

# Quarterly Report: October - December 2020/21

## Introduction

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We are a listening organisation working across Northumberland, interested in what people like about services and what can be improved. We act on what people are saying, sharing their views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area and record this as 'signposting'.

People who use health and social care services tell Healthwatch Northumberland about their experiences throughout the year. This report shares a summary of the feedback collected from October – December 2020. During this period, we have continued to work in different ways due to the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The next report will cover January – March 2021.

This quarter we received feedback and enquiries from:

- Telephone calls, emails, website and social media (73%)
- Talking to people at online engagement events (25%)
- Through a third party (2%)

## Areas of Focus

We are open to all feedback about health and social care services. Responses to our 2020 Annual Survey helped us to identify a specific Areas of Focus which we are prioritising in 2020/21 this includes mental health services, dementia and GP services.

Covid-19 has meant changes have been made to health and social care services. Patients and carers' experiences and signposting requirements are likely to have been different during this time.

For this reason, we have also chosen to focus on any feedback we receive which is related to covid-19 and these changes.

## Aims

The report shows:

- Who Healthwatch Northumberland is hearing from
- What people are saying
  - The general sentiment of comments
- What people are experiencing
  - What is working well?
  - Where there are areas for improvement?

## Feedback

Between October and December 2020, we received feedback from 59 individuals from talking to people at online engagement events, telephone calls, emails, our website, surveys, and other sources. We signposted 15 of these people to services and provided information or advice to twelve people.

This report explores who we are hearing from across the county, presenting a summary of general respondent demographic information. Demographic information shared includes location, gender, age, and whether the respondent is sharing their own health and social care experience or speaking on behalf of a friend or relative.

We also look at the general sentiment of comments, with specific reference to the service type (e.g. primary care, secondary care, mental health, social care), as well as whether the feedback relates specifically to quality of care or access to services. Service category, for instance whether the comment refers to a GP surgery or acute care, is also explored alongside the sentiment of feedback. A list of services mentioned in comments has also been shared.

## Who is Healthwatch Northumberland hearing from?

We have collected and anonymised demographic information where consent has been given. The

following presents a general summary of who Healthwatch Northumberland is hearing from.

Online engagement has been excluded from these figures.

### Location:

In total between October and December 2020, we collected feedback from respondents from thirteen different Northumberland postcode areas, accounting for 52% of all responses this quarter. A total of 48% of respondents gave no postcode (although may have indicated the local area). Below Table 1 shows the number of responses we received from residents in different Local Area Councils this quarter:

*Table 1. Frequency of known responses across Local Area Councils in Northumberland, Q3 2020/21<sup>1</sup>*

Local Area Council	Number
Ashington and Blyth	7
Castle Morpeth	6
Cramlington, Bedlington & Seaton Valley	3
North Northumberland	5
Tynedale	15

There are too few known locations of patients, carers, and families to reliably say where we are hearing from most. Tynedale has a higher frequency this quarter, last quarter it was Ashington and Blyth.

### Age:

The majority of our respondents did not share their age with us, and we did not ask people taking part in our online forums to give their age as these were public events. Of those that did, there were respondents from mainly older age groups (shown below in Table 2).

*Table 2. Number and percentage of responses across age groups in Northumberland, Q3 2020-21*

	Number	Percentage
Under 18	1	2%
19-24	0	0%
25-49	0	0%
50-64	2	5%
65-79	6	14%
80+	1	2%
Unknown	34	77%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Excludes online forum participants

## Gender:

Of the people who told us their gender there was a higher proportion of female respondents, accounting for 23% of all responses (10 people). A total of 18% of responses were from males (8 people). Below Figure 1 shows a breakdown of responses by gender:

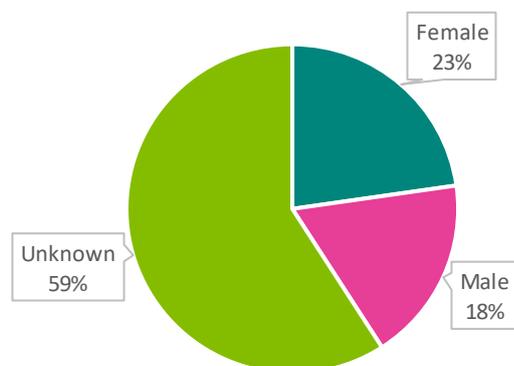


Figure 1. Frequency of responses by gender in Northumberland, Q3 2020/21

## Whose experiences are we finding out about?

Most respondents were sharing their own individual experience of health and social care with us. A total of 48% of all respondents gave us feedback about the health and social care experiences of a relative, friend, or someone they care for.

Below a breakdown of all respondent types, and the number and proportion of responses from these groups is shared in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of responses by respondent type, Q3 2020-21

	Number	Percentage
<b>Individual</b>	23	52%
<b>Client relative, friend or carer</b>	21	48%
<b>Advocate</b>	0	0
<b>Health or social care professional</b>	0	0
<b>Local Campaigner</b>	0	0
<b>Other</b>	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

## What people are saying and experiencing

Of the 44 responses<sup>2</sup>, we were asked or told about 22 individual services/service providers. Some respondents shared their experiences of using more than one service in their comments and many services were mentioned more than once, bringing the total frequency of services mentioned to 37. Please see Appendix 1 and 2 for a list of all the services/service providers mentioned.

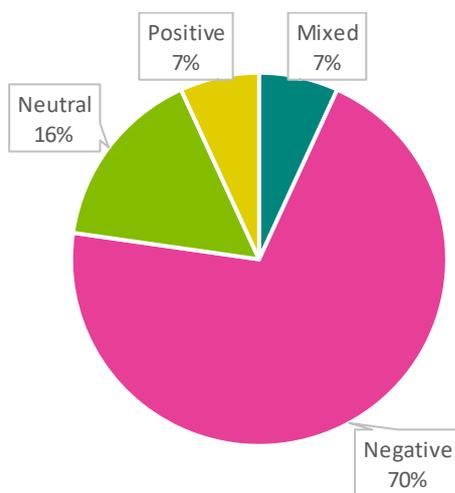


Figure 2. General sentiment of responses

The services/service providers have been categorised into service type, with the five main groups being: primary care, secondary care, mental health, social care, and urgent and emergency care. Below, Figure 3, shows the service type and sentiment of responses.

It shows there is a greater number of negative comments and feedback for all service types.

**Positive:**

Patient reported that she had a telephone consultation with her GP and was then asked to attend the surgery. She was met in the car park by a member of staff in PPE and it all felt very organised. Going to the surgery for her flu jab was also very quick and efficient.

She has also been to her dentist. She reports a great service - she was asked to arrive on time and there was no hanging around. "

**Patient, Tynedale**

**Mixed:**

The caller's husband is deaf and has hearing aids. He needed new tubes for them and these were sent out from the Freeman audiology service postal service. However, he struggles to cut the tubes to size so after approaching the service again they cut them for him before posting.

The audiology clinic is only open for emergencies at present and the community drop-in clinics aren't operating at the moment. The couple will be pleased when they can get help with tubes and batteries at libraries and GP practices again.

**Relative, undisclosed location**

**Negative:**

Caller contacted us about his wife's care home. He has received correspondence from the management company about pods for visiting but when he contacts care home is told he is unable to visit and they do not have pods. Has not visited his wife since March.

**Relative, Cramlington, Bedlington, Seaton Valley**

<sup>2</sup> Discussions from the online forums have been excluded from this section of the report

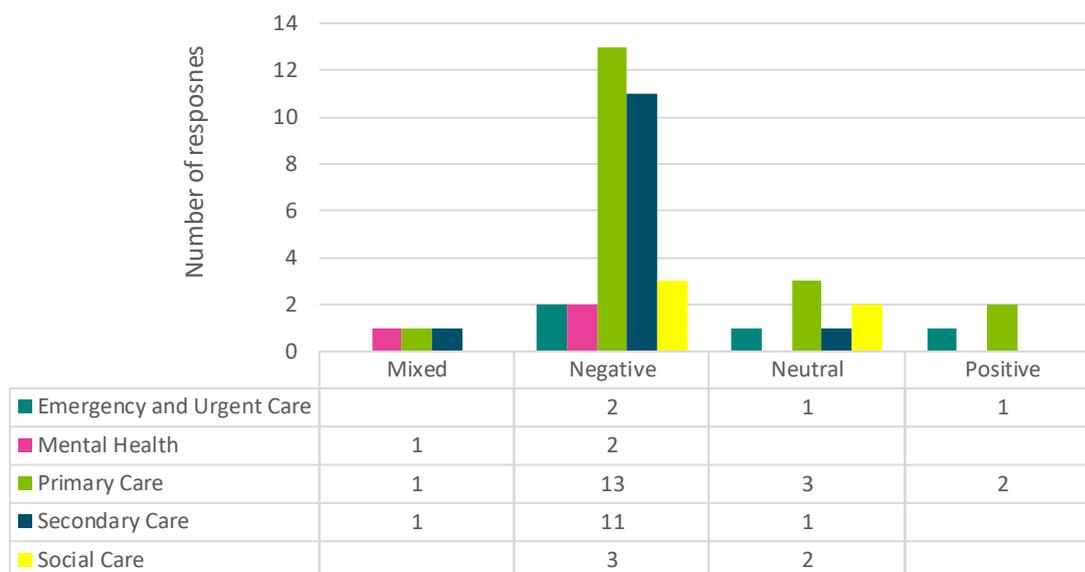


Figure 3. Service Type and Sentiment of responses

Below Table 5 indicates more comments were about primary care services or service providers (43% of all comments, 19 total comments).

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of responses by Service Type

Service Type	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Care	19	43%
Secondary Care	13	30%
Mental health	3	7%
Social Care	5	11%
Urgent and Emergency care	4	9%

### Covid-19

Between October and December 2020 nearly half (45%) of comments received were related to the covid-19 pandemic in some way (45%, 20 comments). This is an increase on last quarter (28%, 13 comments).

### **Covid-19: what people told us:**

- *“My dental check-up is six months overdue, and every time my dentist is contacted they're still catching up with the backlog and that I'll be contacted, "probably next month". I'm still waiting. My husband was told to carry out a DIY filling, but when he (was) in more pain, he was given an appointment. All credit to his dentist who, when he went for his appointment, also replaced his broken cap”.*
- *Caller's mother has dementia and lives in a care home. The care home has been closed to personal visitors since March 2020. She says the management company's communication and marketing shows reports that internal COVID secure spaces are available in 60% of its homes. The daughter has been contacting the home regularly to ask when a COVID secure visiting space will be available at her mother's home.*

*The home had facilitated window and garden visits in the summer, but since September there have not been any planned appointments for Zoom or telephone calls. She has had to phone up on the chance that a member of the care staff could facilitate a call or the home has called her without checking she is available and therefore missed the call and opportunity to talk to her mum. She has contacted the home's management company, but it has not been able to give anything beyond general assurances that such spaces are being constructed as soon as possible. She says the responses have been "too focused on what they can't do and not what could be done".*

*Her experience of the home prior to COVID was that the care was excellent, but communication was poor. She had to be proactive in finding out if her mother required toiletries or clothes etc. She says COVID has made this worse.*

- *Male, with long term hearing loss is concerned that his GP practice has not thought through the access issues for people with hearing loss with the physical changes that have been made to the waiting room due to COVID. He says the screens have a negative effect on the way sound travels. He also noted that the personal hearing loops which are available for patients to use are put to one side and do not seem to be charged and ready for use.*

### **Access and Quality**

This quarter comments have been divided between issues about ‘access to services’ (54%) and ‘quality of services’ (46%)<sup>3</sup>. This is like previous quarters although ‘quality’ is higher than last quarter. Most of the negative comments about primary care relate to access to services, those for quality of service are about secondary care (see Figure 4a).

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<sup>3</sup> Neutral comments have been excluded here as they relate to requests for information. Although these could indicate an issue about access to information.

Figure 3 is best considered alongside Figures 4 (shown below), which show whether comments are related to quality or access and their relevant sentiment.

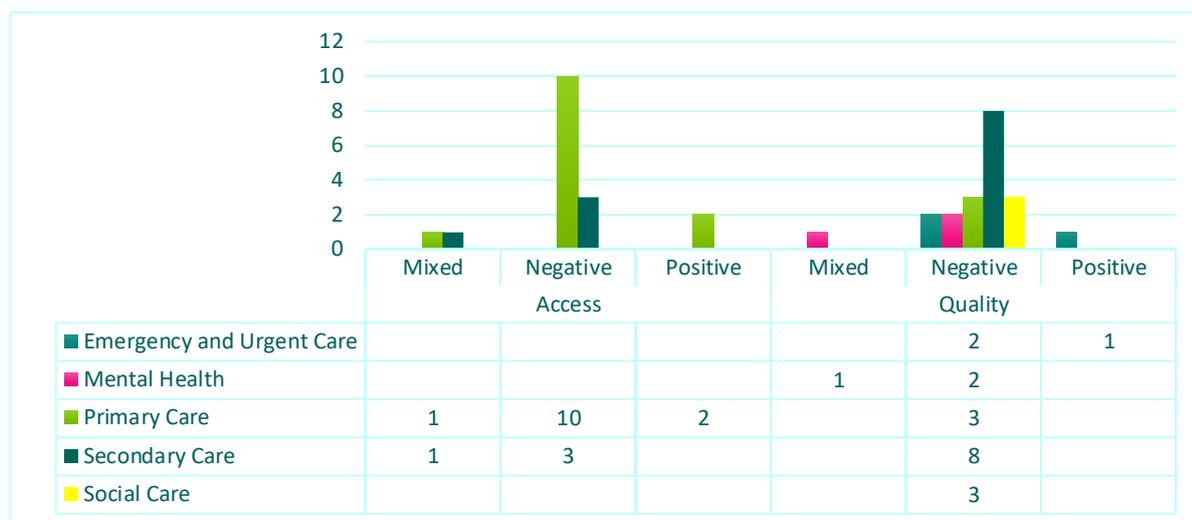


Figure 4. Frequency of responses related to Quality of care and Access to services

## Signposting

In total we signposted or gave information to 14 people who contacted us with an enquiry. Some people were signposted to more than one service. Below Table 6 shows the services Healthwatch Northumberland signposted people to this quarter. In previous quarters most of our signposting has been to voluntary sector organisations.

Table 6. List of services Healthwatch Northumberland signposted people to, Q3 2020/21

Service Name	Service Type	Number of times signposted to	Signposted to in Jul - Sept 20-21?
Carers Northumberland	Voluntary Sector	1	Yes
Healthwatch Newcastle	Statutory	1	No
ICAN	Voluntary Sector	2	Yes
Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	Health	2	No
North of Tyne PALS	Health	5	Yes
Sunderland PALS	Health	1	No
St Oswald's Hospice	Voluntary Sector	1	No
Valens Medical Partnership	Health	1	No

## Online Forums

As part of our engagement work we have held online forums so that we can continue to find out about people's experiences of health and social care without speaking with people face to face. Between October and December, we ran three forums and a summary of the feedback we collected through these forums has been included below. Please see Appendix 3 for the list of forums

### **Care Homes and keeping in touch during the pandemic:**

People told us:

- Their relatives in care homes experienced difficulties with new visiting procedures such as window visits, video calls or new Covid-19 secure visiting areas either due to dementia and confusion around changes or problems caused by hearing loss.
- As care home staff often must facilitate calls some residents may feel unable to talk openly
- Garden visits were felt to be more successful but weather turning colder and going back into 'lockdown' ended these.
- One person felt their relative's care home was excellent at facilitating visits and calls.
- The language care home staff used to explain Covid-19 and resultant changes was often confusing to those with dementia living in the care home and relatives would have to explain things further and relate it to experiences they could understand such as the war or Spanish Flu.
- The impact of restrictions on carers had been significant. They were not only upset about being unable to visit but also being unable to help those relatives new to a home settle in and whether their relatives would recognise them post pandemic.
- They felt there may be over-caution in protecting people against Covid-19 at the cost of people's wellbeing particularly in 'end of life' situations the question raised was 'protecting them from what?'

- There was a lack of contact from staff within the care homes with updates on their relatives' day, any activities they had taken part in and changes to their physical health. Other issues around communication included letters that included incorrect details and that letters were not received frequently enough.
- There were concerns that care home staff were having to use their own phones to facilitate calls.
- They felt activities for their relatives within the care home could be more stimulating and that a separate key worker or engagement worker for care homes would really help with this as well as with facilitating video contact with loved ones.
- Relatives felt there should be more acknowledgment of them as carers and recognition they know their relatives needs best.
- Easier digital methods for communication like walkie talkies, baby monitors or a live transcribe service for phone would be welcomed.
- They had heard of other homes being able to facilitate visitors through a designated entrance which did not go near individuals' rooms and they felt this should be possible in other homes.
- They appreciated the chance to talk about their concerns and feelings and wanted to meet in few months' time to review their experiences.

#### **Young People Online Forum:**

This forum was developed and delivered by our young volunteers. Due to a small number of young people attending we had a more informal meeting about what may work in future forums to help people feel comfortable in sharing experiences around mental health.

We heard that:

- Young people felt more comfortable doing activities within virtual forums rather than just chatting about experiences, for example, drawing or something creative to act as an 'ice-breaker'.

- Introductions by staff and other professionals in forums should be as informal as possible to ensure it is not intimidating.
- It was felt there is not enough done in schools to encourage people to feel safe and comfortable to share experiences around mental health.
- There would be interest in doing further forums to ensure young people's voices are heard in relation to mental health.

### **Choppington Disability Group**

In addition to holding our own forums we have made our online platforms available to community groups who do not have them.

In this quarter we helped facilitate a virtual meeting for Choppington Disability Group by allowing secure use of our Zoom so they could continue to provide support in lockdown for those with disabilities as well as their carers.

**If you would like any further information, or have any feedback or questions about this report, please get in touch using the following contact details:**

Email: [DerryN@HealthwatchNorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:DerryN@HealthwatchNorthumberland.co.uk)

Phone: 07590 880016

## Appendix

### *Appendix 1. List of services mentioned in feedback and comments*

<b>Service</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Alnwick Medical Group	1
Asda Opticians Blyth	1
Brockwell Medical Group	1
Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHSFT (CNTW)	1
Coquet Medical Group	1
Corbridge Medical Group	1
Guidepost Medical Group	1
Haltwhistle Medical Group	2
Meadow Park Care Home	2
NHS 111	1
NHS Test & Trace	1
North East Ambulance Service NHS FT	1
Northumbria Healthcare NHSFT - Berwick Infirmary	1
Northumbria Healthcare NHSFT - Hexham General Hospital	4
Northumbria Healthcare NHSFT - Joint Musculoskeletal and Pain Service	2
Northumbria Healthcare NHSFT - Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital	1
Northumbria Healthcare NHSFT - Wansbeck General Hospital	1
Oaklands Medical Centre	3
South Quay Care Home	1
South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust	1
Talking Matters Northumberland	1
The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust -Audiology	4
Valens Medical Partnership	2

*Appendix 2. Service category and sentiment*

Service Category	Mixed	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Acute Care		1	1	1	3
Acute services with overnight beds		1			1
Ambulance Services		1			1
Audiology	1	2	1		4
Care at Home			1		1
Child & Adult Mental Health Services (Other Services)	1				1
Community Mental Health Team (CMHT)		1			1
COVID Testing		1	1		2
Dentist (non-hospital)	1				1
Dentistry		1			1
GP practice		12	1	2	15
Inpatient Care		1			1
Maternity		1			1
NHS 111		1			1
Ophthalmology		1			1
Optometry services		1			1
Other (Community services)			1		1
Pharmacy			1		1
Physiotherapy		1			1
Residential Care Home		3			3
Sexual Health		1			1
Urgent and Emergency Care services		1			1

**Appendix 3. List of online forums Q3 2020/21**

Care Homes- keeping in touch with loved ones- 11th November

Young People and Mental Health- 23rd November

Choppington Disability Group- 19th November