Item 2

At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2025 at 5:30pm.

Present:-

Councillor Usher in the Chair

Councillors Donkin, Hunter, Miller F., Reed and Walton.

Also in attendance:-

Nigel Cummings – Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council
Anna Gillingham – Manager, Healthwatch, Sunderland
Andrea Hetherington - Director of Corporate Affairs and Legal, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust
Julie Lynn – Performance Lead, Adult Social Care, Sunderland City Council
Gillian Robinson – Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Manager, Sunderland City Council
Joanne Stewart - Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council
Ryan Swiers – Deputy Director of Public Health and Well Being, Sunderland City Council
Scott Watson – Director of Place (Sunderland), North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dagg, Feeley, Heron, McDonough, D.E. Snowdon and Tobin

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 2 September, 2025

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 2 September, 2025 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

NHS North East and North Cumbria ICB Performance Report

The Director of Place (Sunderland) – North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an update on the performance of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and in particular Sunderland.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Scott Watson, Director of Place (Sunderland), North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, took Members through a presentation which covered a number of key performance issues, including:-

- Monthly Accident and Emergency Performance;
- Referral to Treatment Performance;
- Diagnostics;
- Cancer;
- Community Mental Health Services; and
- GP Patient Survey.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

The Chairman thanked for Mr. Watson for their detailed presentation and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Hunter referred to the announcement from Government regarding moving a lot of services to digital / online and commented that those patients who were more able to use technology were freeing up face to face appointment times for those who may not be as able.

Councillor Hunter asked what plans they had to improve the waiting lists for children and adult mental health services and asked if there was time frame in place and was informed that it may warrant a report being submitted to a future meeting of the Committee but in short they were developing a needs met pathway; meeting patient's needs without it having to escalate up to secondary care and consultant services. Historically, there had been an open referral policy which had led to a huge volume of patients waiting but they had found that not everyone needed that consultant approach and their needs could be met very differently.

Mr. Watson went on to advise that they were looking to have a more tiered approach, so that more mental health practitioners were available to schools and general practice so that when patients present to their GP, or in school for children, there were options at that point rather than having to be referred on. This would ensure that those patients who were referred to the secondary level, and consultant services, were those that really needed it and other patients were getting quicker access to lower-level mental health intervention.

In response to a question from Councillor Walton as to whether there were examples of good practice in relation to the No Criteria to Reside (NCtR) which could be shared, Mr. Watson advised that as part of the Guiding You Home Programme they had brought in a delivery partner, Newton, who had experiences and exemplars from other parts of the country where they had already undertaken this work and made big improvements. Ms. Lynn advised that the workstreams had been based around that good practice and that they also needed to understand the city's own drivers for the measure being that way; before focussing on what the barriers may have been in the past.

In a further question from Councillor Watson regarding diagnostic figures and the use of Community Diagnostic Centres, Ms. Hetherington advised that there was a CDC based at the Metro Centre, with another at South Tyneside with a PET CT Scanner, which had been instrumental in reducing waiting times. She advised that it

was now at maximum capacity but they were looking to see if they could extend the opening hours to get even more patients seen.

With regards to the rise in using online consultation services through the NHS app, Councillor Walton asked how and if there would be any monitoring to ensure it was not detrimental to the level of face-to-face activity, given that staff may be tied up dealing with online requests. Ms. Hetherington explained that as a trust the electronic patient records were quite advanced, so a lot of information was already being used rather than being duplicated. Mr. Watson advised that the areas they were looking at locally was in reducing the duplication of things such as blood tests being repeated unnecessarily when better use of the technology available to them could provide an altogether better patient service.

Councillor Miller referred to the discharge of homeless people and mentioned the use of Pods that had been raised as a possibility at another meeting she attended. Ms. Lynn advised that they had invested in Nap Pads which were currently available and she could look to get more information on how well used they were. Mr. Watson also informed Members that there was a Homelessness Coordinator in the discharge hub so they were able to help coordinate a patient's discharge.

Councillor Miller referred to bone density scans taking some time to get results and wondered if this may be part of the reason for the differing scores for GP satisfaction and Mr. Watson advised that he would need to pull data from specific practices but there was no general trend that there was better satisfaction in more affluent areas; in fact quite the opposite in some areas of the city.

Ms. Gillingham advised the Committee that they had been approached by one of the practices who had received a lower score and they had spoken with some patients, where they had advised that the issue had been around access. They would continue to undertake further work with the practice to understand why patients had scored them lower, as they had thought they were undertaking some good work to improve access.

The Chairman asked who the poorer performing practices were and Mr. Watson advised he could provide a table for Members information.

In relation to the systems practices used, Members were informed that in Sunderland all practices used the EMIS Clinical System so there was a relatively stable structure, with good connectivity between practices. There was an element of dissatisfaction in some practices with some of the functionality with EMIS and it could drop out or be laborious for data entry and therefore some were looking at other systems. They would all be joined through national standards so that they could still connect and all practices would have to continue to report core standards as a minimum level of capability. Members were informed it did vary from system to system and the issues around EMIS were mainly on the operational side.

In response to a question from the Chairman as to how long it would be before results starting to be seen from the Guiding You Home Programme, Members were advised that there a number of pilots being undertaken at the moment which would be evaluated over the coming weeks, with the hope to address any issues, and a rollout expected at the end of November / beginning of December.

Councillor Donkin referred to the presentation they had received from the North East Ambulance Service and response times at a previous meeting and asked if the thirty minutes versus fifteen minutes was having any effect on the figures presented to the Committee. Mr. Watson commented that the more ambulances queueing or waiting at the hospital were having an effect and they were aspiring to have as few delays in handovers as they could. This year they had implemented a forty-five minute handover whereby if the crew were not released within that time the trust would automatically take over the care of the patient, allowing them to get back on the road.

With regards to CNTW dropping from 2 to 4, Mr. Watson advised that it was about making sure people got access to the right services, in the right place. Giving better access to professionals in school and general practice would stop referrals being made to consultancy services when they were not needed and meeting patient's needs not wants.

The Chairman referred to the NHS app and the level of waste, where appointments are made and confirmed online but then paper letters were still being provided, at times after the appointment had actually taken place. Members were informed that it was Officers understanding that if a text or online message was not read within a certain amount of time, an actual letter would be issued, but there was also the risk of information being lost for those patients who did not use the technology but it was an area that would continue to be looked at.

Councillor Hunter referred to other organisations, whereby they asked if you were happy to opt out of paper correspondence, and asked if this was something which could be considered, and Mr. Watson commented that it was an area which was consistently being looked at to improve and he would expect there would be rapid progress made over the coming years.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Mr. Watson for their presentation and attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information received within the presentation and report be received and noted.

Pathways Into Information Care and Support

Healthwatch Sunderland submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an overview of the work undertaken by Healthwatch Sunderland into how people access information, advice and guidance on adult social care.

(for copy report – see original minute)

Julie Lynn, Performance Lead, Adult Social Care, took Members through their presentation which covered key points from the work undertaken by Healthwatch Sunderland, including:-

- Respondent Demographics;
- Finding information on health and care;
- Accessing health and care records;
- Information in an understandable way;
- Barriers to access;

- What is working well and areas for improvement; and;
- Recommendations.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

The Chairman thanked the Officer for their presentation and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Hunter referred to the multi-channel awareness campaign and conversations she had heard on a national radio station where the presenters had been advocating the pharmacy service and commented that she had found that more appealing to listen to than a generic advert. Ms. Lynn advised that nothing was off the table for consideration and they were working with residents who could tell them where and how they would take notice of information better.

In response to whether there were specific languages resident's had raised that they would prefer information to be provided in, Ms. Lynn advised that there wasn't but that online they did have a translation tool which would convert documents into languages but this didn't automatically translate printed information. Mr. Swiers commented that the data was available at a city level of the top ten most common languages outside of English which they could also provide locally.

Councillor Miller referred to access, and commented that Gentoo had a strong package for people looking at care and health, and asked if it had been picked up in the data provided. Ms. Lynn advised that Gentoo were different as there service was delivered directly to the resident whereby adult social care had to be a city wide offer and they needed to reflect on how they could deliver all elements of the service on the feedback received and ongoing.

Councillor Donkin commented that he was delighted and not surprised that residents saw the local voluntary sector as a good source of information and asked how many of the surveys were carried out in local VCS environments as it may skew the responses. He was informed that as they wanted to sit and help residents complete the survey there were a lot of visits to community centres, etc. but it had also been available through social media outlets.

Councillor Donkin commented that it was also important that the smaller organisations and harder to reach groups were also given the opportunity to share their views and support them too. Ms. Gillingham advised that all size groups had been involved, with different age groups and demographics to get a wide range of responses.

There being no further questions or comments the Chairman thanked Ms. Lynn for their report and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Sunderland Local Account 24-25

The Director of Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with an overview of Sunderland's Adult Social Care Local Account 2024/25.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Julie Lynn, Performance Lead, Adult Social Care, took Members through their presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Supporting people to live independently;
- Social prescribing;
- Supporting people to regain independence;
- Helping people to live with support;
- Safeguarding adults;
- Residents voice; and
- How adult social care money is spent.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

Members thanked Ms. Lynn for the informative report and presentation and thanked the Adult Social Care Directorate for the fantastic work they undertook.

There being no further questions for Ms. Lynn, the Chairman thanked her for her attendance, and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Work Programme 2025/26

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2025/26 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from the 17 September 2025.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

6. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

There being no further items of business, the Chairman closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) J. USHER,
Chairman.