

Committee minutes – Public

23rd July 2025: 10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Hybrid: at the Boardroom (Milburn House, Newcastle) in person and via Zoom

Committee members present

Feyi Awotona (FA)	(in Person)
Terry Bearpark (TB)	(in person)
Alisdair Cameron (AC)	(via Zoom)
Alex Hoole (AH)	(in Person)
Meera Soundararajan (MS)	(via Zoom)
Emily Sinclair (ES)	(via Zoom)

In attendance

Yvonne Probert	CEO (in Person)
Courtney Peel (CP)	Business Services Manager (in Person)
Daniel Milburn (DM)	Healthwatch Newcastle Lead officer (in Person)
Avish Johnson (AJ)	Business Support Officer (in Person)
Tobi Oludade(TO)	Observer (via zoom)

1. Welcome by the Chair

- 1.1 FA, as stand in Chair due to Michael Brown's apologies, welcome everyone to the meeting and introduction were made.
- 1.2 FA welcomed Tobi Oludade as observer to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

- 2.1 Ann Wynn is on sabbatical leave.
- 2.2 Michael Brown (MB), Nick Linfoot (NL), and Afsana Begum (AB) gave their apologies for the meeting

3. Minutes of meeting held on 21st May 2025

- 3.1. LB (Communications and Information Officer) is in the process of updating the website in line with the feedback received. Stock images have been replaced with local images, and links are being checked. The Committee is asked to review the website again and provide any further feedback.

Action – all to send feedback to LB.

- 3.2. The details for the stakeholder survey have been shared with the Committee.
- 3.3. DM has sent the details and rationale for the Adult Social Care project topic.
- 3.4. The Committee is invited to share any suggestions for drop-in venues.

Action – all to send suggestions to DM.

- 3.5. The minutes of the meeting held on 21st May 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Electronic Decisions

- 4.1. Annual Report 2024/25 have been approved and published.
- 4.2. Co-option of members onto committee agreed for Emily Sinclair-James and Meera Soundararajan.

5. Chair – Verbal Update

- 5.1. DASH review and NHS 10-year Plan summary of impact:
 - 5.1.1. For the Government to close Healthwatch England (HWE) and local Healthwatch, this will require new legislation (e.g. a new Care Act), which is expected in October 2026.
 - 5.1.2. The responsibility to commission a local Healthwatch (as set out in the 2012 Care Act) will continue with the local authorities until new legislation is enacted.
 - 5.1.3. Local Healthwatch responsibilities will be passed to Local Authorities for social care and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) for health. The aim is to align local Healthwatch functions more closely with local commissioning.
 - 5.1.4. All local Healthwatch are continuing to champion the voices of users/carers in decision-making and will still deliver on our 2025/26 Workplan, shaped by local priorities.
 - 5.1.5. **Healthwatch England's** strategic functions will be transferred to the Government over the next 12-18 months or so, their staff will be subject to the CQC's Management of Change process and are not expected to move to the Department of Health and Social Care. In the short term Healthwatch England have confirmed the below.
 - Continue to gather insight, analyse it, and share key findings with national health and social care decision makers. So please keep sharing your data until further notice.
 - Continue to provide support and training, which is in demand.

- Continue supporting key systems, including the national and local websites, our online community, Smart Survey and the National Data Store.
- Publish our current pipeline of reports and continue to publish insights from our ongoing analysis of your data.
- Pause work where we will not realise the benefit in the near term or where it falls outside our core statutory activity. For example, we have paused work on our national conference and the Healthwatch Impact Awards.

5.1.6. MB (Chair) and YP (CEO) have been working with the NENC Regional Healthwatch Network who are focusing efforts to work through the transition and are forming combined/shared aims around.

- Securing the future of independent voice.
- Ensuring a person-centred view of their health and care journey.
- Influencing the design of future services and identifying service improvements.
- Secure investment in involving communities that find it hard to have their say.

5.1.7. FA thanked MB and YP for their efforts and for regularly updating the committee and staff.

5.1.8. Nationally the 152 local Healthwatch have come together. Both Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle have signed the open letter to the Secretary of State which was delivered last week. Our signatures are part of the united front from 131 local Healthwatch (86% of the local Healthwatch Network across England). A petition is being created as well.

5.2. The committee expressed support for staff in these uncertain times, urging them not to feel anxious and to reach out to committee members for any assistance.

5.3. Discussion took place around the possibility that the ICB might choose to commission services across all 14 regions in a combined way, while local authorities may continue to commission locally. This could have implications for the current Healthwatch model.

5.4. There was a lack of clarity in the DASH Review and NHS 10-Year Plan regarding the commissioning process. This is expected to be addressed in the forthcoming new Care Act.

5.5. The committee agreed that the approach should focus on transitioning current processes into the new model, with an emphasis on maintaining an independent voice and ensuring that the public continues to be heard.

6. CEO written update

- 6.1. Quarter 1 Monitoring return – YP summarised; 46 signposting instances were recorded, and over 50 drop-in sessions were held, with contact made with more than 1,800 people. The full report will be shared with the committee shortly.
- 6.2. The commissioner has agreed to continue the contract until 31st March 2026, and business will proceed as usual until that time.
- 6.3. Annual Joint Meeting Agenda
 - 6.3.1. The usual agenda includes the presentation of the Annual Report followed by a discussion on priority setting for the research topic for the coming year. However, it was noted that priority setting may not be helpful at this time, as Healthwatch is uncertain whether it will be able to deliver projects in the next year due to upcoming changes. Therefore, it was suggested that the focus of the meeting be a discussion on the future Healthwatch model and what an independent voice should look like.
 - 6.3.2. The Healthwatch Gateshead committee had already agreed not to do emerging priorities for 2026/7 in the Annual Joint Meeting and instead have a discussion about "what should an independent voice look like in the new model? And what needs to be retained from the existing Healthwatch functions?'
 - 6.3.3. The Healthwatch Newcastle committee agreed to also discuss this topic jointly with Healthwatch Gateshead at the Annual Joint Meeting.

7. Project Update

- 7.1. Aim is to complete all current projects and reports published by 31st March 2026.
- 7.2. Accessible Information & Health Literacy – The Project Scoping Document is currently in development. The Research and Engagement Team continues to meet with partners to gather local data and identify key issues and concerns. The team will conduct focus groups based on demographic differences to identify gaps in health literacy and variations in the types of health information required by different groups, such as by age, sex, etc.
- 7.3. Adult Social Care – Research and Engagement Team continuing to meet with partners to gather local data and identify key issues and concerns.

- 7.4. Physiotherapy – Research and Engagement Team continuing to gather local data and identify key issues and concerns. Next steps: arrange meetings with relevant contacts.
- 7.5. Reasonable Adjustments Phase 2 – Research and Engagement Team contacting key organisations to speak to service providers/users to enquire about taking part in a focus group to discuss reasonable adjustments.
- 7.6. Enter & View – Adult Social Care theme: the current venue visits and observations have been completed, the team are working on the data and producing the report which will be ready to be published soon. A second venue is being scoped for the next visit; this venue supports individuals with a wide range of needs, including learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, mental health needs, and palliative care.
- 7.7. Youthwatch – The staff team have spoken to Groundwork Newcastle to arrange a workshop with group. Short Survey has been sent to group. Team continuing to scope other organisations/partners for workshop delivery over Summer/Autumn period.

8. Locality working update from Lead Officer

- 8.1. DM reported that locality working is continuing successfully, with drop-ins taking place across Newcastle.
- 8.2. Full financial year statistics were presented, including a quarterly breakdown. Emerging topics and main themes were also discussed.

9. Finance Update

- 9.1. There has been a slight overspend in the areas of Events and Branded Merchandise. This is due to attending both Pride and Mela events in the same quarter, along with the preparation of materials for these events. There have been no expenses for freepost or general printing, as there are currently no live surveys.
- 9.2. Expenditure and income are as expected, and there are no immediate concerns.

Action – CP to send the financial report to the committee once available.

10. Staff Satisfaction Survey

- 10.1. A Staff Satisfaction Survey was conducted and received largely positive feedback. Staff reported being very happy to work with the community and felt that their voices were heard and valued within the organisation.

- 10.2. On area where staff had queried on PayScale, a briefing was held, and all queries raised have now been addressed.
- 10.3. The committee suggested that this positive feedback be used as part of a recruitment welcome pack to showcase the organisation's values and strengths.

11. Standing Items

- 11.1. No reported safeguarding concerns, health and safety issues, equality and diversity concerns, or freedom of information requests.

12. Any other Business

- 12.1. YP explained the process involved in the recruitment of committee members for the benefit of the Observers.
- 12.2. Representatives from all 14 Healthwatch organisations in the North East region are scheduled to meet with the ICB in August to discuss the future of Healthwatch. Any updates from this meeting will be presented at the next committee meeting.

13. Date and time of next meeting.

- 13.1. 1st October 2025 at 10:30 am.