

Championing what matters to you Annual report 2021–2022



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Message from our Chair



Once again, we are reporting on an extraordinary year where the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on individuals and families across Newcastle. Organisations and communities built on what they had already learned and continued to work together to find the best way to deliver health and social care services, but it has not been easy for anyone.

We continued to adapt too, getting out and about and listening to communities when this was safe and possible. It really was great to see people face to face! And when this was not possible, we carried on our conversations with local people using different methods – social media, email, phone and surveys. Survey fatigue has been a real issue for a lot of organisations and the people we spoke to told us the same. It means we're enjoying going to meet people in their places more than ever and will continue to build on this for the year ahead.

At the start of the year the Healthwatch Newcastle Committee agreed on the priority areas we wanted to focus on: annual health checks for adults with a learning disability and services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse in Newcastle. To increase our reach into these communities we worked in partnership with other organisations and, using their trusted relationships, encouraged more people to get involved. The reports on this work have been welcomed locally and fed into the local system to influence and improve service delivery.

We've also worked with our colleagues from the other regional Healthwatch teams, developing a regional approach to engaging with the emerging North East North Cumbria Integrated Care System. This work has been very practical too, jointly undertaking research into people's experiences of dental services to present collective findings from across eight different Healthwatch areas.

None of our achievements would be possible without the guidance of Committee members and the dedication of our volunteers and staff. Whilst I only joined Healthwatch Newcastle in late 2021 I have already been so impressed with the commitment and passion they have for providing opportunities for people to tell their stories and to feedback on their experiences of health and social care services. This, and our promise to keep challenging ourselves to do even more to hear from all communities, means we face the coming year with confidence that we will make a difference here in our place, in the wider system, and, most importantly, to the people of Newcastle.

Jon Knight

Healthwatch Newcastle Chair

About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Newcastle is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



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.



Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, government and the voluntary and community sector serving as the public's independent advocate.



"The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities."

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people

Reaching out



688 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

14,761 people

accessed our advice and information via our helpline, website, social media and information videos.

Making a difference to care



We published

7 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse in Newcastle

which looks at the availability and accessibility of specialist services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse living in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Health and care that works for you



MM3

outstanding volunteers, who gave up **17** days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received £209,008

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

We're lucky to have

7 staff

who contribute to the delivery of Healthwatch Newcastle.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022

Spring



We provided a report on children and young people affected by domestic abuse. The

report focuses on identifying what is currently provided across the city, how it is resourced and how accessible it is for families.



We gathered carers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our report was sent to

Newcastle City Council so they were aware of carers' needs when tendering for new provider contracts.

Summe



We continued reflecting on our Patient Participation Group work and sought views on how this can evolve over the next 12 months.



We supported the #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people come

forward to tell Healthwatch about issues they faced with services.

Autumn



check

We engaged with people with a learning disability to get a better understanding of their experience of receiving an annual health



We shared our findings with NHS England after reporting some patients were unable to find an NHS dentist.

Winter



We promoted Healthwatch England priorities around the Accessible Information Standard. We engaged

with people to complete the survey and shared information with the public and with services.



Throughout the year we have continued to share up to date information about the COVID-19 vaccine roll out and COVID updates in the area.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve.

Dental services in Newcastle

Due to COVID-19 lockdowns and government regulation of dental practices during the pandemic, feedback about access and provision of dental services increased within the local Healthwatch network and national evidence provided by the General Dental Council in December 2020.

We carried out our research during the second lockdown as a way of understanding the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on oral health and dentistry. We involved colleagues from NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Local Dental Committees during the scoping phase of this work and agreed public engagement should be done at pace to increase opportunities for our findings and recommendations to be included in future policymaking. There were three elements to the work:



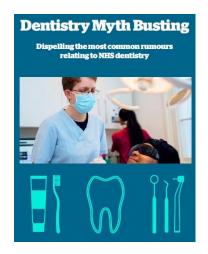
- 1. A public questionnaire to gather feedback on individual experiences.
- 2. Contacting/talking to individual surgeries and local dental practices to understand the availability/provision of services in Newcastle.
- 3. Myth buster information.

In total, 71 Newcastle respondents shared their experiences of dental services between March 2020 and December 2021. We also contacted 39 dental practices and surgeries to ask three brief questions about the availability of registering as a new patient, waiting times for routine check-ups and how appointments were prioritised. Only six of the 39 contacted agreed to take part in the survey. Based on feedback from participants and the result of the findings, we included the following recommendations:

- Customer service training skills for frontline staff.
- Explore frontline staff experiences during COVID-19 to identify areas of improvement resulting in better experiences for both staff and patients.
- Explore telephone systems for timelier responses.

- Develop and encourage the use of an online booking system.
- Promote online patient advice services to reduce calls to practices.
- Promote relevant information, such as myth-busters and other documents.

The report is available on our website at **www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk**. It was distributed to key stakeholders including Healthwatch England, Public Health Newcastle, Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group and participant organisations from the voluntary and community sector. Our findings have also contributed to a regional Healthwatch report of experiences of dental services in the North East.



A dental care myth-buster document was also created published on our website and distributed to various statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations.

We hope that the findings of this project will help to improve dental services within Newcastle and that our recommendations based on public feedback will be implemented by dental practices and surgeries in the city. This project was replicated throughout the Healthwatch NENC ICS footprint network, and together we were able to form a regional report. This report is available on our website at www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk.

Healthwatch England will use and include both our regional and local feedback to inform the government and NHS at a national level to make changes for better dental health outcomes.

Gathering the views of people with learning disabilities

We invited Skills for People, which supports people with learning disabilities and autism, to work collaboratively with us in a consultation.

A questionnaire was developed in collaboration with Skills for People and focused on three main areas: user experience, continuity of care and accessibility. We asked people with a learning disability and their carers/support workers to share their views and experiences of their annual health check in the questionnaire. We asked key stakeholders that support adults with a learning disability and their carers to share the questionnaire too.

We also spoke to some of the local Newcastle Primary Care Network and GP Practice Managers. Our discussions provided an understanding of the Annual health checks for adults with learning disabilities

problems and achievements in delivering the annual health check at a practice level.

To get a personal feel for the annual health check process and issues faced by participants and potential improvements, we spoke to groups supporting adults with a questionnaire (Lawnmowers Theatre and Twisting Ducks). The findings from group discussions and the feedback from the questionnaires informed the direction of the report.

Findings revealed the annual health check service has continued despite the COVID-19 pandemic and vastly different working practices. There is evidence of existing good practice, which has been shared and continues to be shared at a Primary Care Network level as well as key areas of improvement. Areas for improvement have been categorized as follows:

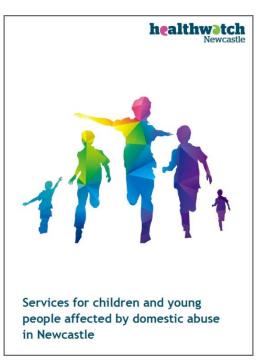
- Raising awareness and eligibility of annual health checks for people with learning disabilities.
- Improvement of written communications.
- Seeking patient involvement in the development of services relating to annual health checks.
- Increased awareness of the Health Action Plan.

Read the 'Annual health checks for adults with learning disabilities' report on our website at **www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk**.

Services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse

Services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse were chosen as a priority by the Healthwatch Newcastle Committee for 2021—2022. We initially scoped the work from a series of informal conversations with local agencies we identified that:

- The content of the new Domestic Abuse Act was welcomed by everyone we spoke to, particularly the recognition that children living with domestic abuse should be recognised as victims in their own right and provided with specialist services.
- Concerns were raised about the availability and accessibility of services for children and young people in Newcastle and whether there was enough provision to meet demand.



In recognition of the importance and timeliness of the work and the pressures that organisations we wanted to involve are under, we provided a small grant to cover staff time and involvement. We recognise that we aren't always the expert and that we can best amplify voices and experiences by working with and through others.

Conversations took place in person, by conference call and phone with (non-abusive) parents whose children had been living with domestic abuse, staff working with families and/or survivors of abuse who refer to specialist services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse, and providers of specialist services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse. The focus of the conversations was around current provision, resourcing and security of funding, how easy it is for families to find and access support and what, if any gaps there are in provision.

As a result of these conversations, we made the following recommendations:

- 1. Increase awareness in professionals and parents of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and how trauma affects them.
- 2. Future focus could usefully be placed on joint working between commissioners to maximise the resources available for this work over the long term, to ensure services have both the stability and the capacity to meet demand.
- 3. Commissioners might also want to work with providers to promote the availability of services, with coherent messaging and simple referral pathways that work for both professionals and the wider community.

For further details on our findings, read the 'Services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse in Newcastle' report on our website at **www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk**.

The report was presented to the Newcastle Domestic Violence and Abuse Local Partnership Board and was well received, with positive email feedback received from Joan Flood (see below). We will return to the Partnership Board in six to nine months to find out what difference the report has made. The organisations we worked with were pleased to see the focus on this area, given the rise in domestic during lockdowns and the new Act so all very timely.

"I just wanted to say thank you very much for coming to the DA Local Partnership Board today to talk through your report. It provoked a good discussion and the information in the report will be useful to inform our strategy and our future commissioning intentions. I look forward to updating you in due course on our future plans and appreciate your support for our domestic abuse work in commissioning the report."

Joan Flood, Community Safety Lead Violence Against Women and Girls/Hate Crime, Newcastle City Council

Understanding carers' experiences during the pandemic

Newcastle City Council reviewed support for carers across the city, holding focus groups with Newcastle Carers' service users and staff. To provide further evidence for the council, Newcastle Carers reached out to Healthwatch Newcastle to help evaluate its services and survey carers' experiences of caring during the COVID-19 pandemic more widely. This was based on a piece of work carried out by Healthwatch North Tyneside.

We worked with Newcastle Carers to create an online questionnaire, which was promoted between November 2021 and January 2022. It was publicised to carers in Newcastle on social media platforms and via the networks of Healthwatch Newcastle and Newcastle Carers. Paper copies were also available at the

Newcastle Carers' survey 2022
Understanding carers' experiences during the pandemic

Newcastle Carers' centre and phone calls were offered to people who needed help completing the questionnaire.

We gathered the views of 192 Newcastle residents who were unpaid carers. The results were analysed and the report is published on our website at **www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk**.

We compared Newcastle's findings to North Tyneside's in a separate report. This presents a similar picture of carers' experiences across both local authority areas, despite the questionnaires being distributed during two different lockdowns. We are hoping to complete the same work in Gateshead and Northumberland to collate a regional view of carers' support services.

Both reports were sent to Newcastle City Council and other key stakeholders to provide evidence of carers' needs in Newcastle and support the Newcastle Carers' contract review. Our findings were also featured in the presentation of an initial tender event for carer service providers.

Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's help identifying a local NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or where to find information to be able to choose a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19.
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust.
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme.
- Helping people to access the services they need.

Supporting COVID-19 vaccinations

A social worker (Mrs X) contacted us after difficulties in arranging a COVID-19 vaccination on behalf of a mute patient. The patient hadn't left the house in two years and contact with other people created heightened anxiety for her.

When the social worker contacted the patient's GP practice she was informed they couldn't facilitate the vaccination. Mrs X didn't know where else to turn and asked if we could help.

We contacted Newcastle GP services and Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group for guidance. They reported back that they were able to put the patient on the housebound patient list so the patient could receive her vaccine at home. Subsequently, the patient communicated she would prefer a small room close to her home. After this was made known to Newcastle GP services, they were able to offer the patient a vaccine at a venue that was familiar to her — her local community centre.

"Thank you so much for being the only service I have interreacted with that actually took the time out to listen instead of passing me to someone else."

Mrs X

Hospital referral for a temporary patient

Mrs Y contacted us for advice. She lives in Scotland but registered as a temporary patient at a local GP practice after becoming unwell while visiting a relative in Newcastle. On assessment, the GP in Newcastle advised they were going to make an urgent two-week wait referral. When Mrs Y called the GP practice for an update on the referral she was advised that the referral could not be made because she was a temporary patient. Mrs Y emailed the practice asking for reasons why and did not receive a response

We checked the guidance on referrals for temporary patients. Referrals could be done but outside of the normal e-referral system (e-RS). English administrative systems do not allow referrals for temporary patients from Scotland. As a workaround we suggested the practice in Newcastle contact Mrs Y's GP practice in Scotland and request a referral to Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) on the back of the English clinical assessment.

An agreement was put in place to do this with Mrs Y's consent. As a result, she was able to receive an urgent cancer referral to the urology department at the RVI.

Supporting care home visits

Mrs Z was unable to visit her mother, who has dementia, in a care home. Only window visits were allowed at the time she contacted us. Whenever she has asked about this, the care home stated that they were understaffed so were unable to facilitate the testing and booking procedures necessary for family visits. Mrs Z offered to support the care home and made some suggestions, but these offers of support were not taken up. Mrs Z told us it makes such a difference being able to see her mother and have a 'second eye' for her health as her family knows her best.

Mrs Z raised this issue with the home but no progress had been made and she did not wish to make a complaint about the home.

We contacted the Care Quality Commission (CQC) directly about the caller's concerns to make her aware of the situation. Mrs Z spoke to the CQC and a day later received an email from the home directly with the plans they are implementing over the next few months.

"Thank you for taking the time to listen and understand my frustrations. A step in the right direction."

Mrs Z



Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. We're here for you.

w: www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

t: 0808 178 9282

e: info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Took part in six volunteer catch-up sessions.
- Took part in a workshop on stroke awareness facilitated by one of our volunteers.
- Helped lead an online discussion on our 'tell us your story' campaign.
- Co-created a questionnaire on loneliness and social isolation in young people.

Violet

During the past year I have volunteered with Healthwatch and a few other organisations. I have tried to promote health and education in many ways in the hope it might improve the lives of those in the community who needed support.

The volunteering included befriending calls to support individuals who needed reassurance or providing a friendly voice on the other end of a phone. Other



aspects of volunteering included attending online Zoom, Teams or Google Meet events concerning being a governor with the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust or a local school.

I am also a Community Champion with Newcastle City Council and attended online discussions hearing about vaccinations and sent the information to other networks and put it on Facebook and Twitter. I have been a volunteer with Healthwatch since it started and was the Vice Chair of Newcastle LINk, Healthwatch's statutory predecessor. Previous to that I was the Chair of the Community Voices in 2006.

I find since I retired from being a nurse and a midwife, being a volunteer gives me a sense of purpose. On one occasion before the COVID-19 pandemic I was involved in a survey of dentists and GP services. This involved both visiting areas to ensure information was available to patients on premises and also checking the information was available on websites. I hope this project and the many other projects I have pursued via Healthwatch are of help to the community.

Finances and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Income	
Funding received from local authority	£203,113
Additional funding	0
Total income	£203,113

Outgoings	
Staff costs	£129,134
Operational costs	£39,148
Support and administration	£16,371
Total expenditure	£184,652

Transition from priority working to a programme of work for 2022–2023

As part of our learning from the pandemic, we are looking to enable our staff, volunteers and work to become more flexible in approach. We believe transitioning from our annual priority setting style of working to a more flexible programme of work is the best way to do this. We will review this programme every six months and set themes based on feedback, learning and understanding of the needs of our community similar to how we have done previously with priorities.

We are currently in a period of extended engagement to inform the early theme setting process.

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard. We aim to get a better understanding of who we are not hearing from, both from our own listening and the listening of the systems we engage and contribute to.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard and decision-makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that's because of where you live, income or race.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Newcastle, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS Organisation holding the Healthwatch Newcastle contract:

Tell Us North CIC (company number 10394966), MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS

Email: info@tellusnorth.org.uk

Healthwatch Newcastle uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.



Share your views with us

If you have a query about a health and social care service or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch Newcastle is here for you.

w: www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

t: 0808 178 9282

e: info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and laypeople in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Committee consists of five members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. The Committee ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. During 2021—2022 the Committee met four times and made decisions on matters such as agreeing on annual priorities and changing the way of working to a programme of work style model.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have revisited our priority setting process and how we decide on our priorities, we gather information and evidence from several sources. The main source is our engagement with people (public, patients, service users, stakeholders) through:

- Feedback and issues raised through our general work and engagement.
- Feedback and issues raised through our online feedback centre.
- Information from Committee members and our volunteers.
- Information and feedback from voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Information from the local authority and other local health and social care providers and commissioners. Also, from horizon scanning activities of issues at a national level.
- Healthwatch England data, which includes Care Quality Commission findings.

When we are considering our priorities we take into account the fit with our role as a local Healthwatch, the kind of work that will be involved and if we have the skills and resources to deliver, the likelihood that we can make a difference, have an impact and will add value. Also, if there are opportunities for us to work collaboratively with others.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight into their experiences of health and care services. During 2020—2021 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities, and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and social care decision-makers. This year we have done this by working with partner organisations in Newcastle to ensure that we can share the views of under-represented groups so that services can be accessible for all.

Key community organisations we have engaged with over the past year included:

- Peace of Mind support for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Better Days user-led organisation of adults with learning difficulties.
- South Mountain Chinese Older People's Association.
- Search support and welfare of older people.
- People's Kitchen support for homeless and vulnerable people.
- West End Refugee Service support for refugees and asylum seekers.

Our feedback centre makes it quick and easy to leave feedback about local health or social care organisations. Our website is regularly updated with accurate COVID-19 information, and we send out a monthly newsletter with local news and support. We also attend regular virtual Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning meetings and voluntary and community sector organisations network groups such as Connected Voice and Haref (Health and Racial Equality Forum) where attendees can get Healthwatch updates and share information about their work.

This year it is more important than ever that we hear from everyone in our community, including people who may be heard from less often. Our staff and volunteers identify what matters most to people by going out into the community and visiting services to get public feedback on their experiences, through stalls, focus groups and other engagement methods. We then work collaboratively with our health and social care partners to ensure their services are the best they can be. We play an important role in bringing together those who commission services, those who deliver services and the people who use services. Our work makes a difference, in shaping health and social care across Newcastle and nationally, influencing policy at the highest levels.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website at **www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk.**

Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers responded to requests for information or recommendations, except for 33 dentists who did not provide us information for our dentistry work due to time constraints.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to the Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Newcastle is represented on the Newcastle Health and Wellbeing Board, now known as the City Futures Board by Healthwatch Newcastle Chief Executive Siobhan O'Neill and Chair Jon Knight.

During 2021—2022 our representatives have effectively carried out this role by attending meetings and contributing to actions and decisions in order to improve the wellbeing and health of everyone in the city, particularly focusing on reducing health inequalities. Our representatives at this meeting also assumed an additional role of participating in the COVID-19 recovery board to ensure a successful recovery for the city.



Volunteer with us

Help us make a difference in Newcastle. Find out about the opportunities we have for you at www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

Thank you

Thank you to everyone that is helping us put people at the heart of care, including:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- All of our amazing staff and volunteers.
- The organisations that have contributed to our work.
- Our partners and stakeholders including

The Angelou Centre

Better Days

Connected Voice

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Disability North

The Elders Council of Newcastle

Haref

The Lawnmowers

Newcastle Carers

Newcastle City Council

Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

NHS Newcastle Gateshead CCG

North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Peace of Mind

Primary Care Networks in Newcastle and GP Practice Managers

PRS café, MEA House

ReCoCo

Search

Skills for People

South Mountain Chinese Older People's Association

St Oswald's Hospice

Sunderland People First

The Twisting Ducks Theatre Company

Welford Centre

West End Refugee Service (WERS)





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