

# On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Annual Report 2020-21



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# Message from our Chair

**A very warm welcome to the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Annual Report 2020/21. Having recently taken over as Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our former Chair Anne Sykes for all her hard work and support to both the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Board and Healthwatch Officers.**

I have great pleasure in introducing this year's Annual Report which highlights some of the work undertaken by the staff and volunteers of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees. Our team has worked hard during this difficult time to look at new ways to engage with the public and our partners, while the ongoing pandemic has been at the forefront of everyone's mind.

The impact on the families and friends of the 430 local people who have died from Covid-19 over the last 12 months has been immense. Fortunately, we are now seeing some of the restrictions placed on our lives lifted and beginning to understand the impact this pandemic has had on our mental and physical health, and the services in our local communities.

**We have endeavoured to continue our work throughout this difficult year, asking questions and following up concerns to better understand the impact of Covid-19.**

We have published reports, recommendations and case studies on subjects such as Carer and Young People's issues; Sexual Health Services and people's experiences on the Covid-19 Vaccine, along with Hospital Discharge. Unfortunately, some of our statutory duties have been curtailed due to restrictions, such as our ongoing programme of Enter and View visits.



In November 2020 I am pleased to say we were congratulated as runners up in the National Healthwatch England Network Achievement Awards.

We now look forward to 2021/22, a year of dedication and hard work, continuing to ensure we represent the views of residents here in Stockton-on-Tees, working in collaboration with our partners to improve Health and Social Care Services now and in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Smith'.

Peter Smith, Board Chair

# About us

## Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Stockton-on-Tees. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, by sharing these views with those who have the power to make change happen.

## Helping you to find the information you need

We help people find the information they need about services in their area. This has been vital during the pandemic with the ever-changing environment and restrictions limiting people's access to health and social care services.

### Our goals



#### 1 Supporting you to have your say

We want more people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care, make informed decisions and shape the services that support them.



#### 2 Providing a high quality service

We want everyone who shares an experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.



#### 3 Ensuring your views help improve health & care

We want more services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



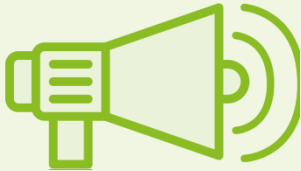
**“We were delighted to welcome members of the public and our volunteers to our first virtual coffee morning, which was a great success.”**

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

# Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

## Reaching out



We heard from

**1,357 people**

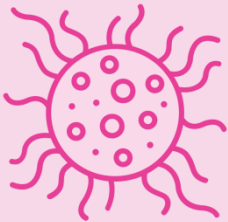
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

**10,796 people**

this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

**1,357 people**

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**5 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 15 recommendations for improvement.

**100% of the recommendations**

we made last year have been acted upon, at the point where we reviewed progress updates.

## Health and care that works for you



**15 volunteers**

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 19 days.

**We employ 5 staff**

20% of whom are full time equivalent, which is the same as the previous year.

We received

**£130,000 in funding**

from our local authority in 2020-21, the same as the previous year.



# Theme one: Then and now Hospital Discharge



## Then: views on hospital discharge process

**Thanks to people sharing their views and experiences of hospital discharge during the pandemic, we were able to help the NHS Trust adapt hospital discharge process to better meet the health and support needs of patients and their families.**

Our report found that 60% of patients did not receive information about the new discharge procedure and 80% of patients did not receive a follow-up assessment visit after they had returned home. Nearly half of patients told us that they were not provided with information about who they should contact if they needed health information or support.

The findings of our report have highlighted that ensuring a single point of contact following discharge from hospital (in line with National Guidance for Hospital Discharge at this time) is imperative in meeting the health and support needs of patients and relatives. This has led to the Trust staff emphasizing the importance and function of the integrated single point of access (ISPA) with patients, families and carers during and post discharge of patients. The Trust have also introduced QR (Quick Response) codes that direct people to relevant materials about hospital discharge, including contact details for the ISPA.

The Trust are now taking measures through partnership working with relevant services to improve communication around provision of contacts for families and carers if specialist support is required. The report has also enabled the Trust to look at ways to develop processes that support patient information, belongings and medication during patient discharge from hospital.



## Now: Ongoing hospital discharge issues

**Thanks to people sharing their views and experiences of hospital discharge during the pandemic we will be attending the Integrated Discharge Team, ISPA and Fragility Coordinator working group to look at ways of improving communication for patients.**

Between March 2020 – December 2020 patients, carers and family members shared their experiences of hospital discharge and told us that good communication with staff is even more important during the pandemic due to restrictions and reduced patient choice.

The main issues include:

- The impact of communication restrictions for people with a disability.
- Family members experiencing communication difficulties with hospital staff.
- Patients not being asked if they needed transport after discharge.

Family members told us that it's important that they are able to contact the hospital wards to receive updates on their relative's health and to be involved in their loved one's discharge. Family members have also told us that it is important to them that communication is responsive, clear and consistent with regards to their loved ones' wellbeing.



**"As part of a pilot there are clinical teams within the Trust that now have Team Support Workers. Some of the Team Support Workers support patients with daily contacts to their family and friends. They're also in contact with care homes and they're supporting with the 'All About Me' documents."**

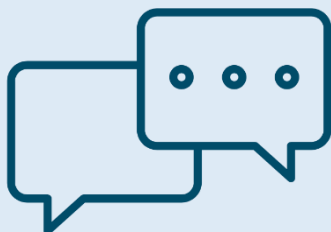
**North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust**



While some visiting restrictions continue, we have called for special arrangements to be put in place to ensure families and carers can participate in decisions made during and after the discharge process, particularly for patients with disabilities or additional needs.

With the continuing changes, as a result of the pandemic, that require frontline staff to adapt quickly to different ways of working, we have called for hospital discharge policies to be clear and promoted to front line staff. This includes clarifying guidance to avoid different interpretations of discharge pathways. We have called on the hospital discharge team to ensure that patients are always asked about transport home, as part of a wider conversation about their non-clinical needs. This should involve conversations with their family members to ensure that patients have the immediate support they need to get home safely.

### Share your views with us



If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is here for you.



[www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk)



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## Theme two: Then and now Mental health and wellbeing



### Then: mental health during the pandemic

**Thanks to people sharing their views and experiences of the pandemic we were able to help commissioners look at ways to improve and enhance services which take into account the importance of information and communication in supporting peoples' mental health and wellbeing.**

Our report found that almost three quarters of people told us that their mental health and wellbeing has been affected by the pandemic with an increase in levels of anxiety and low mood and worsening of pre-existing mental health conditions.

Lack of communication with services was one of the main factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing. It needed to be clear to people why appointments, treatments and service provisions were being cancelled by health and social care services. Highlighting the importance of communication has contributed to the NHS Trust developing a recovery plan for restarting routine appointments and ensuring that patients are contacted. The report also helped inform the Clinical Commissioning Group's plans on recovery following the pandemic, especially in terms of how health services are accessed by patients.

We also identified that those with caring responsibilities for family members were a particular group of people that were experiencing difficulties with their own mental health and wellbeing.





## Now: mental health and wellbeing of unpaid carers

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, we are working alongside local carers support services to reach out to unpaid carers during social distancing and local and national lockdown restrictions. This is to ensure that unpaid carers voices are brought to the forefront and heard by relevant service providers.

Between December 2020 and March 2021, 33 unpaid carers have shared their experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic. More than three quarters of carers told us that the pandemic has affected their own mental health and wellbeing.

The main issues included:

- Changes to the support and contact from health and social care services.
- Exhaustion due to the demands of the caring role.
- Stress and anxiety due to concerns of the welfare of the person they care for.

Carers have told us that they need to feel valued, and it is important that they have someone to talk to and to know that there are a range of support services available to them and the person that they are caring for.



**“Thank you for working with us... it’s nice to hear that people care and want to work with us. It’s been such a difficult time and the morale of the carers that we reach out to has reached it’s lowest.”**

**Teesside Dementia Link Service**



The pandemic has had a profound impact on carers mental health and wellbeing and the demands of the unpaid caring role has increased. We have called on local service providers to prioritise carers health and wellbeing and to deliver targeted mental health for carers and those that they care for. We have also called for a high priority to be placed on guidance, information, advice and the delivery of healthcare appointments for carers that are adapted to their needs. We have called for health and social care services to provide appropriate, regular contact and communication with carers to support them in their caring role, and to ensure that the return of essential services are prioritised.

Confusing and conflicting visiting restrictions and a lack of facilitation of contact with loved ones at some care homes has been a significant source of distress for carers. We have called on the local authority to provide more guidance to care homes in relation to visiting policies, and to ensure priority in facilitating contact and communication with loved ones.



To find out more, read our report on [“Living with Covid-19”](#)

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## Responding to COVID-19

Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through the pandemic. The insight we collect is shared with both Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as best as possible during the pandemic.



“Thank you very much for sharing the latest Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees report with us, the content of which will inform the ongoing work of the Tees Valley Vaccination Board, helping to drive discussion around what has gone well and what could have been improved upon regarding the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Stockton-on-Tees.”



Janet Walker, Medical Director & Dave Gallagher, Chief Officer  
NHS Tees Valley CCG



**This year we helped 10,796 people by:**

- **Supporting local people to have their say about how the pandemic has affected their mental health and wellbeing**
- **Linking people to reliable and updated local information**
- **Signposting and helping people access relevant services to meet their needs**
- **Working in partnership with health, social care and community support services to help people communicate and make contact with each other**
- **Supporting patients to have their say about hospital discharge during the pandemic**
- **Reaching out to those with caring responsibilities to support them to share their experiences of the pandemic and to signpost to relevant appropriate support services where needed.**

## Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



12% on GP services



12% on Dentistry



16% on Care Homes



10% on Vaccines



Throughout the pandemic we have heard from 94 people requiring or sharing information about the Covid-19 vaccinations, the NHS Test and Trace Service, difficulties around the use PPE equipment, and the welfare of business owners during and after lockdown. This required our role to be more focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information articles on our website and social media to help address people's concerns.

The key questions people were asking included:

- How am I able to get the Covid-19 vaccine?
- What information should we receive from the Test and Trace Service after being given a positive diagnosis of Coronavirus?
- How long do I need to shield for after I've returned into the country?



### Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is here for you.



[www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk)

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# Volunteers

**At Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees we are supported by 15 volunteers who help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.**

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Helped people have their say from home by promoting surveys and supporting people to write case study narratives of their views and experiences of health, wellbeing and local services.
- Supported with public engagement, making contact with harder to reach communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Reached out to people through their contacts with local services and as part of the Healthwatch Champion network to highlight any areas of concerns that people were sharing and to share best practice of service delivery.
- Attended online public meetings as part of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees to share relevant local information and to feedback local intelligence.



### Volunteer – Margaret Docherty

"Being part of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is very rewarding. Before the pandemic I volunteered as part of the enter and views, visiting care homes and talking to residents. Due to Covid-19 this has changed, and I have now been involved in the online coffee mornings. I am proud to be a volunteer, doing something to help others and listening to stories from people we meet. Where we can help, we will, which can make a difference to someone, even if it is small. We are here to help the public, supporting people to have their say."



### Healthwatch Champion - Peter Mayes

"I work as Starfish Youth Employment Coordinator and I'm a Healthwatch Champion. During lockdown it was all about trying to keep people involved where we could, using all sorts of ways to keep people connected. Lockdown made things much harder for people of all ages, but once community groups started to re-join the activities we have to offer, we did an awareness session to explain what Healthwatch is about, which provided the group with another way to speak up on their own experiences of mental health."



### Board member and volunteer - Colin Wilkinson

"Healthwatch is different from all the other things I do because our role is to collect, interpret and present people's views, not to take a view. It's been very interesting to discuss Healthwatch's work with the outstanding staff team's expertise and knowledge, and the complementary and individually unique expertise of my fellow Executive Board members. What I have learned from Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, while contributing a little, is the value of diversity in every possible way in shaping and informing decisions. Diversity is the key."



### Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch at Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees.



[Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees](https://www.healthwatchstockton-on-tees.org.uk)



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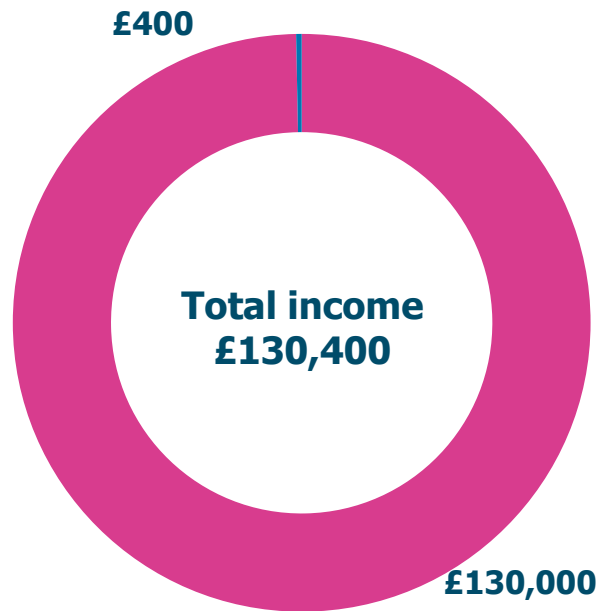
[healthwatchstockton@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchstockton@pcp.uk.net)

# Finances

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

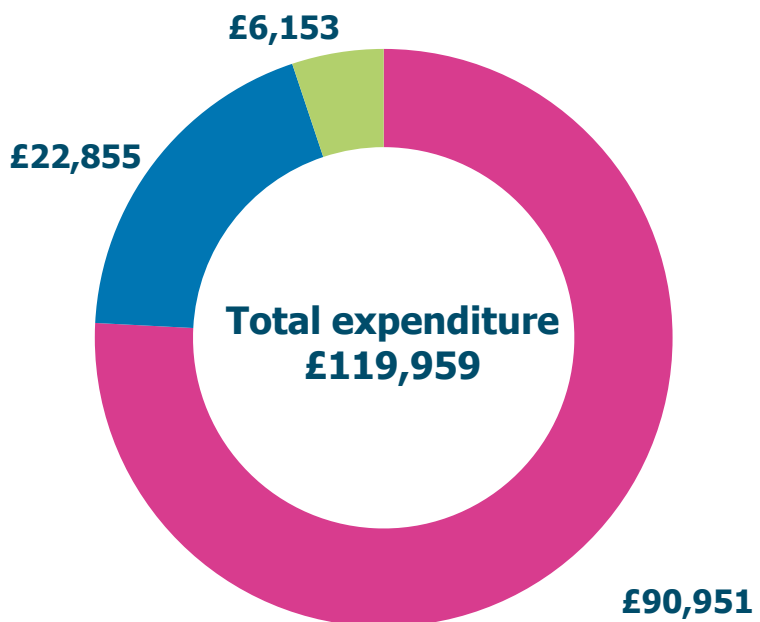
## Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



## Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Support and administration



# Next steps & thank you

This year has been challenging for many of us as we adapt to new ways of working, while maintaining our strong work ethic to empower the voice of the public in the delivery of health and social care services.

## Next steps

Along with the challenges of this year, there has also been the opportunity to learn new skills. We have focused on the development of our team, Executive Board and our Volunteers. We have identified strategies to ensure that the residents of Stockton-on-Tees remain central to the future plans of service delivery.

Our focus for the coming year 2021-2022 will continue to be on partnership working, ensuring as we exit restrictions that services work together and the needs of individuals remain at the forefront of the planning and design of health and social care service delivery. We will continue to build upon the robust relationships that have been developed with our partners, both in the community and with statutory bodies.



**"We look forward to the opportunity of working with Healthwatch as we embark on this transformational process, to ensure that people receive the right care and support at the right time, with people and their needs being central to the development of the programme."**



**Dr Ranjeet Shah - Associate Clinical Director Adult Mental Health Services Teesside**

**Shaun Mayo – Head of Service for Older Peoples Mental Health Teesside**



# Next steps & thank you

## Next steps (cont...)



**'We look forward with determination and ambition to 2021-2022, achieving positive outcomes and change for the residents of Stockton-on-Tees both at a local and national level. Together we can make a difference.'**



**Natasha Judge, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Project Leader**

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for an in-depth review of how mental health services are delivered, how we can improve accessibility to digital services for those that are currently digitally excluded, the future design and delivery of day care services and the redesign of care within the NHS known also as the Integrated Care System (ICS).

It is our mission to ensure that the public are consulted throughout this transition period and remain informed of the changes that will affect them, while providing a platform to share their views on outcomes they would like to see achieved in the redesign of health and social care services.

I would like to take this opportunity to express thanks from both myself, the team, our hosts PCP and the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Board for the hard work and dedication of Geoff Newton, who provided a wealth of support to us during this difficult year. Geoff has now gone off to enjoy his retirement and we wish him well in all his endeavours.

Natasha Judge, Project Lead



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, Catalyst House, 27 Yarm Road, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3NJ

## The way we work

### **Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making.**

Our Healthwatch board consists of six members with a diverse range of experience and skills, they work on a voluntary basis to provide independence, direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 we have continued to meet via digital platforms and made decisions on matters such as:

- The inclusion of a non voting seat on the board to enable a broad range of public representation of service user groups with the local area. The board also made the decision to proceed with the engagement with unpaid carers to find out their views and experiences of their own mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.

- We use the information and signposting enquiries which enable us to gain insight and build up a picture of potential areas of public need that may require some attention. We also attend various local forums such as the Catalyst Health and Wellbeing Forum and the Patient Carer Experience Committee meeting, the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee meeting, the Children & Young People’s Partnership, the Children & Young People’s Select Committee and the NHS Primary Care Commissioning Meeting.
- We use intelligence gathered at partner meetings to help inform our work plan, ensuring the information we gather can influence service delivery and improvements for those accessing them.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

**Methods and systems used across the year’s work to obtain people’s views and experience.**

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, hosted our own virtual coffee mornings and engaged with the public through social media.

We have worked closely with partners to share and gather feedback on both local and national priorities, and currently are redesigning our website to ensure that it as accessible as possible for everyone, and highlights our collaborative working.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by developing a network of Healthwatch Champions that work to support hard-to-reach groups.

The network includes four Social Prescribing Link Workers who are currently in contact with patients referred by GP surgeries in the area who may require some extra mental health support at this time. The Healthwatch Champion can support those that they are in contact with to have their say by working in partnership with Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it:

- On our website: [www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk)
- On social media: Twitter: [@HwStockton](https://twitter.com/HwStockton) Facebook: [@HWStockton.on.Tees](https://www.facebook.com/HWStockton.on.Tees)
- In e-newsletters

**2020-21 priorities**

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Living with Covid-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing	We have supported people to have their say about how the pandemic has affected their lives, mental health and wellbeing. We have disseminated this information and this has resulted in the NHS Trust developing a recovery plan for restarting routine appointments. Our intelligence has also resulted in the Clinical Commissioning Group developing plans for accessing health services in recovery following the pandemic.

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Living with Covid-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing (cont)	This highlighted the need for further engagement with unpaid carers we continue to work with local carers support service to ensure that unpaid carers have their say about their own mental health and wellbeing during Covid-19.
Covid-19 Vaccinations	Our report based on findings from our Covid-19 vaccination survey will inform the ongoing work of the Tees Valley Vaccination Board. It has also helped to drive the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group discussion around lessons learned about what has gone well and how the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Stockton-on-Tees could be improved. The CCG have stated that since the findings in this report were captured, many more venues have successfully offered Covid-19 vaccinations, including Bowesfield Lane Mosque in Stockton, the Al Mustafa Community Centre in Middlesbrough, large vaccination hubs at the Darlington Arena and Middlesbrough Riverside Stadium and various community pharmacy sites, all of which have increased access to vaccines to help alleviate public concerns of accessibility.
Sexual Health	We have supported the Stockton-on-Tees Public Health Team to find out peoples' views of local sexual health services. Throughout the pandemic the Teesside Sexual Health Services have provided a telephone triage consultations for patients and we promote the Teesside Triage system throughout our networks and sign post where appropriate.
Hospital Discharge	The intelligence we have shared based on what people have told us and this has resulted in the NHS Trust promoting the Integrated Single Point of Access (ISPA) to further support patients and relatives during and post discharge. From the findings of our patient engagement, we have seen the NHS Trust introduced QR codes that direct people to relevant materials about hospital discharge and ISPA. The Trust have also developed processes that support patient information, belongings and medication during patients discharge from hospitals.

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Healthwatch Champions	As a result of the pandemic, we have established effective partnership working through our development of the Healthwatch Champion Network. We currently have 19 Healthwatch Champions that work with a wide range of service providers within Stockton-on-Tees. The Healthwatch Champions are in regular contact with the public especially those of harder to reach groups.

### Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers responded to requests for information or recommendations.

This demonstrates the strength of our partnership working and despite the challenges of the pandemic we have continued to receive feedback that has reflected our ability to ensure meaningful participation of the public that we support in having their say about Health and Social Care Service in the local area.

**“We would like to reiterate our thanks to the Healthwatch team for the time invested in undertaking this important piece of work and we have noted the recommendations. It is extremely useful to receive feedback to enable us to improve and enhance our services and we look forward to working closely with the team in the future.”**

**Julie Lane Chief Nurse/Director of Patient Safety and Quality, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust**

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

### Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is represented on the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) by Peter Smith, Board Chair, providing us the opportunity to share our findings and gather additional intelligence that informs our ongoing work plan. This ensures collaboration with many areas of our work, ensuring the information and intelligence we gather can be used appropriately.

During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing our findings from our reports and ensuring recommendations are addressed.

Raising priorities highlighted at the HWBB ensure alignment and coordination where possible, allowing intelligence gathered to be used to influence plans for service delivery.

# healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees

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