

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Sunderland  
Annual Report 2023–2024



**healthwatch**  
Sunderland

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**"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



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# Message from our Chair

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**Healthwatch Sunderland works hard to gather local peoples' views on health and social care services and to provide the community with up-to-date information.**

It has been another busy but solid year for Healthwatch Sunderland, with the core work involving us getting into the community to hear from local people about their experiences, as well as signposting them around the often confusing and challenging health and care system. The work has been enhanced with more volunteers, especially younger volunteers who have joined our Youthwatch and have focused on what's important to younger people in our city. We also continued to hear from others in our local community, paying particular attention this year to some of those groups who often struggle to be heard including carers, ethnic minorities, the homeless, people with disabilities and refugees and asylum seekers.

We have seen clear trends around problems people have accessing NHS Dentists locally, especially from those who face health inequalities. We are working with the other 13 Healthwatch across the North East and North Cumbria region to really get into the detail of what is and is not working and have helped collectively to generate over 3,500 local survey responses to feed into the North East wide work.

As a result of gathering responses to potential changes to foot care services, working with the Integrated Care Board locally, it was good to see NHS Commissioners change the proposed service model to include the key themes from the findings of our work, resulting in a proposed service that better fits with the needs of patients.

Healthwatch Sunderland are now members of the Sunderland Place Committee, a system wide group of leaders who have agreed to work together to tackle the current challenges and identify opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.



**“This Annual Report shows the benefit and power of Healthwatch Sunderland working in partnership with others in order to improve the experience of local people using health and care services. I hope you enjoy reading it and as a result if you want to volunteer with us and get involved, we would love to hear from you.”**

**Debbie Burnicle, Healthwatch Sunderland Chair**



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# About us

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## Healthwatch Sunderland is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS and social care leaders and 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

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



### Our values are:

- **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 sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**2598 people**

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

**978 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as GP access, hospital care, dentistry and social care services.



## Making a difference to care:

We published

**5 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services. These are Care in the home services, Hospital discharge, Podiatry services, Nutrition and hydration patient feedback, Older people wards patient feedback.

Our most popular report was

**Hospital discharge**

which highlighted the struggles some people face when being discharged from Sunderland Royal Hospital.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**33**

outstanding volunteers who gave up over 800 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

**£163,800**









We currently employ

**6 staff** (4 full time equivalent)

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>By listening to the views of hundreds of patients experiences of using the outpatient departments within Sunderland Royal Hospital, we supported the Trust to improve patients' overall experiences.</p>	 <p>By hosting information stands at Sunderland Royal Hospital we helped amputees to access peer support and signpost them to relevant services locally.</p>
Summer	 <p>By raising awareness of Lion's Club Message in a Bottle scheme, people now feel more confident and safe living in their own homes.</p>	 <p>Through their work experience and volunteering with us 2 young people from Sunderland have now chosen a future carer in medicine.</p>
Autumn	 <p>Our "Star Awards" recognised 4 local care homes for the outstanding care given by the staff to residents and their families.</p>	 <p>By increasing awareness of a local wellbeing directory, local asylum seekers and refugees now have key health and care information in a format they can understand.</p>
Winter	 <p>Through partnership working in the community, local carers now have access to a carer passport enabling their loved ones to have an improved experience whilst in hospital.</p>	 <p>Through our information and signposting service, we enabled a member of the public to get timely access to palliative care to enable their last weeks to be as safe and comfortable as possible.</p>

\*Please note this is just an example of where we have made a difference during the year, additional examples are shown throughout this report.

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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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## We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Sunderland influence decisions made about services at Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year Healthwatch Sunderland has worked with other Healthwatch across the North East and North Cumbria to achieve the following:



### Achievement 1

All 14 Local Healthwatch were involved in the formation of a network which enables us to work together, both on a regional and an area basis. Through funding from the Integrated Care Board we appointed co-ordinators to facilitate engagement projects and the gathering of region-wide public feedback; our Board representative ensures that the public voice is heard at Integrated Care System level, influencing decision making across the whole of the North East and North Cumbria.



### Achievement 2

At the end of 2023-24, the Healthwatch Network was commissioned to carry out public engagement about dentistry, to help inform the Integrated Care Board's decisions around improvements to services. Healthwatch carried out extensive public engagement across the region, including surveys and mystery shopper exercises – we gathered over 3500 responses to our general survey alone. Our list of recommendations will form part of our report to the ICB in early 2024-25.



# 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 feed this back to services and help them improve.**



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# Ensuring podiatry service review puts patients at its centre

**Through engagement with patients accessing local podiatry services, we were able to support the NHS to address patients' priorities as they develop new ways of delivering podiatry services.**

Patients shared with us their views on proposed changes and expressed concerns these changes may impact on, these included:

- Whether they could get to locations where the service was available.
- Waiting times.
- Who is still eligible to get the service and who must start to self-care instead.
- Overall quality of care.

## What difference did this make?

Following receipt of our findings the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board were able to develop a new set of proposals that reflected patient input. These included:

- Detailed testing around transport and travel infrastructure, including public transport links, parking, disabled parking and costs.
- A model designed to free up appointments for those most in need, reducing waiting times for all.
- Regular meetings to be held with the service provider to evaluate whether the requirements of the contract are being met.
- An increase in the number of venues in each locality, where people can receive treatment.
- Decision making in relation to deciding who will be eligible for clinical treatment and who will be encouraged and educated to self-care, to be carried out in a clinically sound way.
- A model that would ensure that patients can be confident that care received is consistent.



**“It is important that locations are easily accessible for all patients; on bus routes, with adequate parking and facilities for disabled access.”**

Patient interviewed by Healthwatch Sunderland

# Making the discharge process smoother and more successful for patients and their families

In 2021 we highlighted areas of concern regarding hospital discharge. This year we returned to the subject for a priority piece of research. The experiences of 227 people showed that levels of dissatisfaction were still high and further improvement was needed. Findings showed:

- 43% of people didn't feel informed about the care plan put into place to support them following their discharge.
- 45% of people didn't receive the information they needed to help them recover following discharge.
- 52% of patients rated the planning and co-ordinating of their discharge as fair to very poor.
- 45% of people didn't receive any follow up after discharge to help identify any additional support needed.

## What difference did this make?

Our research led to the hospital trust developing a 24-point improvement plan which included a set of actions for the ward staff, the discharge lounge, the pharmacy team and the system as a whole. Many of the plan's actions have now been implemented and changes have been put into place. It's anticipated that the trust's positive response to patient experience will ensure among other things that:

- Less people will be left unclear about what they need, to achieve a quick recovery including information on their medication.
- Risk of having to be readmitted to hospital will be reduced as problems will be identified earlier.
- Family and carers of patients will have greater confidence in the discharge process, due to their involvement in plans and the decision-making processes.

To help establish the extent of the improvement plan on peoples' experiences of the discharge process, we are working with the Trust during 2024 to carry out further research.



**“An improvement action plan has been developed against each of the areas of improvement. Our Integrated Discharge Team will spend more time on our wards talking to patients about their discharge from hospital. We will continue to gather patient feedback to help us understand their expectations of leaving hospital.”**

Anna Hargrave, Divisional Director of Community Services at South Tyneside & Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

## Supporting asylum seekers and refugees to access healthcare in Sunderland

It is important that people have information in a format they can understand. Hearing that asylum seekers and refugees in the city were struggling to navigate the local healthcare system we stepped in.

Using the translatable website, (Sunderland Health & Wellness Hub) we regularly support people new to the city to navigate local healthcare services including how to register online with a local GP practice and self-refer into other healthcare services etc. This has enabled them to access healthcare services in a timely manner both for them and their loved ones.



## Giving patients in GP practices a voice

GP practices are required to understand the experiences of their patients and use them to improve services provided. This is done by practices recruiting a group of patients, usually called a Patient Participation Group (PPG).

Due to our visits to practices, the use of our newly developed Healthwatch Sunderland PPG Guide and one to one support given to GP Practice Managers and PPG groups, there are now more effective PPG groups across our city. This has enabled more patients to have their say directly to GP practices resulting in improved overall patient experience.



## Supporting a family member to know their loved one is safe

When a loved one is living in a care home it can be a time of worry and uncertainty.

We supported one family member through the safeguarding process when she shared concerns about her mother's care in a local care home but was hesitant to report her concerns. We took time to explain the safeguarding process and reassured her that raising a concern would not impact her mother's care.

This family member now feels empowered by the process and has peace of mind that her mother is safe in her home and supported by the care home staff in a way that meets her needs.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



# Hearing from all communities

**Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.**

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Listening to the voices of people who are less heard, by visiting community venues where they feel safe and supported.
- Visiting groups and activities being delivered across the most deprived areas of our city, to listen to people's feedback on services and support them through our information and signposting service.
- Sharing feedback from the general public with local service providers and commissioners, through our reports and attendance at strategic meetings.

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# Creating more community based primary care services

**Sunderland City Council and the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) are taking steps to improve access to primary care services for patients locally. Research commissioned by the ICB and Sunderland City Council focused on those living in areas of high deprivation and/or those with the greatest health inequalities within the city.**

Findings from our research highlighted that people continue to struggle to access GP appointments for multiple reasons, are unsure of where to go when seeking health support and advice but are open to the idea of a more community-based approach to delivery of services.

## **As a result of what people shared, we have helped the NHS ICB and Sunderland City Council to better understand:**

- Where services should be located and delivered to best support the needs of local people to overcome some of the barriers faced.
- People need more information on the range of primary care services available, when they are seeking health support and advice.
- Some people don't understand the importance of preventative screening and regular health check ups or simply don't know how to access them.

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# Improving care received for hospital patients

**Following the work completed by Healthwatch Sunderland, Sunderland Royal Hospital have taken steps to improve the care and experience of older patients in hospital.**

Thanks to those patients who took the time to speak to us on the 6 wards we visited, we were able to collect information on what people felt was working well, including communication between staff and patients, quality of food and drink and staff care and those areas that required improvements.

People shared that they struggled with sleeping well on the wards, that there was little, or no activities provided on the wards and patients aren't encouraged by staff to wash hands before meals or change into day clothes when appropriate.

## **As a result of the feedback we shared, we were able to highlight issues in the following areas:**

- Activity provision on wards.
- Quality of sleep.
- Staffing levels.
- Encouragement and support from staff.

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, who manage Sunderland Royal Hospital, developed and delivered an action plan to tackle these issues. This has helped to improve patient care and patient experience of those who stay on the wards we visited.



## 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 making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust.
- Helping people to navigate the services they need.
- Helping people access social care support.

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# Support given to a patient to get speedy access to the care they need

## How we supported a patient with a terminal diagnosis to get speedy access to the services he needed.

After receiving a call from a local community group about a patient struggling to access appropriate support, we acted immediately. We contacted staff working in End of Life/Palliative Care, based at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and informed them of the patients' situation.

This resulted in staff from the hospital trust making speedy contact with the patient to arrange a comprehensive package of support, including contact with their GP that same day, visits by a district nurse at home and a referral into the Community Specialist Palliative Care Team. This ensured the patient had all the relevant care and support they needed at a critical time.

The patient fed back to inform us how pleased he was, to have the correct help in place to assist him through this difficult time and as a result is now feeling more confident and secure in the knowledge that he can access all the appropriate support he needs for his health and wellbeing.

Karen, Manager at Pallion Action Group said; "Thank you to Healthwatch Sunderland for the help they have given to our client. My staff and I are now confident that he is getting the correct support. We know that when we call Healthwatch for help, they are there for us and the people in our community and always go the extra mile to make sure they do the best they can."

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# Informing young people where to go for mental health support.

## It's essential that people understand where and how to access health and care support when they need it.

The young people of Sunderland told us that mental health was a key concern, whether this was for themselves or for their friends and family members. They also informed us they were unaware of where to go to seek help. With this in mind, our Youthwatch volunteers suggested creating a suite of videos to explain to the young people of Sunderland what local mental health support services are available, what they provide and how to access them.

When we approached key mental health support organisations from across the city, they were excited to be involved. Using questions which were collected from a range of young people from across the city and asked by our Youthwatch, videos were developed in partnership with those organisations. These are now available on our YouTube for the young people of Sunderland to see and use.

Thanks to our young volunteers, young people now have the information they need on local services to enable them to make informed choices when accessing mental health and wellbeing support. By watching the videos and seeing some of the staff they may encounter when they access services, it is hoped that they will feel more comfortable and confident when engaging with services.



# Volunteering

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

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Taken part in service reviews and consultations to share their views and shape service delivery.
- Represented Healthwatch Sunderland at key strategic meetings.



## Making a real difference

Our volunteers have dedicated over 800 days of their time over the year in various roles including on our Board, via our engagement activities and with our Youthwatch. Throughout the year they have supported us by:

- Attending hundreds of meetings, community groups and events to promote Healthwatch and what we have to offer, reaching over 5,000 local people throughout the year.
- Supporting our local community to share their views and collecting over 2,944 views.
- Reviewing new NHS websites to review accessibility and usefulness.
- Attending several workshops hosted by health and social care providers to share their views on service improvements and changes.
- Delivering promotional health related campaigns on self-care, mental health, cancer awareness, vaping and smoking, oral health etc.
- Representing us at key strategic meetings including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Adults Executive Board, Sunderland Place Committee, Northeast Ambulance Forum, plus many more. Ensuring patient and service user voice is paramount.



"Healthwatch has provided me with a valuable platform for career development, skill enhancement, and personal growth. Through my involvement in signposting information, I have gained insights into community perspectives and opportunities for improvement. Despite busy schedules, Healthwatch has consistently accommodated me and welcomed my contributions.

The dedicated and caring staff at Healthwatch are always available to impart knowledge and offer support, fostering a nurturing environment for personal growth and learning."

(Favour, Engagement volunteer)

## Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



[www.healthwatchesunderland.com](http://www.healthwatchesunderland.com)



0191 514 7145



[healthwatchesunderland@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchesunderland@pcp.uk.net)



# Finance 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.

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£163,797	Expenditure on pay	£123,109
Additional income	£5,056	Non-pay expenditure	£4,530
		Office and management fees	£38,007
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£168,853</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£165,646</b>

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### Additional income is broken down by:

- £3,295 received from the local ICS for joint work on various projects (see below).
- £120 received from local ICB to carry out some pharmacy research.
- £1,340 received from local ICB for work around podiatry service review.

## ICS funding

Healthwatch across North East and North Cumbria also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Waiting Well workshops	£250
Dentistry review	£1,170
Core funding	£1,875

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## Next steps

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.**

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

### Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Patient experiences of emergency and urgent care.
2. Social care services – where to go for what.
3. Listening to young people to find out what's most important to them.



# Statutory statements

Healthwatch Sunderland, The Co-op Centre, Whitehouse Road, Hendon, Sunderland, SR2 8AH

The organisation holding the Healthwatch Sunderland contract is the Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP). PCP is a multi-award winning health and wellbeing charity operating across the North East.

For further information please visit [www.pcp.uk.net](http://www.pcp.uk.net). Registered Charity No, 1067888  
Company Registered in England No. 3491237 Registered address: Pioneering Care Centre, Carer's Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 4SF © Pioneering Care Centre.

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

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# The way we work

## Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 6 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023–2024, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as hospital discharge, adult safeguarding, primary care access, smoking and vaping in young people and future work items such as navigating social care services and emergency and urgent care. The Board also held face to face board development sessions and informal virtual sessions to aid development and communication. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

## Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023–2024, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and distribute it via our e-newsletter and social media platforms. It is also available in hard copy on request.

## Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Executive Board, South Tyneside & Sunderland Foundation Trust Patient Experience Committee, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Group, Sunderland Place ICB Sub Committee and the Sunderland Health and Wellbeing Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in NENC ICS. Through our Operational Protocol working arrangements, the network formally and systematically represent the views of service users, families and carers with partners across the ICS. Local intelligence is collated across each of the four subregional areas and shared at area ICP meetings. At regional level, the Healthwatch Regional Coordinator represents service-user voice from across the region at the NENC ICP Strategic meeting, Quality & Safety Committee, Primary Care Strategy & Delivery sub-committee, Healthy & Fairness Advisory Group, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion meetings and System Quality Group meetings. The network of local Healthwatch has also been commissioned to undertake additional research to ensure local opinions are represented in the ICB's work priorities

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## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Sunderland is represented on the Sunderland Health and Wellbeing Board by Paul Weddle, Vice Chair. During 2023 – 2024 our representative has effectively carried out this role by working together with key leaders from the local health and care system to improve the health and wellbeing of our population and reduce health inequalities, especially through developing a shared understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of the community, allowing a public voice to be heard from comments received from the local community.

Healthwatch Sunderland is represented on the Central Integrated Care Partnership by Gail McGee, Central Area Co-Ordinator for the Healthwatch Network, and at the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board by Christopher Akers-Belcher, Regional Co-Ordinator for the Healthwatch Network.


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## 2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Hospital discharge	Creation and delivery of an action plan developed by the Sunderland Royal Hospital to address all those key issues raised by our findings.
Podiatry Service review	Proposed changes to services incorporated the patient feedback we collected and adapted to better fit their needs.
Primary Care Access	ICB and Public Health have the information they need to further understand barriers patients encounter when accessing primary care services and their receptiveness, to potential new ways of working. This will help them to better shape and deliver services in the future.
Safeguarding	Increased awareness of safeguarding and how to raise a concern amongst the general population, helping to prevent harm, abuse and neglect from affecting those who may not be able to protect themselves.
Vaping in young people	Increased awareness of the facts on vaping and smoking in young people across the city.
Domiciliary care	Recommissioning of services incorporated the experiences of service users following our research report.
Hospital inpatient evaluation	Improvement and action plan developed incorporating our research and outcomes, which will be monitored by STSFT Hospital Trust's Steering Group.
Hospital nutrition and hydration evaluation	An improvement action plan developed and implemented to improve both nutrition and hydration and overall mealtime experiences for patients at Sunderland Royal Hospital.
Dentistry	NENC ICB now has an increased awareness of the experiences of people who have received treatment through the incentivized access pilot and for the wider population a greater understanding of the experiences of residents trying to access dentistry care when they need it.

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