



What you told us

Trends in feedback
January to June 2024

healthwatch
Northumberland

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'.

Feedback

Between January and June 2024, we received feedback from 417 individuals from talking to people at face-to-face events, telephone calls, emails, our website, social media and other sources. This is approximately the same as the previous six months (we heard from 422 individuals between July and December 2023). Between January and June 2024, we signposted 65 people to different organisations for further support. This is up slightly from 59 during the previous six months. Our social media content had a reach of 110,000 and almost 7000 engagements, and our website had 23,000 views, compared to a social media reach of 77,000, over 7,000 engagements and 16,000 website views between July and December 2023.

The feedback we have had for the past six months has mainly been around three service areas:

GP services

29% of all feedback received in January to June 2024 was to do with GP services (roughly the same proportion as July to December 2023). The main issues we received feedback on were difficulty getting an appointment and poor service. However, approximately one in four comments we received about GP services were positive which is an increase on the previous six months (one in five comments were positive between July and December 2023).

Hospitals

25% of all feedback received during the six months was about hospital services. The biggest concerns were around the distance to travel and lengthy waiting lists. There were also concerns raised about poor communication and poor quality of care when people got to hospital. However, just under one in three of the comments we received about hospitals were positive.

Dentists

Dentists were mentioned in 7% of all the comments we received. The vast majority of feedback was to do with the difficulties getting an NHS appointment. About 10% of respondents who fed back about dentists reported that the dentists they had spoken to were only accepting private patients. Approximately one in ten of the comments we received about dentists were positive.

These three categories made up almost two thirds (just over 61%) of the feedback we received in January to June 2024. This is up from the previous six months when these categories amounted to less than half of the feedback received (48% in July to December 2023).

Over a quarter of the feedback for GP services was about three particular GP practices. We will contact these practices individually to discuss the themes that have been raised in the feedback.

Signposting/requests for information

16% of the contacts we received in January to June 2024 were requests for information or signposting support. The top three areas were:

Adult social care

Enquiries were mainly about getting care in the home and care assessments.

Cost of living support

This included requests for information around benefits advice.

COVID-19 vaccinations

Enquiries were around eligibility and vaccination sites.

Signposting and Information Service

At one of our events we heard from someone who is a carer for their spouse who has recently had a stroke. They asked if there were any local stroke groups. We signposted them to Blyth Stroke Support Club and gave them a contact telephone number. We also signposted them to Carers Northumberland, an organisation they were not previously aware of.

Ashington and Blyth resident

Geographical spread

We heard regularly from all parts of the county with people in Tynedale providing the most responses at 18% as shown in Figure 1, below. Over a fifth of the people we received more detailed feedback from came to us via Healthwatch England. Unfortunately, Healthwatch England's feedback form currently doesn't provide us with the area of Northumberland or the postcode of where the feedback came from.

We have asked for this greater level of detail from Healthwatch England, particularly as we have received increasing amounts of feedback through Healthwatch England. In the last six months over a fifth (24%) of the feedback we received came via Healthwatch England. This has more than quadrupled from the same period a year ago (5% in January to June 2023). Healthwatch England is reviewing its feedback form and the amount of geographical information it provides.

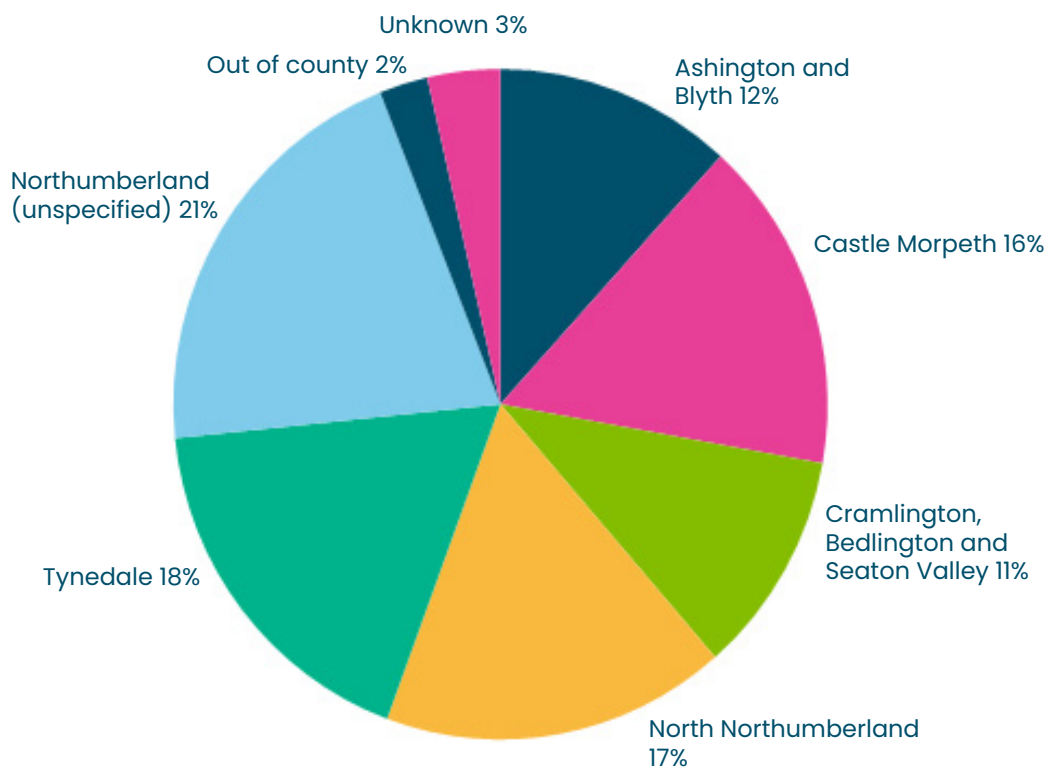


Fig. 1. Where we heard from people across the county

All five Local Area Committees (LACs) had either GP or hospital services as their top issue and all, except people in Tynedale, had NHS dentists as the third most common issue. The third most commonly raised service in Tynedale was pharmacies but 50% of the feedback was positive and there wasn't one stand out issue in the negative feedback.

	Percentage of responses for each LAC
Ashington and Blyth	
GP services	48%
Hospital	20%
Dentist	13%
Castle Morpeth	
GP services	41%
Hospital	31%
Dentist	8%
Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley	
Hospital	35%
GP services	27%
Dentist	12%
North Northumberland	
GP services	44%
Hospital	31%
Dentist	9%
Tynedale	
Hospital	43%
GP services	16%
Pharmacy	6%
Northumberland (unspecified)	
GP services	39%
Hospital	22%
Dentist	7%
Unknown	
Dentist	25%
Hospital	25%

Table 1. Services we heard about most by LAC

Trends

In the six-month period of January to June 2024 the percentage of positive comments declined fairly steadily by a third from 24% in January to 16% in June. The percentage of negative comments was more up and down over the course of the six-month period with a slight downward trend. Overall, it would seem that Northumberland residents have become less happy with the NHS and Adult Social Care services they have received in the past six months.

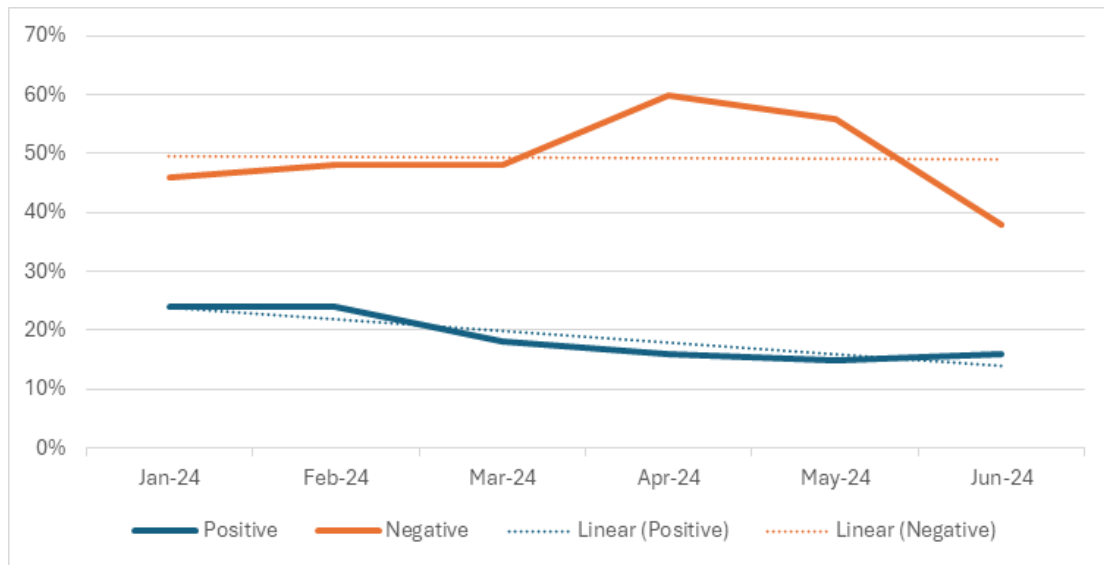


Fig. 2. How people were feeling January to June 2024

However, Northumberland residents’ perception of services has gradually improved since July 2022, as shown in Fig. 3, so the recent six-months trend may be only a temporary blip in the longer-term trend.

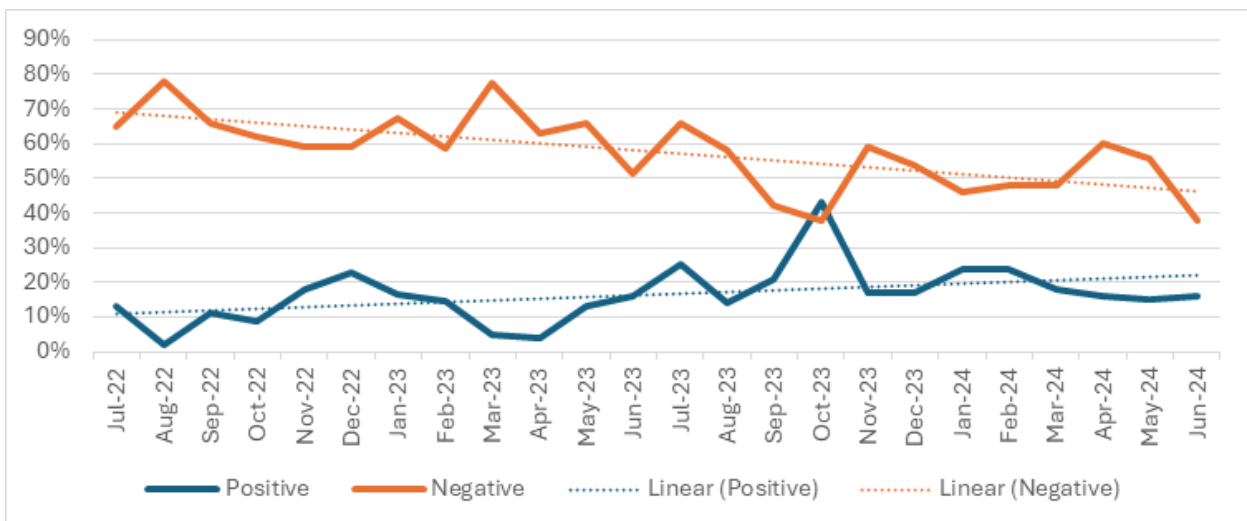


Fig. 3. How people were feeling July 2022 to June 2024

Demographics

Figures 4 to 6 give the demographic breakdown of those who gave feedback on services over the past six months, with the first graph, Fig. 4, showing the distribution of ages and sex across the county. Overall, 65% of respondents were female, 27% were male and for the remaining 8% the sex was unknown. (Less than 0.25% preferred not to say.) These overall figures show a slight increase in proportion of male respondents compared to the previous six months (66% female, 25% male, 10% unknown, during July to December 2023).

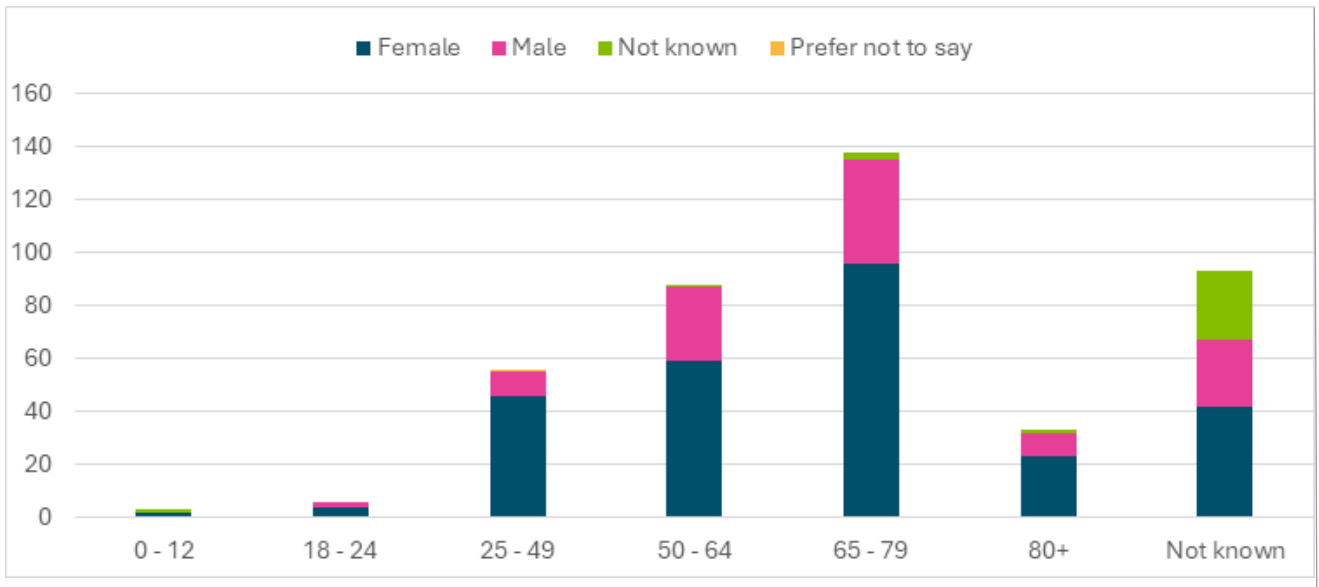


Fig. 4. Age distribution by sex, January to June 2024 (n=417)

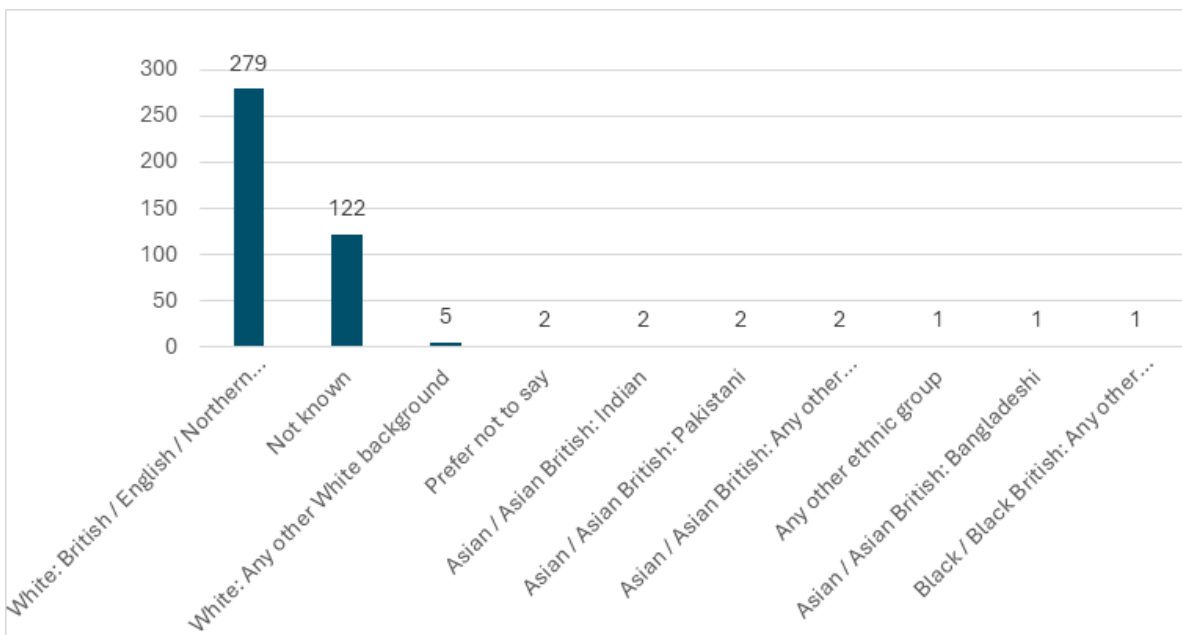
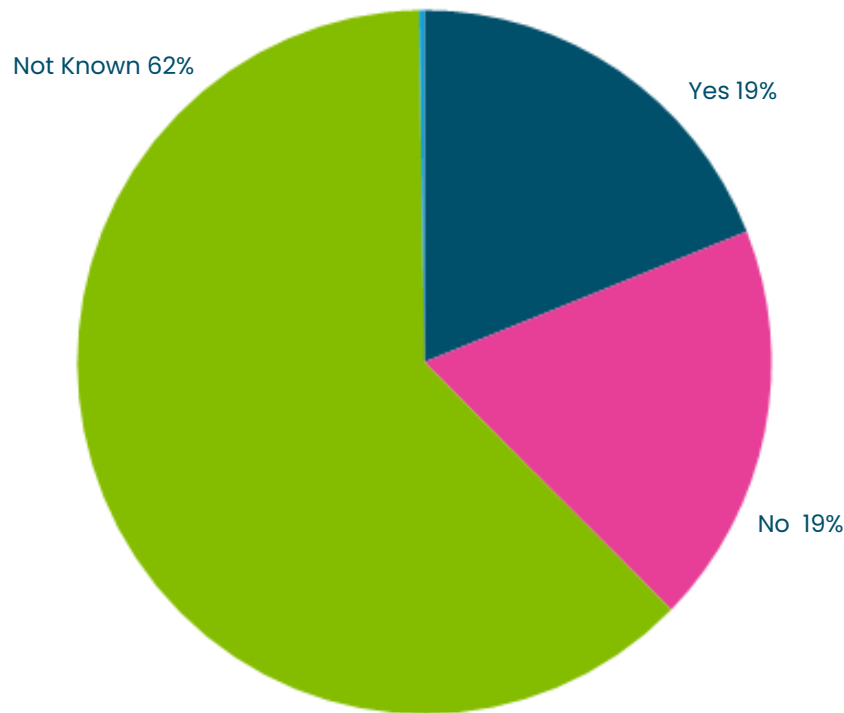


Fig. 5. Ethnicity of respondents, January to June 2024 (n=417)



**Fig. 6. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?
January to June 2024 (n=417)**

The proportion of disabled people we heard from in the period January to June 2024 was slightly reduced compared to the previous six months (July to December 2023 – Yes 23%, No 23%, Not known 53%, Prefer not to say 1%) but still up compared to the same time period the previous year (January to June 2023 – Yes 9%, No 35%, Not known 56%).

Signposting and Information Service

Someone came to see us at our Here to Hear session in Morpeth. They wanted advice on where to get the COVID-19 booster locally, as they had received a letter in the post advising they were eligible. They didn't want to have to travel far to get the booster jab. We advised them of the mobile vaccination unit and where and when it was due to visit Morpeth.

Castle Morpeth resident

Levels of deprivation

We have started asking respondents for their full postcode in the past six months to cross check against the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and determine which decile they are from.

The IMD ranks geographical areas of England with the same levels of population in order of deprivation, from the most to the least deprived. These rankings are divided into ten bands, 'deciles', and using a postcode tool a respondent's address can be given a decile score – where the first decile is the most deprived area, and the tenth decile is the least deprived area.

We have only been able to gather the full postcode from an eighth of those we heard from, but this data shows that we are hearing from all deciles (except the 9th decile) with a 60:40 split of hearing from the least deprived areas (30 respondents, deciles 6 – 10) to hearing from the most deprived areas (20 respondents, deciles 1 – 5). See Fig. 7 below.

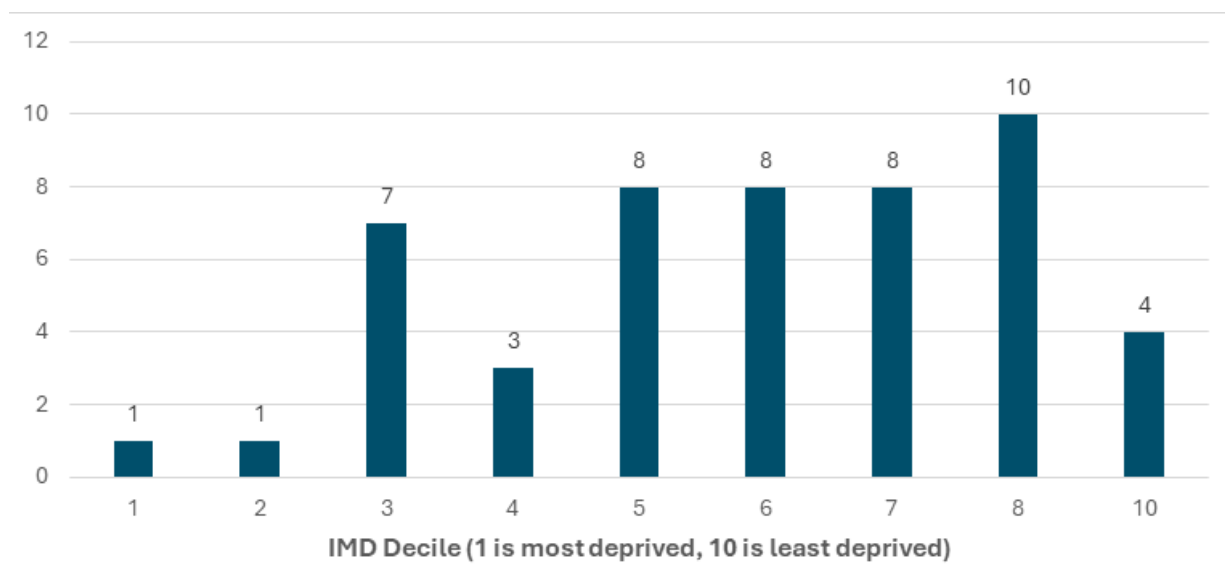


Fig. 7. We are hearing from more people from the least deprived postcodes (n=50)

Insights

Although there has been a slight downward dip in the past six months, the long-term trend is that people's perception of services still appears to be improving, judging from proportion of positive to negative comments.

The proportion of feedback we receive from Healthwatch England has more than doubled again and now comprises 24% of all the feedback we receive (up from 10% in July to December 2023). We are still in discussion with Healthwatch England about getting a more specific location for people leaving feedback other than 'Northumberland'.

We are still hearing from a greater proportion of respondents with a disability than the county's own demographic distribution. Although there has been a slight improvement in the amount of men and boys of all ages we hear from, we still need to contact a bigger range of ethnically diverse people and young people under the age of 25 years old.

In terms of the requests for information, two of the top three requests could be addressed by better publicity, particularly the COVID-19 booster vaccinations. There appeared to be some confusion from respondents regarding the eligibility criteria and the location of their nearest vaccination site.

Actions

We will:

- Recommend that North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Board produces a more effective publicity campaign on eligibility criteria and locations of vaccination sites for the next COVID-19 booster campaign
- Review the feedback we have received about the three GP practices highlighted in this report to identify the themes that patients are raising and then discuss this with the practices concerned
- Continue to press Healthwatch England for more detail on the area of Northumberland in which respondents live

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