

**TITLE OF REPORT: Healthwatch Gateshead Update****REPORT OF: Yvonne Probert, CEO Tell Us North**

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**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

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**Introduction to Healthwatch Gateshead**

Healthwatch Gateshead is an independent, not-for-profit service. We help people of all ages and from all backgrounds have their say about social care and health services in Gateshead. This includes every part of the community, so we give a voice to people who sometimes struggle to be heard. We also offer free, confidential and independent information about social care and health services in Gateshead.

Healthwatch Gateshead is one of 152 Healthwatch groups in England and each local authority is linked to a Healthwatch for their area. We have statutory powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2022 including the ability to:

- Request information from commissioners and service providers.
- Visit publicly funded health or social care services to see how they are working (known as 'enter and view' visits).
- Represent the views of the public at Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Board meetings.

**Healthwatch Gateshead**

- 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".

Healthwatch Gateshead works to make sure that the people who plan and run social care and health services are listening to their service users. When people's voices can be heard, we can make positive change. Together, we can create services that cater to what real people actual need and want.

## **Background**

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

The report headings reflect 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. These domains are:

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

### **Leadership and decision-making**

Over the past 12 months Healthwatch Gateshead (like most organisations) has adapted, renewed, and shifted our delivery patterns as we adjust with the aftereffects of the pandemic.

Nationally, Healthwatch England has set nine priorities:

- Tackle waiting times
- Review access to GP services
- Reforming NHS Dentistry
- Making care information accessible
- Improving hospital discharge
- Making patient data more transparent
- Understanding the impact of NHS 111 First
- Tackling health inequalities
- Learning from complaints

Healthwatch Gateshead supports these nine national priorities through providing local data collection, supplying service users input and raising people's awareness of the issues.

At local level, the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee agrees on two or three themes of work per year and in 2021/22 they 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.

Also, through our rolling community engagement and outreach programme the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee pick up emerging issues and new trends that address local need.

The Healthwatch Gateshead Committee work with commissioners and local partners to ensure they have agreed themes for work that reflect strategic objectives. Yet they also make sure that they have the capacity/resources to remain responsive and flexible to meet the changing local needs. We are setting your annual priorities for the year ahead and under the section “Looking Ahead and Next Steps” we have included our emerging themes for your input.

## **People**

Our dedicated staff and volunteers are fundamental to us delivering an effective Healthwatch service in Gateshead. However, since the last report in February 2022, the staff team has undergone several significant changes. The previous CEO (Siobhan O’Neill) left in the summer of 2022 and a new CEO (Yvonne Probert) joined in December 2022, an interim CEO (Phill Capewell) bridged the gap and new staff have come on board too. We are now in a time of renewal and looking positively to the future with an enthusiastic new team.

We are looking to review our governance arrangements of the Gateshead Healthwatch Committee to ensure the members roles, their responsibilities and the decision-making processes are clearer ahead of recruiting new members in.

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

## **Sustainability and Resilience**

The Tell Us North Board, the delivery vehicle for this contract, and Healthwatch Gateshead Committee reset its vision last year to:  
“We believe that users views can improve health and social care services.”

And revisited 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 our model aligning with the Healthwatch England Quality Framework and these principles underpinning all this work are to enable us to deliver a good 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 others. This includes Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, other Healthwatch and statutory partners.

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 also recognise the importance and the benefits of working in partnership with other local Healthwatch.

We are a core member of the regional Healthwatch working group for the Northeast and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS). This group is enabling the network of thirteen local Healthwatch within the NENC ICS to come together and ensure that people's experiences of health and social care services are shared and that, where appropriate, work is coordinated across the wider system. Healthwatch Gateshead will also be taking the lead on communications for the network.

There is appreciation at a national level that the NENC ICS is a new way 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 Outreach**

Engagement, Involvement and Outreach 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 Healthwatch Gateshead, as an independent partner within systems, can effectively collaborate, influence, and impact health and social care services.

From February 2022 to January 2023, we have undertaken the following engagement, involvement, and outreach work:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services - Experiences of children, young people, and their families in Gateshead

In October / November 2022 a total of 45 children and young people with SEND needs and their families (CYP&F) participated in a survey to share their experiences using education, health, and social care services in the Gateshead Local Authority area. Feedback from the CYP&F highlighted that needs were complex, and services were in high demand. Among the 45 respondents, there were high levels of dissatisfaction in how services met the needs of their child and the wider family. However, there were also several examples of good practice reported and positive experiences shared.

Analysis of the feedback from the CYP&F had identified a small number of potential actions, which could improve experiences across education, health, and social care in the future.

- More work needs to be done to ensure good practice is shared between Specialist Schools / College and Mainstream education providers. Interorganisational working could take place through

workshops and peer learning to help schools without adequate SEND provision to learn from schools who have implemented effective procedures.

- Services should further develop any training already provided to staff to help them understand how they can better meet the needs of service users with specific conditions.

There are several examples of useful services that made a real difference to many of the families consulted. Service providers such as SENDIASS, CYPS, and The Chev were highlighted as especially useful services among the respondent group. Efforts should be made to increase awareness of services of this type.

- Resilient communities post-COVID-19

Healthwatch Gateshead 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 our recommendations:

- 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 for those who could participate.

We found that the impact of the pandemic was not equal. Some in our communities have been further disadvantaged as systemic issues have increased vulnerability.

- Dentistry: Your Experiences

Healthwatch Gateshead wants to understand service users’ experiences of dental services. The information shared with us will feed into evidence submitted by Healthwatch England for the House of Commons Cross-Party Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into NHS dentistry. The survey is at

[https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/dentalservices\\_2022/](https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/dentalservices_2022/)

## Currently active work:

- Loneliness and isolation in the post-retirement age (65+) population of Gateshead.

Healthwatch Gateshead are interested in understanding what loneliness and isolation means to people aged 65 and over in Gateshead. The project focuses on how often people feel lonely, any contributing factors to feelings of loneliness, and what helps when people feel lonely or isolated.

We are asking the public to complete the survey, to help us understand what support and services are working well and any other support that may be need. The survey is available at [https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/loneliness\\_in\\_postretirement\\_age/](https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/loneliness_in_postretirement_age/)

- Living the life I want - Autistic People in Gateshead

We are wanting to understand specific changes, benefits, learning and effects that happen or are expected to happen as a result of an intervention or activity provided by Gateshead Council.

We want to evaluate services to understand what services are working and what needs to be done to improve services. This work is rolling out in January 2023 with people with autism and their carers who have been identified by Gateshead Council as suitable persons to provide feedback. Feedback will be obtained through semi-structured interviews both in-person and via telephone. -

- Gateshead Carers Survey

This survey was developed by Healthwatch Gateshead to help Gateshead Council understand the experiences of care givers (unpaid carers) as we come out of the Covid 19 pandemic.

This care givers have just finished their feedback to us, and the draft report with outcomes is to be presented at the next Gateshead Carers Partnership meeting.

- Asylum seekers and refugees

We are working with local voluntary and community groups to hear the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers using health services in Gateshead. We want to understand if there is a need to explore what services matter most to support their health and wellbeing and what improvements could be made.

## Influence and Impact

We 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
- 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

We combine 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.

Examples of our work and its results are below in this "You said we did" format:

- Just ask about COVID-19 vaccinations for long-term hospital patients

*You said...*

*Mr B of Gateshead contacted us at Healthwatch Gateshead about the process for a COVID-19 vaccination for long-term patients in Gateshead hospitals.*

*We did...*

*We contacted the Patient Experience Team at Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust, which raised the issue at the Trust's vaccination meetings.*

*As a result of your feedback...*

*There will be a process for vaccination for inpatients who have been in hospital for more than 42 days. This will cover people who haven't had the vaccine, who fit in one of the priority groups being vaccinated and who are clinically fit to receive the vaccine.*

*"This has been achieved through your intervention and I am extremely grateful. Now that the QE has adopted a policy for long-stay inpatients it will benefit a number of those who otherwise may have faced an unnecessary delay in receiving their protection."*

- Just ask about how to complain about healthcare

*You said...*

*Mr C of Gateshead called us about his son, who had an operation some years ago. He has had several operations since then due to complications. He and his wife raised this with the RVI in Newcastle, as they believed mistakes were made during the first operation.*

*Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust investigated Mr C's issues but he was dissatisfied with the outcome. Mr C wanted to know where he should go with his complaint as the family needed closure and answers.*

*We did...*

*We provided information on how to escalate the complaint to Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (which commissions local hospital services). Mr C did not have the experience or knowledge about complaints or hospital processes. We referred him to North East Independent Complaints Advocacy (ICA) so he had the support he needed to take the complaint further.*

*As a result...*

*Mr C felt more informed to be able to take the next steps towards closure for his wife and himself. Making Mr C aware of ICA meant he had extra support and guidance, which he previously did not know was available.*

- Just ask about registering with a dental practice

*You said...*

*Miss D called us after moving to Gateshead to start university in September. She needed urgent dental treatment and called numerous practices to register. She was told that practices were full or not taking any more patients until September. Miss D asked if we could help and said she was willing to travel anywhere.*

*We did...*

*We were not aware of any issues regarding dental registration in Gateshead. We called all dental practices in Miss D's surrounding area and asked if they were accepting new patients. As a result, we managed to find three practices that were accepting patients.*

*As a result...*

*Miss D was able to register with a local dental practice and receive the urgent dental treatment she needed. We were able to support Miss D to get the treatment she needed and provide information on services in her local area.*

*"Brilliant work. Thank you so much for your help."*

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

- Care Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Safeguarding Adult's Board
- Primary Care commissioning meetings
- Gateshead Cares System Board
- People at the Heart of Care
- Regional Healthwatch lead officer meetings
- Healthwatch North East volunteer coordinator meetings
- NEAS Healthwatch Forum

## **Looking Ahead and next steps**

Looking ahead 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.

The next step is to define the work plan for the next year and the priorities for 2022/23 are currently being debated by the Healthwatch Gateshead Committee.

The following themes are being discussed:

- Accessible Information Standards - to undertake research on the barriers for people with sensory needs in accessing services.
- Keeping warm - linking with partners to determine the affects the cost-of-living crisis is having on people's health and social care needs
- Substance Misuse – reports are showing that alcohol, drugs and smoking are having a greater impact of people's lives. Research to gather views from service users, the public and the providers of services that wrap them.
- Health Literacy – access to health information on GP websites and how to access screening priorities (e.g., bowel, breast, cervical cancer) are limited. Work could be done to find out how, where and in what format people would prefer to receive health information. Digital inclusion and those digitally exclude – what are their needs for accessing health information easier.
- Veterans Mental Health – access to specialised mental health (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder) services for veterans is being verbally reported by local VCSE partners as being difficult to gain access to. Gathering data to confirm this would be helpful.
- Nutrition - Information on nutrition doesn't appear to be easily accessible to all in the local community. There are views that buying good quality and fresh food is being affected by the cost-of-living crisis. People may not be making informed choices on their food purchases and alongside adopting non-healthy lifestyles could be a burden on health and social care services.
- Developing Youthwatch Gateshead to enable the voice of young people as service users, to be heard

*The Healthwatch Gateshead Committee would be keen to hear the views from the members of the Care Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on these seven themes and/or if new themes are emerging locally.*

## **Recommendations**

The Care Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- i) Note the information provided.
- ii) Provide views on the priorities for Healthwatch Gateshead in 2022/23 at the meeting, or direct to Yvonne Probert on 0191 338 5721, text 07498 503 497 email [info@healthwatchgateshead.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchgateshead.co.uk)