

Views and experiences of health and social care in Gateshead

**Insights to inform Gateshead Cares Development
Session**

March 2022



Involve North East

This report was produced by Involve North East on behalf of NHS Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group. We are an independent organisation who specialises in involvement and engagement. We work with integrity, ensuring people's voices influence the design of services they receive.

We have vast experience and expertise in gathering the views and opinions of patients, carers, and the general public in relation to health services. For example:

- service evaluations
- changes to care pathways
- locating new services

We employ quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques including:

- Questionnaires – paper-based and online
- Participatory appraisals
- Drop-in events
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews
- Focus groups
- Informal group discussions

For more information about the services we can provide please contact Andrew White on 0191 226 3450 or email andrew@involve.org.uk. Visit our website at: www.involve.org.uk

Contents

Introduction	1
Patient views and experiences	2
Appendices	16

Introduction

- NHS Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (NGCCG) is supporting Gateshead Cares (local NHS providers, Gateshead Council, and voluntary sector partners) to develop a new Health and Care Plan.
- To help inform the Plan, Gateshead's residents and organisations operating within the local area were invited to share:
 - o Their experiences of health and social care services – what works well and what could be better.
 - o What they feel are the key challenges facing health and social care in Gateshead in the coming years.
 - o What they think the health and social care priorities for the next year should be.
- Due to very tight timescales data was gathered via an online survey 11th-20th March 2022.
 - o Other data collection formats were available upon request.
 - o The survey was shared widely by local statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations and across social media.
 - o 188 people and organisations shared their views. A participant profile can be found in the Appendices.
 - o It is acknowledged that the short engagement period may have resulted in the views of some groups being underrepresented. It is recommended that any further engagement around the Health and Care Plan takes place over a longer timeframe.
- This report summarises the findings of the survey.

Views and experiences

- We engaged with 173 individuals and 17 organisations from across Gateshead.

What has the NHS been doing well? – Understandably people talked about the impact of the pandemic in many of their responses but particularly in the case of what the NHS has been doing well. They were grateful that the NHS was able to continue to provide a high-quality health service whilst dealing with all the pressures associated with the spread of Covid-19. They felt that the vaccination programme had been well organised and that collaborative working between sectors had improved as a result of the pandemic. Secondary care services were highlighted and in particular maternity services. GP services were also commended for providing quick access to appointments which included both telephone and online formats and good quality care.

What could the NHS do differently or better? – GP services were mentioned most frequently by individuals in this respect. Better access to face-to-face GP appointments was requested alongside demand for more GP appointments generally. Respondents asked for improved accessibility through more evening and weekend appointments and the ability to book appointments in advance and online. A reduction in waiting times for referrals and hospital appointments was also requested. Organisations feel that there should be greater joined up working within the NHS and between the NHS and other sectors to redevelop pathways and improve patient experience. They also want accessible services for all, made possible by strong patient and public involvement and greater provision of mental health support including crisis beds and greater recognition of unpaid carers and their needs.

What changes that were made as result of the pandemic should be kept? – Access to telephone and online GP appointments was requested by over two-thirds of respondents. However, this should not be at the expense of face-to-face GP appointments and patients should be offered choice. It was also felt that safety measures put in place to stop the spread of Covid-19 should continue within healthcare settings – safety screens, mask wearing and hand sanitisation.

What have Social Care services been doing well? – Staff are helpful and supportive and social workers in particular were praised. There was felt to be good communication between social care workers, clients, and their families. The Adult Safeguarding Team was commended for being responsive and keeping people informed.

What could Social Care services do differently or better? – Despite being praised by some, others felt that communication could be improved in terms of how frequently staff communicate with clients/families, how well they listen, a need for greater client/family involvement (including the sharing of care plans), and more written information about services available. Others wanted more support generally and earlier interventions.

What are Gateshead's health and social care challenges? – Underfunding of health and social care services is seen as the biggest challenge for Gateshead by individuals. This is as a result of recent budget cuts or continued underfunding. Both individuals and organisations highlighted the challenges of supporting an ageing population and staffing shortages (problems recruiting and crucially retaining staff). Increased demand for mental health services was also identified as a challenge. Organisations pointed to increased socio-economic deprivation brought on by the pandemic and increasing living costs. They emphasised the challenge of integrating health and social care and increasing joined up working across sectors.

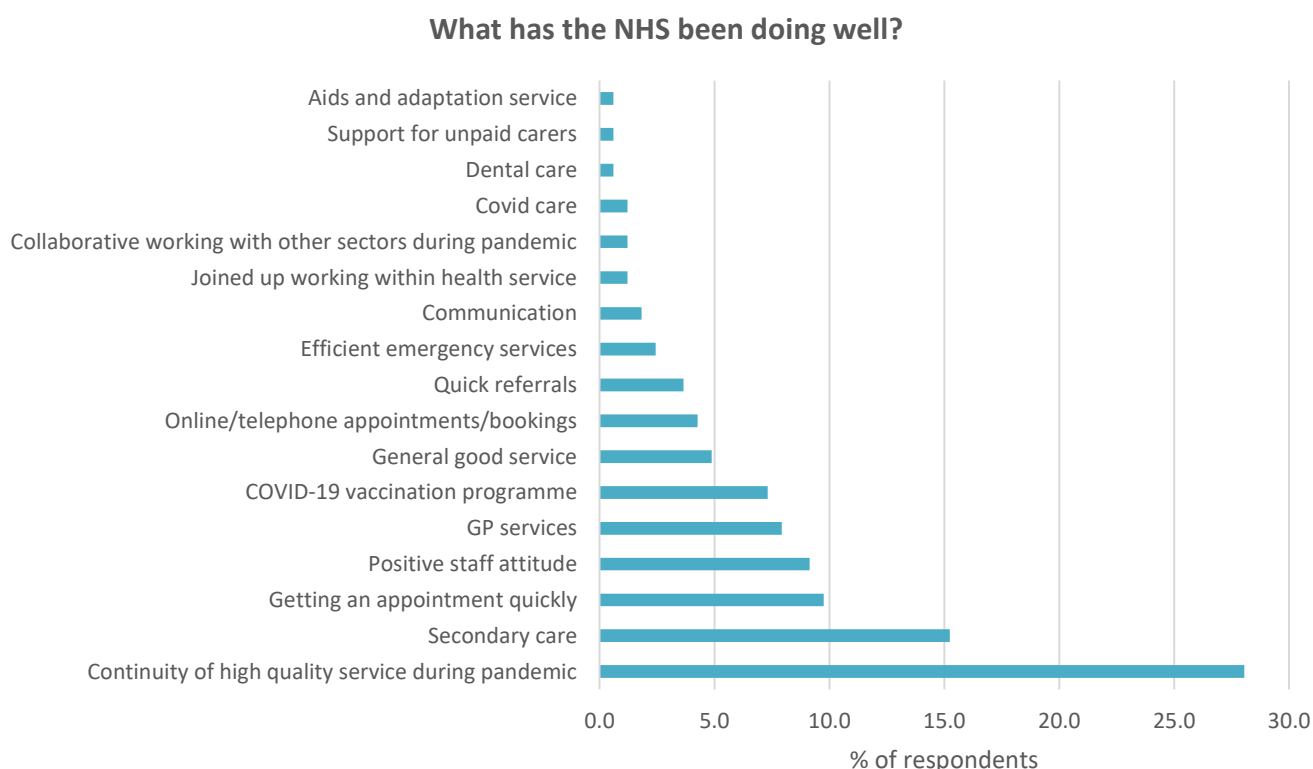
What should Gateshead's health and social care priorities be? – Mental health support should be prioritised with easier and more timely access to services for children and young people, families and older people. More out of hours support was also requested. Staff recruitment into health and particularly social care, should also be a priority. This should happen in tandem with the development of plans to retain staff – ensuring wages are appropriate and staff training and support is ongoing. Support for children and young people with additional needs (and particularly Special Educational Needs and Disability [SEND]) should also be a priority and this should be provided at the earliest possible opportunity. Reducing waiting lists in terms of the backlog of planned surgeries caused by the pandemic and earlier referral and diagnosis was also suggested as a priority. Finally, organisations would like to see joined up working between health and social care in particular, but also with voluntary and other statutory partners. They feel this will enable higher quality, patient-centred care, and reduce duplication.

NHS Services

- Responses from individual members of the public and organisations have been summarised separately.

What has the NHS been doing well?

- **123 individuals** shared their views of what they feel the NHS has been doing well.



N=123

Respondents could give more than one answer

- Understandably, the Covid-19 pandemic features heavily when people consider what the NHS has been doing well.

- o More than one quarter of people (28.0%) highlighted the continuity of NHS services during the pandemic.

“During the pandemic, despite the burden on services, my personal needs have been looked after.”

“I feel that they have done all they can possibly do, within reason, to ensure the safe access to services during a pandemic. They have also continued to deliver a service for those most in need.”

- o Others feel that the Covid-19 vaccination programme has been well organised and efficient as has treatment and support for people who had the virus.
- o Collaborative working between the NHS and other sectors such as education and the voluntary sector has also improved as a result of the pandemic.

“[They] started listening to the community and communicating with more diverse groups.”

- 15.2% described the high-quality care they received from secondary care services with midwifery, cancer care and screening services most frequently mentioned.

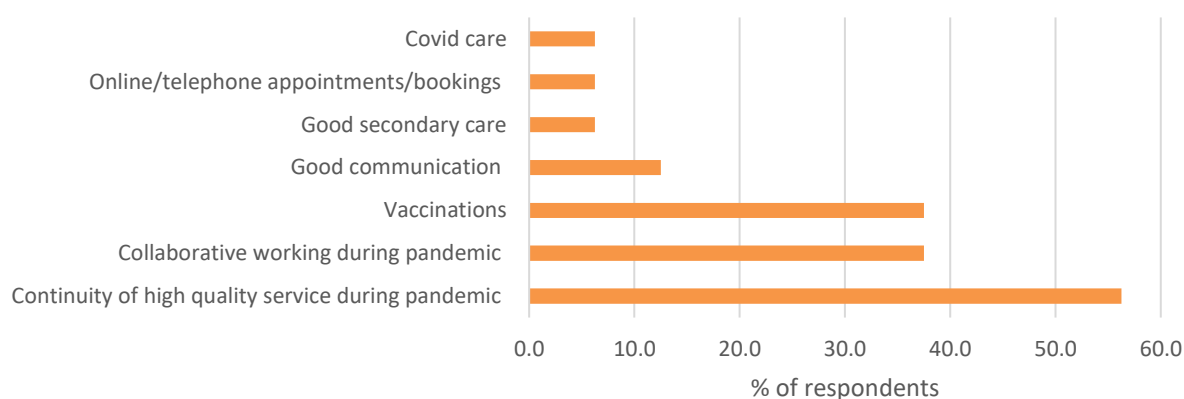
“I gave birth in September 2021 and we...were treated as individuals during the labour process. The staff were outstanding from midwives to consultants to cleaners to health care assistants, everyone treated us with respect, everyone listened to me and my wants and needs during labour and everyone was so personable and friendly.”

- 9.8% felt that appointments were timely and efficient, whilst a similar number highlighted the positive attitudes of NHS staff they had been in contact with.

“We are so lucky to have the NHS, and whenever I am at the hospital the staff work so hard while keeping a happy face for everyone they meet.”

- **16 organisations** also identified things they feel the NHS has been doing well and similar themes emerged from this group with Covid-19 dominating.

What has the NHS been doing well?



N=16

Respondents could give more than one answer

- The ability of the NHS to continue to operate a high-quality service was mentioned most frequently (56.3%).

“The NHS has performed amazingly well throughout the pandemic not just in managing the pressures and demands it faced but also the vaccination roll out and continuing to provide the highest levels of service possible across all areas.”

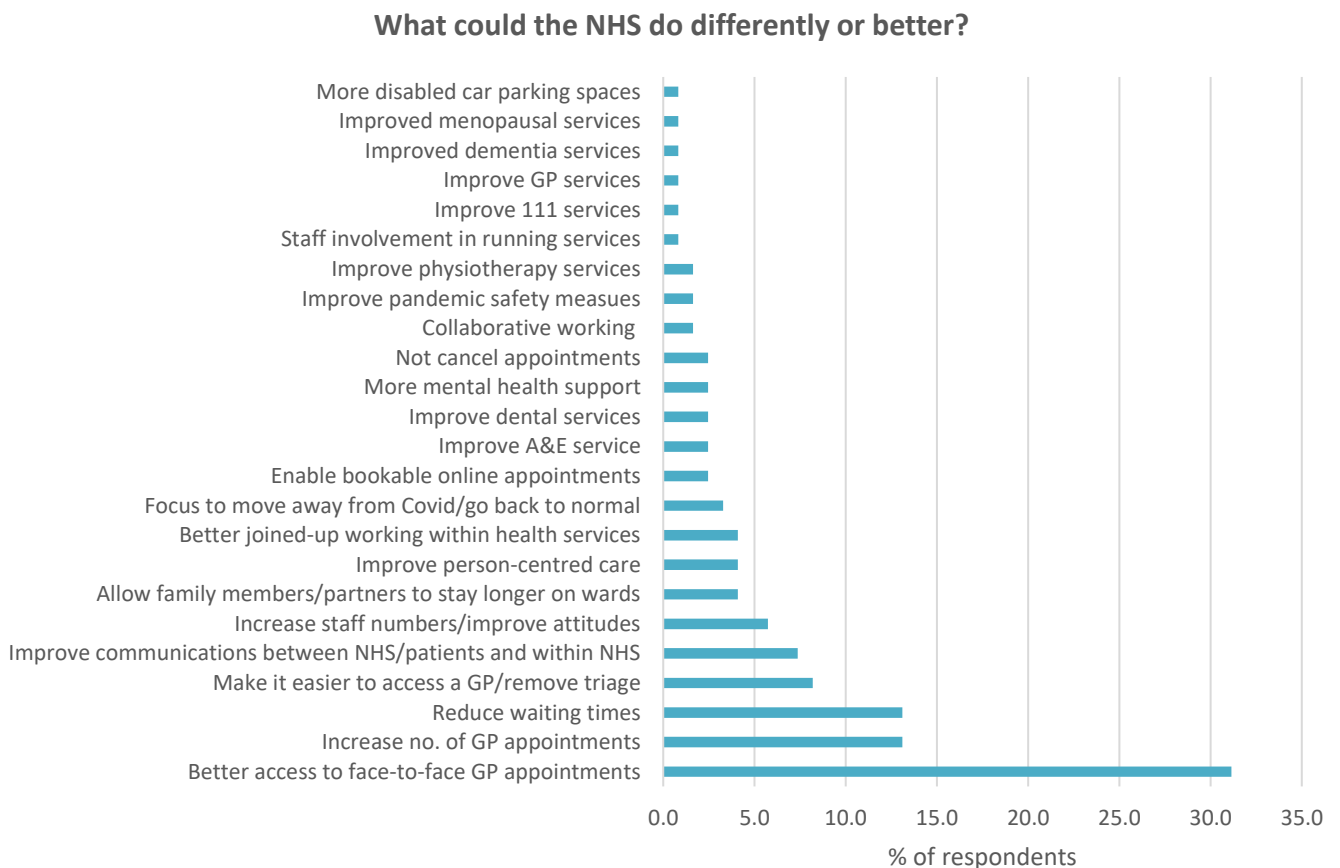
- Collaborative working between the NHS and the voluntary sector in particular was highlighted. Engaging with the voluntary sector has enabled the voices of communities to be heard and Covid-19 support designed to meet local needs.

“During an extremely difficult time, the local NHS has continued to provide the population of Gateshead with a high standard of health care. This has been possible due to the ability to build on the good working relationships in the area between the GP Practices/Primary Care Networks, Local Authority, Trust and the many voluntary sector organisations that operate in the area.”

- The Covid-19 vaccination roll-out was also highly praised.

What could the NHS do differently or better?

- **121 individuals** shared their views of what they feel the NHS could be doing differently or better.



N=122

Respondents could give more than one answer

- Comments about changes to GP practices made up nearly half (48.2%) of all responses.
 - o Nearly one third of people (31.4%) want better access to face-to-face GP appointments. They feel that it is much more difficult to get a face-to-face appointment and some feel that telephone and online appointments do not work.

“GP telephone appointments have been a complete failure. For most ailments that you require a GP, they need to inspect it face-to-face. Complete waste of theirs and our time having to go through the whole thing on the phone before going in for a consultation anyway.”

- o There is also demand for access to more GP appointments and access to appointments in the evening and on weekends to enable patients to be seen in a timely manner. They also want to be able to book appointments in advance and online.

“More availability for appointments, more flexibility (weekends for the non-urgent things that can’t fit into a normal work day), quicker appointments (if I ring one day, I won’t necessarily get a non-urgent appointment for another 4-5 weeks).”

- A reduction in waiting times for referrals or hospital appointments was also highlighted.

“Partner has for months not been given appointment after GP referred for mental health and physio treatment.”

- Communication was also mentioned in terms of dialogue between NHS services and patients regarding:
 - o Reduction in services due to Covid-19
 - o How to access online GP services
 - o Navigating the QE hospital

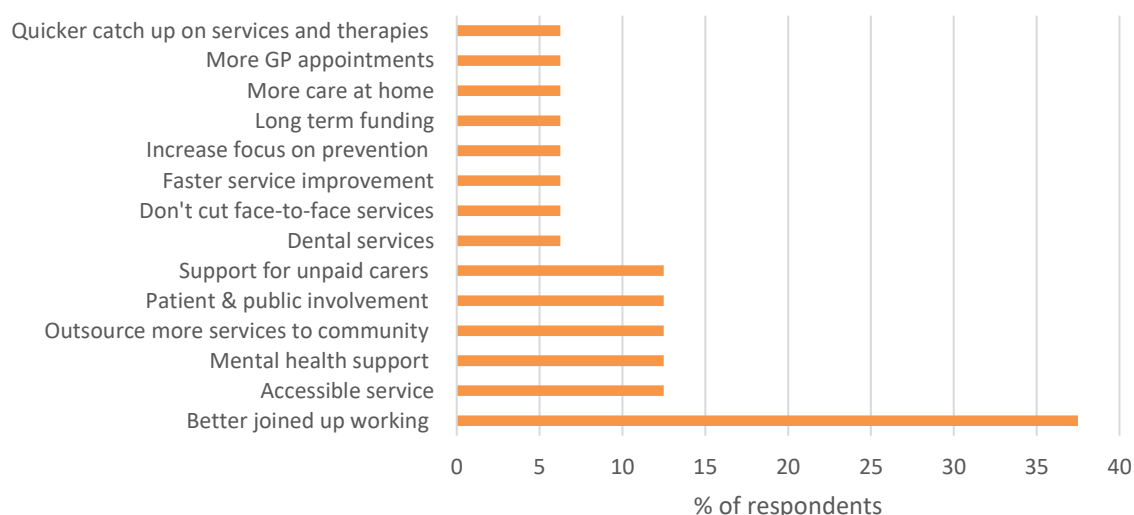
There was also a request for more information to be available in British Sign Language (BSL).

- Better joined up working was highlighted, particularly in terms of different parts of the NHS communicating with each other but also in terms of organisations working together to meet the needs of patients discharged from hospital. Services need to consider the whole person and what additional non-clinical support they may require.

"When my son was about to be discharged from the mental health hospital last year, nobody asked him if he had any benefits coming in...he didn't have the ability to work out how the benefit system worked, so basically his mental health went right down again...I would really like to see the NHS and the Council and charities doing more to make sure people have the right benefits in place before the hospital puts them out into the community again."

- **17 organisations** also identified things they feel the NHS could do differently or better.

What could the NHS do differently or better?



N=17

Respondents could give more than one answer

- Over one-third (37.5%) of organisations felt that through better joined up working within the NHS and between the NHS, other statutory services and the voluntary and community sector, services could be reimagined to increase efficiencies and produce better quality services to meet patient need.

“Look more holistically at care. Services are still funded for specific conditions such as mental health, homelessness, eating disorder rather where an individual could quite easily sit across all of these areas.”

For example, looking at care of the elderly:

“More joined up working between primary and secondary care and social services...[we are in a] great position of mental health, community services and Care of the Elderly being in same trust - potential for beacon service to deliver excellent care for the elderly to maintain health, treat as much as possible in community, prevent admission unless necessary - work with social services, to develop safe places for the elderly whilst ill that is not hospital.”

- o Moving more services into the community was also suggested for example:

“Utilise the primary care optical practice work force, make the most of their skills to bring more eyecare closer to patients’ home and free up capacity within ophthalmology.”

- o There was also a request for a single point for reporting safeguarding concerns and improved links with safeguarding boards.
- There is also a need to ensure that services meet the needs of all communities and are accessible to all and this requires patient and public involvement to be embedded in all aspects of the NHS. For example, with the focus on increased digitalisation there must be an acknowledgement that

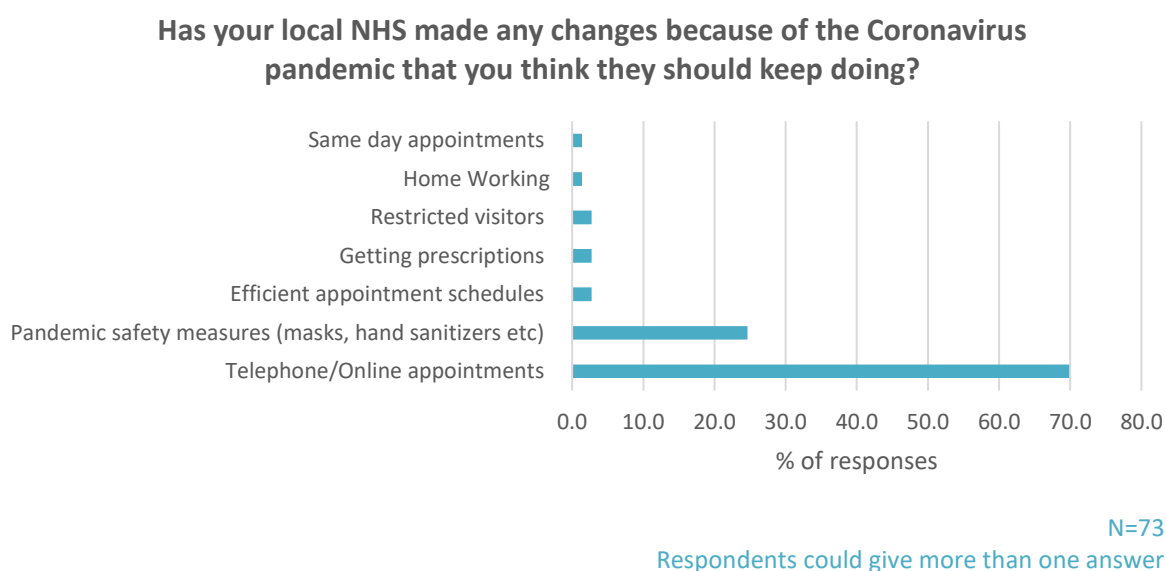
some patients can not use online services and that alternative methods are needed. Providing clear information about how to access services is also important.

“Avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach to care. People come from differing backgrounds and have different sensitivities and religious and cultural requirements. Understanding and tweaks can go a long way to understanding and improving patient care. Work with the community and listen to their needs.”

- Improvements to mental health support were mentioned with a request for more crisis beds and more mental health provision generally.

Has your local NHS made any changes because of the Coronavirus pandemic that you think they should keep doing?

- **73 individuals** identified changes made within the NHS during the pandemic they felt should continue.

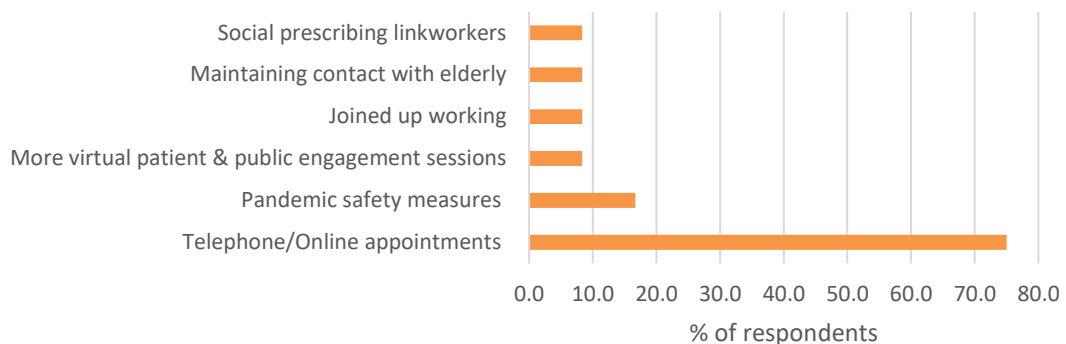


- Over two-thirds (69.9%) of people feel that patients should continue to be able to have telephone and online GP appointments. Telephone triage is also supported. Telephone and online appointments should not however replace face-to-face consultations and patients should have the option of which type of appointment they have.

“Some appointments over the phone are easier and I think this should continue, but the option to have face-to-face when wanted should still be in place.”

- o Considering online services, there was also a request for using virtual interpreters which it was felt saves time and money.
- One quarter of people (24.7%) felt that mask wearing, safety screens and hand sanitizer should continue within all NHS settings.
- **13 organisations** identified things they felt should continue.

Has your local NHS made any changes because of the Coronavirus pandemic that you think they should keep doing?



N=13

Respondents could give more than one answer

- As with individual responses, access to telephone (including triage) and online GP appointments was most commonly mentioned (66.7%). This is a particularly valuable addition for unpaid carers and people in paid employment:

“Whilst many people prefer to see their GP in person the move towards digital service provision has made access to GPs easier. This is particularly true for unpaid carers, many of whom have historically neglected their own health needs by feeling they cannot leave the person they care for alone whilst they visit a GP practice. The same also applies to those unpaid carers who are still able to work. Digital makes accessing GPs easier, and it should stay as a core part of the NHS offer.”

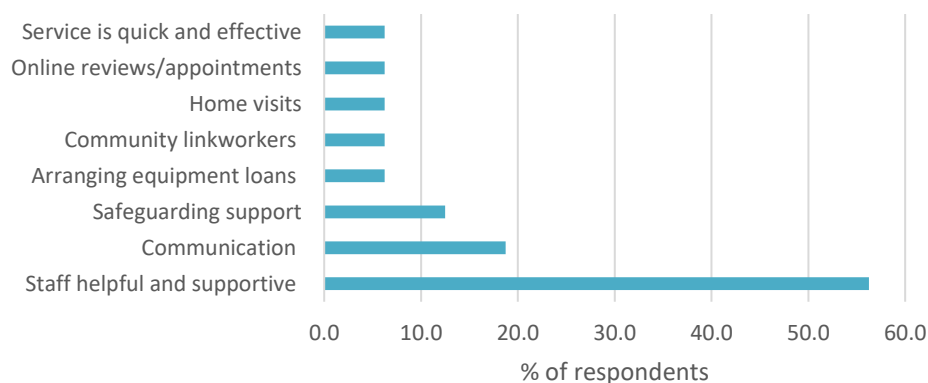
- Pandemic safety measures should also continue.

Social Care Services

What have Social Care services been doing well?

- 16 individuals** shared their views of what they feel Social Care services have been doing well.

What have Social Care services been doing well?



N=16

Respondents could give more than one answer

- Most comments (56.3%) related to staff, particularly social workers being helpful and supportive.

“Just being there in very difficult and distressing times.”

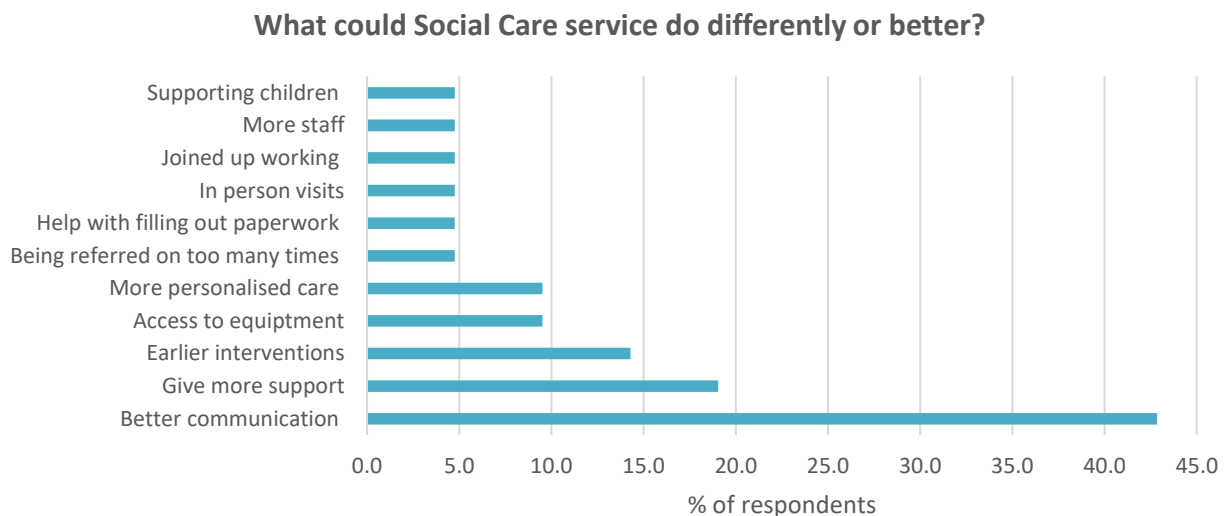
“I think that they have done all that they could do under a very difficult situation and haven’t been given the recognition that they deserved. It is by far one of the most difficult jobs and by far the most underpaid.”

- Communication between social care workers and clients or the relatives of clients was also highlighted. In particular the Safeguarding Adults Team was mentioned twice with respondents finding them to be responsive and informative. Communication from their social worker was also highlighted by one respondent:

“I have a Social Worker [name] and she is an absolute star. She goes above and beyond and does not only listen to me but HEARS ME. Which no-one ever has. I would truly be lost without her.”

What could Social Care services do differently or better?

- However, when asked what social care services could do better or differently, communication was mentioned most frequently (40.9%).



N=22

Respondents could give more than one answer

- People want better communication in terms of:
 - o More frequent communication
 - o More listening and involving clients and their families/unpaid carers
 - o More information in written form e.g. leaflets
 - o Copies of care plans shared

“Communicating and consulting with carers could be better. In our experience we have had to chase up and confirm information. Consultation with care givers is not done at present.”

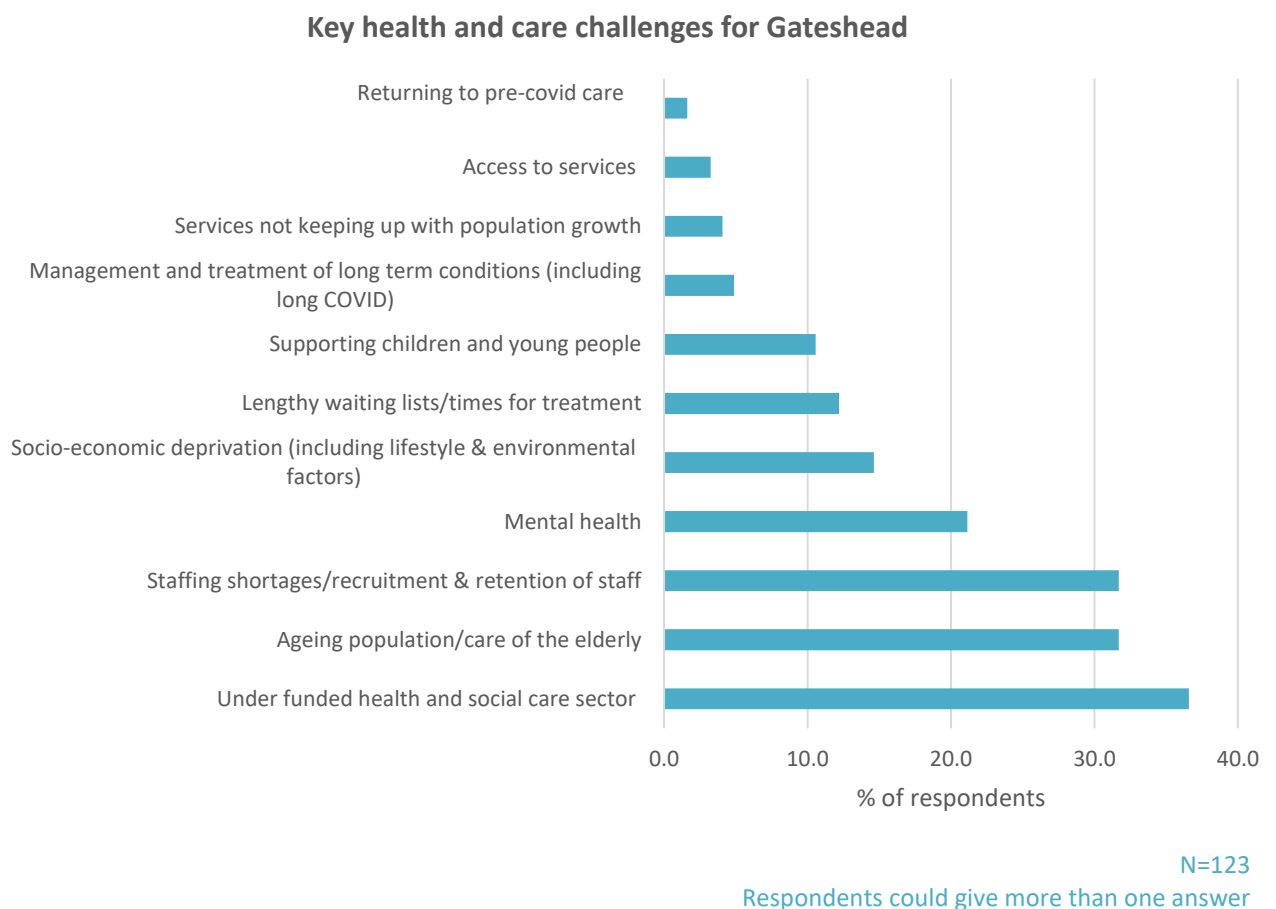
- Several people requested more general support and support at an earlier stage, one person reported waiting six months before the service got in touch with them.
- Two people requested faster access to equipment and for two care needs to be more personal.

“[Could have] looked after my elderly Mother with a more personal approach and quite frankly more care.”

Health and Care challenges

What do you think are the key health and care challenges facing Gateshead in the coming years?

- **123 individuals** identified key health and social care challenges for Gateshead in the next few years.



- The key challenge for health and social care is a lack of funding with over one third of respondents mentioning this issue (36.6%). This is either as a result of budget cuts or continued underfunding.
- An increasingly ageing population and having the resources in place to support the needs of this group was also identified (31.7%).
- Staffing shortages and problems with recruiting and retaining staff was also mentioned by 31.7% of respondents.

“There is a need to provide all Social Care staff with good quality structured and monitored ongoing training and development. Staff need to have the right mental and physical attributes to care for the vulnerable and the recruitment system should be robust enough to identify these traits in potential candidates.”

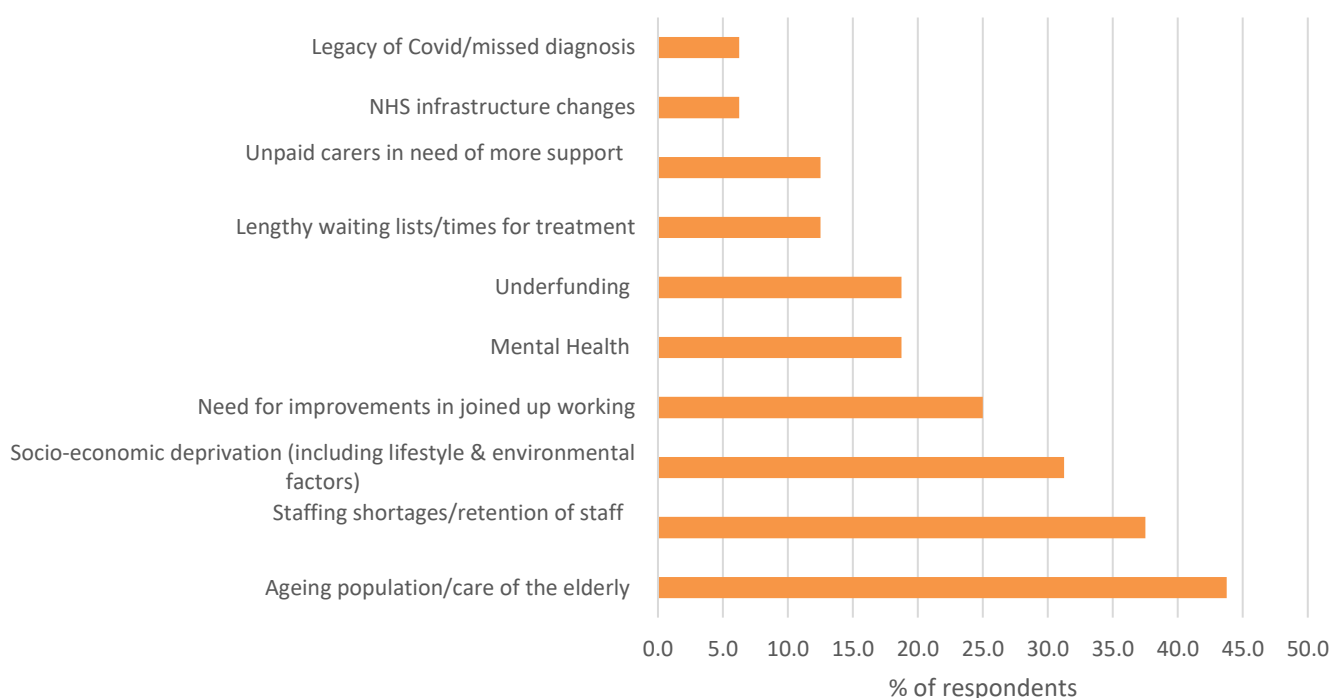
“Financial [challenge] and time spent with patients. Services are being stretched even further - which stresses the staff and results in poor experience for service users.”

- Increased demand for mental health support across all ages is also a challenge. People feel that services are not currently adequate and that this could worsen with increased demand as a result of Covid-19 and pressures associated with the sharply rising cost of living.

“Mental health for all age groups. Children and adolescent services are currently unacceptable but so are adults’ services.”

- 16 organisations** identified challenges they felt health and social care services in Gateshead are facing.

Key health and care challenges for Gateshead



N=16

Respondents could give more than one answer

- For organisations the increasingly ageing population was most commonly mentioned by 40.0% of respondents.
- Staff shortages across health and social care is also an issue, resulting in services which are unable to support their clients fully.

“We are seeing a rise in adult concerns - more of our most vulnerable residents are experiencing abuse and neglect. Our care sector is struggling to respond to the needs of our

residents following a sustained period of underfunding and difficulties in workforce recruitment and retention. Health and social care therefore have a difficult balance in trying to improve quality of care within a dwindling sector.”

- Socio-economic factors were also identified as a challenge.

“Inequalities - we know these have been exacerbated during the pandemic and we have further to go to ensure a level playing field for all. The cost of living crisis (as it is commonly termed) will impact on those who were previously just managing, increasing demand on services.”

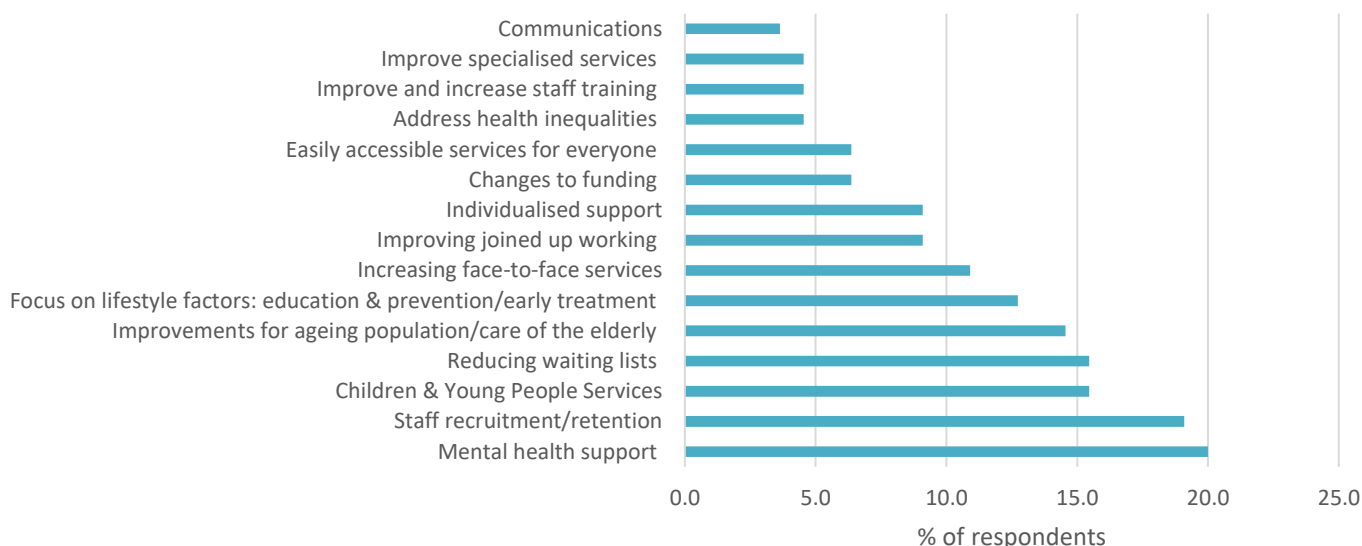
- Also for organisations, the need for more joined up working within the NHS and integration between health and social care was also seen as more important than ever.

“The close reliance of the care elements on one another has an impact when these patient needs cannot be met, e.g. when social care is not able to provide care packages for patients awaiting discharge from hospital then hospital beds become blocked until this can be arranged. Non-availability of hospital beds means a delay in the provision of medical care for somebody who may have to remain at home with a care package in place until they can be admitted.”

What do you think are the key priorities or actions health and social care should focus on?

- **110 individuals** identified key priorities for health and social care challenges for Gateshead in the next few years.

What do you think are the key priorities health and social care should focus on in the next year?



N=110

Respondents could give more than one answer

- **110 individuals** identified key priorities for health and social care challenges for Gateshead in the next few years.

- One fifth of people said that mental health support should be a priority for the coming year. They requested easier access to services, with shorter waiting times and more services available to children and young people, older people, and family-based assessments.

“Mental health, shorter waiting times, more facilities/help groups especially children and the elderly.”

- Staff recruitment and retention across both health and social care should also be prioritised. More staff are needed and recruitment into social care professions should be improved targeting people at a younger age. Wages should reflect the valuable work staff do.

“Ensure that all health and social care staff are valued and rewarded to help retain existing staff and to also encourage new staff into these essential roles and professions.”

“Employing enough social workers and developing a positive ethos in your social care departments so that your staff stay for a long time. They will do a better job if they are well supported with a deep knowledge of their clients and the areas they work in. And that will only happen if you stop the churn.”

- It was also felt that services supporting children and young people should be prioritised. Children with additional needs require support at the earliest opportunity and support for children with special educational needs was mentioned in particular.

“Children - if they aren't given the right care and support now, the implications on adult social care later on are significant and, ultimately, more expensive.”

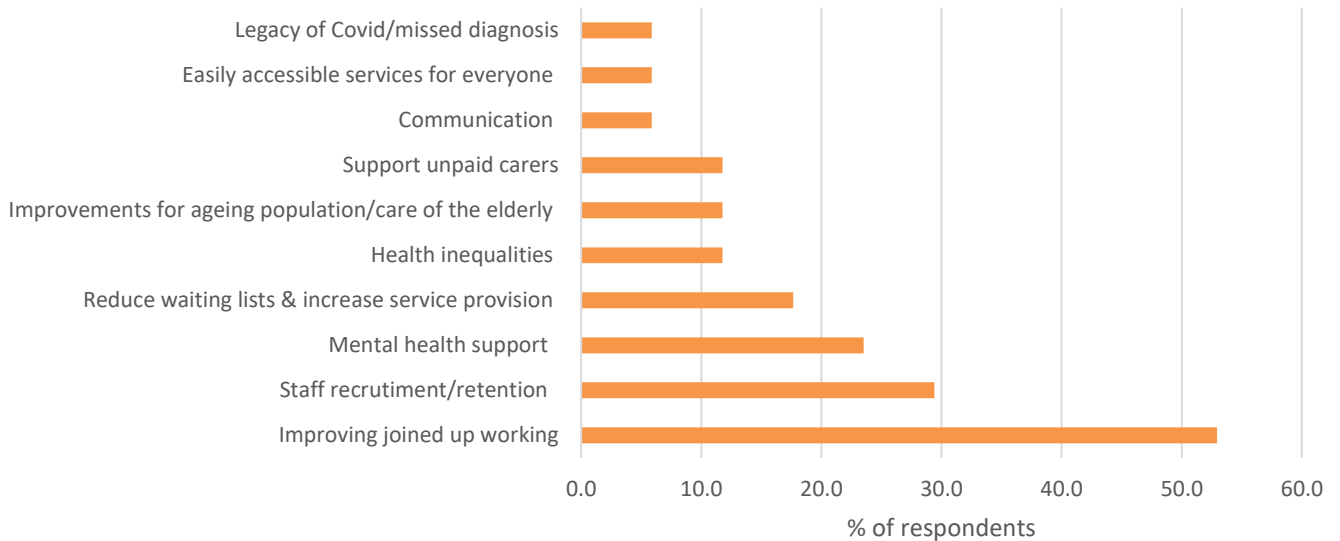
“Sorting the provision for children with additional needs. Reassess the special school provision. Overhaul how educational psychology is funded - it's all about money and not needs led. If the public actually knew then the uproar!”

- Another priority should be around reducing waiting lists, trying to reduce the backlog caused by the pandemic around planned surgeries and ensuring that people do not have to wait for diagnosis. For social care, ensuring that children in particular receive diagnosis and support in a timely manner.

“Treating the people who have had their health put on hold for two years.”

- Prioritising services to support an ageing population is also important.
- **17 organisations** identified key priorities for health and social care challenges for Gateshead in the next few years.

What do you think are the key health and social care priorities we should focus on in the next year?



N=17

Respondents could give more than one answer

- The main priority identified by over half (52.9%) of organisations was the need for more and improved joined up working between health and social care in particular but also with voluntary sector support services and other statutory sectors. This will enable higher quality, patient-centred care; and a reduction in duplication.

“Continuing to develop the links between health and social care so that patients can be provided with seamless care which addresses their needs. Development of pathways to avoid duplication of services being provided by organisations.”

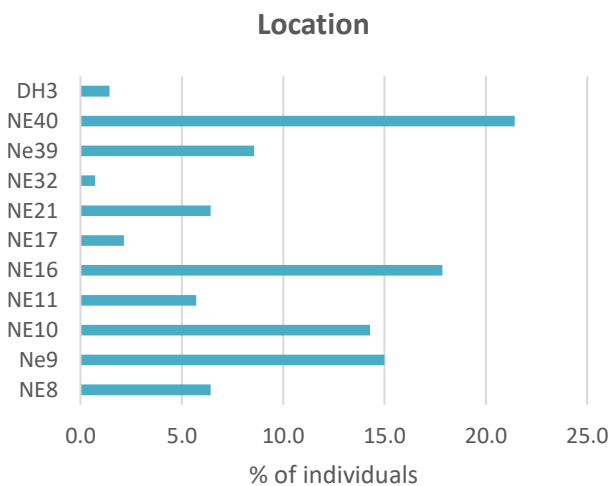
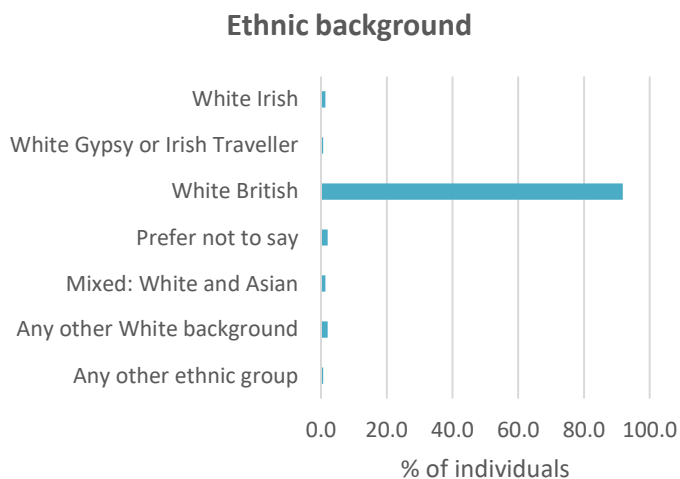
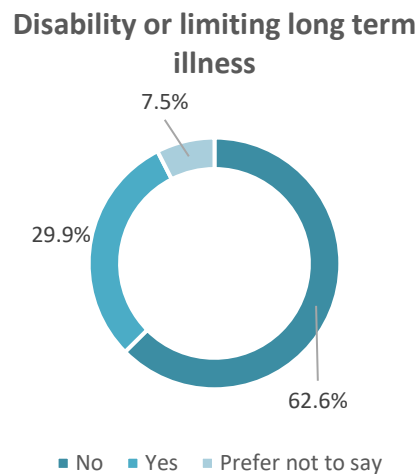
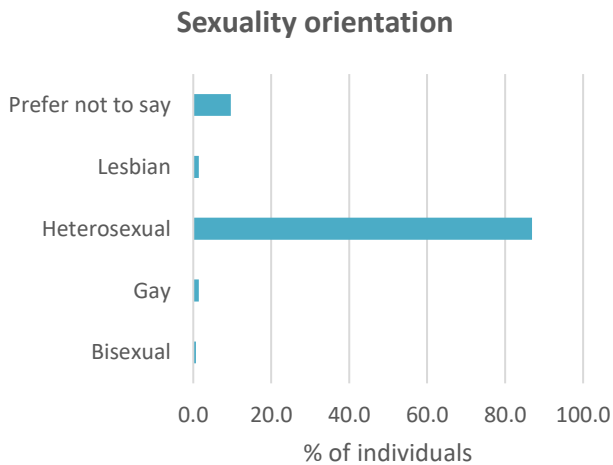
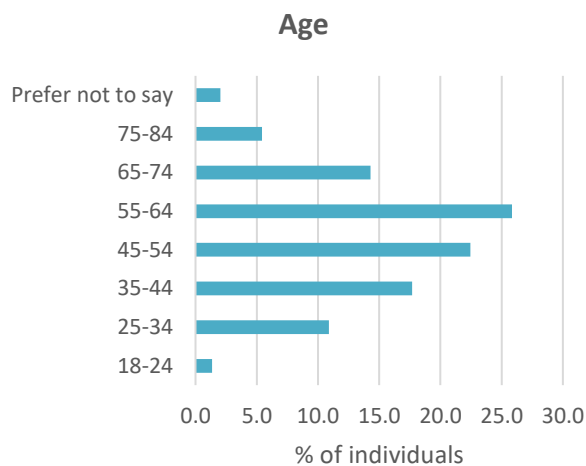
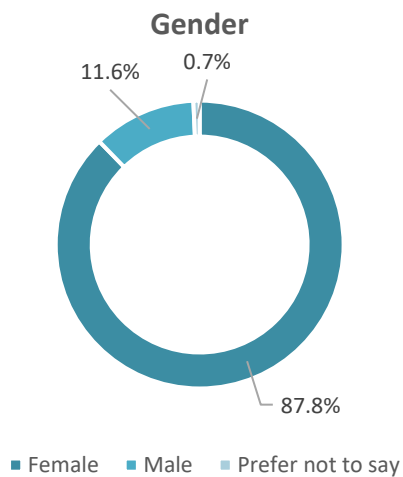
- Recruitment, retention, and development of particularly social care staff was also highlighted as a top priority, mirroring individual responses.

“Supporting our commissioned care providers with workforce recruitment and retention.”

“Significant investment must be made so that professional care work is paid at an attractive rate that demonstrates it is valued. Paid carers are currently better off working for Amazon and we are facing a recruitment crisis.”

- As with individuals, mental health support was felt to be a priority area. Increasing provision of services to enable quicker and easier access to intervention is needed. Out of hours support was also requested.

Appendix 1: Profile of individuals who shared their views



Appendix 2: Organisations who shared their views*

- Carers Trust Tyne and Wear
- NHS Newcastle and Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group
- Chopwell Primary Health Care Centre
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- Fell Cottage Surgery
- Gateshead Carers Association
- Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Healthwatch Gateshead
- Labriut Healthy Living Centre
- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Local Optical Committee
- Rise North East
- Safeguarding Adults Board
- The Winlaton Centre

*Three other organisations also shared views but chose not to leave their name