

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee

A meeting of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee was held on Tuesday 21 July 2026.

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

Officers: Angela Connor, Carol Malham (A,H&W); Chris Renahan (R&IG); Geraldine Brown, Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: Natasha Douglas (Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees)

Apologies: None

ASCH/26/26 Livestreaming

The Chair announced to those present that the meeting would be livestreamed.

ASCH/27/26 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

ASCH/28/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

ASCH/29/26 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes from the Committee meeting held on 23 June 2026, with specific attention drawn to the following items:

- Minutes (North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust – Quality Account 2025-2026): With reference to the Committee's request for a DEXA (Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry) scanner to be added to the local Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) in Stockton, Members were delighted by the recently relayed news that a scanner had now been installed within the facility and praised University Hospitals Tees (UHT) for actioning this so promptly. Noting that the equipment was anticipated to be fully operational during August 2026, the Committee felt this development would make a real difference for local people who, in many cases, would no longer need to travel to Hartlepool for bone density scans.
- Norton Medical Centre – Response to latest CQC inspection: Members were reminded that, since the June 2026 meeting, further information had been provided by Norton Medical Centre following a Committee query on what the practice had done to get more appropriate representation on its Patient Participation Group (PPG) (shared with Members, via email, on 10 July 2026).

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting on 23 June 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ASCH/30/26 Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees - Annual Report 2025-2026

The Committee considered the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Annual Report covering the 2025-2026 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 (also the Healthwatch representative across the Tees Valley), covered the following:

- A message from our Chair
- About Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees
- Our 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
- Making change over time
- Volunteers at the heart of our work
- Finance and future priorities
- Statutory statements

Headline data for the 2025-2026 showed that Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees had supported more than 16,600 people to have their say and get information about their care, had heard from 2,424 people on their experiences of health and social care, and had published nine reports about improvements people would like to see in areas such as Pharmacy First, the NHS app and accessing GPs, support for the deaf community, and mental health. The organisation had continued to influence discussions at a local, regional and national level, ensuring that lived experience shaped delivery, service improvements, and future planning.

Key themes covered during the year included primary care access (difficulties getting through for GP appointments, long waiting times, lack of continuity of care, and digital barriers), mental health rehabilitation and recovery (long waits, fragmented pathways, being passed between services, and discharge arrangements that felt rushed / unsafe), winter care, shaping 'WorkWell' (a new service designed to help people with long-term health conditions stay in or return to work), and palliative and end-of-life care. National policy in relation to online NHS developments was also influenced via the Healthwatch North East and North Cumbria (NENC) network.

Feedback on this latest Annual Report had recognised the value of the work undertaken by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and its role in influencing local, regional and national policy – indeed, the organisation had recently provided evidence to Parliament on what future models of public voice and engagement could look like.

Looking ahead, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would be directing its efforts towards Neighbourhood Health, hospital access and communication (including an 'enter and view' activity programme within University Hospitals Tees (UHT), extending its work with people experiencing homelessness, and working through trusted organisations to reach those that often remained unheard. Contributing to NHS *Fit for the Future* (the 10-year health plan for England) to help strengthen the health and care workforce, and support services to meet future demand, would be another important area of focus.

Giving thanks for the information provided, and noting its uncertain future following last year's announcement that Healthwatch was to be scrapped, the Committee felt that this latest Annual Report reinforced the essence of what Healthwatch was all about – namely to reach out to local people and give them a voice.

Commending the work undertaken by volunteers within the organisation, the Committee drew attention to the recently published 'enter and view' report following a visit to Synergise Pharmacy, with concerns expressed over the challenges the pharmacy appeared to have in contacting GP practices (as well as its ongoing medication shortages). In related matters, Yarm Medical Practice's recent adoption of an artificial intelligence (AI) system to book an appointment was also noted, with Members highlighting the potential stresses this could cause with patients having to phonetically spell out their names when the system did not recognise it accurately, as well as its limitations in understanding dialects.

Welcoming the publication on support for the deaf community, the Committee sought clarity on who Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees had reached out to with regard previous work around drugs and alcohol. In response, it was stated that the original focus on these issues was in 2024, and that follow-up engagement had taken place with Bridges Family and Carer Service, CGL, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Public Health after it was found that people were not aware of the outreach offer that was already available. Continuing the theme of drug / alcohol use, Members noted problems in both Yarm Lane and Bishopton Road, and queried whether the opening of the new Stockton waterfront park may have dispersed substance-users to other areas of the town.

The Committee voiced encouragement about the evidenced engagement from the public throughout 2025-2026 and the sense that people were becoming more comfortable in sharing their experiences of health and care (particularly around palliative services). Members were informed of the sensitivities involved when seeking views on the existing end-of-life offer as people requiring these services were already experiencing difficult situations which Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees was mindful not to make worse.

With reference to the work around the ongoing system change by UHT, the Committee asked for any examples where the Group had made alterations following Healthwatch input / feedback (there was also a specific request for more information on the stated 'you said, we did' element). Whilst details would be provided after the meeting, an engagement event with UHT, which helped in developing the Group's six priorities, was noted.

Comments concluded with the Committee praising the efforts of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees during the course of 2025-2026, especially through being involved in and facilitating positive partnership-working, and for continuing to seek views from under-represented groups. In response to whether there were any further developments in relation to digital inclusion (a topic which was stated to be an intended area of focus when the previous year's (2024-2025) summary was presented to the Committee in September 2025), Members were informed that such matters would be considered as part of forthcoming NHS *Fit for the Future* work with the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) around digital access.

AGREED that the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees – Annual Report 2025-2026 be noted, and further information be provided as requested.

ASCH/31/26 Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone

Following an initial briefing on the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone (TVCHIZ) to the Committee in June 2024, and a second presentation in July 2025, a further update on developments in relation to this initiative had been requested. The Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Head of Policy, Development & Public Affairs and the SBC Assistant Director – Inclusive Growth and Development reported that:

- The TVCHIZ brought together health and social care providers, academic institutions, and the business community to create a world-class innovation ecosystem. Developing this alongside one of the largest brownfield regeneration opportunities in the country, Tees Central, would support the continued inclusive growth of the region and strengthen the global position of the UK health innovation sector, as well as helping to tackle the stark health inequalities that existed in the Borough and further afield.
- The TVCHIZ was not a single capital project. It was a long-term place-based programme that co-ordinated multiple projects and investment opportunities across the Borough and wider Tees Valley. Its purpose was to align regeneration, NHS investment, research, education, skills and commercial growth around a common vision. As a result, Members should expect individual projects to come forward separately through the Council's normal governance processes, rather than as one comprehensive scheme.
- Activity supporting the achievement of this long-term vision was structured around three key workstreams, with achievements noted as follows:
 - Research and Innovation: Work had taken place (through CPI and Teesside University) to understand what the local unique selling point (USP) was. Building on this, focused 'health' and 'care' workshops saw multiple partners from across the sector come together to understand challenges and establish priorities. Teesside University had secured resources to develop an 'innovation brochure' which would highlight the activity taking place and would help attract inward investment and promote the area's core strengths / innovation assets.
 - Skills and Workforce Development: Chaired by the Principal of Stockton Riverside College, this group continued to look at opportunities to increase the prevalence of the care and health curriculum within further education. The creation of new vocational-focused V-Levels would enable skills development in a number of disciplines (as opposed to T-Levels which focused on one particular topic), with the potential to base skills provision next to Neighbourhood Health facilities being explored. Also, a new SBC Care and Health Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator had been in post since April 2026 (based within the Council's Employment and Training Hub but operating across the Tees Valley and with other Tees Valley Local Authorities) who was working with local employers and education providers to help increase employment / placement opportunities. Encouragingly, a recent event saw 110 attendees, 32 of whom had already been shortlisted for roles, with five successfully gaining a new role. Furthermore, the Care Academy (through the Council's Employment

and Training Hub / Learning and Skills Service) continued to develop recruitment into the care sector.

- Place and Regeneration: Developments in relation to the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) included input into its now-published Growth Plan (the result of which had seen the TVCHIZ referenced in this document) and ongoing work around the Investment Zone, specifically on shaping the digitisation of the care and health sectors. The TVCA also participated in considerations around the Tees Central site (a longer-term regeneration project which involved others such as Homes England and Network Rail), with transport-related funding already assigned. In other matters, the Neighbourhood Health concept continued to be explored (funding was available for associated 'hubs'), with partners trying to understand what this looked and felt like for all the Borough as a whole.
- Collectively, the workstreams provided a co-ordinated framework for delivering the TVCHIZ. By aligning regeneration, research, innovation, skills, workforce development and infrastructure investment, the programme sought to improve health outcomes, reduce inequalities, create high-value employment, attract inward investment and establish Stockton-on-Tees as a nationally recognised centre for care and health innovation. The programme would be delivered incrementally over the coming years through collaboration between the Council, NHS, academic institutions, Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) and private sector partners.
- The programme remained in the development and delivery phase. Progress was expected to be incremental, with projects progressing as opportunities, funding, partner priorities and business cases matured. The Strategic Programme Board continued to oversee the programme, ensuring that individual initiatives contributed to the overall vision while recognising that delivery would take place over many years.

Thanking officers for this latest update, the Committee focused its initial response on the skills / workforce development element, with Members noting previous concerns relayed to them during a visit to the local Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) about a lack of radiographers. In response, it was stated that this issue had been raised several times through TVCHIZ-related discussions, and that attempts were being made to link universities more closely with the health sector.

Highlighting the importance of the SBC Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing having a voice in Neighbourhood Health considerations, the Committee referenced development 'phases' which had been included in previous updates, and asked if there had been any engagement with river-users (e.g. Tees Rowing Club) as part of the 'riverside' element of the overall TVCHIZ footprint. Officers stated that some groups no longer existed and that it was more challenging to engage with individual users – however, there was a desire to work more closely with those who utilised the river, something which was widely recognised as being a key asset and a space which had been recently enhanced through the opening of the new Stockton waterfront park.

Closing the item, the Committee welcomed progress made over the last year, though also urged partners to be mindful of those who were not able to access services digitally. Members once again requested more regular feedback on the TVCHIZ, reiterating that it was appropriate for this Committee to be sighted on developments in a timely manner. It was subsequently noted that assurance had recently been given

that a further report would be provided to the next Committee meeting in September 2026.

AGREED that the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone update be noted.

ASCH/32/26 Scrutiny Review of Protection of Property

Consideration was given to the draft scope and project plan for the Scrutiny Review of Protection of Property, the proposed aims of which would be to determine whether:

- Existing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) arrangements for fulfilling the Care Act duty to protect properties were fit for purpose.
- SBC Adult Social Care Financial Services (ASCFS) had the capacity, procedures and resources to manage increasing numbers of properties (including clarity around what was defined as 'property').
- SBC was recovering reasonable expenses (as allowed by legislation).
- Risk, accountability and decision-making processes (including those involving Mental Capacity Act decisions) were clear, consistent and auditable.

A number of contributors had been identified in relation to this scrutiny topic, including SBC departments (Adult Social Care, Community Safety, and Housing Services), local NHS Trusts, local housing associations, and Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) – an understanding of how other Local Authorities viewed / conducted work around this duty would also be sought. It was anticipated that the Committee's final report would be presented to the SBC Cabinet in January 2027.

AGREED that the draft scope and project plan for the Protection of Property review be approved.

ASCH/33/26 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work 2026-2027

CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair had no further updates.

WORK PROGRAMME 2026-2027

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme. The next meeting was due to take place on 22 September 2026, and it was stated that there had been some changes to the published document following the decision to delay the presentation of the new Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adult Services Complaints Report until after the summer recess (originally, this was scheduled for July 2026). As a result:

- The next meeting in September 2026 was due to include the aforementioned complaints report, the first update on progress of the agreed actions following the previously completed Scrutiny Review of Reablement Service, the first evidence-gathering session in relation to the Scrutiny Review of Protection of Property, and a further update on the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone (TVCHIZ).
- The Overview and Performance Report (Adults, Health & Wellbeing – Public Health) and the CQC / PAMMS Quarterly Update (Q1 2026-2027) would now be presented to the Committee meeting in October 2026.

Members were also reminded of the following documentation which had recently been circulated to the Committee:

- Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees: Two reports (published in July 2026) following 'enter and view' visits to Synergise Pharmacy and Elm Tree Medical Centre.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC): Presentation slides regarding an ongoing SBC consultation on Community Day Options and Allensway Day Centre.
- Ockenden Report: Findings, conclusions and essential actions from the Independent Review of Maternity Services at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (published on 24 June 2026) which included learning for all NHS Trusts.

It was also noted that the next Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee meeting was taking place later this week (23 July 2026) where consideration would be given to a University Hospitals Tees (UHT) 'Case for Change' presentation relating to anticipated variations to the way services will be delivered between North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) and neighbours South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (STHFT).

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee Work Programme 2026-2027 be noted.

Chair:

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