



Help to Live at Home

Feedback from home care staff and service users
March 2025

healthwatch

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Background

Help to Live at Home is one of the four key priorities in Healthwatch South Tyneside's 2024/26 Operational Plan.

Since 2020 homecare provision has changed in South Tyneside, following the introduction of four zones within the local authority area.

We want to understand how the newly established zonal system meets the needs of our communities by approaching those who need care in the community, to assess the alignment or gaps between the perception of the service providers and the experiences of those who need to use the services.

Our focus is in two areas – the people and the providers:

- Are users of home care services receiving the service indicated in their Care Plan, including quality of care, punctuality, respect? Are care providers matching carers to people appropriately? Do people know who to contact if there is a problem?
- What is the agency view on the service they are providing? What is the current status on staff recruitment and retention? Are there any training issues? How often do care providers check on clients to ensure their Care Plan is being followed?

GOAL: To understand how the service is working with the four-zone framework and how it is meeting the needs of those who need care in the community.



Methodology

In summer 2020 South Tyneside Council introduced a new model of home care with services provided by four private providers, each allocated an area.

The operators and the areas they cover are:

- Zone 1 (Springfield) – Hebburn and Jarrow
- Zone 2 (Dale Care) – Boldon, Boldon Colliery and Fellgate
- Zone 3 (Human Support Group) – South Shields
- Zone 4 (Cera Care) – Whitburn, Cleadon , Horsley Hill, The Nook, Whiteleas and Marsden.

The four care providers employ 370 staff. The services they offer can include domiciliary care, dementia support, respite care, live-in care, end-of-life care, practical support and companionship.

Users of home care services

Between July 2024 and February 2025, Healthwatch South Tyneside contacted 200 users of home care services – 50 in each zone – to conduct a survey over the phone or arrange its completion online or via post.

Questions ranged from timekeeping to the quality of care and treatment, time allocated to visits, how easy it is to contact the care agency and details of any issues experienced.

Care staff

Members of staff who deliver the home care services on behalf of the four providers were contacted between November 2024 and February 2025 and asked to complete a short online survey.

This requested their feedback on their role and the support they receive to deliver it. Managers were emailed on four occasions and asked to promote uptake with staff.

Managers

We had meetings both in person and via Teams with managers from all four providers between July and September 2024.

They were asked questions about the new zonal system, safeguarding, staff training, staff retention, subcontracting, the introduction of two new roles – Trusted Assessors and Living Made Easy Assessors – and interaction with [South Tyneside Care Academy](#).

Local groups

We contacted the following groups in August 2024 to share information about the Help to Live at Home survey: Connected Caring; ACTS; NAAFI Break; Veterans Response; Fire Service; New Hope Church; Apna Ghar; CREST and Happy at Home.

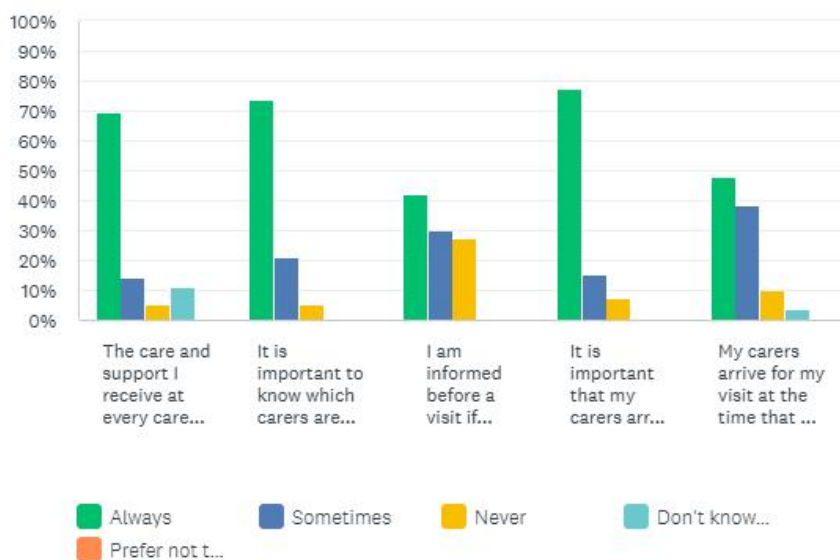


Findings

The users of home care services

More than 200 people were asked questions in six areas: the visit/punctuality; quality of care and treatment; time allocated; level of skills and training; ease of contacting the agency; personal/demographic information.

PART 1 – Visit from my carers



	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER	DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	TOTAL
▼ The care and support I receive at every care visit is what has been agreed in my care and support plan	69.31% 140	14.36% 29	5.45% 11	10.89% 22	0.00% 0	202
▼ It is important to know which carers are and when they will be visiting me	73.76% 149	20.79% 42	5.45% 11	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	202
▼ I am informed before a visit if there is going to be a change in who will be visiting me or if they are going to be late	42.08% 85	30.20% 61	27.23% 55	0.50% 1	0.00% 0	202
▼ It is important that my carers arrive on time	77.11% 155	15.42% 31	7.46% 15	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	201
▼ My carers arrive for my visit at the time that has been planned	48.02% 97	38.61% 78	9.90% 20	3.47% 7	0.00% 0	202

Nearly seven in ten respondents (69.3%) said the care and support received is always as agreed in the care and support plan, with 14.4% reporting it sometimes was.

Knowing which carer is coming and when is important to the users of home care services – 73.8% said this is always the case and 20.8% responded sometimes.

Less than half (42.1%) said they were always told in advance if there would be a change in the carer or time of the visit, with 30.2% saying they were sometimes informed and 27.3% saying they were never given advance notice.

Punctuality is also important – 92.5% of respondents said it was either always (77.1%) or sometimes (15.4%) important that their carer arrived on time, particularly where medication is concerned.

However, less than half (48.0%) said their carer always arrived on time, with 38.6% responding 'sometimes' and 9.9% 'never'.

Most respondents were sympathetic to their carers' busy schedules in their comments, however, which included:

"Sometimes they can be late, but this is only because held up at other people's homes."

"Sometimes carers can be late, depending on their schedule, we realise it isn't their fault."

"Sometimes carers are late, but I don't worry too much as I know they can be busy."

"Carers can be late at times, I know how busy they are especially when other carers are off sick or on holiday."

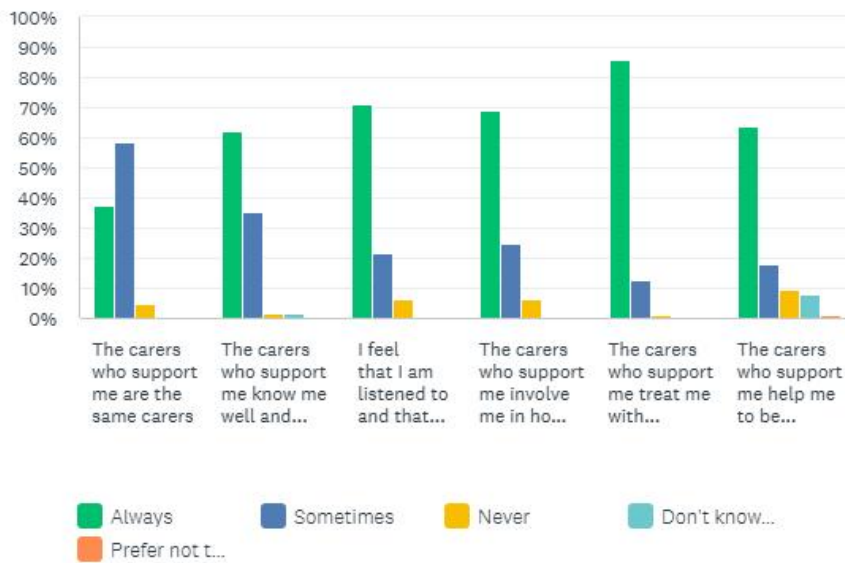
"Receive good care from all the carers, sometimes they are late but always turn up."

"Carers do arrive late sometimes, but I understand how busy they are. I look forward to their visits."

"Carers have difficulty keeping to a timetable; they seem to be always rushed."

"I receive good care. The carers are sometimes late but they do always turn up."

PART 2 – Quality of care and treatment



	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER	DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	TOTAL
▼ The carers who support me are the same carers	37.31% 75	58.21% 117	4.48% 9	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	201
▼ The carers who support me know me well and know how I like and need to be supported	61.88% 125	35.15% 71	1.49% 3	1.49% 3	0.00% 0	202
▼ I feel that I am listened to and that my carers talk to me in a way that I understand	71.29% 144	21.78% 44	6.44% 13	0.50% 1	0.00% 0	202
▼ The carers who support me involve me in how I would like my support to be provided	68.81% 139	24.75% 50	6.44% 13	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	202
▼ The carers who support me treat me with kindness, dignity and respect	85.64% 173	12.87% 26	0.99% 2	0.50% 1	0.00% 0	202
▼ The carers who support me help me to be independent	63.86% 129	17.82% 36	9.41% 19	7.92% 16	0.99% 2	202

The answers and comments indicate a usual high standard of care – 85.6% said they were always treated with kindness, dignity and respect and 71.3% reported feeling they were always listened to and spoken to in a way they understood.

Only 37.3% said they always had the same carers and 58.1% sometimes – the comments indicated weekend carers could be different staff and that they did not spend as much time as during the week.

Almost two-thirds (63.9%) said their carers always supported them to be independent.

Comments included:

"Very cheerful, lots of praise for carers. Ask if I need anything else before they go."

"All of the carers are lovely, but as I have reoccurring cancer tumours and various other medical issues, it would be more helpful to have the same one."

"Monday to Friday carer is excellent. Saturdays and Sundays my carer is often someone different to who I am expecting. At the weekends they don't stay as long as they should. I should get 20 minutes morning and afternoon. At the weekend they only stay 5 to 10 minutes."

"Monday to Friday carers always support me, weekend carers not so good."

"Have no problems with the care I receive, sometimes different carers but that is fine."

"I get every bit of help, treatment or other. All the carers treat me with respect and give 100% support. I am nearly 94 and couldn't ask for more."

"Only a couple of the carers are supportive and caring. Some hardly speak and are in and out after arriving at the wrong time. I have had to ring the agency on occasion after hours when the carers have not turned up."

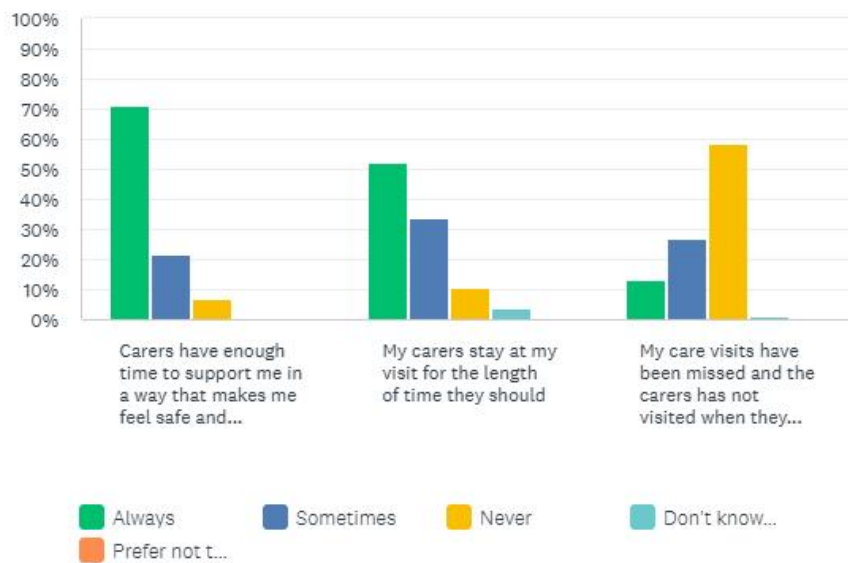
"Majority of the time same carers but on the odd occasion we have new carers that don't understand me or my needs."

"Weekend care could be anyone. All carers know what they need to do. Ask at the end of the visit if anything else needs doing."

"I get quite a few different carers. Sometimes takes a while for new carer to get to know me. I am a little deaf, but manage."

"Never feel like I am listened to, sometimes I feel like a hindrance. My family are involved now."

PART 3 -Time



	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER	DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	TOTAL
Carers have enough time to support me in a way that makes me feel safe and comfortable	70.79% 143	21.78% 44	6.93% 14	0.50% 1	0.00% 0	202
My carers stay at my visit for the length of time they should	51.98% 105	33.66% 68	10.40% 21	3.47% 7	0.50% 1	202
My care visits have been missed and the carers has not visited when they should have	13.37% 27	26.73% 54	58.42% 118	0.99% 2	0.50% 1	202

Respondents are divided on whether they feel carers stay for the correct length of time, with 52.0% saying they always do, 33.7% saying they sometimes do and 10.4% saying they never do.

When asked if carers have enough time to support clients in a way that makes them feel safe and comfortable, 70.8% said always, 21.8% sometimes and 6.9% never.

The comments reflect this divide on whether clients feel they get enough time, but there is a recognition of the pressure on time carers have:

“Carers tend to be in a rush because of the pressures of the workload. I have visits from the managers who have stepped in because of a shortage of staff. I have no complaints.”

“My carers are always pushed for time.”

"Carers seem to be rushed, it was never like this before."

"The carers never stay for a little chat, they tend to be in and out."

"Carers are very busy but always stay the time they should."

"The carers stay for the length of time they should, do all the jobs they need to in that time."

"Carers always stay for the 20 minutes. I feel very comfortable and safe with them, they are wonderful."

"Carers stay for the time they are supposed to, sometimes they seem a bit rushed. I like that they make me comfortable, really look after me."

"Never enough time especially if they are late arriving. Visits been missed a few times which is not right."

"I feel carers are rushed at times, I don't know how long they are supposed to stay."

"My carers are thoughtful but they don't have enough time."

"They always turn up on time and do as I ask, although I do wish that they were allowed more time as they are always rushed."

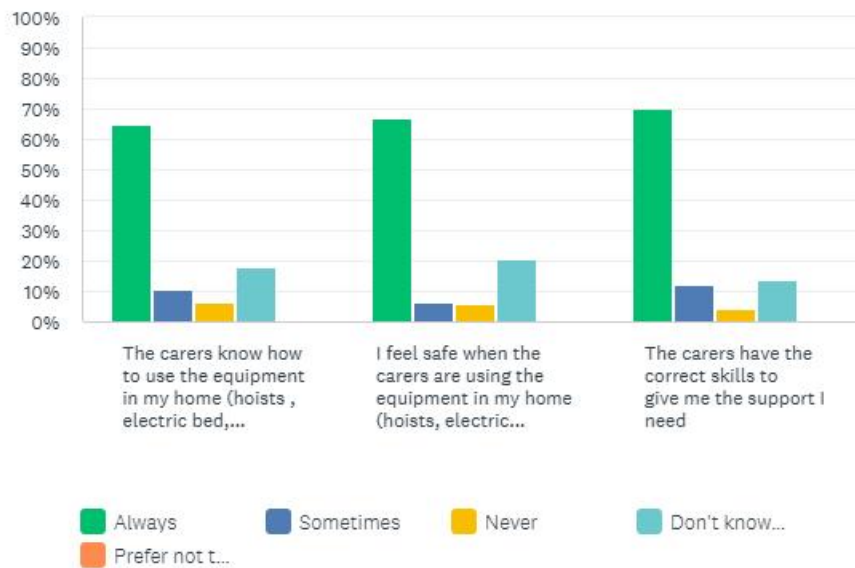
"Carers should stay longer."

"Carers should stay for an hour, I usually only get 20-35 minutes of care. They hurry tasks, such as taking me to the toilet."

"I should get a half hour visit but they only stay 10 minutes, they have other patients."

"Carers stay as long as they can, I understand how busy their schedule is, so if they have to leave early that is totally fine."

PART 4 – Skills and training



	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER	DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	TOTAL
▼ The carers know how to use the equipment in my home (hoists, electric bed, medication safe, cooker / microwave)	64.82% 129	10.55% 21	6.53% 13	18.09% 36	0.00% 0	199
▼ I feel safe when the carers are using the equipment in my home (hoists, electric bed, medication safe, cooker / microwave)	66.83% 133	6.53% 13	6.03% 12	20.60% 41	0.00% 0	199
▼ The carers have the correct skills to give me the support I need	69.80% 141	11.88% 24	4.46% 9	13.86% 28	0.00% 0	202

Around two-thirds of respondents answered 'always' when asked if carers knew how to use equipment in their home, if they felt safe when they were using equipment and if the carers had the correct skills to give them the support they need.

Comments would suggest that the majority of carers are well trained and proficient in the use of equipment such as hoists, electric beds, medication safes and kitchen tools. However, many respondents said their carer did not use any equipment in their home.

They were some negative responses relating to new carers and relief carers.

Comments included:

"The carers are very skilled. They are lovely and compassionate."

"I highly rate my carers. They appear to keep up to date with their training."

"Different carers, some know how to use equipment, some don't, especially the younger ones."

"I feel safe at all times with my carers. They know how to use all of my equipment."

"I always feel safe with my carers, they know what they are doing and do it well."

"I cannot fault their knowledge of the equipment and medication needed."

"I always feel safe and well with my carers."

"Need more training on handling (I did speak to carer about this). One carer has 15+ years of experience, the new carers do not and require training. My carers mentioned that they need to be provided with more gloves."

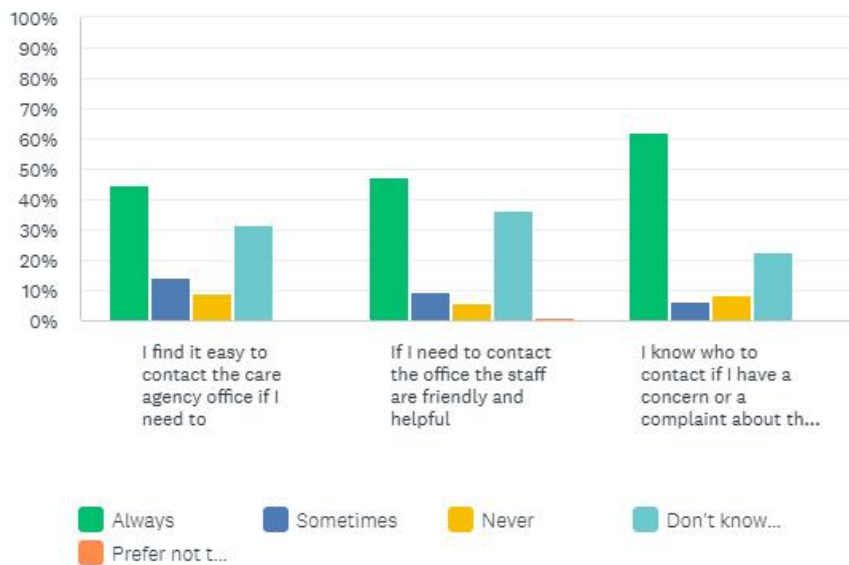
"Main three carers very capable of using equipment, hoists etc; relief carers are not. One carer could not operate the hoist and said that he had not been trained. When the client's wife contacted the agency, they said he had been trained. Another carer arrived after the client's wife was told he was a qualified carer; he was a qualified chef."

"I have never felt that my carers needed more training. They are friendly and able to do the job."

"Some are very good and I'm afraid some are not. On one occasion I asked for a bacon sandwich, she brought ham. Another time brought chicken instead and then raw bacon as he (carer) didn't realise it had to be cooked first."

"Some carers are trained and make me feel safe using the hoist; other carers don't know how to use the hoist from using the right hooks, moving hoist, putting brakes on! Sometimes I feel very unsafe."

Part 5 - Contacting the care agency



	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER	DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	TOTAL
▼ I find it easy to contact the care agency office if I need to	44.78% 90	14.43% 29	8.96% 18	31.34% 63	0.50% 1	201
▼ If I need to contact the office the staff are friendly and helpful	47.24% 94	9.55% 19	6.03% 12	36.18% 72	1.01% 2	199
▼ I know who to contact if I have a concern or a complaint about the service I am receiving	62.00% 124	6.50% 13	8.50% 17	22.50% 45	0.50% 1	200

While many respondents said they knew how to contact their care agency, nearly a third (31.3%) did not. In some cases this was because they had never needed to.

There were also a lot of 'don't know/not sure' responses to the questions around finding it easy to contact the agency and finding agency staff friendly and helpful when called. Some of the clients stated that this was because family members had made contact with the agency on their behalf.

Comments would indicate a varied customer service experience, perhaps best summed up by this response: *"It very much depends who is on the office desk answering the phone."*

Others included:

"I have contacted the agency on a few occasions, they are always helpful and friendly. They call me at least once a month to see if things are okay."

"I did contact the office on one occasion. I felt that I was listened to, but nothing changed."

"I have the contact details for the agency and they have answered my calls before, always polite."

"When I call, if I can get through, staff tend to pass me around different departments. I don't actually know how to cancel an appointment."

"Some of the office staff are friendly and some will fob you off."

"The office called me to arrange a visit but they didn't turn up. They have done this twice."

"Contacted the agency a few times when I had appointments to cancel care visits. Very polite and helpful on the phone."

"I have contact number and name of who to speak to. All staff who I have spoken to are helpful."

"I only contacted the agency once for a minor issue which was dealt with very quickly."

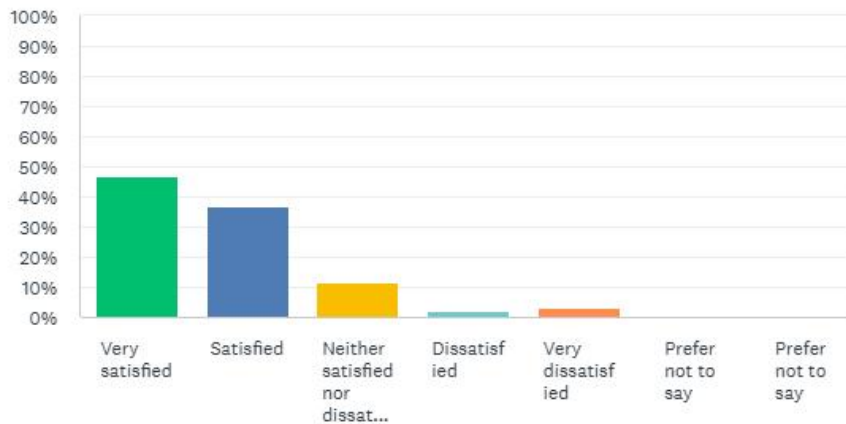
"I have never had a problem contacting the agency, but any follow up calls never happen. Occasionally they do apologise, one evening they sent out two carers after my telephone call, which by that time were not required."

"Never had a problem with the agency. They do a great job with any changes I need or if going on holidays, very professional."

"Tried to contact the office w/c 29/07/24 from 9am until 2.45pm when it was answered. I don't feel that they care. On the weekends the phone is transferred to Grimsby."

PART 6 – Further information:

Q12. Overall how happy are you with the service you receive from your care agency?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	47.03%	95
Satisfied	36.63%	74
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11.39%	23
Dissatisfied	1.98%	4
Very dissatisfied	2.97%	6
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	Responses 0.00%	0
TOTAL		202

When asked ‘overall how happy are you with the service you receive from your care agency’, 83.6% responded either very satisfied (47.0%) or satisfied (36.6%), with just under 2% dissatisfied and just under 3% very dissatisfied, with 11.4% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Comments included:

“The carers are always helpful and very caring. If they are late they will apologise. This is not their fault as it can be due to being short staffed.”

“Overall I am happy but would like to see improvement regarding timekeeping.”

"There are too many different carers and no set visiting times."

"I have no complaints about the carers. The office staff have carers running all over the place."

"My carers do a wonderful job, I could not cope without them."

"I have good carers who respect me and my home."

"Some carers are great, some not so great."

"I enjoy the time with the carers, it is nice company too. Would like to see the same faces more often."

"I enjoy and look forward to my visits, so I am very satisfied with the agency and carers."

"I would appreciate better time keeping."

"I have had carers since 1990, 30+ years. Lately they are coming with no proper training or passion. Anybody can look after people but caring is different."

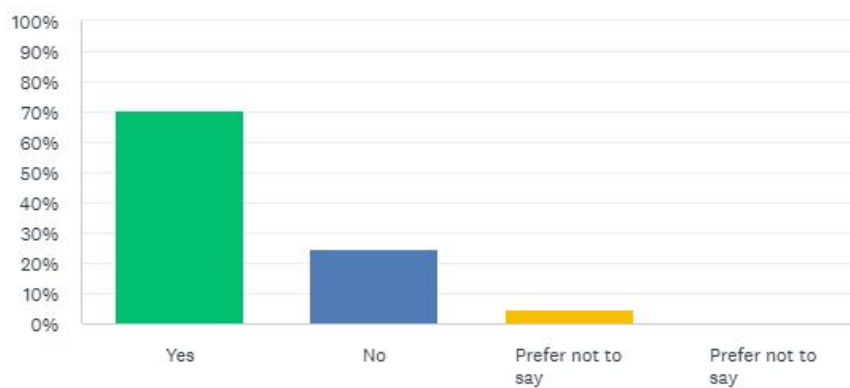
"I am happy with the carers (most of them) but not happy with the agency. When you are able to get through, they never follow up on issues!"

"Standard of care very good. Poor administration. Lack of communication from the office."

"Always amazing helpful staff, nothing is a problem."



Q14. If you are not happy have you ever told anyone?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	70.79% 63
No	24.72% 22
Prefer not to say	4.49% 4
Prefer not to say	Responses 0.00% 0
TOTAL	89

Less than half of the respondents answered this question, which may indicate others were happy with the service provided.

But of the 44% who did respond, 70.8% said they had told someone they were unhappy with the service, 24.7% said they hadn't and 4.5% opted to not say.

Q15. If yes, who did you tell?

Just over a third (35%) answered this question and, of these, 70% responded 'the office'. Other replies included family, carers, social worker, CQC and South Tyneside Council adult services.

Q16. What happened about it?

Less than a third (28%) answered this question.

Comments included:

"They were very helpful and rectified my issue."

"Nothing changed with the situation. I was very upset because my carers were changed as the office said that I had asked for visits at different times. This was not the case."

"They dealt with the situation well and quickly and sympathetically."

"Senior staff visited me at home."

"The agency assured me the issue had been sorted out - but it hasn't."

"I told her why I was not happy, she said she would look into it, she rang me back and the issue was sorted out."

"Agency worked to provide me with alternative carers."

"(The care provider) put measures in place which corrected the complaint."

"They apologised, but nothing has changed."

"They said they would get back to me but I have not heard anything yet."

"Agency member did nothing to help; made me feel like I was the problem."

"Nothing. They never got back in touch."

"The response was 'trying to get more staff'."

Q17. If you didn't tell anyone – why was this?

There were only eight responses to this question. Comments included:

"I didn't want to get a worker into trouble for their conduct."

"The care workers change frequently so I didn't report an incident."

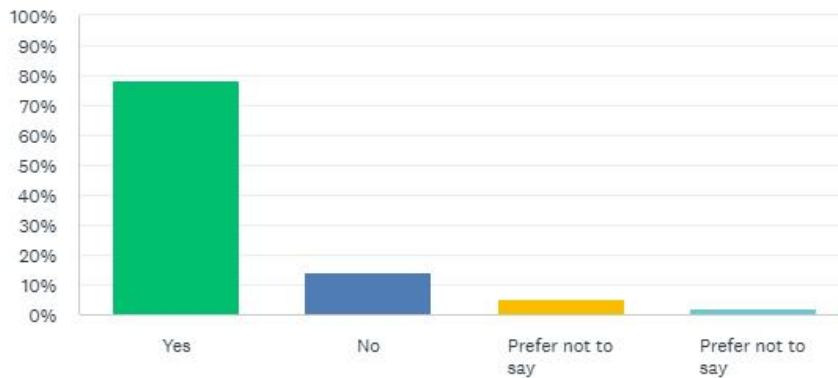
"Never got the chance as no answer at the agency. Or not getting back in touch with me."

"Had nobody to tell."

"I am 92 years old and have a lot of medical issues. I feel sometimes when I mention things I am not listened to, therefore don't bother."



Q18. Would you recommend the agency to a family member or friend?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	78.22% 158
No	14.36% 29
Prefer not to say	5.45% 11
Prefer not to say	Responses 1.98% 4
TOTAL	202

More than three-quarters of respondents (78.2%) answered that they would recommend their care agency to a family member or friend. However, 14.4% said they wouldn't recommend and 7.4% replied 'prefer not to say'.

Q19. Explain your answer

There were a lot of comments made (92% of respondents added a comment). Positive responses included:

"I have recommended to a friend due to the lovely carers."

"Carers are very helpful and kind; they do an amazing job."

"The carers are friendly, reliable and kind."

"The care I receive is great, I have already recommended to a friend."

"I would not hesitate. The carers actually care."

"My carers go above and beyond, help me to stay at home in a safe, comfortable way."

"The carers do a brilliant job."

"Brilliant bunch of carers, can't do enough for me."

"They employ good, skilled carers who care about you."

Although outweighed by laudatory comments, there were some negative comments made:

"The agency doesn't listen to its clients and don't care about their carers."

"Had too many visits missed."

"Never had any problems apart from carers being late on occasion."

"I do not trust them, they have had many staff turnover. One of the carers said to me 'we know what we are doing' so I felt belittled."

"I am in two minds whether I would recommend or not. I am aware how busy they get, but a short call would help if they were going to be late."

"Understaffed, useless office staff so it's been an uphill battle. The way that they treat the workers is appalling."

Q20. In your opinion, what makes a good care agency?

This question again attracted a high response rate (93%). Comments included:

"An agency that listens to clients, who only send out well trained carers to their clients."

"Continuity, friendliness and good timekeeping."

"Someone who cares for me. I would like to know that a person is looking out for me."

"Professional. Being offered early visits by senior staff to check care package is correct and suits the client's needs. An agency who looks after their staff and appreciates them."

"Senior staff who go out on the job and see what the carers are expected to do and where they travel to and from."

"Employ well trained, polite carers. Make sure clients are informed if carers are going to be late or a change in carers."

"Being professional when answering the phone. Care for their carers."

"To be as their name says 'care agency'. Listen to what people's needs are and send out the appropriate staff."

"An agency who listens to the care workers themselves as well as the clients if there are any issues. Making sure everyone is receiving good care."

"Organise rotas so carers have enough time to do their job. Have well trained carers."

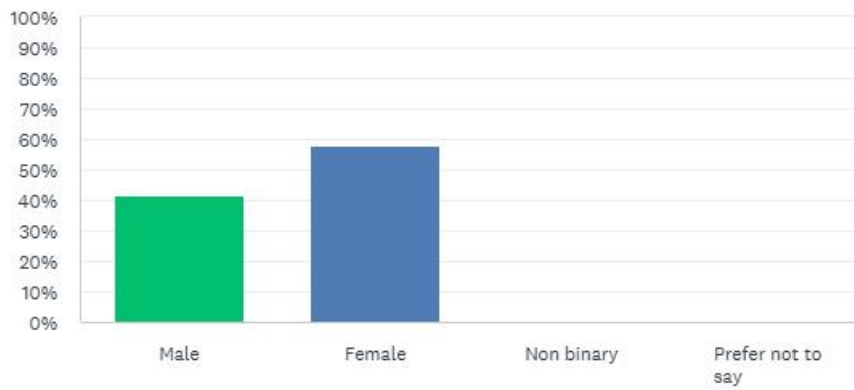
"Consistency and good communication. Also, if there is a new carer, please introduce them with an existing one who visits."

"Empathy, caring nature, listening ear and patience."

"To always be there for you, day or night with a helpful friendly attitude."

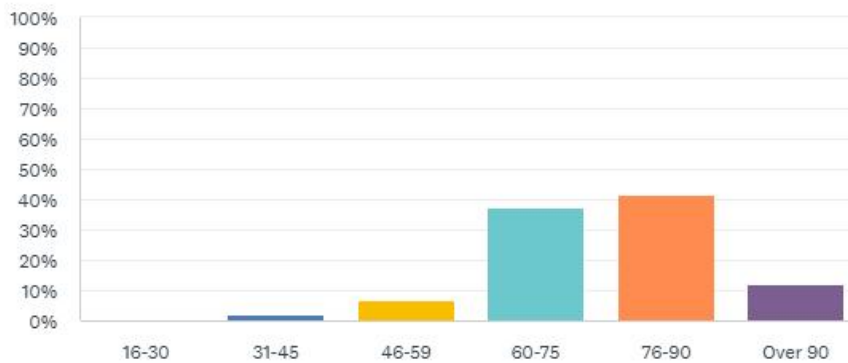


Q21. Gender



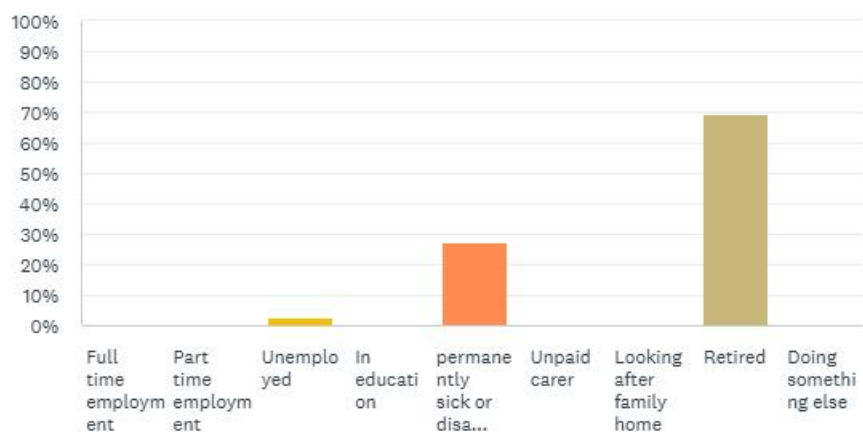
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Male	41.79%	84
▼ Female	57.71%	116
▼ Non binary	0.00%	0
▼ Prefer not to say	0.50%	1
TOTAL		201

Q22. Age



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ 16-30	0.00%	0
▼ 31-45	1.98%	4
▼ 46-59	6.93%	14
▼ 60-75	37.62%	76
▼ 76-90	41.58%	84
▼ Over 90	11.88%	24
TOTAL		202

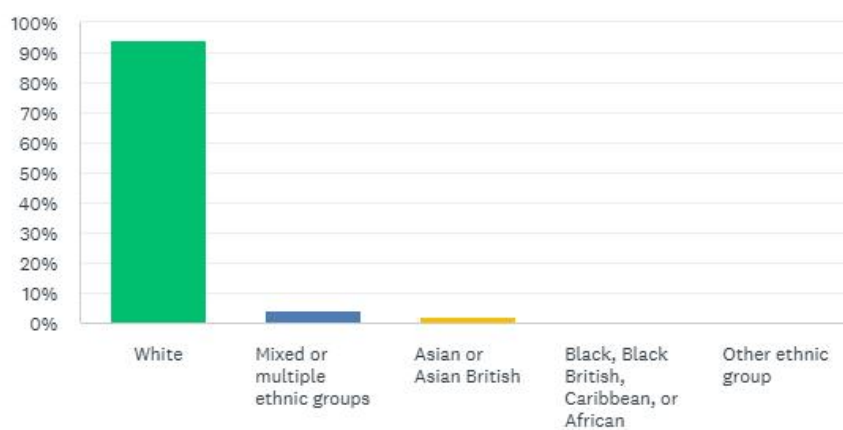
Q23. Employment status



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Full time employment	0.00% 0
Part time employment	0.00% 0
Unemployed	2.48% 5
In education	0.00% 0
permanently sick or disabled	27.23% 55
Unpaid carer	0.00% 0
Looking after family home	0.50% 1
Retired	69.31% 140
Doing something else	0.50% 1
TOTAL	202



Q24. Ethnicity



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ White	94.06% 190
▼ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3.96% 8
▼ Asian or Asian British	1.98% 4
▼ Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African	0.00% 0
▼ Other ethnic group	0.00% 0
TOTAL	202

Home care staff

Thirteen members of staff completed our online survey, which asked questions about work and travel time allocated, training and support, how they involve clients in the care they provide, communication barriers, satisfaction with the agency and personal/demographic information.

Q1. Please confirm which Care Provider that you work for

Four respondents were employed by Cera Homecare Ltd, three by Human Support Group, five by Springfield Healthcare Services and one by Dale Care Ltd.

Q2. Do you feel that you have enough time to complete your work?

Twelve members of staff responded 'yes' and one answered 'prefer not to say'. None replied 'no'. In response to question 3, no comments were left.

Q4. Do you involve the people you care for in how they would like their care to be provided?

Twelve members of staff responded 'yes' and one answered 'sometimes'. No one replied 'never'. In response to question 5, no comments were left.

Q6. Do you receive training in all aspects of your role?

Eleven members of staff responded 'yes' and two answered 'sometimes'. One respondent replied 'no'. In response to question 7, no comments were left.

Q8. Do you encounter any communication barriers with the people you care for?

Three members of staff responded 'yes', five said 'no' and six replied 'sometimes'. In response to question 9, there were two comments left: "Some service users have speech problems" and "None".

Q10. Do you feel that you receive enough support from the Agency that you work for?

Eleven members of staff responded 'yes', one said 'no' and one replied 'prefer

not to say'. In response to question 11, one comment was left: "None".

Q12. Is your travel time factored into your work day? If so, how does this work?

Nine members of staff responded 'yes and four said 'no'. The four who replied 'no' made the following comments:

"I am still unsure on how travel time works as I was not told about it until another carer mentioned they received a payment for travel time. I lost out on a few months' pay of travel time and was told it would be looked into but it never was."

"Calls are close to each other."

"No travel time to get there."

"None."

Q14. Overall, are you satisfied with the agency that you work for?

Eleven members of staff responded 'yes and two replied 'prefer not to say'. No one said 'no'. There was one comment left:

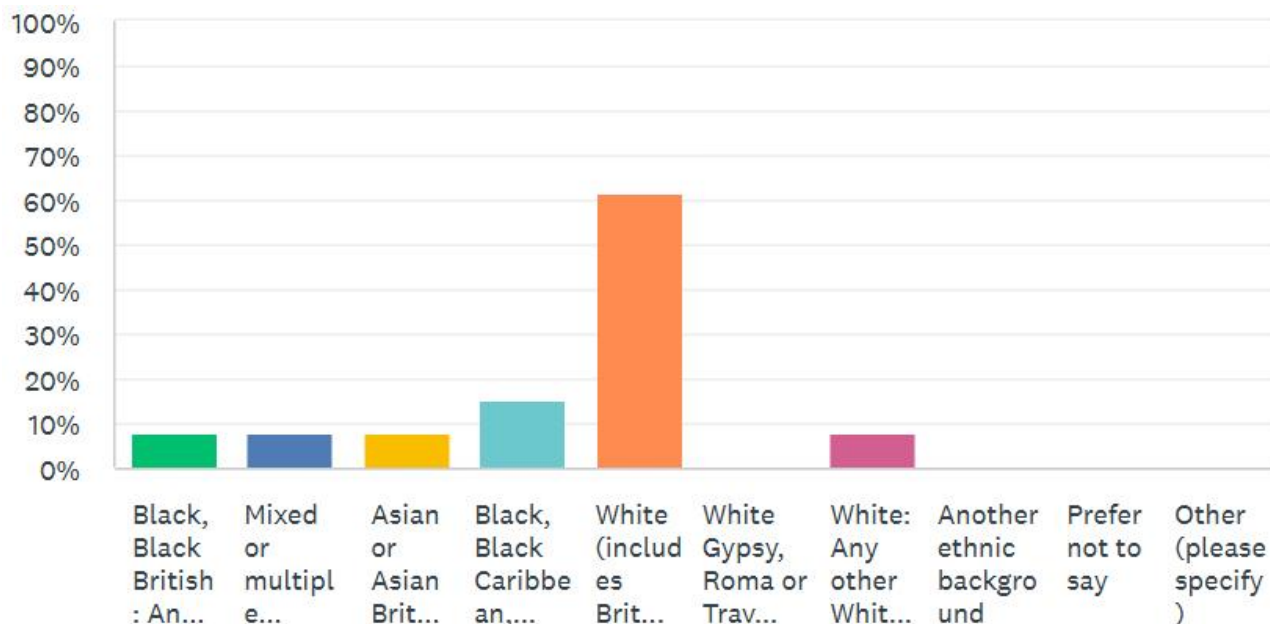
"Very happy. Great bunch of care workers and very supportive coordinators and management."

Q16. Gender

Male: one

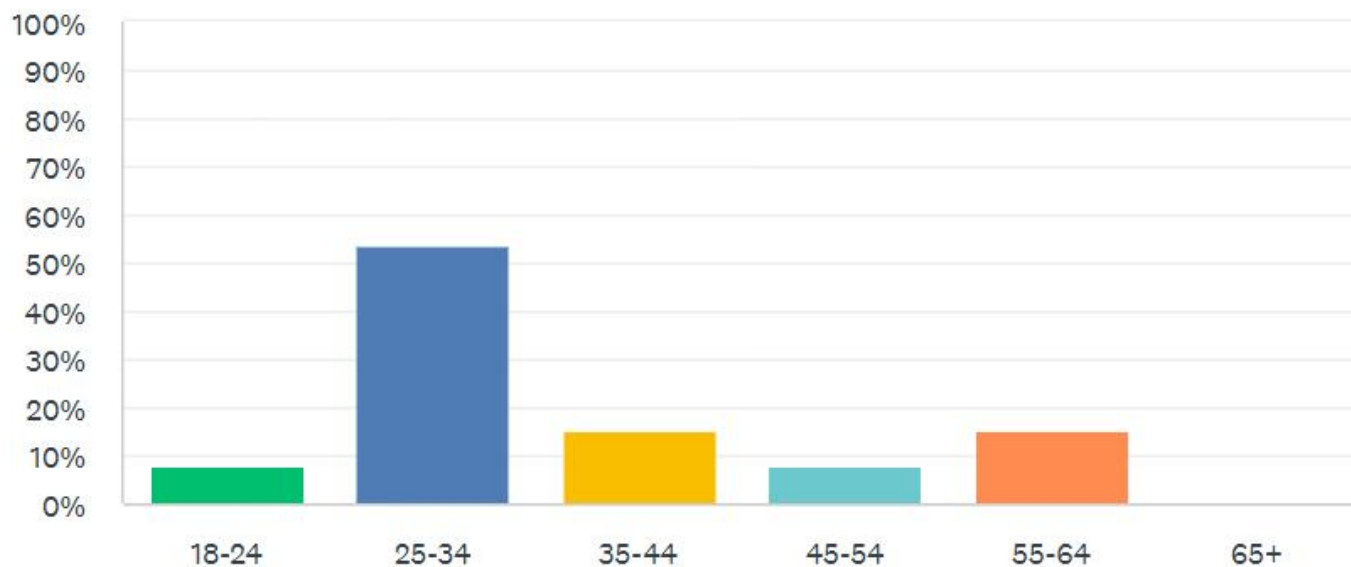
Female: 12

Q17. What is your racial or ethnic identity?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Black, Black British: Any other Black / British British background	7.69% 1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (includes white and black Caribbean, White and Black African, Asian or any other Mixed or Multiple background)	7.69% 1
Asian or Asian British (includes Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese or any other Asian background)	7.69% 1
Black, Black Caribbean, African or other Black background	15.38% 2
White (includes British, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh or any other white background)	61.54% 8
White Gypsy, Roma or Traveller	0.00% 0
White: Any other White background	7.69% 1
Another ethnic background	0.00% 0
Prefer not to say	0.00% 0
Other (please specify)	0.00% 0
Responses	
Total Respondents: 13	

Q18. Age



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
18-24	7.69% 1
25-34	53.85% 7
35-44	15.38% 2
45-54	7.69% 1
55-64	15.38% 2
65+	0.00% 0
TOTAL	13

Home care managers

We met managers of all four agencies both in person and via Teams and asked them questions about the four zone system, challenges they faced, staff retention, subcontracting and contact with South Tyneside Care Academy.

How are the four zones working for you?

All four agencies reported that the zonal system was working well for them, after early teething issues.

Challenges

The issues highlighted by managers included:

- Finding staff to cover Cleadon and Whitburn
- Staff who don't drive
- Competing with rates of pay in the hospitality sector
- Restrictions on working hours for international staff
- Staffing levels versus service demand
- Spikes in demand
- DBS delays
- Nigerian employees from the university facing racism

Retaining staff

Staff retention was highlighted as an issue, both immediately on completion of training and also once carers go out into the community and find out what the job really entails.

One manager said their agency had a full-time recruitment officer for South Tyneside and another commented that recruitment was 'constant', using Indeed, CV Library and Smart Recruiters.

Do you sub-contract to other companies?

Three of the four agencies confirmed they did sub-contract, naming the following firms: Amna Care; Care Outcomes; Help at Home Care; North Haven; Westholme Care.

Do you have any contact with the Care Academy?

Three of the four agencies said they did engage with the Care Academy, including for L3 Safeguarding and Mental Capacity training, training on competency and carrying out assessments, tailored mental health training and attending the managers' forum. One described the involvement as 'minimal' as they had their own training package

Comments by managers

"Demand for the service against staff available can be a challenge."

"We do lose staff after completion of their induction training, whilst attending shadowing. No amount of classroom training can provide staff with the ability to attend a customer's home for the first time and see home care for the first time."

"Some staff leave after training, particularly those carers who are not aware what is expected of them so they leave once they are out in the field."

"There were teething issues initially when the new zone system was put into place. Carers moved to the zone where most of their clients were. This has settled down and is working well."

Key observations

Our key observations included:

- Knowing which carer is coming and when is important to the users of home care, but less than half (42.1%) said they were always told in advance if there would be a change in the carer or time of the visit.
- A desire for continuity of care came out as a key issue but only 37.3% of respondents said they always had the same carers.
- Punctuality is also important to home care users – 92.5% of respondents said it was either always or sometimes important that their carer arrived on time but less than half (48.0%) said their carer always arrived on time.
- Comments indicated a usual high standard of customer care – 85.6% said they were always treated with kindness, dignity and respect and 71.3% reported feeling they were always listened to and spoken to in a way they understood.
- A number of respondents felt their carer did not spend enough – or the allocated – length of time during their visits, but many expressed sympathy – saying their carer was ‘rushed’ due to their caseload.
- Respondents indicated they felt the majority of carers are well trained and proficient in the use of equipment such as hoists, electric beds, medication safes and kitchen tools. But there were some negative comments that would suggest there are some training issues with a small minority of staff.
- Similarly, most respondents were positive about the customer service experience they had when contacting their care agency. However, some negative responses would indicate a possible training issue with some members of the office team. It was also noteworthy that nearly a third of respondents said they did not know how to contact their care agency.
- Despite the issues raised with punctuality and continuity of care, there were high levels of satisfaction with the service received – 83.6% responded that they were either very satisfied (47.0%) or satisfied (36.6%), with just under 2% dissatisfied and just under 3% very dissatisfied.

- This is reinforced by more than three-quarters of respondents (78.2%) answering that they would recommend their care agency to a family member or friend. However, one in seven (14.4%) said they would not.
- Four of the 13 members of staff who responded to the survey said travel time was not factored into their work day and one said they were 'unsure' how this should work and believed they may have missed out on a few months' travel pay. The very low number of staff respondents was disappointing.



Recommendations

Users of care services in South Tyneside clearly hugely value their carers and credit should be given for the high-quality service they provide in often testing circumstances.

In an ideal world, users want continuity of care with the same carer arriving at the same time(s) each day. Visits also provide welcome company for vulnerable residents who could feel isolated and lonely.

But given the staffing pressures agencies face, due to difficulties in both recruitment and retention, it may be some expectation management is needed to address the disconnect and avoid some of the negative reaction we found relating to personnel changes and timekeeping.

Based on the feedback we have received from service users, care workers and managers, we would recommend the following:

- Care providers need to ensure an up to date, person-centred Care Plan is in place which reflects each person's needs and wishes, perhaps by scheduling routine monitoring calls/visits.
- Check that all clients have a contact name and number for the care provider to report any problems and discuss any issues
- Ensure the right care worker(s) is/are matched to the person, i.e. male carers to male clients when personal care is involved
- Care worker/agency to inform the person in advance if a visit is going to be missed, with as much notice as possible
- Ensure care workers are at each person's home for the length of time they are contracted to be there
- Look into potential training issues relating to the use of equipment in clients' homes and the quality of customer service when people ring the agency
- Address the issue raised by some staff about travel time/pay.

We would like to thank all people who use home care services, care workers and care provider managers for taking the time to take part in this research.

Response from local authority

“Social care in South Tyneside is about ensuring people are supported to live in the place they call home with the people and things that they love, in communities where people look out for one another, doing things that matter to them.”

“We know from our work in developing the Living Better Lives Strategy that this is important to people and this can only happen with the support of good quality services.”

“Help to Live at Home is critical in supporting people to remain at home and Healthwatch South Tyneside have been helping us to understand more about the experience of people who use these services and the outcomes they achieve.”

“Healthwatch also talked to staff and managers in the Help to Live at Home services to understand their experiences. It is important that we recognise the vital role of our Adult Social Care Workforce and the contribution they make to supporting people to Live Better Lives.”

“The work Healthwatch have undertaken with people who draw upon care and support and the Adult Social Care Workforce employed within Help to Live at Home has provided valuable insights into the experiences of people using our services, helping us to build upon the positive aspects of the service but also identify areas for ongoing improvement.”

“Our commitment is to design the improvements with people who use services and staff to ensure we can continue working together to improve outcomes for the residents of South Tyneside.”



Vicki Pattinson

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