meet with senior figures in the Jewish community on a regular basis to provide information and hear about their experiences. Recently, they have told us about an overwhelming fear of social care involvement throughout most of the community and around adult mental health and the lack of understanding when services have been involved in the past. We have raised these concerns with both Gateshead Council Adult social care and CNTW. We feel this ongoing communication will improve relationship building with local services.

### **Influence and Impact**

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

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."*

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, currently being analysed.

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.

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