



Strategic Plan

2023-26

healthwatch
Northumberland

What is Healthwatch Northumberland?

The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 set out a powerful ambition of putting people at the heart of health and social care. The Act created Healthwatch England and a network of independent Healthwatch in every local authority area.

Healthwatch Northumberland is delivered by Adapt (NE). Adapt (NE) is a registered charity and community-based organisation which aims to improve the quality of life of disabled people who have sensory, physical and learning disabilities or mental health problems; also people who are disadvantaged in being able to access services because they live in a rural location. The current contract runs from 2022 – 2025.

Healthwatch Northumberland listens to the residents, patients, families and carers of Northumberland to understand their experiences and views and use these to influence local services. We want to know what is working well and what could be done better.

We talk to a range of key organisations in the county and beyond, sharing the views of the people of Northumberland and working to ensure they are central to all decisions made about health and social care. These organisations include, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System, Northumberland County Council, Cumbria, NHS Foundation Trusts, the Care Quality Commission and companies and voluntary and community sector organisations which provide care services.

We are independent and are not part of the NHS or Northumberland County Council. We are not affiliated with any of the health and social care providers or any political party.

We also provide information about local care services and choices to be made in respect of those services.

Our Vision

The people of Northumberland have their health and social care needs met and their experience of using services heard and understood by those responsible for commissioning and providing services

Our Mission

To ensure that the people of Northumberland can give their views and are involved in and can influence decisions made about their health and social care.

We will:

- Listen to people, especially the most vulnerable, to understand their experiences and what matters most to them
- Inform people about local health and social care services to help them make informed choices about their care
- Influence those who have the power to change services so they better meet people's needs now and in the future

Our Principles

Our core purpose is making sure the views of the public shape the health and care services they need.

This requires us to be:

- Independent in purpose – amplifying the voice and experiences of the most pressing and difficult issues in health and social care.
- Independent in voice – speaking up on behalf of sometimes unpopular causes or groups who are marginalised and/or face disadvantage or discrimination.
- Independent in action – designing and delivering activities that best meet the needs of the people we serve.

To have credibility with the communities we serve and the organisations we seek to influence, we must operate with integrity, accountability and transparency.

We will achieve this by:

- The Healthwatch Northumberland Board overseeing the work we do and setting directions for our work based on what people tell us is important.
- Basing our work on the evidence gathered from people who use health and social care services.
- Providing evidence of the impact we have by publishing timely reports with realistic recommendations and monitoring how service providers and commissioners are implementing them.
- Maintaining positive, effective relationships with service providers and commissioners based on mutual respect.
- Work collaboratively with local voluntary and community groups who have strong local knowledge and are connected to communities of interest and place.

Diversity and Inclusion

Because Healthwatch Northumberland starts with people first, it is essential that all our work is inclusive, accessible and meaningful to everyone. Our work covers the health and social care needs of children, young people and adults and we are committed to working for everyone, not just those who shout the loudest.

There are big differences in the experience of receiving or accessing health and social care – people's ability to access services might be affected, for example, by their ethnicity, income, gender or where they live. How well people are listened to might be affected by their disability or language or cultural differences. At the same time, access to health and social care affects people's ability to work, care for others or play a part in their local communities. This is why diversity and inclusion is at the heart of everything we do. We work with all groups and individuals including those who are seldom heard or traditionally less likely to engage with services.

Diversity and inclusion is about all of us – including Healthwatch Northumberland staff and board members and everyone who works in the network or comes into contact with us. We will always ensure our staff and board can do their work in an environment where they are valued, involved, and supported and feel safe from discrimination.

The world we work in

Health and social care are vital parts of many people's day to day lives. Many of us are passionate about the NHS and social care because we, or a loved one, are using a service right now. At some point, though, it is likely that every one of us will need support or treatment.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic we were working in a period of major change in health and social care and their delivery mechanisms. The pandemic and the response to it have increased the challenges that relate to demographic, economic and environmental factors and we need to take all of these into consideration when developing our strategy and planning our work.

An ageing population is something to celebrate and it is health and social care services which have allowed many of us to live for longer. This changing demographic represents a new challenge for services. Needs are changing; there is a growth in demand for social care and there are now different demands on health services with more of us managing long term or multiple conditions. At the same time, the resources available to services are under unrelenting pressure. It is more important than ever for people to know what they can expect from health and social care and to stay as healthy and independent as possible.

Our Annual Survey results tell us that people in Northumberland are generally content with the health and social care services they receive. The gratitude and relief of how they coped during the height of COVID-19 will remain but that does not mean that there is not still much to do. Concern about access to services remains a consistent theme, especially in the rural areas of the county where travel can be a barrier to both service users and providers.

The health and social care system is large and complex. It is not surprising that people have spoken to us about how challenging it can be to get even basic information, such as what services are available locally and how to access them. Proposals to change local services often cause concern for communities. Healthwatch Northumberland will continue its call to service providers to involve people early and effectively in the change process.

COVID -19 has led to accelerated technological changes by health and social care providers and users of the services. More of us now have experience of using services remotely via phones and computers. Not everyone, however, has access to technology which can impact not only on their ability to access services but also to engage with those who seek to improve them.

There is huge, ongoing change for both health and social care both nationally and regionally. The development of an Integrated Care System (ICS) to help teams in different organisations work together mean there is an even greater need for Healthwatch Northumberland to be a powerful independent champion to ensure that the people of Northumberland not only understand what changes are happening but have input to them.

How we work

Healthwatch Northumberland voices people's concerns and provides feedback to service providers and commissioners. By engaging directly with users of the service and their carers we collect vital data on how and why people use services in their area.

We listen to local stories and combine this with our research of specific issues and use this to influence the decisions made and the service provided. We analyse the information we receive and use this to evaluate services, identify areas for improvement and work with commissioners and providers to find ways to improve services. We call this the principle of 'check and challenge'. We work with all stakeholders to ensure the voice of the residents of Northumberland is amplified and listened to. Our place on the Health and Wellbeing Board and our relationship with commissioners

and providers means Healthwatch Northumberland can ensure that the voice of the people is brought to the very heart of the decision-making process. Specifically, we:

- Engage regularly with the population of Northumberland to learn about their health and social care issues, views and experiences
- Focus on issues where Healthwatch Northumberland can achieve positive change
- Make concrete recommendations and ensure service providers and commissioners respond to our recommendations
- Provide information and signpost people to sources of support
- Publicise our work and our successes

By giving information or signposting people to the local services they need we provide direct support to people in their communities.

How we decide what to focus on

The potential scope of our work is vast as it covers health and social care services for all adults, children and young people in Northumberland with particular reference to those who are most vulnerable or may be excluded. This means we must prioritise the issues we focus on.

We use three sources to inform our operational plan. They are:

- Feedback provided to us through feedback mechanisms such as listening events where we listen to local stories and peoples' experiences, feedback cards, surveys and information provided by our partners. Our Annual Survey is a very important part of this.
- Evidence we gather through our work including projects, meeting with stakeholders and liaising with regional and national Healthwatch.
- Wider data – Local, regional and national data sets that highlight issues affecting the most excluded, large areas of our population, etc.

Our work is informed by policy debates and developments at both a national and local level and this makes sure our work remains relevant to the changing health and social care landscape. To prioritise our work our board considers carefully all these sources of information and then identifies where Healthwatch Northumberland can add most value.

- We ensure that our prioritisation of the issues we work on fits with our role and responsibilities. This ensures that we are delivering to our statutory remit.
- Then we consider how much the issue matters to people. It must be something they care about as we are here to be the voice of people in health and social care.
- We then ask whether the change needs to come from us so we aren't focusing on things that others can do more easily and effectively.
- Finally, we consider our work as a full set of priorities, as together they need to have the greatest impact for people using health and social care services.



Our strategic aims

We have three strategic aims which are the themes for our work over the lifetime of the strategy. Our work each year will be identified as meeting one or more of the aims.

Health

With the help of Healthwatch Northumberland, the views, knowledge and experiences of a health service users and carers, particularly those less often heard, are listened to, and have a positive influence on changes and developments in health services in Northumberland.

Social care

With the help of Healthwatch Northumberland, the views, knowledge and experiences of a social care service users and carers, particularly those less often heard, are listened to, and have a positive influence on changes and developments in social care services in Northumberland.

Promotion

Healthwatch Northumberland is used by people in the county as a trusted source of information and signposting to health and social care services. Service providers, commissioners and key stakeholders in Northumberland and the wider care system know, trust and actively engage with Healthwatch Northumberland.

The Healthwatch Northumberland Board debated whether social care should be a separate Strategic Aim in the context of greater integration of service delivery and that very often it is one aspect of care from the same or closely aligned providers.

The decision was to keep social care separate. From feedback it was noted that how people experience social care services and the needs and challenges they face, may require a different approach from Healthwatch Northumberland and that it was important to keep a distinct focus on the issue.

How we will achieve these strategic aims

The board and staff of Healthwatch Northumberland are committed to working together with others to do everything we can for the people of Northumberland, to ensure that their voices are heard and that their views are central to all decisions about the care they receive. We will:

- Continue to build strong relationships with service providers and commissioners and encourage them to listen and involve local people
- Continue to build relationships with community groups and voluntary sector organisations to ensure we hear the experiences of our communities
- Share what we learn from our engagement and information and signposting work
- Use our position on the Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board and in the wider scrutiny and decision-making structures to champion the voice of the service users
- Use our powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to 'look and listen' to users and carers the premises where services are provided and to work with other
- Work with other local Healthwatch through the NENC ICS and Healthwatch England on issues of joint interest.

Operational Plan

The activities and projects we do will change each year and will be set out in an Operational Plan as Strategic Objectives. These provide the framework for specific activities in the Operational Plan and delivered through our core activities of Engagement and Insight, Communications, Volunteering and Strategic Influence. For reference they are given a short title and reference number e.g. SO1 Championing service users voice.

A simple measure is suggested for each. Note these are not outcomes (changes achieved) they are output indicators which give a direction of travel for the objective. More detailed outcomes and measures are built into the Operational Plan.

SO1 To champion service users voice

Use our position on the Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board and with the NENC Integrated Care Board scrutiny and decision-making structures to champion the voice of the service users.

Measure: Public records in minutes and service provider and commissioner communications.

SO2 To demonstrate our impact

Ask service providers and commissioners to show how the insight we share with them, based on what we learn from our own work and from working with others has been used in their decisions.

Measure: Public responses from service providers and commissioners to our reports.

SO3 To focus on inequalities

Ensure our engagement, information and signposting and communications work means we hear from people and communities that experience worse healthcare access or health outcomes across all four domains of inequalities (protected characteristics, geographical, socio-economic factors, and marginalised groups).

Measure: Our reports include experiences of people and communities that experience worse healthcare access or health outcomes across the four domains of inequalities. We may choose to focus on particular groups on an annual basis.

SO4 To work together

Continue to build strong relationships and work collaboratively with key stakeholders, service providers, Northumberland County Council, the NENC Integrated Care Board, community groups and voluntary sector organisations, local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England.

Measure: Results from a Stakeholder Review.

SO5 To be well governed

Ensure our policies and procedures, including our powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 support us to deliver our Strategy and Operational Plan.

Measure: Annual programme of policy reviews.