

# Committee minutes – Public

11<sup>th</sup> March 2026 – 10:30am

Hybrid: Milburn House, Newcastle in person and online via Zoom

## Committee members present.

Feyi Awotona	(FA)	(in person)
Michael Brown – Chair	(MB)	(in person)
Terry Bearpark	(PW)	(in person)
Alex Hoole	(LB)	online (via zoom)
Baran Hadid	(BH)	online (via zoom)

## In attendance

Yvonne Probert	(YP)	Tell Us North CEO (in person)
Dan Milburn	(DM)	Healthwatch Newcastle Manager (in person)
Avish Johnson	(AJ)	Tell Us North Business Manager (in person)

## 1. Welcome and introductions.

1.1. MB as Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## 2. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Ann Wynn (AW), Rogelio Rivera (RR), Alisdair Cameron (AC) Emily Sinclair-James (ESJ), Roo Begom (RB), Tobi Oludade (TO), Meera Soundararajan (MS) and Courtney Peel (CP).

## 3. Minutes of previous meeting/matters arising.

3.1. Comments from the Committee were recorded for the Healthwatch England and Department of Health and Social Care meeting.

3.2. There was nothing to report regarding changes in work capacity and this will continue to be reviewed.

3.3. The minutes from the Committee meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record.

## 4. Electronic Decisions

4.1. Co-opt Baran Hadid as committee member agreed electronically.

Action – AJ to re-send the electronic decision email to FA.

## 5. Chair – Verbal update

- 5.1. A new Chair for Healthwatch Newcastle will take effect from 1 April 2026. AH will chair the Committee going forward, and this was approved by the Committee. FA thanked MB for their support and for chairing the Committee over the past six months.
- 5.2. Healthwatch England and Department of Health & Social Care meeting:
  - 5.2.1. A new health reform bill is to replace the existing Care Act as expected, with new legislation anticipated by April 2027.
  - 5.2.2. A Department of Patient Experience is expected to be established to replace some functions of Healthwatch.
  - 5.2.3. The Healthwatch brand is expected to end, with functions likely to transfer to Local Authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).
  - 5.2.4. There will be a transition period following the abolishment of Healthwatch, expected to last for six months.
  - 5.2.5. Advocacy services are expected to continue, potentially delivered by Local Authorities or ICBs.
  - 5.2.6. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken.
  - 5.2.7. The independence of the system and potential impacts under the new model were discussed.
  - 5.2.8. There was no mention of Enter and View, and this will need to be monitored.
  - 5.2.9. There will not be a central decision on the commissioning of Healthwatch activities; responsibility will lie with ICBs and Local Authorities.
  - 5.2.10. Funding for 2026–2027 has been confirmed, and the Local Authority has confirmed this and extended the contract for the following year.
- 5.3. NENC Healthwatch Regional Network: Feedback from meeting on 29th January 2026:
  - 5.3.1. Healthwatch England attended the meeting, and there was discussion around the timeframe for new legislation and the six-month transition period.

- 5.3.2. Healthwatch England staff capacity has been reduced; however, they will continue to support local Healthwatch as usual with learning, training and digital platforms.
  - 5.3.3. The NENC Healthwatch Regional Network has a fund of £200,000, which will be used for future projects.
  - 5.3.4. The Committee discussed the need to be more involved in regional network work and administrative support.
  - 5.3.5. The document “What does a good Committee look like” was discussed, and it was noted that it is similar to how Healthwatch Newcastle already operates.
- 5.4. Annual Survey 2026 report: The report was presented to the Committee, outlining public views on health and care services in and around Newcastle. A total of 282 responses were received, with experiences ranging from excellent to very poor. Services such as pharmacy, hospital and ambulance services were generally rated positively. Mixed feedback was received for GP and dentistry. Additional topics included mental health, social care, physiotherapy, COVID-19 clinics, autism, sexual health and social prescribing.
- 5.4.1. YP discussed how shorter surveys have helped to gather more responses from the public.
  - 5.4.2. Discussion took place on how survey findings help shape Enter and View themes and set priorities for the following year.
  - 5.4.3. The Committee observed that some national topics such as GP, NHS 111 and dentistry have also been raised at a local level.
  - 5.4.4. The Committee noted that Enter and View should also be undertaken at services with positive reviews to identify and share best practice across other services.
  - 5.4.5. The Committee agreed to set Hospital, GP and Dentistry as priorities for the following year.

**11:10 – DM joined the meeting**

- 5.5. Newcastle Council Contract: The Council has confirmed the extension of the contract for 2026–2027, with a 3% uplift to the existing funding. This will cover costs which are currently being covered by the Tell Us North reserves fund.

- 5.6. A regional bid led by Healthwatch Gateshead (supported by Healthwatch Newcastle) to undertake a national case study on local Healthwatch organisations was submitted but has been unsuccessful. It was awarded to an organisation in South London which delivers multiple Healthwatch services.
- 5.7. Closure of Ward 31a at RVI:
  - 5.7.1. The Committee discussed issues such as the difficulties people might face in travelling for treatment and the geographical impact due to a 25% reduction of beds across the region.
  - 5.7.2. The Committee also noted that public consultation had not been undertaken prior to the decision, which is of concern.
  - 5.7.3. Healthwatch has raised concerns with the relevant organisations.

## 6. Project Update

- 6.1. Accessible Information & Health Literacy: The first draft report is complete and under review. The final draft will be shared with partners shortly and is expected to be published by the end of March 2026.
- 6.2. Adult Social Care: Project scoping is in progress, with engagement expected to begin in April 2026.
- 6.3. Physiotherapy: The team is continuing to gather local data and identify key issues/concerns and is in the process of scoping the project. TB is the allocated project sponsor.
- 6.4. Reasonable adjustments phase 2: Data has been analysed and a checklist has been created. The first draft report is in progress.
- 6.5. Enter & View: Adult social Care: The report for Castle Dene Respite Centre has been published on the website. Another Enter & View is at the report writing stage, and further service is in the scoping stage for the next Enter and View visit.

Action – DM to send the scoping details to the committee.
- 6.6. The Committee discussed the importance of undertaking Enter & View at a GP practice with positive reviews to provide contrast and offer meaningful comparison and feedback to services that do not meet expectations.

Action – DM to check with the ICB regarding GP practices demonstrating good practice and positive feedback.
- 6.7. Youthwatch: The team is continuing to scope opportunities.

6.8. ICB project update: Reports for recently completed projects are awaited, and there are currently no new live projects.

6.9. New – Project Tracker: YP presented the new project tracker, which outlines project timelines and changes over time to provide an up-to-date status of each project for the year.

Action – YP to change the file heading to Newcastle.

## **7. Locality working update**

7.1. The committee were presented with a verbal locality update covering all the venues and localities with top themes.

## **8. Finance Update**

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

## **9. Standing Items**

9.1. Nothing to report regarding Safeguarding, Health and Safety, or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

9.2. There is no Freedom of Information requests.

## **10. Any other business**

10.1. None.

## **11. Date and time of next meeting.**

11.1. Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026 at 4:00 pm.

Action – AJ to check and confirm the date and time with other committee members.