

## **Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee**

A meeting of Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee was held on Tuesday 23 September 2025.

**Present:** Cllr Marc Besford (Chair), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley

**Officers:** Sarah Bowman-Abouna, Angela Connor, Rebecca Gray, Graham Lyons (A,H&W); Darren Boyd, Lisa Mussett, Gary Woods (CS)

**Also in attendance:** Natasha Douglas (Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees); Emma Joyeux, Rebecca Warden (NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board)

**Apologies:** Cllr Nathan Gale (Vice-Chair), Cllr Stefan Barnes

### **ASCH/30/25 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **ASCH/31/25 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **ASCH/32/25 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes from the Committee meeting held on 22 July 2025. Attention was drawn to the following:

- Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone: As requested by Members, information on the membership (and respective Chairs) for each of the new working groups associated with this initiative was circulated to the Committee in August 2025.
- SBC Adult Social Care Strategy Refresh: Confirmation of future engagement with the Committee around this strategy was still awaited from senior SBC officers. Members felt that a draft of the proposed strategy should be presented to the next Committee meeting in October 2025 prior to the previously stated publication of the new strategy in November 2025.
- Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026: Members were reminded that the slides from the Committee's visit to the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) discharge and command centre at the University Hospital of North Tees, Stockton in late-July 2025 were subsequently shared electronically for information.

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting on 22 July 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **ASCH/33/25 Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees - Annual Report 2024-2025**

The Committee considered the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Annual Report covering the 2024-2025 period. Local Healthwatch organisations were required to produce an Annual Report setting out their aims and achievements, and this latest document, an overview of which was given by the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Manager, covered the following:

- A message from our Chair
- About us
- Your Voice, Our Impact; A year in numbers
- A year of making a difference
- Working together for change
- Making a difference in our community
- Listening to your experiences
- Hearing from all communities
- Information and signposting
- Showcasing volunteer impact
- Finance and future priorities
- Statutory statements

Employing four staff (with its work supported by 13 volunteers and 33 Health and Care Ambassadors), Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees had helped more than 18,500 people to have their say and get advice and information about their care during 2024-2025. Seven reports highlighting the changes people wanted to see were published covering areas like pharmacy services, women's health, and drug and alcohol support.

A snapshot of the work undertaken throughout the year was highlighted, including visits to local pharmacies, mystery shopping to identify problems local people were facing when trying to access dental care services, and public engagement over the closer partnership-working between North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (STHFT). Attention was also focused upon migrant health (strengthening connections with local communities to understand their challenges in accessing health and care services), establishing what mattered most to young people (mental health emerging as the top concern), and the launch of the Health and Care Ambassador Programme (to make it easier for people to access services and information). Building influence at a 'system' level was another key element, with efforts made to further relationships with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) and contribute to overarching strategies.

Looking ahead, four priorities had been agreed for 2025-2026 – tackling health inequalities, hearing from under-represented voices, ensuring patient feedback shapes real change to mental health and social care services, and growing the Health and Care Ambassador Programme.

The Committee commended Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees for one of the best reports it had produced which evidenced increased engagement / communication with more diverse groups. Noting the references to GPs, Members drew attention to people receiving appointment letters for dates which had already passed, as well as continuing issues around missed appointments (including the impact parking limitations / charges can have on these statistics). It was confirmed that Healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees would be looking into how accessible NTHFT / STHFT services were in terms of transport.

Regarding the financial information contained within the report, the Committee asked why Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees had received 0.8% less funding from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) for 2024-2025 compared to the previous year. Whilst the reason for this was unknown, the additional Integrated Care System (ICS) income to support new areas of collaborative work was a key contributor towards last year's overall achievements, and Members were assured that there appeared to be enough SBC / ICS funding for Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees to continue its operations until 2027. Welcoming this security, the Committee did, however, point to the nearly £20,000 overspend – something which could not be sustained. In response, it was noted that an underspend in the previous year (which included non-recruitment to a vacant role) was used to backfill this year's overspend.

Comments concluded with the Committee highlighting the essence of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees' role in local provision (*'Your voices are helping shape real change'*) and expressing interest in future exploration of issues around digital exclusion. Members were informed that work would begin with the NENC ICB in October 2025 on digital access, with alternatives for those not wanting / able to use apps being one particular focus.

AGREED that the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees – Annual Report 2024-2025 be noted.

#### **ASCH/34/25 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care**

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care. This was the first progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in July 2024, and a supplementary data pack detailing existing general practice across the Borough (opening hours, latest Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating, staffing levels, appointment data, GP patient survey results, and Friends and Family Test outcomes) was also provided for information.

Presented by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) Strategic Head of Primary Care (Tees Valley), and supported by the NENC ICB Head of Primary Care (Tees Valley) and the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Director of Public Health, the Committee was informed that all approved actions for recommendations 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were deemed 'fully achieved'. For recommendations 1, 2, 3, 6 and 11, only some agreed actions were 'fully achieved', with other elements yet to be completed (though 'on-track'). Key developments were summarised as follows:

- The NENC ICB had undertaken a significant communications drive around primary care, with vaccinations being the present focus.
- There had been good progress made around the Modern General Practice Access (MGPA) initiative.
- Roles employed or engaged via the Additional Role Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) continued to expand during 2024-2025 and into 2025-2026, with a

significant increase (58%) in whole-time equivalent (WTE) ARRS roles in Stockton-on-Tees since March 2023.

- Increases in both booked and used enhanced access appointments.
- All the Borough's Primary Care Networks (PCNs) were on board with the recently announced neighbourhood health model.
- Feedback processes had changed as a result of the new GP contract going live on 1 October 2025 (You and Your General Practice Charter) – this would provide more opportunities for patients to provide feedback to their practice, the ICB, or Healthwatch regarding their experience.
- Those actions concerning planning considerations required further work – this was being pursued with the Council's planning officers.

Thanking officers for their submission of a very comprehensive update, the Committee asked if the minutes of Local Clinical Interface Group (LCIG) were accessible – in response, it was explained that the LCIG was more of a partnership of clinicians for discussing clinical pathways rather than a formal, public-facing entity.

With reference to the '*Top Tips for Accessing your GP Practice*' resource originally developed by Healthwatch South Tees, Members noted that this was becoming dated and did not reflect the value of social prescribing. NENC ICB officers highlighted a national toolkit around this approach that connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to meet needs, and confirmed that social prescribers were embedded within local practices.

Regarding previously stated difficulties in placing resources within libraries, the Committee suggested utilising Stockton News to relay important messaging / developments around this scrutiny topic. SBC officers agreed to follow this up with internal colleagues.

AGREED that the Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed as stated.

### **ASCH/35/25 CQC / PAMMS Inspection Results - Quarterly Summary (Q1 2025-2026)**

Consideration was given to the latest quarterly summary regarding Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections for services operating within the Borough (Appendix 1). Six inspection reports were published during this period (April to June 2025 (inclusive)), with attention drawn to the following Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) contracted providers:

#### *Providers rated 'Good' overall (5)*

- Churchview Nursing and Residential Home was upgraded to 'Good' overall, reflecting an upturn in the 'Safe', 'Effective' and 'Well-Led' domains which had previously been rated as 'Requires Improvement'. Similarly, Beechwood House was deemed 'Good' overall (and across all five domains) which represented progress on its previous inspection in 2022 when issues within the 'Effective' and 'Well-Led' domains led to it being rated 'Requires Improvement'. Piper Court was also upgraded to 'Good' overall (with all five domains judged 'Good') following 'Safe' and 'Well-Led' shortfalls identified during its last assessment (published in March 2023).
- Wellburn House had maintained its overall 'Good' rating (all five domains deemed 'Good', with 'Well-Led' improving from 'Requires Improvement').

- Tees Grange received a 'Good' overall judgement (with all five domains found to be 'Good') following its first rated CQC assessment.

The remaining report was in relation to a non-contracted provider. Primary medical care service, The Densham Surgery had maintained its 'Good' overall rating, with all domains retaining this status apart from 'Well-Led' which was downgraded to 'Requires Improvement' (there were gaps in the overview of assurance and some processes were not always effective – one breach of regulation linked to governance was identified, with the CQC requesting an Action Plan in response to the concerns found at this assessment).

Although not part of this latest quarterly report, the Committee referenced recently released CQC reports on services overseen by T.L. Care Limited (Mandale Care Home and Ingleby Care Home) which had led to the regulator identifying a number of concerns. Assurance was given that relevant SBC officers met with the management of these services on a bi-monthly basis, and pointed to a very recent CQC inspection of The Beeches Care Home (also overseen by T.L. Care Limited) which had been positive (though was yet to be published), as well as discussions regarding investment in the décor of the homes under the provider's umbrella. Confidence was expressed that the right people were in place, though it was acknowledged that assurances had been received in the past which had not then been actioned. Responding to further Member queries on any common issues being identified across T.L. Care Limited settings, SBC officers noted challenges around recruitment and retention of good management (along with the support given to them from above) – however, development plans were in place with the three existing managers (who did feel supported), one of whom had enrolled onto the SBC Well-Led Programme (of the other two managers, one had already completed this, with the other already having a management qualification and a wealth of experience). SBC officers had received assurance from the providers' Area Manager that individual service managers were not being swapped around in an effort to improve a failing setting at the expense of another.

Focus turned to the section on Provider Assessment and Market Management Solutions (PAMMS) inspections (Appendix 2), of which there was one report published during this period (April to June 2025 (inclusive)):

- Park House Rest Home maintained an overall rating of 'Excellent', with all five PAMMS domains being deemed as such ('Quality of Management' upgraded from 'Good').

Referring to the last CQC report on Park House Rest Home (published in August 2018), the Committee queried if it was common for the regulator not to inspect a provider for over seven years. SBC officers stated that, in recent years, the CQC had not tended to prioritise those services with a previous 'Good' or above rating (though telephone checks did take place) – in contrast, PAMMS inspections were undertaken on an annual basis. In response, Members asked if CQC guidelines remained effective, with SBC officers noting the ongoing restructuring of the health and social care regulator and its inspection regime. From a PAMMS perspective, inspections were geared towards the Council's contract expectations.

In more general matters, the Committee questioned if there was a staff-to-resident ratio guide that services should be following. SBC officers drew attention to the

dependency tool which was used to ensure the appropriate level of resource was in place to meet the needs of those within a particular setting.

Finally, a query was raised around the scheduling of PAMMS inspections, with a much smaller number of reports published during the first half of the year (April to September) compared to the second half (October to March). SBC officers stated that the inspection cycle had evolved over time and that visits had to be scheduled outside of traditional periods of annual leave. It was also noted that initial findings were shared with providers who had two weeks to comment before a report was finalised and shared more widely.

AGREED that the CQC / PAMMS Inspection Results – Quarterly Summary (Q1 2025-2026) report be noted.

### **ASCH/36/25 Scrutiny Review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service**

The first evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service considered initial information from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate. Presented by relevant SBC Service Managers, information included:

- The Local Landscape
- Identifying Carers
- Current Staffing Structure
- Referrals (2018-2024)
- Cumulative Number of Carers Open to the Service (2018-2024)
- Budget
- Services Provided
- Statutory Assessment and Personal Budgets
- Carers Emergency Card
- Time Out Support Service
- Mobilise
- Promotion and Engaging with the Community
- Issues faced by carers
- What do carers tell us they want?
- Working Carers
- Staff Carers Network
- How do we involve carers?
- What do carers tell us?

The Committee heard that there were approximately 20,000 unpaid carers across Stockton-on-Tees out of a population of around 200,000. Whilst not everyone would identify as a carer, any person might find themselves in a position of having to support a family member, friend, neighbour, colleague or, as part of their employment, a service-user. It was therefore important for everyone to be mindful of this eventuality, have conversations around this topic, and help identify those people in need of support.

The existing local Adult Carers Support Service was brought in-house by SBC in 2018, had close links with adult social care and other support services, and provided employment and training opportunities for the Borough's carers. Referrals to the service totalled around 450 in 2018, dipped to below 300 during 2020 (COVID-

impacted), but then continually escalated to nearly 700 in 2024. The cumulative number of carers open to the service, meanwhile, had continually increased from almost 500 in 2018 to 3,500 in 2024 (those accessing it remained open to the service and could come back at any time).

In terms of finance, the service budget increased from £319,109 in 2022-2023 to £394,207 in 2023-2024 following the introduction of the 'Shared Lives' element – this rose to £396,522 for 2024-2025. An associated Carers Personal Budget fund had increased from £479,716 in 2022-2023 to £495,490 in 2024-2025.

A wide range of support was provided by the service including statutory carers assessments, person-centred support planning, one-to-one support, carers education sessions, welfare calls, a hospital-based carers advisor, and support for external organisations to increase their support for adult carers. Other communication and engagement mechanisms existed via online services, newsletter and email bulletins, social media presence, drop-in sessions, weekly / monthly peer support groups, and the Carers Connect service.

Further detail was given on several of the service's key aspects, including statutory assessment (carers had a legal right to an assessment of need, support to meet that need, and access to information and advice) and personal budgets (it was noted that the previous use of pre-payment cards had created issues – SBC was now looking at direct payments into individual accounts). The Carers Emergency Card (helping to prepare / plan for emergencies) was also highlighted, as was the Time Out offer, which gave carers up to eight hours of ad-hoc support per month free-of-charge, allowing them a break from their caring role.

Attention was drawn to the Council's work with Mobilise, the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers. This partnership was in to its second year and helped to provide a range of free online services, as well as identify hidden carers. Thus far, carers had engaged over 2,000 times through Mobilise's actions or tools (such as its e-support subscription), been supported over 1,000 times with deeper actions like its Personalised Guide to Caring, and been enabled to apply for over £363,550 in eligible carers allowance support. Developments in relation to a mapping exercise of carers across the Borough (potential aiding targeted support) were ongoing.

A host of well-known issues were associated with unpaid caring, ranging from financial hardship and social isolation to poor physical and / or mental health, and stress, worry and feelings of anger, guilt and frustration. Difficulties in accessing primary care / other universal services and challenges in getting information / support were further experiences. As such, local carers had identified several elements which they would find helpful, including access to mental health support and counselling, health and wellbeing support, information and signposting, regular 'check-ins', practical assistance, and visible communications and support from senior leaders. Being able to work flexibly in order to facilitate their caring role was also highlighted, as was raising awareness with managers on carer tools / guidance, the creation of a Virtual Carers Network, and focusing on outcomes rather than presence.

Continuing the theme of working carers, it was noted that, nationally, one in five employees was a carer, 90% of whom were over the age of 30. One in six people would leave their employment due to the pressure of the caring role, resulting in a knock-on annual cost to the UK economy of £5.3 billion. In light of this, SBC had a Staff Carers Network which met online bi-monthly, provided peer support, advice and

signposting, and played a role in steering the plans / objectives of the local Adult Carers Support Service.

The presentation concluded with an overview of how the Council involved carers themselves in shaping future service delivery, emphasising the importance of a warm and open culture which encouraged engagement and listening. Several subsequent quotes demonstrated very positive carer views on the existing offer.

Thanking SBC officers for the uplifting submission which outlined the support available to those undertaking a very difficult role, the Committee emphasised the importance of enabling carers to have some occasional time to themselves, including the facilitation of access to community groups (where desired). Members felt it would be useful for the Council to seek the views of carers on the benefits of providing this relief from their caring duties.

Regarding the help given to external organisations to increase their support for adult carers, the Committee was informed that this was happening across all locations within the Borough, and that raising awareness of carers and the caring role was a key part of the local service.

Returning to the theme of respite, Members praised the ad-hoc nature of the Time Out support and asked about take-up. It was confirmed that around 120 people accessed this offer, though there were only nine support workers (providing up to 75 hours per week) to facilitate demand. Positive feedback had been received from those using this element of the overall service, with the Council having success in employing current and ex-carers to deliver it in the home and community (it was noted that this was not domiciliary support, though).

Acknowledging the financial challenges that carers often endured, the Committee queried whether the Adult Carers Support Service liaised with the Council's A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees department. SBC officers stated that there was an established link between these two entities (including The Bread and Butter Thing initiative), and that the former also worked with the in-house Welfare Rights Team to ensure carers were aware of the support available to them. A number of carers were reluctant to admit to financial hardship – the established newsletter was therefore a useful resource to promote assistance for carers without the need for them to physically approach the service.

AGREED that information provided by the SBC Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate for the Committee's Scrutiny Review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service be noted.

## **ASCH/37/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026**

### **CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair had no further updates.

### **WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026**

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme. The next meeting was due to take place on 21 October 2025 and would feature the latest SBC Director of Public Health Annual Report, as well as the next evidence-gathering

session for the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Adult Carers Support Service. As discussed at last week's (19 September 2025) informal session, it was also the intention to present for approval the amended draft final report in relation to the Committee's review of Reablement Service. In addition, a request had been made for clarity around the annual Care and Health Winter Planning update which was anticipated at a forthcoming meeting.

The Committee was reminded about a number of email correspondences which had recently been shared, including:

- University Hospitals Tees: Annual Members' Meeting Video (2024-2025 highlights and key metrics)
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: Annual Review of Adult Social Care Complaints 2024-2025
- Care Quality Commission (CQC): Response to the Committee's letter expressing concerns about the regulator's output and its engagement with scrutiny functions (September 2025)

With regard to the correspondence recently received from the CQC, the Committee noted the lack of reference to scrutiny in its response and proposed that the Chair considers an appropriate reply.

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026 be noted.

Chair: .....