

Complaints: Policy and procedure

Our policy

Individuals and organisations have the right to express their views about the performance of Healthwatch County Durham and the way in which it conducts its business.

Anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service received by Healthwatch County Durham can make a complaint.

We will treat both concerns and complaints in the same way.

It is the policy of Healthwatch County Durham to:

- Listen carefully to your concern.
- Be polite, helpful and deal with your complaint fairly and efficiently.
- Let you know how we are getting on with your complaint, admitting any mistakes made and putting matters right wherever possible.
- Give the right of appeal against a decision made by the Lead Officer
- Provide reasonable adjustments to the procedure set out below to empower those who need support in making a complaint, such as the right to be accompanied in any necessary meetings and providing accessible information formats.
- Use your feedback to improve our service for all who need it.

Complaints we cannot deal with:

1. Complaints or concerns about the NHS, which should be dealt with through the NHS complaints procedure.
2. Complaints about the provision of social care services which should be dealt with by Healthwatch County Durham complaints procedure.

Our team can signpost you to the correct organisation that is best placed to handle your complaint.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Healthwatch County Durham is committed to ensuring all complaints are handled free from any form of discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Healthwatch County Durham will monitor this policy in order to identify whether it is having an adverse impact on any group of individuals and act accordingly.

Data protection

To help us handle your complaint we will keep a record of all the information we gather. All information held and processed shall be treated in confidence. Such information will be shared with representatives of Healthwatch County Durham and the host organisation only to the extent required to resolve the complaint in accordance with this policy and procedure.

If the details of a complaint are to be used for quality improvement or training purposes, express permission will be sought from the complainant and personal details will be anonymised from all information prior to it being used.

All personal information collected by Healthwatch County Durham shall be handled in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as detailed in our host organisation's Data Protection Policy.

How we will handle your complaint

How to raise a concern or make a complaint about Healthwatch County Durham

Let us know if you need our complaints procedure in a different format such as Easy Read another language or any other format and we will make reasonable adjustments, large print to support you in sharing your concern or complaint with us.

1. In the first instance we would encourage you to tell us as soon as possible if you are unhappy with our service so that we can understand your concerns and quickly try to put things right for you.
2. Providing information or discussing misunderstandings and misconceptions at this early stage may enable your concern or complaint to be successfully resolved. You can discuss with any member of the team or contact us via telephone, email or letter (contact details in step 2 below).
3. If your concern or complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, then you should notify the Lead Officer of Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) to enable an investigation to take place:
 - Telephone: 07935 793785
 - Email: dave.logan@pcp.uk.net
 - Letter: Dave Logan, Project Lead
Healthwatch County Durham, Whitfield House
St Johns Road, Meadowfield, County Durham, DH7 8XL
4. If your concern or complaint relates to the Lead Officer, then you can notify the Chair of the Healthwatch County Durham Board
 - Telephone: 0800 3047039 (asking for the Chair to contact you)
 - Email: healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net (requesting that the Chair contacts you)
 - Letter: Mr C Cunnington-Shore, Chair of the Board
C/O Healthwatch County Durham, Whitfield House
St Johns Road, Meadowfield, County Durham, DH7 8XL
5. The Lead Officer or Chair of HWCD will acknowledge your concern or complaint in writing (or in your preferred method of communication) within 7 days. They will contact you to acquire as much information as possible and explain how your concern or complaint will be handled.
6. The Lead Officer or Chair of HWCD will review and arrange investigation of all concerns and complaints. Through the support officer they will gather relevant information and carefully evaluate that information to decide on your complaint. They will act to resolve your complaint within 15 working days, and will advise you of the outcome in writing, explaining the decision and how it has been reached. If more than 15 working days are needed, you will be contacted and updated with progress and a new timescale agreed.
7. If you are not happy with the outcome at this stage, you will be able to appeal. Let us know within 20 days of receiving your written reply from us, and your concern or complaint will be passed to a member of the HWCD board who has not previously been involved with your complaint or if more appropriate to the Senior Management Team at the host organisation for Healthwatch County Durham (this is the organisation that

currently holds the contract with the local authority for the delivery of Healthwatch), who will investigate in line with their Complaints Policy.

If a member of the Healthwatch Board investigates, they will review the facts and consider all the evidence to decide if your appeal is upheld. They will share their findings and confirm their decision to you in writing within 20 working days. The concern or complaint will then be closed.

8. If you are still not satisfied you can take your concern or complaint to the Local Authority Healthwatch commissioner:

- Rachael Mawston, Commissioning and Planning Office,
Durham County Council
County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UG
- Switchboard telephone: 03000 260000
- Email: Rachael.Mawston@durham.gov.uk

You may also subsequently take your concern or complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman who can be contacted in the following ways:

- By visiting: www.lgo.org.uk
- Telephone: 0300 061 0614
- Review of policy document

The Board of HWCD will review the effectiveness of the complaints policy and procedures set out in this document every 2 years. Any amendments to this policy and the procedures governing complaints will require a simple majority of board members voting in favour. The amended policy document will be published on the website of Healthwatch County Durham as soon as is practicable.

Complaints policy and procedures	
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