



What you told us

Trends in feedback
July to December 2024

healthwatch
Northumberland

Introduction

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We are a listening organisation working across Northumberland, interested in what people like about services and what can be improved.

We act on what people are saying, sharing their views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area and record this as 'signposting'.

Feedback

Between July and December 2024, we received detailed feedback from 388 people at face-to-face events, via telephone calls, emails, our website, social media and other sources. This is less than the previous six months (we heard from 417 people between January to June 2024). Between July and December 2024, we signposted 61 people to different organisations for further support. This is down slightly from 65 people in the previous six months but is a similar proportion of all feedback received (signposting/ requests for information, July to December 2024: 15.7% of overall feedback; January to June 2024: 15.6% of overall feedback).

Our social media content had a reach of 105,000 and our website had 17,500 views, compared to 23,000 between January to June 2024.

The feedback we have had for the past six months has mainly been around two service areas: GP services and hospitals.

GP services

Just over a quarter (27%) of all feedback we received in July to December 2024 was to do with GP services which was less than between January to June 2024 (29%). The main issues we received feedback on were poor service and access issues. The access issues were largely divided into three categories: perceived pressure by the patients to use online services, difficulties with the online systems when using them and difficulty getting an appointment (whether by phone or online).

Hospitals

23% of all feedback received during the six months was about hospital services. The biggest concerns were around poor communication and to a lesser extent, poor quality of care and lengthy waiting lists. The poor quality of care when people got to hospital was also frequently raised. It wasn't all negative feedback, with around one in seven of the comments we received about hospitals being positive. However, this is a reduction on the previous six months where approximately one in four comments about hospital services were positive.

Signposting/requests for information

17% of the contacts we received in July to December 2024 were requests for information or signposting support. The subject matters asked about were very varied with no real themes emerging other than for mental health support which occurred in about 7% of requests for information.

Geographical spread

We heard regularly from all parts of the county with little variation in levels of response between the localities, as shown in Figure 1.

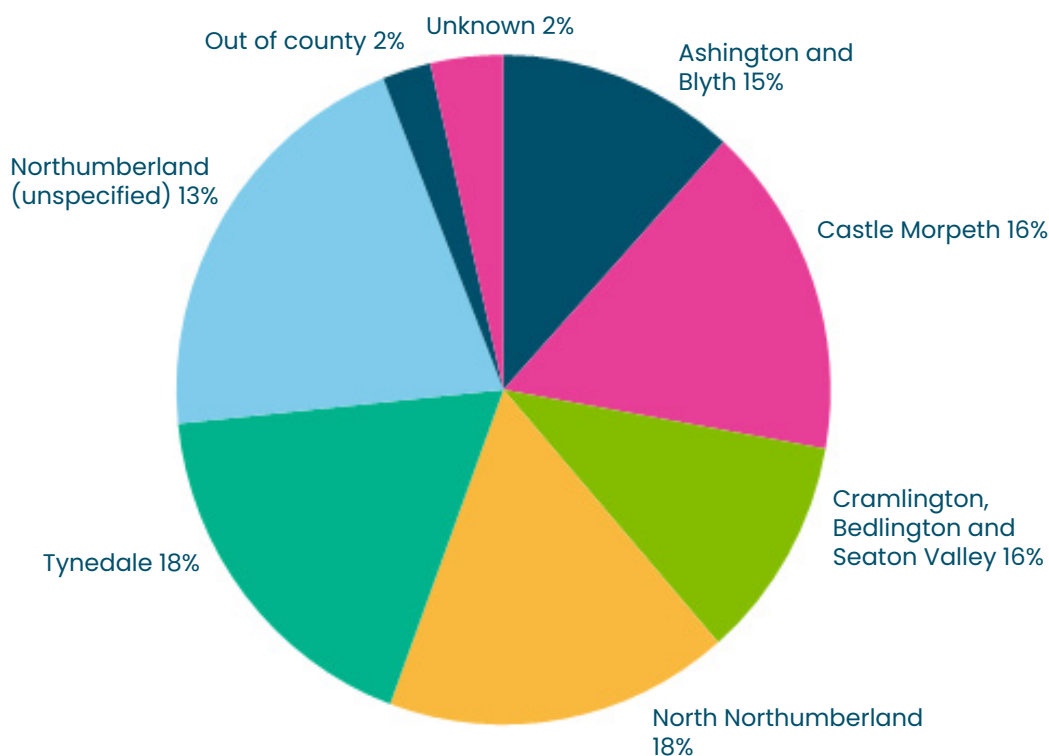


Fig. 1. Where we heard from people across the county

The 13% of respondents who came from an unspecified area of Northumberland were from feedback forwarded to us from Healthwatch England's website.

All five Local Area Committees (LAC) had either GP or hospital services as their top issue and all areas except Tynedale had NHS dentists as the third most common issue (see Table 1.). This was due to the high levels of positive comments about Allendale pharmacy in August when we asked the public to tell us about their local pharmacy.

All five LACs had either GP or hospital services as their top issue and all, except people in Tynedale, had NHS dentists as the third most common issue. The third most commonly raised service in Tynedale was pharmacies but 50% of the feedback was positive and there wasn't one stand out issue in the negative feedback.

	Percentage of responses for each LAC
Ashington and Blyth	
GP services	41%
Hospital	15%
Dentist	10%
Castle Morpeth	
Hospital	33%
GP services	33%
Dentist	11%
Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley	
GP services	40%
Hospital	31%
Dentist	10%
North Northumberland	
GP services	43%
Hospital	19%
Dentist	7%
Tynedale	
Hospital	39%
GP services	21%
Pharmacy	10%
Northumberland (unspecified)	
GP services	25%
Hospital	25%
Dentist	16%

Table 1. Services we heard about most by LAC

Trends

In the six-month period of July to December 2024 the percentage of positive comments rose slightly from 12% in July to 17% in December and the trend line of percentage of negative comments remained roughly the same over July to December 2024 (see Figure 2). This is an improvement on the previous six months, which showed a decline in satisfaction over the period of January to June, and has gone back to the long-term trend over the last two years which shows an overall improvement in the Northumberland residents' perception of services (Figure 3).

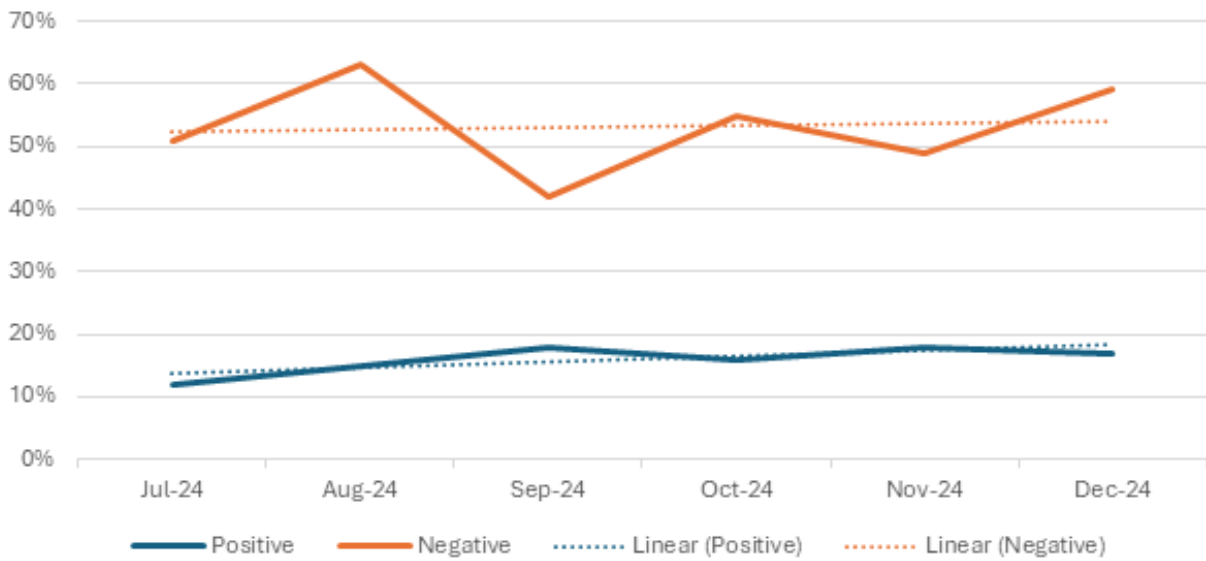


Fig. 2. How people were feeling July to December 2024

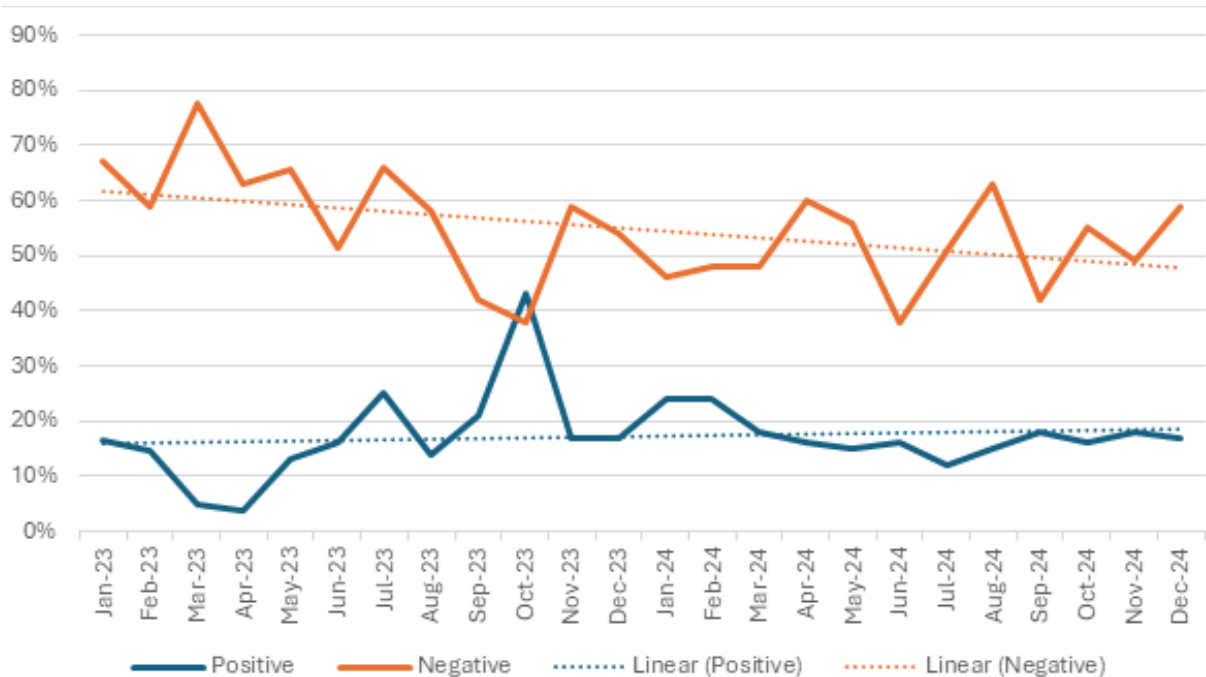


Fig. 3. How people were feeling January 2022 to December 2024

Demographics

Figures 4 to 6 give the demographic breakdown of those who gave feedback on services over the past six months, with the first graph, Figure 4, showing the distribution of ages and sex across the county. Overall, 65% of respondents were female, 27% were male and for the remaining 8% the sex was unknown. (Less than 0.25% preferred not to say.) These overall figures show a slight increase in proportion of male respondents compared to the previous six months (66% female, 25% male, 10% unknown, during July to December 2023).

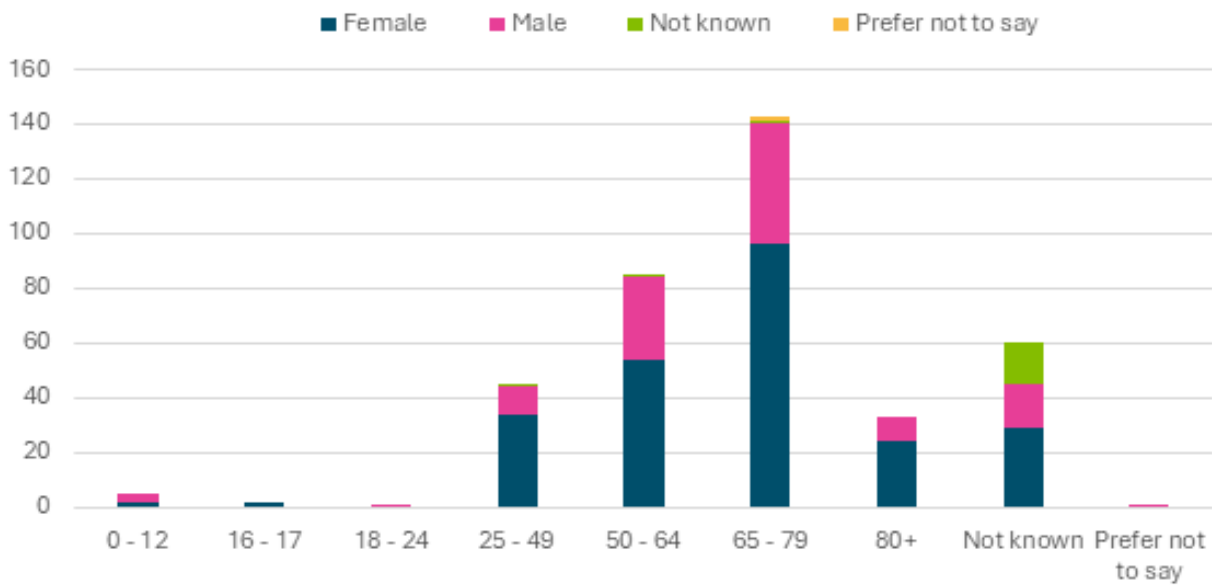


Fig. 4. Age distribution by sex, July to December 2024 (n=375)

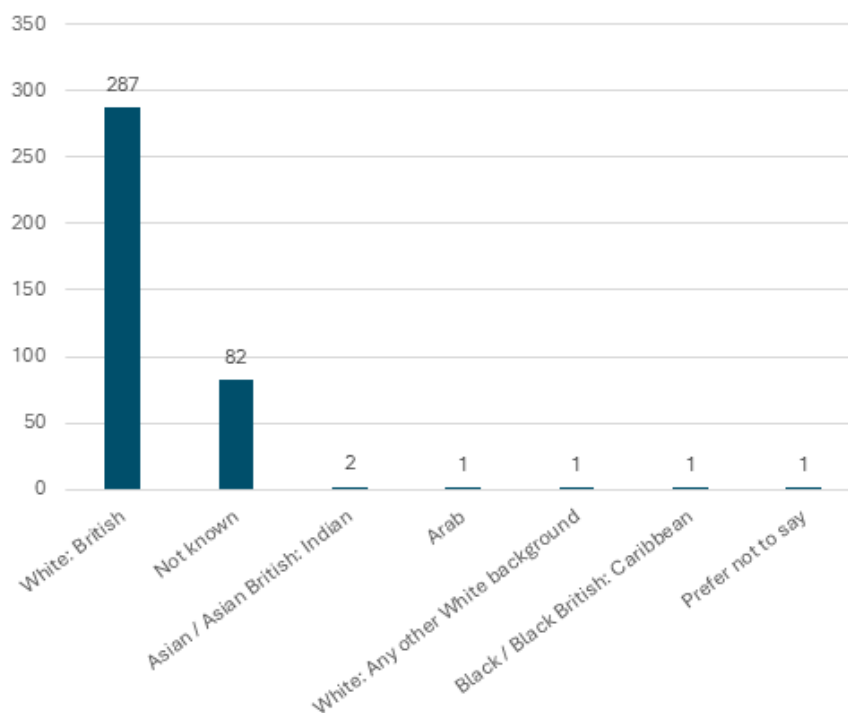


Fig. 5. Ethnicity of respondents, July to December 2024 (n=375)

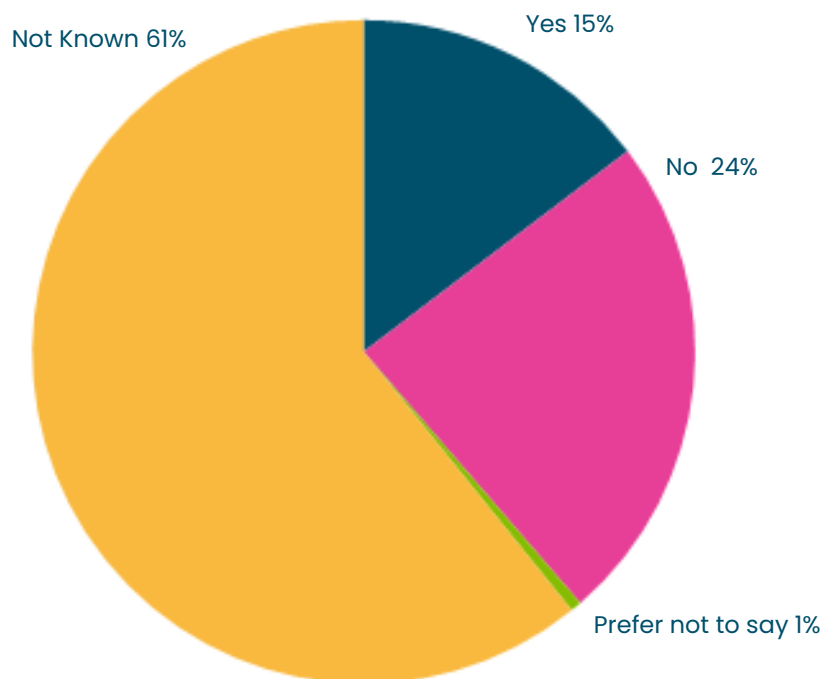


Fig. 6. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? July to December 2024 (n=375)

The proportion of disabled people we heard from in the period July to December 2024 had reduced compared to the previous six months (January to June 2024 – Yes 19%, No 19%, Not known 62%).

Signposting and Information Service

We heard from a member of the public at one of our drop-in events at West Hartford Fire Station. They feel there is not enough mental health support in their area. Their brother was badly affected couple of years ago and didn't have anywhere to turn. They were not aware of The Bothy in Ashington, Northumberland Recovery College or Qwell so we signposted to these services and gave printed information for them to take away. They thanked us and said they would pass onto family and friends that may also benefit.

Ashington and Byth resident

Levels of deprivation

We started asking respondents for their full postcode in January 2024 to cross check against the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and determine which decile they are from.

The IMD ranks geographical areas of England with the same levels of population in order of deprivation, from the most to the least deprived. These rankings are divided into ten bands - 'deciles' - and using a postcode tool a respondent's address can be given a decile score where the first decile is the most deprived area, and the tenth decile is the least deprived area.

We have only been able to gather the full postcode from just over a fifth of those we heard from, but this data shows that we are hearing from all deciles with roughly a 45:55 split of hearing from the most deprived areas (34 respondents, deciles 1-5) to hearing from the least deprived areas (43 respondents, deciles 6-10). See Figure 7, below.

This is an improvement on the previous six months when we were only able to gather the postcode for an eighth of those we heard from, and we didn't hear from the 9th decile. The split was 40:60 (most deprived: least deprived).

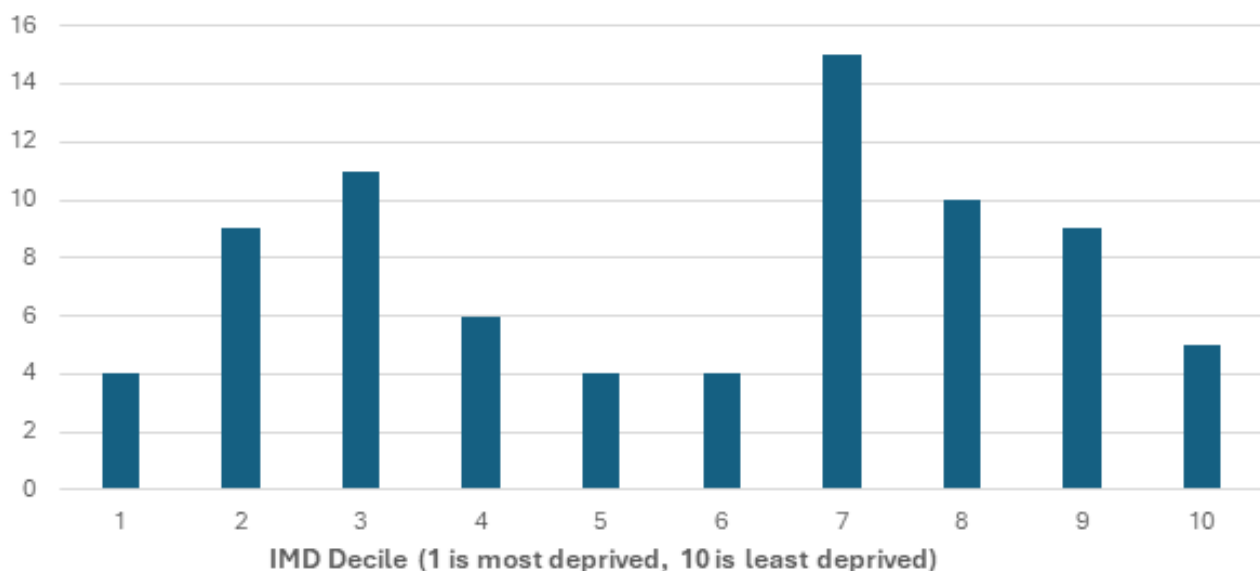


Fig. 7. During July–December 2024 we heard from more people in the least deprived postcodes (n=77)

Insights

Although there was a slight downward dip in the first half of 2024, the long-term trend over the past two years in the public's perception of services has continued to improve, judging from the proportion of positive to negative comments we received in July to December 2024.

We have heard from fewer people with disabilities over the six months than in the first half of 2024, but we are still hearing from a greater proportion of respondents with a disability than the county's own demographic distribution. We have heard from a greater proportion of men and boys of all ages than in the first half of 2024. This continues a slow but steady improvement in our engagement with males over the past two years. We are working to improve this further.

We are still receiving concerns about service from one GP practice in particular. We will raise the matter with them so they can address the identified areas of concern.

Signposting and Information Service

We spoke to a couple at a drop-in event. The lady had had a stroke and her husband was providing some care but needed help with possible aids and adaptations and also financial help with benefits. We introduced them to Northumberland County Council's Short Term Support Service to talk about possible help with aids in their home, and Carers Northumberland, who can help with benefit issues and also support as carer.

North Northumberland residents

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