

Word on the Street

What We Heard This Quarter

Quarter 3 2025/26



A Snapshot of Local Insight Gathered by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees

GP Services

- People continue to struggle getting through on the phone, especially first thing in the morning.
- Many report difficulty accessing urgent appointments and say processes feel unclear.
- Some patients experienced rude or unhelpful communication from staff.
- Confusion persists around referrals to specialists, who makes them, how they work, and what happens next.

Hospital Services

- Long waits for tests, results and follow-up appointments remain a major frustration.
- Individuals with autism and deaf residents highlight poor communication and a lack of reasonable adjustments.
- Several people described being passed between GP and hospital with no clear ownership of their care.
- Examples of cancelled appointments, missing interpreters and dismissive staff were frequently mentioned.
- Transport challenges continue, especially when patients are told to return on another day without support.

Mental Health

- People report difficulty accessing timely support, with long waits and unclear pathways.
- Some residents describe being refused treatment despite being in crisis.
- Carers feel overlooked and unsupported.
- Individuals placed in accommodation without adequate communication or follow-up feel unsafe and isolated.

Pharmacy & Prescriptions

- Local pharmacy closures are affecting medication access.
- Conflicting messages between GP practices and pharmacies are causing delays, especially for UTIs.
- Some residents report being given large volumes of medication and told to throw away unused items.
- Lack of pharmacy provision in Stockton town centre is a growing concern.

Accessibility & Communication

- People continue to struggle with digital barriers, especially the NHS App.
- Mobility challenges were highlighted, particularly at GP practices with stairs, ramps without handrails, or poor wheelchair access.
- Residents say they raise concerns but do not feel listened to.

Dentistry

- Persistent difficulty accessing NHS dental care, with very few appointments available locally.

“Lack of pharmacy provision in Stockton town centre is a growing concern.”

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“People continue to struggle with digital barriers, especially the NHS App.”

What Residents Experienced (Patient Stories)

These anonymised stories reflect what local people have told us:

- Urgent prescriptions delayed due to GP systems that “reset” requests when updated.
- Mental health crisis support denied, leaving individuals and families feeling abandoned.
- Patients discharged without explanation, leading to distress and unsafe situations.
- Breast cancer care communication failures, including lost results, delays and inconsistent information.
- People feeling dismissed or spoken to rudely, particularly when questioning delays or asking for help.



Regional Projects We Contributed to This Quarter

End of Life, Palliative Care and Death Engagement

- Early engagement underway across 14 Healthwatch areas.
- Insight will inform a new regional End of Life Strategy.
- Focus on underserved communities and sensitive, meaningful public engagement.

PCARP (Primary Care Access Recovery Programme)

- Network-wide awareness and survey activity.
- Final report due January 2026.

Winter Pharmacy Services Testing

- Understanding awareness of new pharmacy services.
- Exploring public confidence and clarity of winter messaging.

WorkWell Focus Groups

- Completed across several Healthwatch areas.
- Lived experience used to shape improvements for people with long-term conditions in work.



Dentistry & Oral Health Strategy

- Strategy published October 2025.
- Healthwatch insights recognised in final documents.
- Communications rollout now underway.

Women's Health

- 4,500+ women engaged regionally.
- Findings fed into national strategy refresh.
- Local messaging and awareness work continues.

Published Local Reports Shaping Q3 Insight

Personalised Cancer Care in Tees Valley (Published November 2025)

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees' Cancer Care Report – based on the lived experiences of 71 local people – continues to influence regional conversations this quarter.

Key themes from the report include:

- Unequal access to emotional wellbeing and mental health support.
- Variation in staffing levels across hospital sites, affecting continuity of care.
- Gaps in personalised care and fast-track counselling services.
- Differences in access to financial support, transport, and community-based services.

These findings have already been recognised by the ICB and local Trusts and are helping to shape both pathways and strategic planning across Tees Valley.

Mental Health Case Study: Jane's Story (Published November 2025)

A powerful case study highlighting the experience of a young adult who waited almost two years for mental health support. The report identified significant issues including long waits for talking therapies, unclear discharge processes, digital barriers, and inconsistent communication.

As a result, Healthwatch met with Impact on Teesside, leading to commitments to:

- Improve communication and discharge protocols.
- Upgrade voicemail and phone systems.
- Develop a user-friendly trauma toolkit (pending funding).
- Enhance training for professionals.
- Provide clearer referral routes and realistic wait-time information.

The case study was published during a period of transition, with Kooth ending on 31 December 2025 and the new NENC "Getting Advice & Getting Help" CYP Mental Health & Wellbeing Service launching from January 2026.

Read the case study here: [Mental Health Case Study: Jane's Story](#)

**"Jane's story is sadly
not unique."**



Natasha Douglas, Healthwatch
Stockton-on-Tees Manager

About this publication:

Word on the Street is a quarterly snapshot of themes and patterns emerging from conversations with local people. It brings together lived experience shared with Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees to help partners understand what people are encountering across the local health and care system.

This publication is intended as an insight and intelligence-sharing tool, not a report making recommendations or seeking formal responses from individual services. Feedback is anonymised and presented at a thematic level to highlight system-wide issues and support collective discussion and improvement.

Disclaimer:

All findings in our reports are based on the lived experiences shared with Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees. Our aim is to highlight challenges within local health and care services and support meaningful improvements.

Before publication, all feedback was shared with the relevant services to provide an opportunity for response. Any updates included reflect the collaborative work undertaken to improve outcomes for local people.



healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees

6 - 8 Yarm Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 3NA



t: 0300 180 0660

e: info@healthwatchstocktontees.co.uk

healthwatchstocktontees.co.uk