

Minutes of the Healthwatch Northumberland Board meeting held on 16 December 2025 at Adapt NE, Burn Lane, Hexham

Present: Hugh McKendrick (HM) Chair, Hannah Harniess (HH) Adapt NE, Debra Blakey (DB) Carers Northumberland, Sue Taylor (ST) Independent Member, Mike Allport (MA) Independent Member, Gillian Robinson (GR) Independent Member, Peter Standfield (PS) Independent member (from Ilam)

In attendance: Derry Nugent (DN) Project Coordinator, Claire Jackson (CJ) Communication and Marketing Officer, Laura Haugh (LH) Digital Marketing and Content Creator, Lorna Farr (LF) volunteer, Karen Bower (KB) volunteer.

Apologies: Angela Merrie (AM) Deputy Chair, Jim Brown (JB) Public Health NCC, Denise Robson (DR) Patient Advice and Liaison Service, Caroline Rogan (CR) Northumberland CVA

Minutes recorded by: Laura Haugh

1. Introductions, apologies and declarations of interest	Action
<p>1.1 HM opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. There was a round of introductions.</p> <p>1.2 Apologies noted above.</p> <p>1.3 HM reminded the board he is a board member for The Charlotte Straker Project and a governor for Newcastle Hospitals.</p> <p>No other interests were declared pertinent to items at this meeting.</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of last meeting</p> <p>The minutes of 14 October 2025 were agreed as a true record.</p>	
<p>3. Action points</p> <p>All action points marked as complete.</p>	

<p>4. Matters arising</p> <p>HM asked for an update on the carers report which was referred to in the minutes from the last meeting. DN said the publication of the report has been slightly delayed and she is waiting for an official comment from Adult Social Care. The report has been shared with the Adult Social Care Panel and the Adult Carer Forum and was well received. DN will send the report to the Carer Partnership Board. In the meantime, CJ will circulate the latest draft without recommendations.</p> <p>GR asked for an update on the amount of time being spent on the PPS project. DN said the percentage of time TH is spending on the project has decreased now a full-time research assistant is in post, but this will continue to be monitored.</p> <p>There were no other matters arising from the minutes.</p>	<p>DN to send carers 'Taking a break' report to the Carer Partnership Board.</p> <p>CJ to circulate latest draft of carers report.</p>
<p>5. Questions from the public</p> <p>No questions had been received from the public.</p>	
<p>6. Presentation: Communication and Marketing</p> <p>CJ gave a presentation about accessible communications. The definition of this is 'Communications that are inclusive and accessible for all audiences, ensuring information is clear and understandable, so that people with different needs can access and use information effectively.'</p> <p>CJ explained why accessible communications are important and listed some of the ways to make communications more accessible such as simple language and formatting, Alt text, closed captions and Easy Read.</p> <p>CJ showed some examples of images which were not very accessible alongside improved versions.</p> <p>Board members received a handout with further information on accessible communications.</p>	

<p>Questions and comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DN and board members praised the professional standard of HWN’s communications. • HM spoke about a recent HWE meeting and the experience of a blind participant on a Teams meeting. 	
<p>7. Chair’s update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HM’s update was circulated ahead of the meeting. Board members agreed these updates are useful to receive. • HM noted that ST and MA have agreed to extend their term as board members. • HH and HM have written to the Department of Health and Social Care regarding the future of HWN and are awaiting a response. • HM has been trying to make contact with other local HW Chairs, although some have not responded. • HM continues to meet DN on a monthly basis to discuss the operational plan. 	
<p>8. Operational, risk and financial update</p> <p>DN asked for questions on the circulated paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dentistry – DN spoke about the impact of the work on dentistry. The board agreed to close dentistry as a project and to think about a new project in January, possibly on the effect of the new dental communications. • ICB projects – There are several projects from the ICB with short timescales. The latest is on end of life care which needs to be reported on by 11 February. These projects have to be taken into account when planning other work. • Other projects include engagement work on a mental health needs assessment with public health and the local authority. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ST told members that public health has now agreed to undertake a JSNA for eye care. She thanked HWN and JB for helping to push for this. • LF asked if health visiting would be revisited. DN said she saw a theme for the Planning Day around revisiting projects to see what has changed. • The hospital discharge project will be rescoped in January and will be done independently. LF suggested contacting the district nursing team. • Developing NHS online – DN will circulate this consultation and put a meeting in the diary to discuss how to respond. • Risk register – some risks have been moved up to red. There is no action, just to be aware of. • GR noted DN reducing her working hours in January. She stressed the importance of monitoring capacity and ensuring the staff team feels supported. 	<p>DN to circulate 'Developing NHS online' consultation.</p>
<p>9. Stellar Awards proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members agreed the proposal and the importance of celebrating positive feedback and good quality care. LF suggested it fits well with HWN's remit of engaging and listening to feedback. • There was a discussion around team capacity. DN said the process would be simple and low-resource. Volunteers can assist with the process. • There was also a discussion about the name 'Stellar Awards' and where it came from. • HM said the awards would need to be presented regularly to gain momentum. 	
<p>10. Board partner organisation updates</p> <p>10.1 Carers Northumberland</p> <p>DB sent an update ahead of the meeting. Key points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day services – day service provision has been discussed with Alan Curry. NCC is now looking at current provision and what is needed. This will focus on all residents but mainly 	

older people, those with learning disabilities and mental health problems. A survey is expected to hear views of carers.

- Young Carers Futures Conference – showcased the work that Carers Trust and a few of their network partners have been doing with Sir Martyn Oliver, Chief Inspector of Schools for Ofsted. Carers Northumberland were involved in this work and presented some recommendations for the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) to Sir Martyn in Downing Street earlier this year. Ofsted has implemented these recommendations into their new EIF which includes specific reference to young carers as a distinct group, and training inspectors in young carer awareness. It is hoped that by introducing these changes more schools will be prompted to identify and support young carers.
- Carer support in hospitals – Carers Northumberland and North Tyneside Carers’ Centre have been meeting with Jo Mackintosh, Head of Experience for Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust to discuss how best to support carers in a hospital setting. There is potential for funding for a Carer Support role across the hospital trust and NHCT is keen that this funding is placed with one or both of the carer centres. It was agreed that working with discharge teams would be the best place to start if the funding was realised. Very much still in the planning stage as funding has not been confirmed.

10.2 North of Tyne Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

DR sent an update ahead of the meeting:

- 2985 issues were raised with PALS in Quarter 2 2025-2026, across the North of Tyne area, which compares to 2548 from the previous quarter.
- Top 3 concerns continue to be care and treatment, communication and appointments.
- Freephone was the most popular means of contact during quarter 2 and email was the second most popular means of contact.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff update: Lee Million one of our Assistant Service Managers recently left the trust and Kayleigh Miller joined the team as a PALS officer in October 2025. <p>10.3 Northumberland CVA</p> <p>No update received.</p> <p>10.4 Public Health</p> <p>No update received.</p>	
<p>11. Governance issues update</p> <p>11.1 Board recruitment</p> <p>HM and AM have a list of potential organisations which could be invited to join the board. These include Karbon Homes, Northumberland College and Thriving Together. HM will recirculate the list of organisations.</p> <p>MA noted a lack of representation from remote areas. DN suggested Brainbox and North Northumberland Voluntary Forum. ST suggested Churches Together for their work with rural farmers.</p> <p>Next steps are to put together an offer for new members once more is known about the future HWN contract. Then organisations can be approached to join from May onwards.</p> <p>Individual recruitment would need to go out to advert.</p> <p>11.2 Meeting dates 2026/27</p> <p>DN shared a list of meeting dates for 2026/27.</p>	<p>HM to recirculate the list of potential organisations to invite to join the board.</p>
<p>12. Any other business</p> <p>HM asked about the Annual Survey. DN said it has to be completed by the end of May. It is planned for February/March.</p> <p>MA has had some issues opening email attachments. He will send these on to DN or HM to look for a solution.</p>	
<p>13. Close</p>	

Date of next meeting – 20 January 2026 (Planning Day)

Dates of meetings for 2026/27

20 January 2026 (Planning Day)

31 March 2026

16 June 2026

22 September 2026

15 December 2026

19 January 2027

16 March 2027

Suggested discussion items

31 March 2026	Volunteering presentation
16 June 2026	Engagement presentation
22 September 2026	Communications and marketing presentation
15 December 2026	Volunteering presentation
16 March 2027	Engagement presentation