

# Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Executive Board

## Our Role

**February 2026**



# Our Role

The Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Board provides independent leadership, strong governance, and clear accountability, ensuring the organisation acts impartially and in the best interests of local people.

Our independence is a statutory requirement, but we exercise it in a way that is balanced, fair, and constructive, always focused on improving services rather than criticising providers.



## How We Make Decisions

Every element of our workplan follows a transparent, structured decision-making process:

- It begins with grassroots community intelligence, real experiences shared by local people.
- Potential workplan items are assessed for impact, relevance, risk, impartiality, and alignment with statutory duties.
- The Board reviews proposals objectively to ensure decisions are evidence-led, proportionate, and free from organisational influence.
- Approved work is monitored closely for outcomes, learning, and system impact.

This process protects both Healthwatch's independence and the credibility of our findings, especially in times of change.

# Accountability and Oversight

The Board provides a strong but fair level of scrutiny, ensuring:

- Clear governance
- Transparent reporting
- Ethical working practices
- Accurate representation of public experience
- Responsible use of public funds

The Board's oversight strengthens the organisation and reinforces system-wide trust.

The aim is not to challenge for challenge's sake but to ensure that local voices genuinely influence service improvement.



***"The Board provides a strong but fair level of scrutiny"***

## Working with Partners

Although we are independent, we are never isolated. We work alongside partners across health, social care, and the VCSE sector to help shape positive change. Independence is not a barrier, it is an asset that allows Healthwatch to:

- Offer objective insight
- Highlight systemic issues early
- Build bridges between communities and providers
- Support constructive conversations
- Help partners make informed, evidence-led decisions

## Independence is an Asset

Our independence is a statutory requirement, but it is not a barrier to collaboration. In fact, independence is our greatest strength, it allows us to act as a critical friend to services, offering objective insight and constructive challenge while maintaining trust. This impartial position helps us build bridges between communities and providers, ensuring that lived experience informs decisions without compromising integrity or partnership working.

# Maintaining Confidence in Times of Change

During periods of transformation or uncertainty, the Board plays a stabilising role by:

- Strengthening transparency
- Safeguarding impartiality
- Maintaining ethical boundaries
- Ensuring decisions remain rooted in community need
- Providing calm, objective scrutiny

In a shifting landscape, this helps Healthwatch remain a reliable, steady, trusted voice that partners can depend on.



# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## PETER SMITH, CHAIR

### Background & Expertise

Peter brings over 40 years of leadership in adult social care, shaping services for older people, those with learning disabilities, and mental health support.

As a former Strategic Commissioner for Independent Living and Personalisation Manager at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, his career earned him the Gold Lifetime Achievement Award at the Community Care Awards.



### Independent Oversight & Leadership

As Chair, Peter is the guardian of impartiality, ensuring Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees operates with integrity, transparency, and full compliance with statutory obligations. He leads with authority, challenging decisions, scrutinising performance, and demanding evidence-based action so that community voices drive real change.

### Community Engagement

Beyond Healthwatch, Peter champions Public Patient Involvement being involved in a number of health and social care research projects across different universities; is a public committee member of the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) and serves as an 'Expert by Experience' at Teesside University.



**“I am a board member of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees because I want to help improve the experiences of people who use health and care services locally. Being part of the board allows me to support independent scrutiny, promote co-production, and contribute to improving outcomes for our community.**

**“As board members we play a vital role in listening to residents, challenging systems where needed, and helping ensure services are fair, accessible, and accountable.”**

# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## **JON CARLING, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER**

### **Background & Expertise**

Jon is the former CEO of Catalyst Stockton-on-Tees and has extensive leadership experience across the voluntary and public sectors. He played a key role in implementing the VCSE strategy to amplify community voices in health and care policy.



### **Independent Oversight & Leadership**

Jon ensures decisions are informed by robust community intelligence and remain free from institutional bias.

### **Community Engagement**

His strategic insight helps Healthwatch influence policy and tackle health inequalities effectively.

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**“As a local resident, I am keen that the services provided to the community meet their needs as closely as possible.**

**“Healthwatch is key to this and the Board has a role in scrutinising the work, and being a critical friend.”**

# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## LIAM KNOWLES, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

### Background & Expertise

Liam works as a Project Worker at Bridges Family & Carer Service and brings vital lived experience to the Board. His insight ensures Healthwatch decisions reflect the realities faced by carers and families.



Having personally navigated the challenges and stigma surrounding substance use, Liam is passionate about advocating for real change and reaching individuals in communities who are often hardest to engage.

His understanding and empathy, combined with specialist training, enable him to raise awareness among professionals about how substance use can affect anyone at any time. Through this work, Liam helps break down barriers, challenge misconceptions, and promote a more inclusive, informed approach to support.

### Independent Oversight & Leadership

Liam strengthens impartiality by challenging assumptions and advocating for seldom-heard voices in governance.

### Community Engagement

He has contributed to projects on health advocacy, wellbeing hubs, blood-borne virus testing, and addiction training, helping shape services that meet real community needs.



**"After seeing the great work completed by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and the way the team engaged with our clients, I was thrilled to be asked to become involved by becoming a board member."**

**"Since coming on board, I have seen the team do an excellent job in gaining views from those in society who are often excluded from the conversation about their own health."**

# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## LUCY OWENS, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

### Background & Expertise

Lucy is the current CEO of Catalyst Stockton-on-Tees and brings a wealth of experience in volunteer management and community engagement.



### Independent Oversight & Leadership

Lucy champions transparency and grassroots involvement, ensuring Healthwatch governance reflects local needs.

### Community Engagement

Her leadership strengthens collaboration between Healthwatch and the voluntary sector, promoting inclusive decision-making.



**“The work Healthwatch does to make sure local services truly meet the needs of people in our Borough is incredibly important.**

**“Being part of the Board and helping to shape this work is a real privilege and something I deeply enjoy.**

**“I’m grateful for the chance to contribute in this way—both as a resident of Stockton-on-Tees and as CEO of Catalyst—towards making a positive difference in our community.”**

# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## LYNDA WHITE, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

### Background & Expertise

Lynda is a retired NHS Biomedical Scientist who now dedicates her time to volunteering and patient advocacy.

She serves on patient participation groups and as an elected NHS Trust Governor.



### Independent Oversight & Leadership

Lynda uses her clinical expertise to question structures and ensure services are equitable and accessible.

### Community Engagement

She is passionate about improving health and social care pathways and reducing inequalities.



**"I have an interest in health and social care in our area and the inequalities experienced within certain communities. This includes social, economic and diverseness, both in Stockton and Teesside as a whole."**

**"I feel that patients and carers should have access to health and social care in a straightforward way giving them a co-ordinated health and social care pathway."**

# Review Your Healthwatch Board: Board Member Profiles

## LARISSA BENNETT, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

### Background & Expertise

Larissa joined the Board in 2025 after volunteering since 2023. She brings lived experience of ADHD and has led engagement projects that influenced national campaigns.



### Independent Oversight & Leadership

Larissa ensures neurodivergent voices are heard and challenges traditional service design to promote inclusivity.

### Community Engagement

Her advocacy earned her Volunteer of the Year 2025 for outstanding contributions to ADHD awareness and community engagement.



**“When I started sharing my ADHD journey, I never imagined it would reach so many people.**

**“Working with Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees has given me a platform to amplify this issue not just locally, but nationally, pushing for more accessible support and challenging outdated narratives around neurodiversity.”**



# healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees

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