

# **Annual Report**

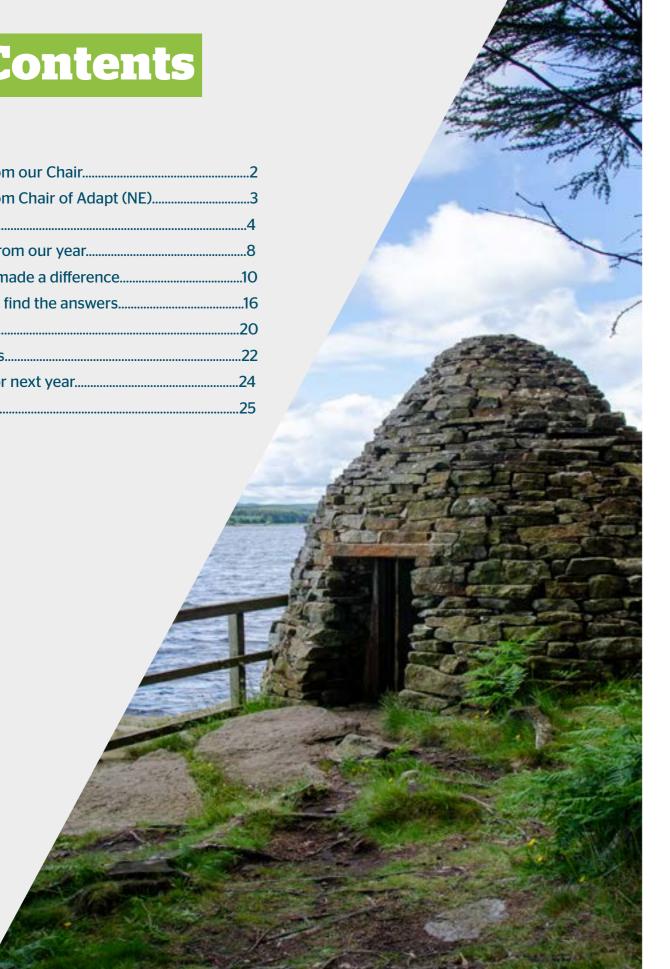
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2018-19





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# **Message from** our Chair

There is a general acceptance that the health and social care provision within Northumberland is of a high standard. That this is so reflects the dedication and professionalism of the staff who serve the community in a whole host of ways. We are indebted to their efforts and it is entirely appropriate to say 'thank you' for the services they provide in the county.

Yet there are always further improvements to be made and colleagues within Healthwatch Northumberland do their best to find out what more can be done - and then to work with the professionals in areas where there is intelligence and/or information which clearly indicates the need for such improvement.

For example, a significant amount of time has been allocated to discussions about Rothbury and Berwick hospitals, the closure or relocation of GP surgeries, the services provided at the Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital. Added to this list are the recurrent themes of access to GP appointments, access to services in the north of the county, communication between health and care services, mental health and dementia.

Such work reflects what we are expected to do - to act as the independent champion for people who use health and social care services and to make sure that those running services and the government, put people at the heart of care. To enable Healthwatch Northumberland to actually fulfil such a responsibility we need to find out from the wider community what are their needs, experiences and concerns. So we are reliant on you, the users of services, to be our eyes and ears so we can engage with the providers and commissioners to help further improve the services you require.

However, just as Healthwatch Northumberland comments, reports and challenges in the quest for the highest quality of services, the organisation itself is also accountable for its own actions. By various ways and means, we are held to account by Northumberland County Council, Adapt (NE) and the Healthwatch Northumberland Board. But above all else we are accountable to the community and so we are always receptive to thoughts and ideas about how we ourselves can improve.



Finally, a word of thanks to Healthwatch Northumberland's staff, board members and volunteers. They work hard individually and collectively and believe they can make a difference. So keep talking to them to ensure that patients, families and carers are very well served to the highest standards.

**David Thompson** Healthwatch Northumberland Chair

# **Message from** Chair of Adapt (NE)

Healthwatch Northumberland is a very important part of the portfolio of projects which deliver Adapt (NE)'s vision of a more inclusive society for the people of Northumberland.

David Thompson and the Healthwatch Northumberland Board have set a rigorous strategy which they combine with fostering healthy, robust relationships with commissioners and providers of health and social care services to ensure Healthwatch Northumberland continues to be an effective independent champion. The acknowledgement from the Independent Review Panel with regards to Rothbury Hospital was deserved recognition of this approach.

The Adapt (NE) Board is pleased with the efforts made by the staff team to get the Healthwatch Northumberland message to communities across the county either in person, through its networks of individuals and organisations or through its digital presence.

The record response to the annual survey this vear and attendance at the annual meeting in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea is testament to their success. I would particularly like to thank Anne Armstrong and Tania Porteous, who have now moved on from Healthwatch Northumberland. for their hard work and dedication in helping to deliver this most successful of years.

Pat Maginn Adapt (NE) Chair



"David Thompson and the Healthwatch Northumberland Board have set a rigorous strategy which they combine with fostering healthy, robust relationships."

### Healthwatch Northumberland

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# **About us**

### Healthwatch is here to make care better

We are the independent champion for people using local health and social care services. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. We share their views with those with the power to make change happen. People can also speak to us to find information about health and social care services available locally.

Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.

As Chair of Healthwatch England, it is my role to make sure your Healthwatch gets effective support and that national decisions are informed by what people are saying all over England.

If you were one of the 400,000 people who shared their experiences with us last year, I want to say a personal thank you. Without your views, Healthwatch wouldn't be able to make a difference to health and social care services, both in your area and at a national level. One example of this is how we shared 85,000 views with the NHS, to highlight what matters most, and help shape its plans for the next decade.

If you're part of an organisation that's worked with, supported or responded to Healthwatch Northumberland, thank you too. You've helped to make an even bigger difference.

None of this could have been possible without our dedicated staff and volunteers, who work in the community every day to understand what is working and what could be better when it comes to people's health and care.

If you've shared your views with us then please keep doing what you're doing. If you haven't, then this is your chance to step forward and help us make care better for your community. We all have a stake in our NHS and social care services; we can all really make a difference in this way.



**Sir Robert Francis QC** Healthwatch England Chair

### What we do

We use the information and feedback people give us to influence the decisions made by service providers and commissioners. Our role is to be a critical friend for health and social care services. We work with other organisations, both statutory and voluntary, representing the views of local people on health and social care.

We meet regularly with NHS and social care leaders to report on trends in feedback and raise the issues people tell us about. We hear their priorities and planned changes and ensure local people are informed and involved in decision making about services.

In addition, we influence decisions and represent local views by attending or being part of county level decision making boards and committees including:

**Health and Wellbeing Board** 

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Primary Care Commissioning Committee** 

### **Our purpose**

To find out what matters to you and to help make sure your views shape the services provided and the support you need.

### **Our approach**

People's views come first - especially those that find it hardest to be heard. We champion what matters to you and work with others to find solutions. We are independent and committed to making the biggest difference to you.

### **Board Governance**

The Healthwatch Northumberland Board sets a three year strategy and oversees an annual plan of activities.

Following an open recruitment process in autumn 2018, the Healthwatch Northumberland Board welcomed Hayley Brown, Harry Wilson and Kelvin Rushworth who between them bring experience and knowledge of mental health services, young people, volunteering and primary care in North Northumberland. The board keeps its skills and knowledge under review and uses co-option to address any identified gaps. Board meetings take place every other month, are open to the public and are held in different locations - this year it met in Hexham, Seahouses and Blyth. Before each meeting there is an opportunity for local people to 'drop in' and meet the board and discuss any local health and social care issues. Dates and locations are advertised on our website and networks.

### **Our Board**

### **Current board members:**

- + David Thompson, Chair
- + Margaret Young, Vice Chair
- + Kelvin Rushworth, Independent
- + Harry Wilson, Independent

### Stakeholder Survey

The Healthwatch England Quality Statements outline what it means to be a local Healthwatch. They are designed to help local Healthwatch to understand how they are doing, identify areas for development and enable stakeholders to discuss impact and effectiveness.

Through an online survey and focus group we asked key organisations to tell us what they think.

### What people told us

- Relationship with stakeholders: we are viewed as having a collaborative relationship with key that we needed to continue to raise our profile and encourage partner organisations to promote Healthwatch with frontline or customer facing staff so that they felt able to signpost people to us.
- Involvement of local people: the involvement of local people was very strong through our engagement work but could be strengthened by involving people in the delivery of Healthwatch Northumberland. We are introducing volunteering opportunities in summer 2019.
- Information and signposting: there was less certainty about this core function as there are many sources of information available to people and therefore we will work to identify our specific contribution.
- clear rationale and are based on people's insight. Healthwatch Northumberland is seen to be contributing to local decision making but this is not always recognised or acknowledged.
- Working with others: there is less understanding about the importance of the relationship with can bring value for partners.

A strong message emerged about the importance of promoting and guarding our independence as an 'honest broker'.

The board used the findings from the stakeholder survey to review the strategic plan, priorities and operational plan for 2019/20.



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- + Hayley Brown, Independent
- + Liz Prudhoe, Adapt (NE)
- + Anne Lyall, Northumberland CVA
- + Catherine Lee, North of tyne PALS
- + Debra Blakey, Carers Northumberland

decision makers, making a contribution within local decision-making structures. There was a view

Reporting findings: stakeholders are aware of our priorities, feel our reports are constructive, have a

Healthwatch England and we need to demonstrate how involvement in regional and national work

### Healthwatch Northumberland

## Annual Meeting 2018

In October 2018 over 100 people came together at Newbiggin Sports and Leisure Centre to hear about the work of Healthwatch Northumberland. Our guest speaker, Stephen Blackman of North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee, gave an informative talk on the role of community pharmacies in Northumberland and answered questions from our guests. There was also a range of information stands from local NHS, support and voluntary organisations offering advice and information about their services.

The minutes of the event and presentations from Healthwatch Northumberland and North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee can be downloaded from our website.









Over 600 people shared their health and social care story with us.

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Our annual survey was completed by almost 800 people; 30% more than last year.



More than 4,000 people accessed Healthwatch advice and information online or contacted us with questions about local support.



We organised or attended 78 community events to understand people's experience of care and let people know about our services.



We attended over 50 meetings with the people who buy and provide health and social care services to represent your views.



We reached 135,000 people on social media and our website had 16,000 visits.



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### Healthwatch Northumberland

## Listening to people

Healthwatch is not a decision maker, nor is it a campaign group. Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to ensure these experiences and views are heard by those in authority, also that those authorities provide a proper, reasoned and transparent response to the issues raised.

A major focus of our work this year has been in North Northumberland. This is because of proposed changes to the way that health services are delivered in the area particularly in Berwick and Rothbury.

### A new hospital for Berwick

In May 2019 Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with NHS Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) announced a £25 million investment in a new hospital for Berwick, to be located on the site of the current Infirmary.

This decision came after public engagement by the CCG, Northumbria Healthcare, Northumberland County Council, Healthwatch Northumberland and the Better Hospital for Berwick campaign showed local people did not support the proposal to build a health and wellbeing centre on a single site.

Between March and October 2018 we had received feedback from over 200 people at 14 group meetings and events about the original proposals and the ways in which they had been involved in developing them. We published a report and shared the responses with Northumbria Healthcare and the CCG.

The feedback showed that the investment for the development of a new hospital was welcomed by everyone we spoke to but there were concerns about existing services as well as future services.

The service that was often mentioned as being problematic was pre-operative assessments. There was general concern that while this is listed as a service currently offered at Berwick, in reality people often have to travel to Alnwick or further. As the appointments are short this can have a big impact for patients and carers in terms of time and cost.

We were pleased to see the commitment to reducing the 'miles travelled' as part of the announcement and the continued local engagement by Northumbria Healthcare.



### **Rothbury Community Hospital**

The future of services to be delivered at Rothbury Community Hospital are still undecided and we are now working as part of the Rothbury Engagement Group, which has been set up to build a partnership between people who use health services in Coquetdale and the agencies which buy and deliver those services.

We have collated feedback over two years from the initial consultation period, focused engagement about GP and dental services, collated views of people in Rothbury and the wider Coquetdale area and met with representatives of parish councils in the upper valley and with the Save Rothbury Hospital Campaign.

We also researched and published the report 'Transport Implications for Health Services in Coquetdale' which can be found on our website.



The Engagement Group followed a review process by the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was set up in response to a formal letter from the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP).

The IRP is the independent expert on NHS service change. It is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care. Under certain circumstances, local authorities can, as Northumberland County Council did, refer issues to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the IRP investigates issues and makes recommendations to the Secretary of State.

In the case of Rothbury Community Hospital the IRP noted Healthwatch Northumberland's 'measured response and helpful comments' and emphasised the need to improve relationships and 'to focus on those most affected, to consider the impact on families and carers of travelling further afield and to engage fully with the community as the health and wellbeing centre is developed'.

Further proposals for the hospital are expected in autumn 2019.



### **Changes to GP services**

We have worked with patients at GP practices in Wylam, Felton and Harbottle this year.

For Wylam and Felton we have used our position on the Primary Care Commissioning Committee to ask for information about when and how proposed changes to services will happen and how these will be communicated to patients. We were pleased the Riversdale Surgery website was updated but continue to press for more consistent communication with the patient group.

We convened a meeting with the parish councils in Upper Coquetdale and Northumbria Primary Care Partnership to discuss concerns about the service offered at Harbottle Surgery by the Rothbury Practice. Concerns were raised about appointment booking systems, flu clinics and health reviews. Some issues were clarified and some were taken away for further work and are being monitored by the parish councils.

### **Whalton Unit**

People in Morpeth contacted Healthwatch Northumberland when Northumbria Healthcare announced that the Whalton Unit (an inpatient ward which delivers specialist rehabilitation for frail older patients) would temporarily transfer to Wansbeck General Hospital in Ashington. Their concerns were that the transfer would become permanent leading to additional cost and stress for people to visit.

We convened a meeting with the Chief Experience Officer and the Morpeth Stands Up for the Whalton Unit campaign to discuss the concerns, review patient feedback data and to observe a focus group where staff discussed their experience of the move. The review, which may lead to further engagement, is on-going.

*"My family appreciates so much how"* fortunate we are to live so close to so many hospitals who try their upmost to care for and treat patients despite the negative press thrown at the NHS. All the staff have been delightful and caring."

Northumberland service user

## **Improving Services**

We help to improve health and social care services by working with individuals and organisations including other local Healthwatch.

### **Emergency Department at Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital**

Working in partnership with Healthwatch North Tyneside and Northumbria Healthcare, we heard from 309 people over 14 three-hour sessions in the waiting area in the emergency department and paediatrics emergency departments in the hospital in November 2018.

People had travelled to the hospital independently and told us why they were attending the department, what other services they had used or tried to use and what they thought could make their experiences of getting care better.



Based on what we heard we produced a number of recommendations that are now being considered by Northumbria Healthcare, Northumberland and North Tyneside CCGs and North East Ambulance Service. These actions include:

- + System wide opportunities to better support people to get the care they need
- + Access to the hospital, particularly by public transport
- + Changes to the waiting room environment to improve experience and accessibility

A detailed report will be published shortly and shared with the Health and Wellbeing Boards and **Overview and Scrutiny Committees in** Northumberland and North Tyneside.

### **Case Study - James' Story**

James (names and details changed) contacted Healthwatch Northumberland a few months after his wife Emily died following a period in residential care and what James describes as 'very good hospital nursing'.

A range of agencies were involved in providing care and support to James and Emily from the time when they received a diagnosis of dementia, but James believes Emily did not receive the level of care or continuity of care needed and these were contributing factors in the speed with which Emily's health and wellbeing declined.

James said, "My purpose in referring this matter to Healthwatch Northumberland was to identify the failings that had such a tragic result for both me and my wife so that lessons can be learned and others can be spared this kind of premature outcome.

"Healthwatch Northumberland provided information and advice about processes for raising concerns and the options open to me, offering information and signposting to other avenues of support.

"They gave me support and a sounding board throughout the process of raising complex concerns regarding the management and delivery of care, including a member of the team accompanying me to meetings when I asked them to do so - enabling but not taking over".

"Healthwatch Northumberland gave me support and a sounding board - enabling but not taking over"

This was a highly complex and sensitive situation. The issues raised have focused on provider practices, the NHS, the police and how agencies engage with one and other. The resulting reviews led to changes in systems and practice and now form part of the Talking Heads Training Tool to ensure care professionals will continue to learn from what happened. The Care Quality Commission has been informed of the concerns raised and this will inform future inspections of the services involved.

James concluded, "I have been so lucky to have your (Healthwatch Northumberland's) help and support, and indeed, belief, over the last year and I do think we have made a difference."

### **Responding to Quality Reports**

One of the formal duties of Healthwatch is to comment on the Quality Account Reports from organisations providing NHS services. A quality account is a report about the quality of services by an NHS healthcare provider and looks at patient safety, the effectiveness of treatments that patients receive and patient feedback.

Healthwatch Northumberland gave comments on the quality accounts of the NHS Trusts serving the county's population: Northumbria Healthcare, North East Ambulance Service, Northumberland Tyne & Wear and Newcastle Hospitals.

In each case we highlighted where the trust was doing well and where we thought there were areas for improvement. For example for the North East Ambulance Service we welcomed the range of approaches to manage the waiting times for people who fall. Feedback we've received tells us ambulance waiting times are a concern to people in rural communities. Our full responses can be found on the relevant trust's website or by asking them for a copy of the 2019 Quality Report.









### **Information and Signposting**

We help people find the information and services they need. We talk to them about how to access services, their rights and eligibility criteria, how to give feedback and how to make a complaint or raise a concern.

This year we signposted over 500 people to other organisations for help. The most common issues people raised with us were:

- getting access to services, particularly transport
- resolving an issue with their healthcare
- making a complaint about their healthcare
- needing help or support

The organisations we signposted people to most are:

- Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
- Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAN)
- **Talking Matters Northumberland**
- Adapt (NE)



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### **Prison Healthcare**

HMP Northumberland is a category C prison for adult male offenders near Morpeth. Most healthcare problems are dealt with by the healthcare team within the prison. If this is not appropriate, then treatment can be arranged in a hospital in the community.

Although a serving prisoner and his family may not actually live in Northumberland, they are signposted to Healthwatch Northumberland if they have concerns about their healthcare.

A serving prisoner wrote to us as he was concerned at the delay in arranging an appointment to see a specialist at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle.

He had a long term health problem which was deteriorating and would leave him with a permanent disability. He said the doctor at a previous appointment had stressed the importance of prompt treatment. With his permission, a close family member also got in touch as they were worried and wanted to help. We supported the relative to navigate the clinic appointment system and the prisoner got an appointment and treatment.

The relative said they felt that Healthwatch Northumberland had listened to them.





### **Collingwood GP Surgery**

We worked with Northumberland CCG to engage with patients of Collingwood Medical Group in Blyth which closed in November 2018, to ensure that they had information about what was happening and were signposted to a new practice. We also made sure that local voluntary and community sector support organisations were aware of the changes and gave feedback to the CCG when patients encountered difficulties.

"Healthwatch Northumberland's input as one of our key 'critical friends' has been very welcome throughout 2018-19. Using canvassed public opinion to best effect they have provided useful, timely and appropriate challenge to CCG proposals and undertaken information gathering exercises that have greatly assisted the CCG's decision making process.

"At the same time as welcoming constructive challenge the CCG has also enjoyed the close relationship that exists between both organisations and looks forward to furthering this in the coming year".

Stephen Young, Strategic Head of Corporate Affairs, NHS Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group

## **Working Together**

### **Dental Services in Hadston and Rothbury**

Last year we reported how we worked with local people in Hadston and Rothbury and NHS England Cumbria and the North East about commissioning a new dental service.

783 people had their say and we are pleased to report that a new service has been commissioned and will be open in Rothbury and Amble from 1 December 2019.

Although there will be a wider choice of appointments in Amble, people told us of their concerns about the cost of travelling to see the dentist. it is of great concern there will not be a direct replacement of the service in Hadston.

This is a situation which we will continue to monitor through feedback from patients.

### **Home Care Services** in Coquetdale

For the last two years we have been working with Carers Northumberland and a group of people in Coquetdale who care for a family member. They raised concerns about the provision of home care they were receiving and were keen to work with providers and commissioners to improve the situation.

There have been several changes to the home care landscape in the Coquetdale area since the first concerns were raised back in October 2017. As well as changes to the commissioned home care provider, Northumberland County Council, following a consultation period at the end of 2018, has introduced changes to home care charges and administration across the county which came into effect on 1 April 2019.

Overall the work has suggested ways in which communication and continuity of care could be supported and has been well received by Northumberland County Council Adult Social Care commissioners. Continuity of care is a main concern for carers and service users and is reported to have been relatively good over the past 18 months despite the changes in provider.

There is scope for a countywide study into home care provision which will enable comparison across the county and could also encompass the effects of the changes to home care charging policy.

### What Would You Do? NHS Long Term Plan

NHS England and NHS Improvement funded the Healthwatch network to carry out engagement with communities across the country to establish how the Long Term Plan should be implemented locally.

Healthwatch Northumberland worked with colleagues in Tyne and Wear and North Durham to find out what local people think. In Northumberland we held focus groups about mental health and dementia services and received feedback from surveys. What people told us will be shared with the NHS and will be used to help develop the plan for our area. We will publish our report in summer 2019.

### **Enhancing Communication** and Engagement

Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board reconvened a communication and engagement subgroup with the aim of sharing information and co-ordinating public engagement. Healthwatch Northumberland's Chair, David Thompson, was asked to chair this group and because it is a complex task, his first aim to is to clarify what the partners want to achieve and how the group's aim to enhance public engagement in Northumberland will work in practice.



### **Volunteering for Healthwatch Northumberland**

### As a volunteer you can:

- + Raise awareness of the work we do in the community
- + Visit services to make sure they're meeting people's needs
- + Help people find local support for a particular illness or condition
- + Support our day to day running for example, communications, research and planning
- + Gather people's views and experiences which we use in our reports



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## Our aim is to put volunteers at the heart of what we do

Volunteering is seen by Healthwatch Northumberland as a vital way to deliver its work by involving people from across local communities who bring skills, knowledge and experience of services as part of our 'voice' and providing ways for people to be involved in improving services.

It is our ambition to introduce a full volunteering programme during 2019/20, and good progress has already been made towards this goal. In order to ensure that the design of our volunteer paperwork is friendly and fit for purpose, we invited twelve potential Healthwatch Northumberland volunteers to review our draft documents. The feedback provided was

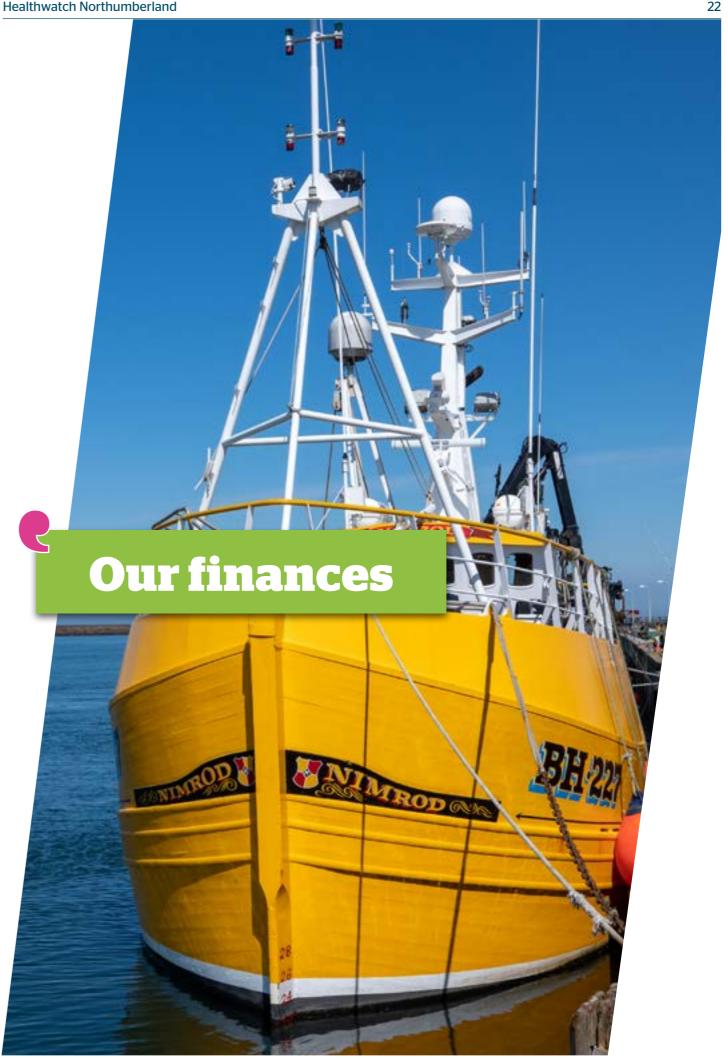
invaluable and we think our new volunteer handbook is all the better for the input we received.

Healthwatch Northumberland aims to put volunteering at the heart of what we do. We are keen to involve volunteers with our engagement and promotional work and, a bit further down the line, with our enter and view activities. If you are interested in volunteering as part of our friendly and supportive team, please contact us for a Volunteer Information Pack. Get involved and make a difference!

"I was delighted to be asked for my thoughts on the volunteer promotional materials and paperwork whilst it was still at the design stage"

Healthwatch Northumberland Volunteer





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### How we use our money

To help us carry out our work, we are funded by our local authority. In 2018-19 we spent £152,189.23.

We also received £2,500.00 of additional income from NHS England.



# Our plans for next year

Respondents to our annual survey were asked to rank a list of priorities for Healthwatch Northumberland in 2019/20.

The top three identified were:

### Mental health

**GP** services

Access to services

Our focus group on the NHS long term plan also showed that people are concerned about the support for people with dementia and their carers, especially at the time of diagnosis.

We will address these areas through our core activities of engaging with communities across the county as well as targeted research through focus groups and surveys. Our aim is to identify what is working well and what could be done better and look at practice in other parts of the country. Based on what we hear, we will make recommendations to service providers and commissioners. We are committed to co-production and so will try to involve users and stakeholders throughout the research process. We are particularly keen to hear from people in the very west and the south east of the county.

"We have found Healthwatch Northumberland to be an engaged and challenging partner over the last 12 months. They are an active member of our Healthwatch Ambulance Forum and have undertaken a number of patient engagement activities. We have very good communication channels between our organisations and key findings from reports have been shared and discussed to seek further clarification, assurance. and feedback.

"Our response has been listened to, considered and reflected in their reports to patients across Northumberland. We value the relationship we have and look forward to working with Healthwatch Northumberland in the year ahead."

Mark Johns, Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, North East Ambulance Service Foundation Trust



## Thank you

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

- + Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us
- + All of our amazing staff and volunteers
- + The voluntary organisations that have contributed to our work
- All of the health and social care organisations which provide services to the communities of Northumberland
- + Northumberland County Council
- + NHS Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group

## **Contact us**

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