



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk

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"Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees has had another impactful year, driven by our ambition to reach even more people and connect with the diverse communities across Stockton-on-Tees.

"A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has shared their views and experiences with us. The people of Stockton-on-Tees are our eyes and ears; your stories shape our priorities and help us focus on what really matters.

"We've worked hard to champion the voices of those who use health and social care services making sure their needs are heard, understood and acted upon.

"Looking ahead, we remain wholeheartedly committed to being the voice of Stockton residents on all matters related to health and care. We will continue to put people's views at the heart of the services we all rely on, especially at the moments when they matter the most."

**David Blacklock, Chief Executive Officer,
People First**

A message from our Chair

A Year of Listening, Learning & Change: Our 2024/25 Annual Report

This year has been one of big changes and continued challenges. We're proud to share our 2024/25 Annual Report, highlighting the voices of local people and the work we've done to make sure they're heard.

Our move to People First as our new host has been a positive step, helping us strengthen our team and focus even more on what matters—listening to those using health and care services in Stockton-on-Tees.

We've heard from many people about the difficulties they face, from long waits for appointments to struggles accessing mental health and dental care. Issues like migrant and women's health, ADHD awareness, and support for drug and alcohol services have been key themes this year.

We're here to make sure those experiences lead to change. This report shares what we've learned and what we're recommending to help improve services.

A huge thank you to our amazing team—Natasha, Kathryn, Janet, Lynn, and Shelly—our Board, Volunteers, Health and Care Ambassadors, Commissioners, and the People First team. Your hard work makes all the difference.

We're excited to keep working together for better care in our community.



"Your story matters—and we're here to make sure it's heard."

At Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, we listen with care, speak up with purpose, and stand beside you to make sure your experiences shape the services we all rely on."

Peter Smith, Chair, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees

About us

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees

Your local champion for better health and social care.



What we do

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice—and act on it. We're also here to help you find clear, trustworthy information and advice when you need it most.



Our vision

A future where everyone gets the care they need—when they need it, and in a way that works for them.



Our mission

To make sure people's voices shape the future of health and care—because real experiences lead to real change.

Our values are:



Equity

We listen with compassion, value every voice, and work to include those who are often left out. We build strong relationships and support people to shape the services they use.

Empowerment

We create a safe and inclusive space where people feel respected, supported, and confident to speak up and shape the changes that matter to them.

Collaboration

We work openly and honestly with others, inside and outside our organisations, to share learning, build trust, and make a bigger difference together.

Independence

We stand up for what matters to the public. We work alongside decision-makers but stay true to our role as an independent, trusted voice.

Truth

We act with honesty and integrity. We speak up when things need to change and make sure those in power hear the truth, even when it's hard to hear.

Learning

We never stop growing. We listen, reflect, and adapt—always open to new ideas and experiences that help us do better for the people we serve.

Impact

We focus on making a real difference in people's lives. We're ambitious, accountable, and committed to helping others take responsibility to make change happen.

Your Voice, Our Impact: A year in numbers

We've supported more than 18,500 people to have their say and get advice and information about their care.

We currently employ four staff and our work is supported by 13 volunteers and 33 Health & Care Ambassadors.

Reaching out:



2,919 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

5,802 people came to us via website, events, email or telephone for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

12,761 people were able to access up-to-date health and care advice and information through our website, social media platforms and newsletters.

We have sent out 13 newsletters to over 430 members.

Turning feedback into action:



This year, we published seven reports highlighting the changes people want to see – covering areas like pharmacy services, women's health and drug and alcohol support.

Our most popular report, with 268 views on the website, was [Accessing Pharmacy Services](#): shining a light on the real struggles people face getting the care they need.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. In 2024/25 we received £129,000, which is 0.8% less than last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the past year, we've been out and about—listening to your stories, connecting with partners, and working hard to make care better across Stockton-on-Tees. Here are just a few highlights from our journey.

Spring



We visited local pharmacies after the Pharmacy First launch in January 2024 to see

how it's going and to help spread the word about the new services now available.



Getting help with dental care is still a big challenge locally and across the country

We carried out mystery shopping to highlight the problems people are facing. Now, we're working with decision makers to help shape plans for improving access to dental services.

Summer



Young people told us they wanted to be heard—so we listened

We spoke with young people across the area to find out what matters most to them. **Mental health** came out as the top concern, and it's now a key focus in our 2025–2026 work plan.



Two local hospital trusts are now working more closely together

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have officially joined forces to improve services. We spoke with local people to make sure your voices help shape how care is delivered in the future.

Autumn



The public asked us to focus on migrant health—and we did

We built strong connections with local migrant communities to understand the biggest challenges they face in accessing health and care services. Their voices are helping shape our work moving forward.



Bringing health and care into the heart of our communities

We launched our **Health & Care Ambassador Programme** to make it easier for people to access services and information where they live. The programme also helps our partners work together in new ways, using real-time insights from the community.

Winter



Sharing local voices on a national stage

We were proud to attend the National Conference alongside **Baroness Merron**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department of Social Care, to share our findings on the impact of **ADHD and long waiting times**. We're now part of a national working group to make sure local experiences help shape future improvements.



Working together to make a difference

We brought together senior leaders and decision makers from across our area to collaborate and explore the positive impact of our **Health & Care Ambassador Programme**. It was a great opportunity to share ideas and strengthen partnerships for better community health.

Working together for change

Introduction to the work between the NENC ICB and Healthwatch

Throughout 2024 -2025 the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Healthwatch have worked together to build robust relationships to improve health and wellbeing for everyone in our communities. This partnership aims to:

- **Enhance Health Services:** By working together, the ICB can better understand and address the health needs of our communities.
- **Promote Wellbeing:** The collaboration focuses on creating opportunities that support improved wellbeing, including mental health, physical health, and social care.
- **Reduce Health Inequalities:** The partnership aims to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, has access to quality health services.
- **Engage the Community:** Healthwatch ensures feedback gathered from the public is escalated appropriately to help the ICB make informed decisions about health and care services.
- **Innovate and Improve:** Together, support the development of new and better ways to deliver health care, making it more efficient and effective.

This partnership is a significant step towards healthier, fairer, and more inclusive communities.



Working together for change

Our goal is to make sure people's experiences with health and care services are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level and help influence decisions made about health and care services.

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Building a Strong Healthwatch Network

We formed a network of 14 local Healthwatch groups to improve health and care services both regionally and nationally.

Funding from our Integrated Care Board helped us build strong, meaningful relationships within this network, consistently adding value to the design of health and care services.

We have representatives from our network on local and regional strategic boards. These boards have robust reporting structures that support coordinated and effective engagement with our communities.

Our collaborative approach is recognised nationally as best practice.



Claire Riley, OBE
Chief Corporate
Services Officer,
NENC ICB

Working together for change

Work carried out during 2024 – 2025:



Integrated Care Strategy

We received over 400 responses during our engagement period.

A review of the feedback showed that children and young people were under-represented.

Impact:

The ICB added a fourth goal: **"Giving children and young people the best start in life."** This goal increases the focus on people of all ages throughout the strategy.

ICB Involvement Strategy



Refreshing the ICB Involvement Strategy

Healthwatch spoke with over 100 people to help update the ICB Involvement Strategy.

Impact:

Based on their feedback, the ICB has updated its principles to include:

- Meaningful involvement
- Removing barriers
- Listening to feedback

We also helped create a shorter, easier-to-read document and a workplan based on these new principles, including ways to measure success.



Working together for change

Access to dental care



Listening to People's Dental Care Challenges

Over 3,800 people shared their views with us.

We engaged with people across the region to understand the difficulties they face in accessing dental services. We used various methods, including surveys, mystery shopping, general conversations, and one-on-one interviews at Darlington Urgent Dental Access Centre (UDAC).

The ICB has provided the following response:

Improving access to dentistry will not be a quick fix but we are working on it. Our key focus areas are:

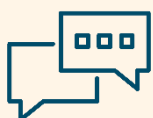
- Stabilising services – additional investment including incentivised access, additional dental out of hours treatment capacity and dental clinical assessment workforce/triage capacity.
- Funding available to deliver a new model of dental care via Urgent Dental Access Centres and provide additional general dental access.
- Working with 'at risk' practices to identify and address financial issues of delivering NHS dental care.
- Working with local dental networks and NHS England North East Workforce Training and Education Directorate to improve recruitment, retention, training and education across the region.
- Developing an oral health strategy to improve oral health and reduce the pressure on dentistry.

We are continuing to work closely with the ICB as new ways of working are developed.



Working together for change

The big conversation: Women's Health



Listening to Women's Health Needs

We spoke to nearly 4,500 people and held six focus groups with women who face extra health challenges. We wanted to understand what matters most to them and their priorities.

What We Learned:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Healthy ageing and long-term conditions (like bone, joint, and muscle health)
- Menopause, perimenopause, and hormone replacement therapy
- Screening services (like cervical, breast, bowel, and cancer screenings)
- Menstrual and gynaecological health

Impact:

We're now working with our partners to create a "Woman's Promise." This will help women, health professionals, and others understand and support women's health needs and rights.

Change NHS:



We supported engagement for the NHS 10 Year Strategy, delivering over 17 workshops throughout North East & North Cumbria including people from an ethnic minority, people with a learning disability and/or autism and young people.



Our commitment to working in partnership with Healthwatch and being open and transparent in our interactions will continue. We value greatly the contribution of the partnership across the region. We should all be rightly proud of what we have achieved to date, and I look forward to seeing this work progress as we enter the next phase of the ICB.



Sam Allen, Chief Executive at North East and North Cumbria ICB

Working together for change

North East Ambulance Service clinical strategy engagement:



Gathering Feedback to Improve NEAS Services

Over 1,700 people shared their valuable feedback. 12 Healthwatch groups in the North East, along with VONNE, engaged with the public and patients as part of the NEAS clinical strategy review. This work will be ongoing throughout 2025–2026.

Key Strengths:

Compassionate and professional staff	Community involvement
Patient Transport Services	Effective emergency care

Areas for Improvement:

Response times	Mental health support
Communication transparency	Resource and staffing limitation
Coordination with other services	

Raising Voices Together:



To showcase the work carried out by the NENC Healthwatch network, all 14 local Healthwatch came together. We shared experiences and learning, highlighting how local engagement has made an impact both regionally and nationally. This gathering helped strengthen relationships, with a commitment to continue collaborative efforts.

Claire Riley, OBE, Chief Corporate Services Officer, emphasized that our efforts have ensured that citizen voices are embedded within the ICB at every level of decision-making. She stressed the importance of involving and engaging with communities in any changes and developments. Claire also highlighted the need for consistent, long-term funding to build on our success and ensure people's voices are heard and acted upon.

Chris McCann, Deputy CEO of Healthwatch England, supported Claire's views on the power of the network. He expressed the ambition for Healthwatch nationally to develop strong systems of work, using NENC Healthwatch as a model for best practice.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Working together for change



"The effective way that Healthwatch Network has engaged with the North East and North Cumbria ICB is extremely impressive. By working with other Healthwatch across their ICB footprint in establishing strong relationships within their ICB, they have ensured that the voice of the public is heard at every level of decision making in their region.

"They are to be commended on their exemplary approach which means that views of users, families and carers are taken into account by health and social care partners across the North East and North Cumbria ICS."

Chris McCann, Deputy Chief Executive, Healthwatch England."



Working together for change

What's Next?

Newcastle University asked the Healthwatch NENC network to help with a funding bid to research NHS workforce shortages. These shortages affect staff wellbeing and patient care, especially in underserved areas.

The Healthwatch Network agreed to be a co-applicant for the bid to the National Institute for Health & Social Care Research (NIHR). In 2024, we were thrilled to learn that our bid was successful! We now have a £5 million NIHR Workforce Research Partnership, led by Newcastle University's Medical Education team, to tackle this urgent issue.

Our Focus:

Primary care and maternity services in remote and deprived areas, where staff face intense pressure and fewer resources.

Our Approach:

We are working directly with staff, patients, educators, and policy leaders to co-design solutions that make a real difference.

This Partnership Includes:

- Researchers from Newcastle, Northumbria, Oxford, Birmingham, and York
- NHS leaders and Integrated Care Boards
- Healthwatch and public advisors
- Design experts to turn insights into action

Our Goals:

- Better working conditions
- Reduced staff turnover
- Improved care in underserved areas
- Smarter, more inclusive workforce planning

Working together for change

Shaping Outcomes Together

These outcomes won't be decided from the top down. Instead, they'll be shaped through ongoing collaboration with those delivering and receiving care.

Partnership Details:

- The Partnership will run for five years, and we'll share our learning along the way.
- If you work in primary care, maternity, or workforce planning, or live in an underserved area, contact the Healthwatch Network to get involved.
- Look out for the launch of the Partnership's social media in the coming months.

Special Thanks:

A huge thanks to our amazing co-leads, Professor Gill Vance and Dr. Bryan Burford, whose leadership and commitment have brought this Partnership to life.

Read more about the Partnership launch here: [Multi-million-pound investment tackling healthcare workforce challenge](#)



“Underserved areas are likely to be on the sharp end of challenges to workforce sustainability, and so are priorities for research.”

Professor Gill Vance



Making a difference in our community

We take what people tell us and bring it directly to healthcare professionals and decision-makers—using real feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are just a few ways we've made a difference in Stockton-on-Tees this year:

Listening, Moving & Making a Difference at Argyll Court



At Argyll Court, residents shared that they often felt unmotivated and anxious about going out. So, we took action.

We ran a gentle, chair-based exercise session—showing how small movements can boost wellbeing. We also introduced the Movement is Medicine team, who offer local sessions to keep people active.

Now, an Activities Co-ordinator will support the group regularly—helping build confidence, connection, and better health.

Local Voices Driving Change in Drug & Alcohol Recovery



In 2024, we listened to people affected by drug and alcohol misuse—alongside families, carers, and professionals—to shape real, experience-based recommendations.

Now in 2025, we're seeing real progress:

- Freephone access introduced by CGL
- Plans for out-of-hours support underway
- Stronger collaboration between service providers
- Open Day planned with taster sessions for families and service users
- Dedicated communications lead raising awareness and sharing harm reduction resources

By listening, services are becoming more responsive, inclusive, and supportive.

Making a difference in our community

Shining a Light on Neurodiverse Voices

Change doesn't happen overnight—but we're always working to make sure people's voices are heard and acted on.

This year, we focused on the experiences of people with neurodiverse needs. Thanks to the powerful stories shared with us, our work reached Healthwatch England and was raised with the Department of Health.

We were proud to speak at the National Conference, sharing how small, thoughtful changes can make a big difference in everyday life for people who experience the world differently.

Now, we've been invited to join a national working group—helping shape long-term improvements in care for neurodiverse communities.

As we continue this vital work into 2025–26, your support and partnership will be more important than ever.

Please contact us if you'd like to be involved:

info@healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk



Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Listening to your experiences

Listening to Our Community: Shaping Better Care

At our 2024 annual event, we heard loud and clear: migrant communities face real barriers when trying to access health and care services.

We took that feedback seriously. It was a key part of our **2024–2025 workplan**, guiding our efforts to make care more inclusive, accessible, and responsive to everyone's needs.

Your voices are helping shape real change.

What did we do?

We spent time out in the community—listening, building relationships, and working with professionals to understand the barriers people face. Together, we looked at how to overcome these challenges and share what we've learned to make services better for everyone.

Key things we learned:



Building trust takes time—but it makes a real difference.

By working with Healthwatch, health and care services were able to reach communities that had been hard to engage. Together, we built understanding and opened the door to better support.

Breaking Down Language Barriers Through Community Connection

Language can be a big barrier to getting the right care—especially when translation services aren't always available. That's why we brought services directly into communities and partnered with trusted local voices.

With the support of **Susan Mansaray**, founder of **Purple Rose**, we reached people on sensitive topics like **sexual and women's health**. At first, there was some hesitation—but by building trust and listening, we helped people feel safe, heard, and supported.

Clear Communication Matters

Many people find health and care information hard to understand. Sometimes, important messages—like a change of address—don't even reach them.

To fix this, services should use **simple, clear language** and, where possible, include **pictures and symbols**. This helps make sure everyone can understand and act on the information they receive.

Listening to your experiences

Respecting Cultural Differences in Healthcare

Culture shapes how people understand health, seek care, and follow advice—from beliefs and communication styles to food and care preferences.

When care isn't culturally sensitive, it can lead to health inequalities, especially in ethnic communities. Inclusive, respectful care isn't just better—it's essential.

Look out for our next report for key learning that will improve health inequalities.

What difference did this make:

242

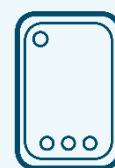
people from migrant communities have accessed health services through the Health and Care Ambassador Programme.

151

people were triaged to additional support services.

33

health and care ambassadors are committed to improving the health of our local population, strengthening partnership working and ensuring the voices of people are heard and responded to.



Our work was shared regionally across news platforms, including the BBC, continually raising awareness and sharing best practice about how to overcome barriers to engagement.

“The recent migrant event hosted in collaboration with Purple Rose and Healthwatch was an outstanding success. It provided a wonderful opportunity to engage with a diverse range of ethnic communities, many of whom can be challenging to reach through traditional methods.

“The atmosphere was incredibly positive, with attendees displaying exceptional politeness and enthusiasm throughout the day. Even when language barriers arose, everyone remained fully engaged, resulting in meaningful and enriching conversations.

“This event has truly become a highlight for us, and we deeply appreciate the warm and welcoming environment created by all involved. We eagerly look forward to future opportunities to connect and build relationships within such a vibrant and diverse community.”

Ann Hope, Northern Cancer Voices



Listening to your experiences

Listening, Learning, Healing—Together



Listening to your experiences

Working Together for Better Care: University Hospitals Tees

North Tees & Hartlepool and South Tees Hospitals are teaming up in a new Group Model to improve healthcare across Tees Valley, North Yorkshire, and County Durham.

To make sure these changes meet local needs, Healthwatch spoke with patients, carers, and communities. Your feedback is helping shape better, more responsive care.

Why Cultural Sensitivity in Healthcare Matters:

- **Beliefs About Health:** People from different cultures may view illness and healing in unique ways, including using traditional or spiritual practices.
- **Communication Styles:** Language and nonverbal cues vary. Misunderstandings can happen if providers aren't aware of these differences.
- **Food and Diet:** Cultural food preferences matter. Ignoring them can lead to discomfort or patients not following dietary advice.
- **Family Roles:** In some cultures, families make health decisions together—not just the patient.
- **Trust Issues:** Past discrimination can cause some communities to distrust the healthcare system.

What people said:



- **Quality of Care:** Generally positive but **long waits** and **poor communication** were common frustrations.
- **Hospital Facilities:** Many felt the **buildings were outdated**, with **uncomfortable waiting areas** and **cleanliness concerns**.
- **Access to Services:** Barriers included **long waits, parking issues, and limited public transport**. Digital tools were helpful for some but **not inclusive for all**.
- **Hospitals Working Together:** People want **shorter waits, better communication**, and **easier access**, especially for those in **rural areas**.

Top Five Recommendations

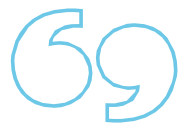
1. **Consistent, high-quality care** across all hospitals.
2. **Modernise hospital environments** for better comfort and cleanliness.
3. **Reduce waiting times**, especially in emergency and surgical services.
4. **Improve rural access** with better transport and more local services.
5. **Enhance communication** so patients feel informed and involved.

Listening to your experiences

Working Together for Better Care: University Hospitals Tees

"Thank you again to you and your colleagues for the time spent on pulling this work together. It has already played an integral role in the work of the clinical boards and wider. The recommendations are being actively discussed and considered as part of our design work."

Maxine Crutwell, Programme Manager for Group Development



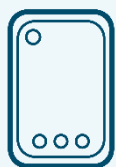
Listening to your experiences

Annual Event 2025: Listening, Collaborating, Improving

Our 2025 Annual Event brought together over 25 organisations, professionals, and community members with one shared goal: to listen, learn, and take action together.

This wasn't just a meeting—it was a powerful moment of connection. People from all walks of life came together to share experiences, raise concerns, and shape the future of health and care in Stockton-on-Tees.

What we heard:



- **Young people** told us mental health is their top concern. We're making it a key focus in our workplan.
- **Migrant communities** shared the barriers they face. We're building trust and improving access together.
- **People with lived experience** of ADHD, autism, and substance misuse helped shape better support services.
- **Public feedback** called for clearer communication, better bereavement support, and more inclusive services.

What we achieved

1. Professionals and community members sat side-by-side, **listening and learning from each other**.
2. We **strengthened partnerships** across health, care, and community sectors.
3. We gathered real-time insight that's already shaping our **2025–2026 priorities**.
4. We celebrated the success of the **Health & Care Ambassador Programme**, which continues to bring services into the heart of communities.

Together, we're turning conversations into action—and building a healthier, more connected Stockton-on-Tees.

Listening to your experiences

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Annual Event 2025



“This event reminded us that real progress comes from listening to the people we serve—and working together to make change happen.”

**Peter Smith, Chair,
Healthwatch Stockton-on-
Tees**



Hearing from all communities

At Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, we believe that everyone's voice matters—especially those who are often unheard.

Over the past year, we've connected with a wide range of communities, listening to their experiences and using their feedback to shape better health and care services.



Hearing from all communities

Reaching Further, Listening Deeper: Making a Difference Across Communities

We've engaged with:

- People with disabilities – through dedicated engagements, we've heard about access challenges, communication barriers, and the need for more inclusive services.
- Carers – engagement helped us understand the pressures carers face and how services can better support their wellbeing.
- Young people – through targeted outreach, we've made mental health a top priority in our workplan.
- Migrant communities – we've built trust and broken down barriers by working directly with groups like Purple Rose, bringing services into the heart of communities.
- Older people – we've listened to concerns about digital exclusion, loneliness, and access to face-to-face care.

What difference did this make?

Each conversation has helped us **spot gaps, highlight good practice, and push for change**. Whether it's improving access to NHS dentists, raising awareness of ADHD, expanding Health & Care Ambassador Programme or supporting carers through crisis, your voices are shaping real improvements.

By working alongside professionals, volunteers, and community leaders, we're not just gathering feedback—we're building a movement for better care, rooted in **trust, inclusion, and action**.



Information and signposting

Key Themes & Support Summary

GP Access: People struggled to get appointments or felt dismissed.

We helped by: advising on complaints, suggesting alternative practices, and supporting with advocacy.

Dental Services: Many couldn't find NHS dentists or afford private care.

We helped by: sharing up-to-date dentist info, advising on 111 for emergencies, and supporting complaints.

Hospital Services: Concerns included poor care, unsafe discharges, and lack of updates.

We helped by: guiding people to PALS, explaining patient rights, and supporting formal complaint processes.

Mental Health: Issues included lack of crisis support and feeling ignored.

We helped by: signposting to services and helping people raise concerns, leading to resolution.

Communication: People felt unheard or passed between services.

We helped by: advising on escalation routes and complaint processes, we raised voices on their behalf.

Medication: Problems with prescriptions and changes without explanation.

We helped by: clarifying rights, supporting resolution, and guiding complaints.

Social Care: Issues with home care, support access, and confusion over services.

We helped by: explaining how to access care and supporting navigation of the system.



Case Study: Navigating Mental Health & GP Complaints

Nature of the issue: An individual living with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD) contacted Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees seeking help to make a complaint. They felt their GP and local mental health services had ignored their requests, which worsened their stress and anxiety. They also shared concerns about past experiences involving family members, including a misdiagnosis that led to a relative's death and delayed treatment for another.

The individual expressed deep frustration, saying they felt like a “massive problem” to the services meant to help them.

Support provided: Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees:

- **Listened** to the full account with empathy and without judgment.
- **Provided clear information** on how to make a formal complaint about both the GP and mental health services.
- **Signposted** the individual to the Independent Complaints Advocacy (ICA) service for further support.
- **Escalated** the information directly to service providers to identify improvement areas.

Outcome: The individual confirmed they received the information they needed and felt better informed about how to move forward. Services have expressed a desire to work with Healthwatch in the coming year to develop better ways of working. This case highlights the emotional toll of feeling unheard in the healthcare system—and the importance of having someone to turn to for guidance and support.

Case Study: Supporting a Resident with Medication Issues

Nature of the issue: A local resident contacted Healthwatch with serious concerns about their GP surgery. They had been taking allopurinol for several years, but the dosage was changed without their knowledge. For seven months, they unknowingly took a higher dose, which led to side effects such as nausea, dizziness, and stomach pain.

Support provided: Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees:

- **Advised** the individual on how to raise the issue with their GP.
- **Recommended** they contact the practice manager directly for clarification.
- **Provided guidance** on how to make a formal complaint if needed.

Outcome: The individual felt better informed and empowered to take the necessary steps to address their concerns. They were able to begin the process of resolving the issue with their GP surgery. This case highlights the importance of clear communication in healthcare and how Healthwatch can support people to speak up and seek safe, effective care.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees volunteers are the heart of our decision making and community engagement. They bring local voices to the forefront and help ensure health and care services work for everyone.

What Volunteers Do

Listening to the Community

- Attend community events, drop-in sessions, and forums.
- Gather feedback from individuals and groups about their experiences with health and social care services.

Signposting and Support

- Help people understand their rights and options.
- Direct individuals to the right services, such as NHS 111, advocacy support, or local charities.

Enter & View Visits

- Visit health and care settings to observe services and speak to patients and staff.
- Report findings to help improve care quality and accessibility.

Outreach and Education

- Deliver talks and presentations to community groups.
- Raise awareness of Healthwatch and other services, sharing ways people can get involved or seek help.

Amplifying Voices

- Supporting underrepresented groups to be heard, including carers, young people, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- Help shape reports and recommendations shared with service providers and commissioners.



Showcasing volunteer impact

Stockton's ADHD Champion Wins Volunteer of the Year!

We're so proud that **Larissa Bennett**, a passionate advocate for ADHD awareness, was named **Volunteer of the Year** at the 2025 Catalyst Conference and Awards!

Larissa first reached out to **Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees** in 2023 to talk about her own experiences of living with ADHD. She wanted to help others who might be facing similar challenges—and she's done just that.

Since then, Larissa has become a key part of the Healthwatch team. She's shared her story with honesty and courage, helping to raise awareness of ADHD and the need for better support. Her insights helped shape a local engagement plan and a powerful report that gathered feedback from others in the community. That report went on to be shared nationally by **Healthwatch England**, helping to shine a light on the experiences of people with ADHD across the country.

Larissa has spoken at events, board meetings, and even helped create a video about her journey—highlighting how ADHD affects her relationships, mental health, and daily life. Her work has inspired many and helped start important conversations.

"Winning this award is truly humbling," Larissa said. "I never imagined my story would reach so many people. I hope it keeps the conversation going about real, accessible support for neurodivergent people."

Larissa Bennett



Natasha Douglas, Manager at Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, said: "Larissa is passionate and dedicated. She's helped raise awareness, improve services, and support others on their journey. We're so proud of everything she's achieved."



Rita Lawson, Chief Executive at Tees Valley Rural Action and member of the Catalyst Awards panel, added: "Larissa's work is inspiring. She's volunteering can break down barriers and make a real difference."

Larissa has now been invited to join the Healthwatch Executive Board and is planning to train as an advocate. She also hopes to start a local peer support group to help others improve their wellbeing and life opportunities.

Congratulations, Larissa! Your voice is making a real difference.

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Funding from LA	£129,000	Expenditure on pay	£136,248
Additional income	£27,252	Non-pay expenditure	£15,622
		Office and management fee	£26,996
Total income	£156,252	Total Expenditure	£178,866

Additional income is broken down into:

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across North East & North Cumbria also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
NENC Network	£1,900
NENC HW Network – ICB South Area Co-ordinator	£11,902

Finance and future priorities

Next steps: Building on what we have heard

As we look ahead, we're committed to turning what we've learned into action. The voices we've heard this year—through conversations, surveys, and community events—will guide our next steps as we continue working with partners to improve health and care for everyone in Stockton-on-Tees.

Our priorities for 2025–26

This year we are focusing on:

- Tackling health inequalities by reaching those who face the biggest barriers to care.
- Hearing from underrepresented voices, including young people, neurodivergent individuals, and minority communities.
- Improving mental health and social care by making sure patient feedback shapes real change.
- Growing our Health and Care Ambassador Programme to empower local people to lead the conversation.

Together we're making sure every voice counts.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

Until 30 September 2024, the organisation holding the Healthwatch contract was Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP).

Registered Charity No: 1067888. Company Registered in England No: 3491237.
Registered address: Pioneering Care Centre, Carer's Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 4SF.

"PCP was proud to host Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees until September 2024. As a local charity, our team successfully supported engagement, listened to views of residents and influenced commissioning for the future. We continue to support their work and look forward to helping Healthwatch in the future as they develop under the guidance of People First."

From 1 October 2024, the organisation holding the Healthwatch contract is People First. Registered Charity No: 1184112. Company Registered in England No: 05438407. Registered address:

People First Conference Centre, Milbourne Street, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA2 5XB.



"We are People First, we believe that life is better for everyone when everyone is included.

"Our mission is to stand shoulder to shoulder with anyone who faces barriers, anyone who needs representation and support to get answers, make decisions or overcome challenging times.

"We are proudly founded by people with learning disabilities and our rights-based, self-advocacy roots continue to inspire us to support anybody who needs us.

"When anyone faces injustice or inequality People First refuses to look the other way. We stand up for the things which matter most, we ensure everyone has a voice.

"As an independent advocacy charity, we stand shoulder to shoulder with people across the north of England to champion fairness and equality."



**Lindsay Graham,
Lancashire & South Cumbria Director,
People First**



Statutory statements

Combining the Strength of People First with the Powers of Healthwatch

We are People First

Everyone has the right to be respected and to have a say on the issues that shape their lives.

As an independent advocacy charity, we stand shoulder to shoulder with people across the North of England to champion fairness and equality.

A mother fighting to keep her son. A young person with learning difficulties training for work. A family who are experiencing issues accessing healthcare.

We challenge the term 'vulnerable' by supporting people to understand their rights and to be heard when they need it most.

Independent Advocacy

Our Advocacy services help people live their lives the way they want to. We listen to those who need to be heard, we empower people to have their say, and we engage with services to increase awareness and improve support.



Statutory statements

The way we work

Your Voice, Our Direction

Our Healthwatch Board includes seven Executive Members and six Community Representatives—all volunteers—who guide our work and ensure we focus on what matters most to local people.

In 2024/25, the Board met five times and made key decisions such as:

- Developing our Health and Care Ambassador Programme
- Continuing our work with young people to amplify their voices in health and care

We're proud to:

- Deliver a work plan shaped by your voices
- Represent Stockton-on-Tees across the NENC Network
- Involve the public in setting our priorities

Listening to You, Sharing What We Learn

We use many ways to hear from you—by phone, email, our website, social media, and by attending local groups and forums.

In 2024/25, your feedback helped shape our work. We make sure our Annual Report reaches as many people as possible by:

- Publishing it on our website and in newsletters
- Presenting it to the Health & Wellbeing Board and Scrutiny Committee
- Sharing it with partners like Stockton Local Authority, Public Health, ICB, University Hospitals Tees, and the Care Quality Commission

Your voice matters—and we're making sure it's heard.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

All our reports throughout the year have received responses from the relevant partners and recommendations made will form part of the future planning and commissioning of services. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to:

- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board
- Adult Social Care & Health Select Committee
- Health & Wellbeing Forum
- Coalition of The Willing Working Group
- Integrated Mental Health Steering Group
- Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy Working Group
- Healthwatch England Leads Meeting
- North Tees & Hartlepool Foundation Trust Council of Governors

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in our North East & North Cumbria ICS:

- Integrated Care Partnership Sub Committee Stockton-on-Tees
- Healthwatch NENC Network Operations Group
- NENC ICB Quality & Safety Committee
- NENC Primary Care Strategy & Delivery Sub Committee
- NENC Integrated Care Board Patient Voice Committee

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Statutory statements



Representing Your Voice at Every Level

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is proud to be represented on the Stockton Health & Wellbeing Board by our Chair, Peter Smith. In 2024/25, Peter:

- Provided leadership to our Executive Board and team
- Helped shape key recommendations and ensured our reports are credible and evidence-based
- Shared updates from our work plan at strategic meetings
- Supported strong service delivery
- Represented us at local and regional forums

We're also represented on the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Partnerships and Boards by Natasha Douglas (Manager) and Peter Smith (Chair).

Additionally, Natasha represents Healthwatch Tees in the NENC Network as the South Regional Coordinator, helping ensure local voices are heard and acted upon across the wider region.

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Regionally	
Integrated Care Strategy Engagement – October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400+ responses gathered • Led to a new ICB goal: “Giving children and young people the best start in life”
ICB Involvement Strategy Refresh – throughout 2024/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100+ people consulted • Resulted in updated principles, a simplified strategy, and a new work plan
Access to Dental Care – April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,800+ people shared experiences • Prompted ICB investment in urgent dental access and a regional oral health strategy
Women’s Health Engagement – March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly 4,500 women participated • Informed the creation of a “Woman’s Promise” to guide future care
NEAS Clinical Strategy Review – October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,700+ responses collected • Informed improvements in emergency care and patient transport
Locally	
ADHD and Neurodiversity Advocacy – November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local stories shared nationally • Led to participation in a national working group for long-term improvements • Launch of ADHD video raising awareness nationally
Health & Care Ambassador Programme – October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 242 migrants supported with access to care • 151 triaged to additional services; 33 ambassadors active
Drug and Alcohol Recovery Support – March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-designed improvements with service users • Outcomes included a freephone number, out-of-hours plans, and a community open day

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
<i>Locally</i>	
Argyll Court Wellbeing Project – February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents shared feelings of isolation and anxiety Healthwatch delivered chair-based exercise sessions and introduced the 'Movement is Medicine' team Resulted in a regular Activities Co-ordinator being assigned to support residents' wellbeing
Mental Health – March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health was the top concern raised by young people Became a key focus in the 2025–2026 work plan Healthwatch supported individuals with complex mental health needs, helping them navigate complaints and access support
North Tees & Hartlepool and South Tees NHS Foundation Trust Group Model – June 2024 – March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key recommendations provided to both Trusts to strengthen the Group Model delivery of care The development of strong working relationships between Tees Valley Healthwatch, ensuring the voice of local people are embedded within future service change








healthwatch
Stockton-on-Tees





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Contact us. Get involved. Join the movement for change.