



What you told us

Trends in feedback
January to June 2026

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 January and June 2026, we received detailed feedback and/or requests for information from 301 individuals from talking to people at face-to-face events, telephone calls, emails, website queries, social media and other sources. This is almost identical to the previous six months (we heard from 310 people between July and December 2025) but well below the same period last year (417 people between January and June 2025). Taken together, these three periods suggest that the sharp fall recorded in the second half of 2025 has levelled off rather than continued.

We still hear the most about GP services, accounting for just under a quarter (23%) of all feedback received in January to June 2026. This is a marked fall from the previous six months, when GP services made up 34% of feedback, and is very similar to the level seen in January to June 2025 (25%). The spike in feedback about GP services in the second half of 2025 therefore looks to have been a peak rather than the start of a sustained rise.

The next most raised service was hospitals – outpatients (excluding audiology), which featured in 15% of feedback received between January and June 2026. This is unchanged from the previous six months and suggests the sharp rise first seen in the second half of 2025 (up from 4% in January to June 2025) might be a lasting shift rather than a one-off.

After that came audiology (7% of total feedback received) and hospitals – inpatients (5%), then ambulance services and mental health, each accounting for 3% of feedback. The table below compares the top five services we heard about most in January to June 2026 with the previous six months.

Percentage of total feedback received in six-month period	January to June 2026	July to December 2025
GP services	23%	34%
Hospital – outpatients (excluding Audiology)	15%	15%
Audiology services	7%	8%
Hospital – inpatients	5%	8%
Ambulance services	5%	4%
Mental health	3%	2%

Table 1: Percentage of total feedback received in six monthly period

Within GP services, concerns were mostly about quality of care (26 of 69 pieces of feedback) and about access, particularly getting an appointment (18). For hospital outpatients the picture was more evenly split between quality of care (13), communication (8) and access (8). Audiology stands out as the most concentrated theme of the half-year: 15 of the 21 pieces of feedback (71%) were about access to the service.

Signposting and Information Service

A woman emailed to say she was trying to find an NHS dentist for her 16-year-old son, who had a broken tooth. She had rung every dentist on the NHS website list and none were taking patients, and the Integrated Care Board had told her they could not help. We signposted her to the NHS Urgent Dental Access Centre.

North Northumberland resident

Signposting/requests for information

In January to June 2026, we signposted 81 people to different organisations for support, which is 27% of the total detailed feedback received. This is almost exactly the same proportion as the previous six months (84 people, 27% of overall feedback in July to December 2025) and well above the position a year ago (71 people, 17% of overall feedback in January to June 2025).

The main issues we had requests about were:

- **Adult social care** — care at home, equipment and home adaptations (10% of the total requests for information)
- **Hearing loss, hearing aids and audiology** (9%)
- **Making a complaint or raising a concern, including PALS contact details** (7%)
- **Finding an NHS dentist** (7%)
- **Benefits, financial and cost-of-living support** (6%)
- **Scams awareness** (6%)
- **Mental health and bereavement support** (6%)

Two of the three themes identified in the last report — making a complaint and finding an NHS dentist — appear again at a similar level, and mental health support remains one of the top issues we were contacted about.

Our Information and Signposting Service also had requests about a variety of others issues and services.

Signposting and Information Service

A person told us they had recently been treated for cancer and were looking for local support groups and activities. There were no known activities in their part of Northumberland, but in conversation it became clear they knew one part of Newcastle well because family live there, so we were able to signpost them to a service running activities there instead. They were very happy with this.

Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley resident

Geographical spread

Between January and June 2026, the largest single group of respondents was feedback forwarded to us from Healthwatch England’s website, shown as Northumberland (unspecified), as shown in figure 1 below. Feedback from Healthwatch England doesn’t provide details of which area of Northumberland people are from. This group has overtaken Tynedale, which was the highest in the previous six months and is now second.

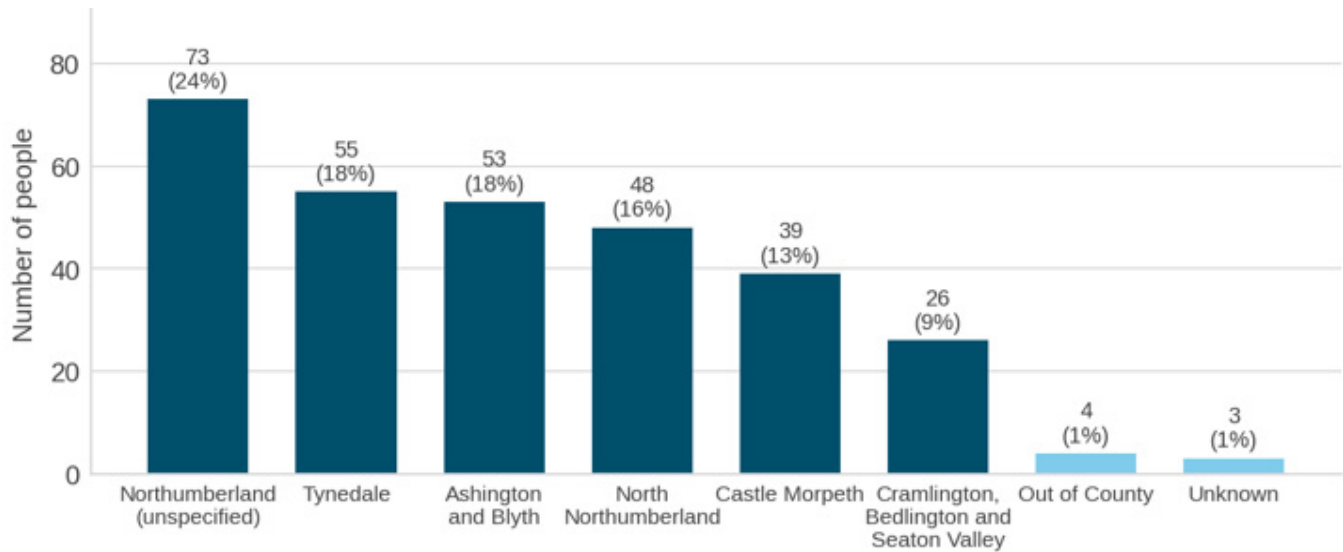


Figure 1: Where the people we heard from live, January to June 2026.

Setting aside requests for information and signposting only, GP services was the most mentioned service in five of the six localities, as shown in Table 2. The exception is Tynedale, where hospital – outpatients was the service we heard most about, followed by hospital inpatients. Hospital outpatients was the second most mentioned service in most other localities, except for in Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley where it was audiology (23%).

Ashington and Blyth (30 pieces of feedback)	Percentage of responses for each locality
GP Services	47%
Hospital – outpatients	13%
Mental health	3%
Castle Morpeth (34)	
GP services	29%
Hospital – outpatients	18%
Audiology	18%
Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley (13)	
GP services	46%
Audiology	23%
Hospital – outpatients	8%
North Northumberland (41)	
GP services	29%
Hospital – outpatients	24%
Ambulance services	10%
Tynedale (34)	
Hospital – outpatients	29%
Hospital – inpatients	21%
GP services	21%
Northumberland unspecified (66)	
GP services	30%
Hospital – outpatients	20%
Audiology	11%

**Table 2. Services we heard about most by locality.
Percentages exclude requests for information and signposting only.**

Trends

Between January and June 2026 the percentage of positive comments rose from 9% in January to 21% in June and the percentage of negative comments fell from 52% to 40%, as shown in figure 2, below.

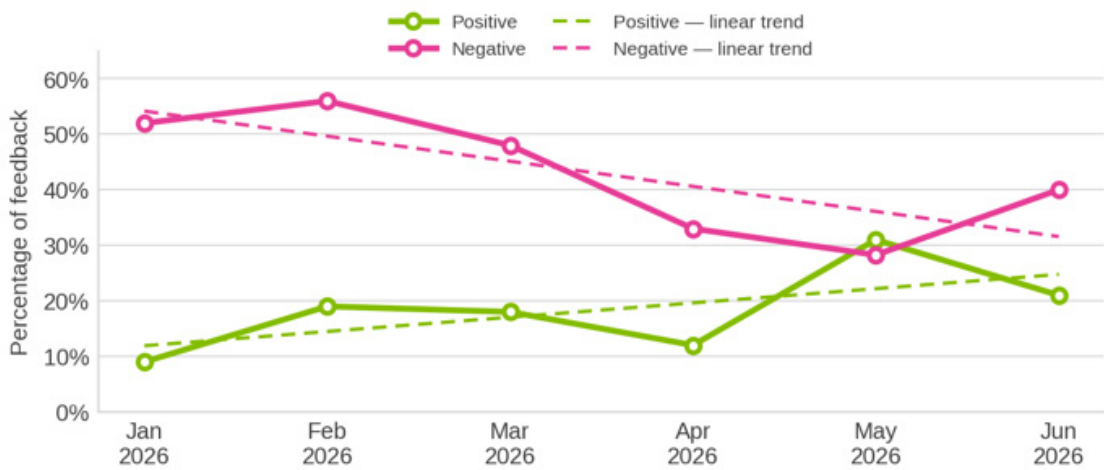


Figure 2. How people were feeling January to June 2026

This is a change from the previous six months when the trends suggested people’s views of services were getting worse. Now things have returned to the longer-term pattern we’ve seen since mid-2024: fewer negative comments and slightly more positive comments over time. See figure 3 below.

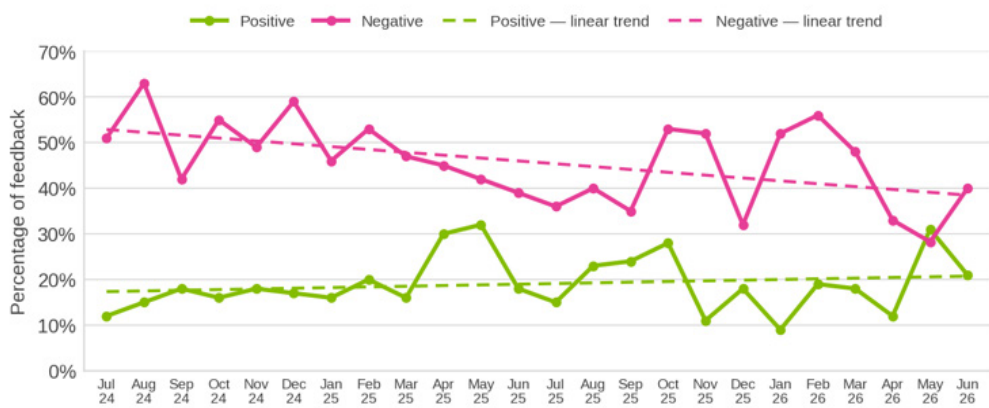


Figure 3. Proportion of positive and negative feedback by month, July 2024 to June 2026, with trend lines.

Based on what we’ve heard over the last six months, the downturn we noted last time looks like a one-off, not a lasting change. We will keep monitoring this.

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 age and sex across the county.

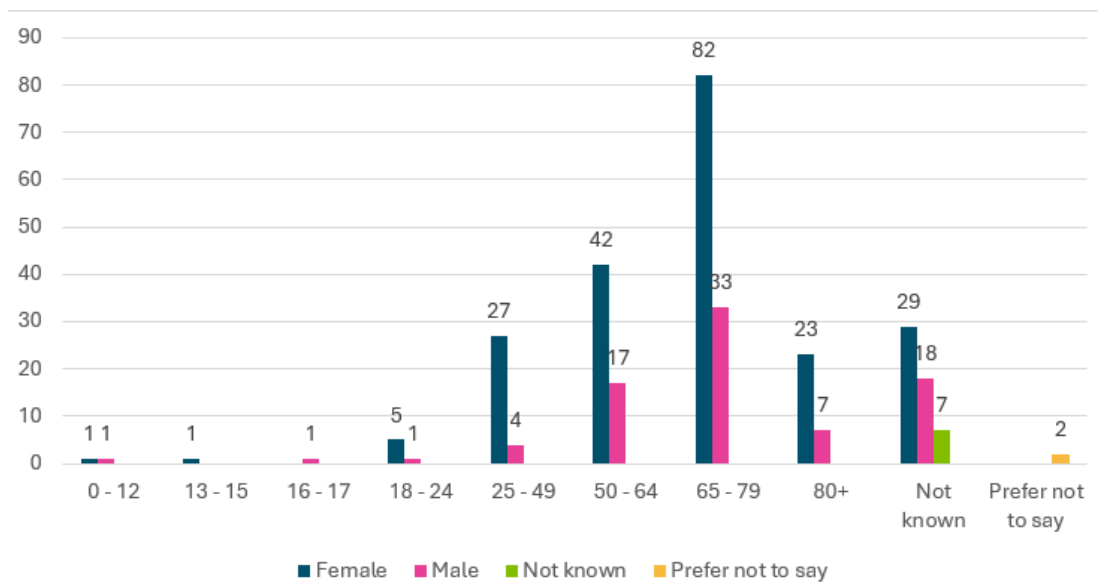


Figure 4. Age and sex of respondents, January to June 2026 (n=301)

Overall, just under 70% of respondents were female and 27% were male, with sex not known for 2%, and 1% preferring not to say. The proportion of females we hear from is unchanged on the previous two six-month periods, but the proportion of male respondents has increased, up from 20% in July to December 2025 and is the same as the previous high point of 27% in July to December 2024. The work to improve hearing from men appears to be having an effect.

Age continues to be skewed towards older residents: 38% of respondents were aged 65 to 79 and a further 10% were aged 80 or over, so nearly half of everyone we heard from was 65 or older. Only 3% were under 25. Age was not recorded for 18% of respondents.

Signposting and Information Service

A person visited a community hub asking for advice about scams, having already been a victim twice. Because Age UK’s Scams Awareness team were in the hub at the same time, we were able to introduce them directly, and they came away with information they had not had before.

Tynedale resident

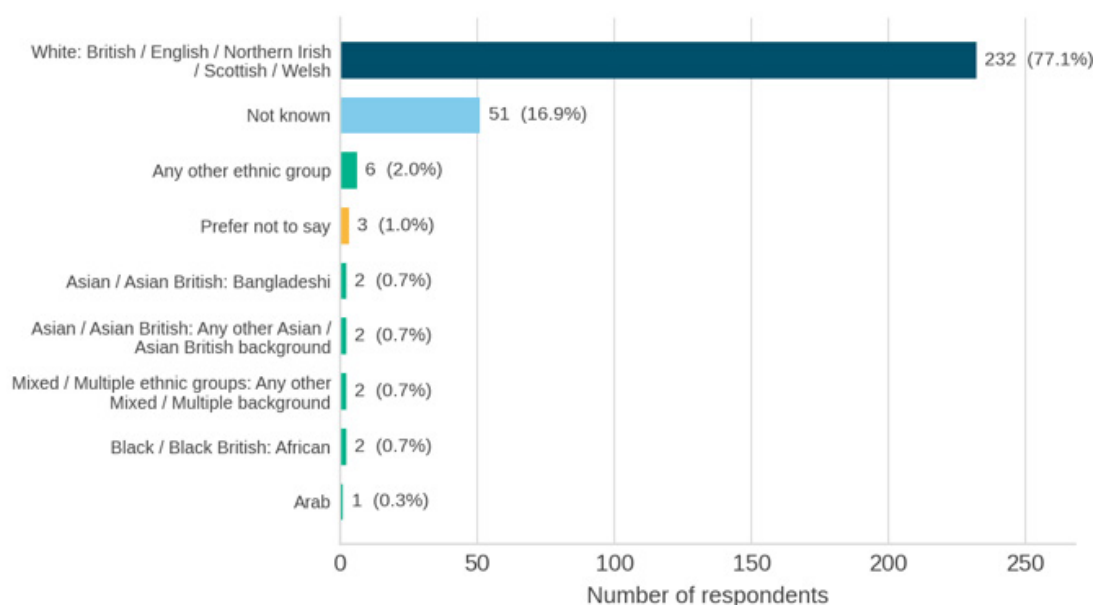


Figure 5. Ethnicity of respondents, January to June 2026 (n=301)

5.0% of our respondents were from non-white ethnic minorities. This continues a clear upward trend (2.2% in January to June 2025, 3.8% in July to December 2025) and is now more than twice the proportion of ethnic minorities in Northumberland (2.4% – 2021 Census).

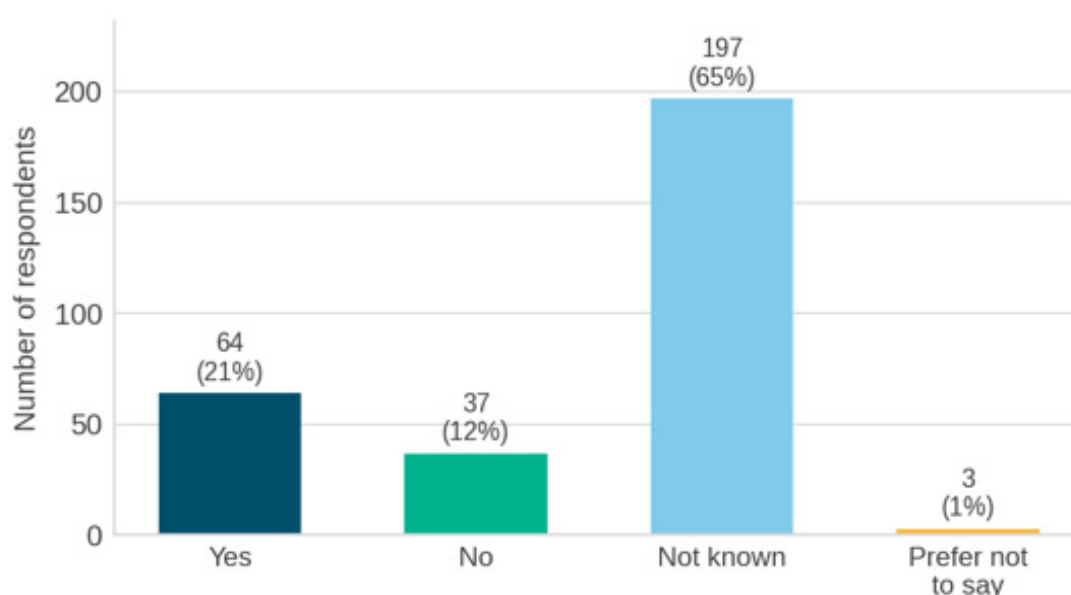


Figure 6. Whether respondents consider themselves to have a disability, January to June 2026 (n=301)

21% of people told us they consider themselves to have a disability, and 12% told us they do not. This is a higher proportion of people with a disability than in January to June 2025 (17%) and reverses the drop we saw during July to December 2025. This figure should be treated with some caution however, because the proportion of respondents for whom disability was not recorded has risen, from 52% in January to June 2025 to 65% in this period. Improving completion of this question would give us a more reliable picture.

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 called ‘deciles’. Using a postcode tool a person’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 were able to establish an IMD decile for 38 respondents, just under 13% of those we heard from. This shows we are hearing from all deciles, with a roughly 58-42 split between the most deprived areas (22 respondents, deciles 1 – 5) and the least deprived areas (16 respondents, deciles 6 – 10). See figure 7, below.

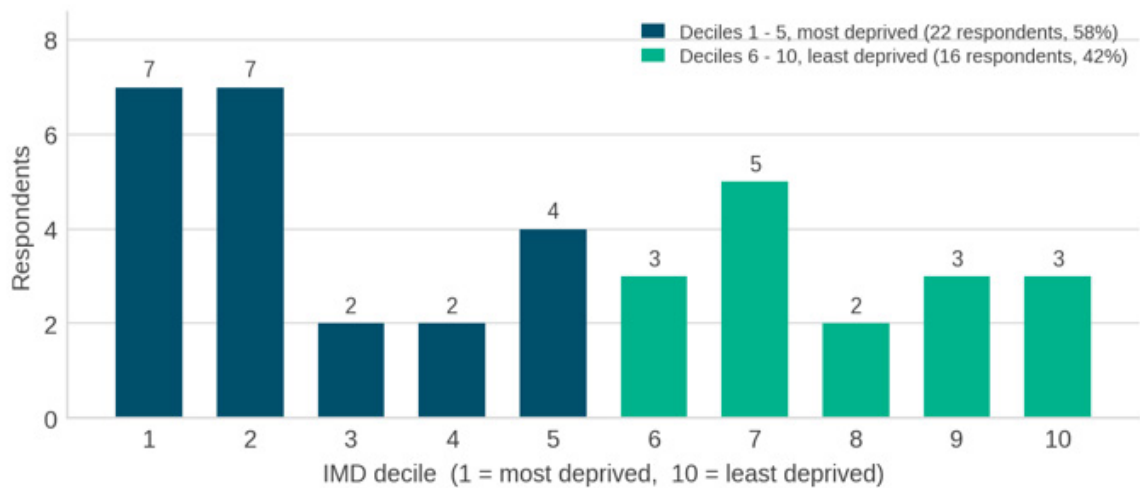


Fig. 7. Respondents by deprivation decile, January to June 2026 (n=38).

“The balance between the most and least deprived areas is similar to the previous six months (a 60-40 split in July to December 2025). However, the proportion of people we could establish a decile for has fallen – from just over 18% in July to December 2025 to just under 13% in this period – so we can’t draw firm conclusions from this figure.

Signposting and Information Service

A person contacted us after being given our details by Citizens Advice. They had taken ill-health retirement following a recent disability and were looking for help to obtain a laptop so they could order medication and groceries online. We signposted them to digital support at BRIC and Northumberland Community and Voluntary Action, and suggested library computers in the meantime.

Castle Morpeth resident

Summary

Between January and June 2026, we received detailed feedback and/or requests for information from 301 individuals from talking to people at face-to-face events, telephone calls, emails, website queries, social media and other sources (we heard from 310 people between July and December 2025 and 417 between January and June 2025).

GP services remain the service we hear about most, at 23% of all feedback received, but this is down from 34% in the previous six months and back to roughly the level of a year ago. GP services was the most raised service in five of the six localities; in Tynedale, hospital outpatient services was raised more often. The services we heard about most were:

- 1. GP services (23%)**
- 2. Hospitals – outpatients excluding audiology (15%)**
- 3. Audiology (7%)**

In January to June 2026, we signposted 81 people to different organisations for support, which is 27% of the total detailed feedback received (84 people, 27% in July to December 2025). The issues most often asked about were:

- 1. Adult social care – care at home, equipment and adaptations (10% of the total requests for information)**
- 2. Hearing loss, hearing aids and audiology (9%)**
- 3= Making a complaint or raising a concern (7%)**
- 3= Finding an NHS dentist (7%)**

Over these six months, positive comments rose and negative comments fell. This matches the longer-term trend we've seen since mid-2024. It looks like the previous six months were a blip, not a lasting change, and we will continue to review this.

We heard from a higher proportion of men in these six months than in the previous six months, returning to the highest ever level of 27%. We also heard from a higher proportion of people with a disability than a year ago, though the rise in unrecorded answers to that question means this needs treating with care.

We have heard from an increasing number of ethnic minority groups for a third consecutive half-year period, with 5% of respondents now from non-white ethnic minorities – more than twice the proportion of Northumberland residents. We continued to hear from more residents from the most deprived areas than from the least deprived areas of Northumberland, but we were able to establish an IMD decile for fewer people than in the previous six months, so this remains an area to improve.

Signposting and Information Service

A person we spoke to during a general discussion mentioned that they had previously been refused Personal Independence Payments and had not applied since, but were thinking of trying again. We gave them information about local Citizens Advice drop-ins so that they could get support with the application.

Ashington and Blyth resident

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