

August 2025

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## August 2025 News Update

### Healthwatch County Durham 2025 Annual Event



Our Annual Event held on 8th July was a great success with over 50 attendees. There was a fantastic round up of the year and all the work we achieved as well as a look ahead to all the incredible work we have planned for 2025-2026.

We had wonderful guest speakers, which included a crowd pleasing speech from Paulette, one of our fabulous volunteers who gave her experience of volunteering with Healthwatch County Durham and all the benefits she gains from it. We also had a very engaging and enlightening presentation from Martin Bell, Management Partner at Sacriston Surgery who explained the benefits and importance of working with Healthwatch to continually strive for improvement and have a independent voice to hold a light up to services.



We would like to thank all attendees for their enthusiasm, openness and participation in what was a wonderful and informative afternoon.



**THANK YOU!**

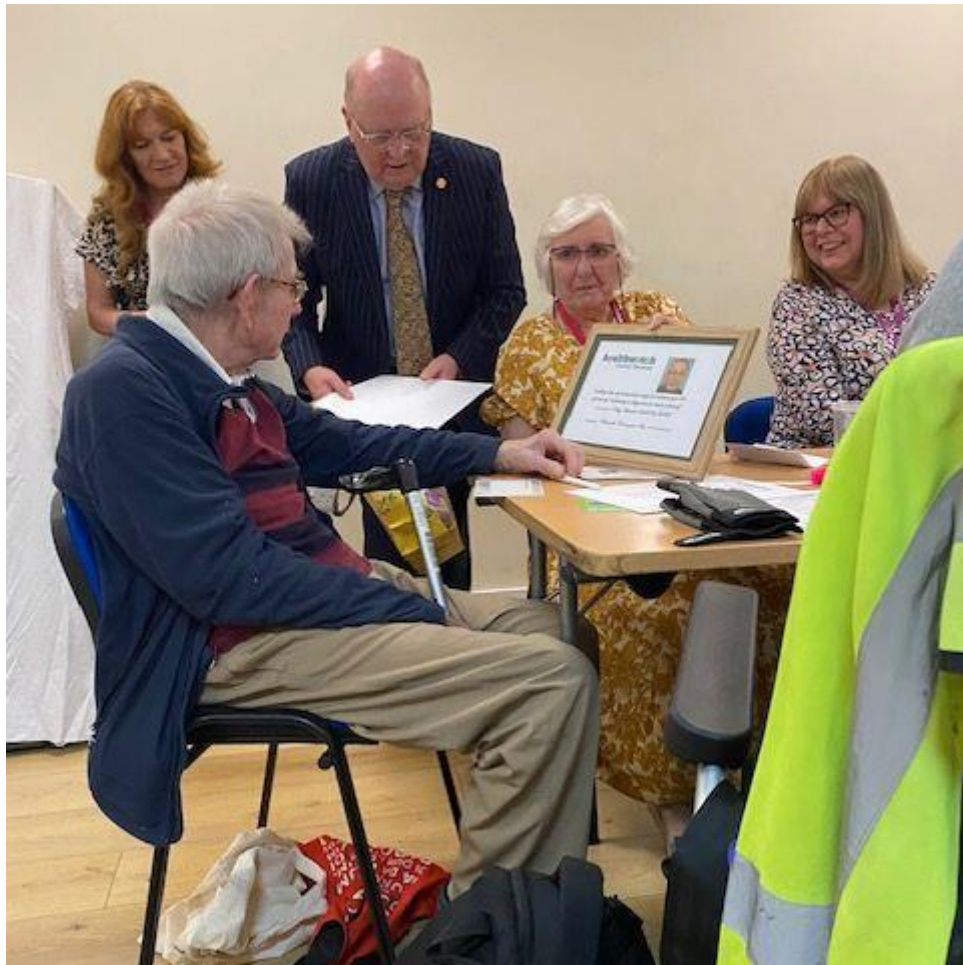
At Healthwatch County Durham Annual event, we had the chance to say thank you to one of our long-standing volunteers, who is retiring.

Cliff Allison has worked with HWCD for over 15 years and has a special interest in Learning Disability, Autism, Mental Health and Dementia which led him to support and link up with the 'People's Parliament' group, in the past.

Over the years Cliff helped at many engagement events and initiated setting up 'drop-in days' at Pinfold GP Surgery to collect user feedback on services. Cliff also has taken part in several focus Groups over the years'

All of your volunteer work is greatly appreciated, and we are so grateful for your hard work Cliff!

**Cliff is keeping in touch with HWCD as a 'Healthwatcher'**



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## Our Annual Report for 2024-25 is now available in hard copy

**\*\*Limited availability\*\***

We have a limited number of hard copies available of our Annual Report 2024-2025.

If you would like a copy please contact us at: [info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk),  
or tel: 0300 180 0025.

Alternatively, you can still download an electronic copy, or printable PDF version from  
our website:





We have updated our Healthwatch County Durham visions and values in line with those adopted by the regional Healthwatch network, and to better reflect our role.

**Our vision:**

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



**Our mission:**

To make sure that people's experiences help make health and care better.

**Our values:**

**Equity** – We listen with compassion, value every voice, and work to include those who are often left out. We build strong relationships and support people to shape the services they use.

**Empowerment** – We create a safe and inclusive space where people feel respected, supported, and confident to speak up and shape the changes that matter to them.

**Collaboration** – We work openly and honestly with others, inside and outside our organisations, to share learning, build trust, and make a bigger difference together.

**Independence** – We stand up for what matters to the public. We work alongside decision-makers but stay true to our role as an independent, trusted voice.

**Truth** – We act with honesty and integrity. We speak up when things need to change and make sure those in power hear the truth, even when it's hard to hear.

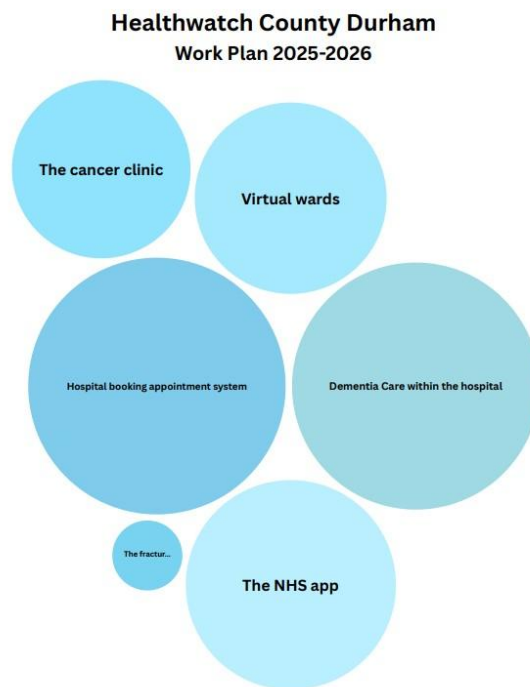
**Impact** – We focus on making a real difference in people's lives. We're ambitious, accountable, and committed to helping others take responsibility to make change happen.

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## What is Healthwatch County Durham currently working on?

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# Work Plan priorities for 2025 - 2026



The hospital appointment booking system

27%



Dementia care within hospital

25%



The NHS app

18%

We asked people what area of hospital services they would like Healthwatch County Durham to focus on this year - the top 3 choices were the hospital booking appointment system, dementia care within hospital and the NHS app.

We will be focusing on the top concerns and looking into the hospital appointment booking system this year.

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# Download Reports



You Told Us Report June 2025

# You Told Us

June 2025



We have produced our first monthly update 'You Told Us' report. This will be a regular feature highlighting the intelligence and experiences we are hearing from the people of County Durham.

[Click below to download a copy of the report from our website:](#)



## You Told Us Report - June 2025

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### Engagement info..

Healthwatch County Durham will be engaging regular with the community at the following venues.

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August Bullion Hall, Chester Le Street 11.30am - 2.15pm

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> August, The Venue Stanley, 10.00am -12.00pm

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> August, Willington Open Door Methodist Church 10.00 - 1.00pm

More venues and dates to follow, please check out our [Facebook](#) page for the most current venues, dates and times.

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### In the news and useful information...

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## Update from Healthwatch



Healthwatch County Durham alongside other regional and national Healthwatch have signed an open letter delivered to Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting on 17th July 2025.

We believe that the independent voice of people must be protected and remains a vital part of the health and care system. We are actively working with both local and national Healthwatch leads to explore a coordinated response to these proposals and to try and ensure a strong, local, and independent voice is retained within future structures.

A petition to save local Healthwatch has also been created, watch this space for updates and links to the petition for anyone who would like to sign.

### **Open Letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care**

#### **Re: The Future of Public Voice and the Importance of Independent Advocacy**

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the Chief Officers of local Healthwatch services across England, are deeply concerned by the government's proposal to bring public voice functions under the control of local authorities and NHS bodies - undermining the independence that makes public feedback effective.

For over a decade, Healthwatch has served as a trusted, impartial voice for members of the public, carers, and communities. Our statutory independence enables us to speak truth to power, challenge poor practice, and amplify the experiences of those too often unheard - particularly the most vulnerable and those with the most complex needs. We work constructively with local systems, but always with the freedom to raise concerns without fear or favour.

The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust scandal stands as a stark reminder of the consequences of failing to listen. The Francis Inquiry made clear that

independent scrutiny and public advocacy are essential. It also exposed the failure of local democratic scrutiny mechanisms, which lacked the expertise to detect serious failings - giving false reassurance to regulators.

Bringing public voice functions in-house risks creating a system where feedback is filtered, inconvenient truths are softened, and accountability is diluted. It sends the wrong message at a time when public trust in institutions must be rebuilt, not eroded.

We have countless examples of where people have chosen to share their experiences with local Healthwatch instead of providers, due to fear of repercussions, previous dismissal, or lack of access. People often tell us we are the first service to truly listen and the only one that follows up to ensure they receive the support needed.

Beyond gathering feedback, Healthwatch provides trusted, independent information and signposting to help people navigate complex health and care systems. We also respond to concerns from the public by carrying out Enter and View visits and conducting focused research that has resulted in real changes to local services. Our local knowledge and impartial advice are often the only support available to those struggling to access services - something not readily offered by the NHS or local authorities, nor covered in the new 10-Year Health Plan.

Since 1974 there has been continuous parliamentary support for independent public voice initiatives being able to hold services to account. Therefore, we urge you to reconsider this direction. Instead of dismantling independence, we should be strengthening it - ensuring every community has access to strong, well-resourced, and fearless local public voice initiatives that hold services to account and shape care that truly meets people's needs.

We ask to meet with you to discuss why preserving independent public voice is essential. We remain committed to improving services - but cannot do so effectively if our independence is compromised.

Yours sincerely,

**Chief Officers of Local Healthwatch Services.**

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## North East Ambulance Service improvements



## **New service improvement project will help identify patients with an underlying heart condition**

**Clinicians at the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) are taking part in a service improvement project which is looking to improve how they communicate with GPs when they detect a patient has an underlying heart condition.**

Ambulance clinicians can come across patients with conditions they are unaware of and are often different to the reason they called the ambulance. One of these conditions is an abnormal heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation (AF).

Having AF increases a person's long-term risk of having a stroke, but the risk can be reduced with medication. By communicating this to a patient's GP, it can be followed up and appropriate medication can be started if needed.

The project, which is funded by the British Heart Foundation and in partnership with Hull York Medical School, will monitor patients over a 12 month period.

Starting on 10 July, ambulance clinicians will complete their medical documentation as normal, but information will then automatically be sent to the patient's GP to say AF has been detected in a patient. Although this information is routinely shared, the new process will highlight the condition to allow a GP to follow-up with a patient more effectively.

Professor Bryan Williams, chief scientific and medical officer at the British Heart Foundation, said: "Atrial fibrillation is an important risk factor for stroke but, if spotted early, we have effective treatments that can reduce that risk. This interesting project could produce real improvements for patients, improving communication between the ambulance service and doctors to keep more people out of hospital."

Click the link below to find out more about this project:

## Gluten-Free prescription service public survey



We are asking people to share their thoughts on a proposal to **stop prescribing gluten-free bread, rolls, and flour mixes** in our area.

These are the only gluten-free foods currently available on prescription here. No other gluten-free products are prescribed.

The survey will run from **15 July to 25 August 2025**. We want to hear from as many people as possible before any decisions are made.

### **Why is this being looked at?**

Some people, like those with **coeliac disease** and some other health conditions, need to avoid gluten to stay healthy. At the moment, about **4,700 people** in our area get gluten-free bread, rolls, and flour mix on prescription. That's around **34,000 items a year**. But things have changed over time:

- Gluten-free foods are now easier to buy in shops and online.



- Food labels are clearer, so it's easier to pick safe foods.
- Gluten-free foods still cost more than regular food.
- The NHS pays more for these products than the prices in shops.

We also know that different areas prescribe different amounts, and we want to make sure NHS money is spent fairly and equally across our region.

#### **What's happening now?**

No decision has been made yet. We want to hear what people think through:

- An **online survey**: [Share your views on health and care projects | North East and North Cumbria NHS](#)
- **Focus groups**, especially for people who may be more affected

#### **How you can help:**

- Please **share the survey** with the people and communities you support.
- You can also **fill in the survey yourself** on behalf of your organisation.

We have also created some materials you can share alongside the survey. These can be found here: [Gluten free](#)

#### **The Involvement Team**

NHS North East and North Cumbria

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**Open consultation - NHS dentistry contract:  
quality and payment reforms**



The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) has opened a consultation on proposed changes to the NHS dental contract. The [NHS dental contract quality and payment reforms 2026](#) represent a significant and essential step on the journey to improve access to and quality of NHS dentistry.

- Developed following engagement with the profession, the proposed changes aim to:
- improve access for those requiring urgent care
- enhance treatment pathways for complex cases
- deliver better preventative care for children.

This includes shifting away from the unit of dental activity (UDA) system towards a more balanced approach prioritising patient needs and professional fulfilment as well as creating fairer funding for complex treatments, and developing new clinical pathways that integrate prevention and treatment. These changes should also help practices use the full dental team effectively while focusing resources where they're most needed.

**\*\*The consultation will close at 11.59pm on 19 August 2025.\*\***

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## Health Awareness Campaigns in August



Breastfeeding is a cornerstone of child survival, nutrition, and development. It provides essential nutrients, strengthens the immune system, and fosters a strong bond between mother and child. For mothers, breastfeeding reduces the risk of certain cancers and promotes postpartum recovery. Despite these benefits, many mothers face challenges that hinder breastfeeding, such as lack of support, misinformation, and societal pressures. World Breastfeeding Week highlights these issues and promotes actions to

overcome them, ensuring that every child has the best start in life.

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The logo for International Relaxation Day is centered on a light blue rectangular background. It features the word "INTERNATIONAL" in a grey, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, the word "RELAXATION" is written in a larger, bold, teal-colored sans-serif font. At the bottom, the word "DAY" is in a grey, sans-serif font, flanked by two light blue wavy lines that resemble stylized waves or clouds.

# INTERNATIONAL RELAXATION DAY

International Relaxation Day in 2025 will be on August 15th 2025 . This day is dedicated to prioritising mental and physical well-being by taking time to relax and recharge. It's a day to unwind, learn new relaxation techniques, and reflect on the importance of relaxation in our daily lives.

Relaxation techniques are methods to help bring about the body's "relaxation response," which is characterised by slower breathing, lower blood pressure, and a reduced heart rate. The relaxation response is the opposite of the stress response.



"Durham offers a serene escape for those seeking relaxation, rejuvenation, and a deeper connection with nature and heritage.

With a wealth of wellness activities, stunning natural landscapes, and tranquil spaces, Durham is the perfect destination to nurture both body and mind. Whether you're looking for peaceful retreats, invigorating outdoor adventures, or mindful experiences, Durham has something for everyone."

[Discover Wellness in Durham](#) by clicking on the link.

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**...and last but not least**



**Thursday, 7th August 2025**

Cycle to Work Day raises awareness about the benefits of active commuting, not just for individuals but for the environment and society at large. Cycling reduces traffic



congestion, cuts down on greenhouse gas emissions, and improves air quality. On a personal level, it helps boost cardiovascular fitness, lowers stress, and enhances mood—all before you've even arrived at your desk.

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## Share your News

If you have anything you would like to share with us to put in the e-bulletin, please get in touch and we will be able to include it in the future. This can include upcoming events, important information on health and social care and support around County Durham.

Email [info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk) if you would like your information to be considered for the e-bulletin.

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