



Annual Report

2018-19

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Message from our Chair

It has been a year of significant change for health and social care services in County Durham. The entire Healthwatch County Durham team has worked hard to make sure both patients and the public have had a voice in these changes and I have been incredibly proud to see the difference our work has made.

These changes have included the reconfiguration of vascular services and the expansion of integrated care services. On a local level, there has also been the introduction of care navigation services to speed up the present GP appointment systems.

We have spoken with patients and members of the public from all over County Durham on issues ranging from dementia care, mental health services, pharmacy services, and young people's transition to adult care.

We have shared recommendations for improvements - based on people's experiences - with NHS England, the local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, as well as with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In many cases our recommendations have been listened to, leading to real improvements in services for everyone - as you will see as you read this report.

My thanks to all those services that have allowed us to visit and speak to patients and to those who have acted on our recommendations.

I would also like to thank all the board members, staff and volunteers at Healthwatch County Durham for their continued support.

You can be sure we will be working just as hard next year to make sure your voice is heard!

Brian Jackson
Chair, Healthwatch County Durham



“The County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board continue to have strong links with Healthwatch County Durham. Brian Jackson’s contributions at board meetings are valued as is the work undertaken by Healthwatch County Durham, which has allowed recommendations to be put forward that aim to improve services for local people.”

Councillor Lucy Hovvels, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board



Did you know...?

All our recommendations for service improvements and changes are based on what you tell us - and we don't keep them to ourselves! We share all our findings and recommendations with:

- + *Commissioners and services providers in County Durham who have the power to make services better.*
- + *Healthwatch England.*
- + *Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors.*

Changes you want to see

Last year, 1,681 people spoke to us about their experiences of different areas of health and social care in County Durham. Here are just a few of the changes you told us you want to see.



- + GP practices to listen to our recommendations for improving appointment systems so they meet your needs.



- + Regular text or email updates that provide practical support and advice for patients using mental health services.



- + Specialist transition coordinators to be appointed to ensure continuity of care for young people moving to adult services.



- + Early referral to support services for people living with dementia so they have prompt help, support and advice.

About us

Healthwatch is here to make care better

We are the independent champion for people using local health and social care services. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. We share their views with those with the power to make change happen. People can also speak to us to find information about health and social care services available locally.

Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.

As Chair of Healthwatch England, it's my role to make sure your Healthwatch gets effective support and that national decisions are informed by what people are saying all over England.

If you were one of the 400,000 people who shared their experiences with us last year, I want to say a personal thank you. Without your views, Healthwatch wouldn't be able to make a difference to health and social care services, both in your area and at a national level. One example of this is how we shared 85,000 views with the NHS, to highlight what matters most, and help shape its plans for the next decade.

If you're part of an organisation that's worked with, supported or responded to Healthwatch County Durham, thank you too. You've helped to make an even bigger difference.

None of this could have been possible without our dedicated staff and volunteers, who work in the community every day to understand what is working and what could be better when it comes to people's health and care.

If you've shared your views with us then please keep doing what you're doing. If you haven't, then this is your chance to step forward and help us make care better for your community. We all have a stake in our NHS and social care services: we can all really make a difference in this way.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Robert Francis'.

Sir Robert Francis QC
Healthwatch England Chair

Our vision is simple

Health and care that works for you. People want health and social care support that works - helping them to stay well, get the best out of services and manage any conditions they face.



Our purpose

To find out what matters to you and to help make sure your views shape the support you need.



Our approach

People's views come first - especially those that find it hardest to be heard. We champion what matters to you and work with others to find solutions. We are independent and committed to making the biggest difference to you.



People are at the heart of everything we do

We play an important role bringing communities and services together. Everything we do is shaped by what people tell us. Our staff and volunteers identify what matters most to people by:

- + Visiting services to see how they work.
- + Running surveys and focus groups.
- + Going out in the community and working with other organisations.

Our main job is to raise people's concerns with health and care decision-makers so that they can improve support across the country. The evidence we gather also helps us recommend how policy and practice can change for the better.





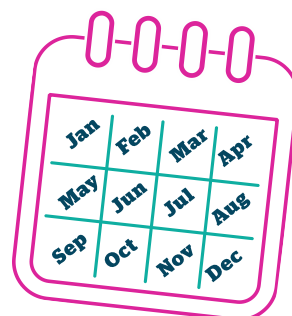
Highlights from

our year

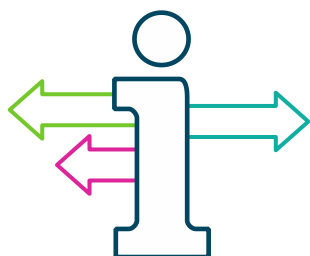
Find out about our resources and the way we have engaged and supported more people in 2018-19. **Our resources:**



1,681 people shared their health and social care stories with us.



We have 22 volunteers helping to carry out our work. In total, they gave up 2,061 hours or 275 days of their time.



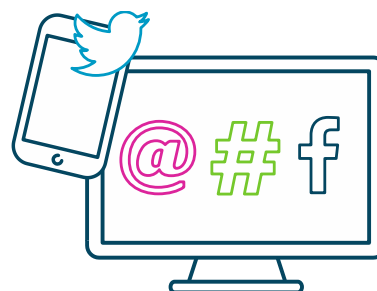
304 people accessed Healthwatch advice and information online or contacted us with questions about local support - 30% more than last year.



We carried out 10 Enter and View visits to different services to understand people's experiences. We made 40 recommendations to improve services and promote patients' needs.



We organised 32 of our own engagement events ranging on topics from care navigation to vascular services.



14% more people engaged with us through our website and social media than last year.

Receiving recognition for our projects and research

We are proud to have been recognised for our work on a number of occasions this year, both locally and nationally.

National awards success

We were thrilled when two of our projects to improve local health and social care were recognised at the Healthwatch England Awards in October 2018.

Our project to make it easier for people to find quality information about County Durham care homes won the #ItStartsWithYou award at the national event.

The #ItStartsWithYou award recognises an individual or group that has worked passionately to improve care in their community and it was our volunteer Tony Bentley who caught the judges' eyes.

It was Tony's own experience of looking for a care home for his mother that originally inspired the project and he has spearheaded much of the work involved.

Our work with vulnerable women on the accessibility of health screening was also highly commended in the "Helping people have their say" category.



Denise Rudkin (L), Claire Cowell, and Julia Catherall (R) accepting the award



Philippa May (L) from Family Action presenting the Young Carers Charter to Denise Alexander

Praised for giving young carers a voice

In June 2018, we were awarded the County Durham Young Carers Charter in recognition of our efforts to include young carers in our work.

We believe young carers deserve the same rights as any other child or young person and should have access to the same facilities, services and support.

We have a nominated member of staff who takes a lead on support for young carers and have worked closely with The Bridge Young Carers Service to ensure young carers have a say in the future of local health services. For example, young carers were included in our work on young people's transition to adult services.

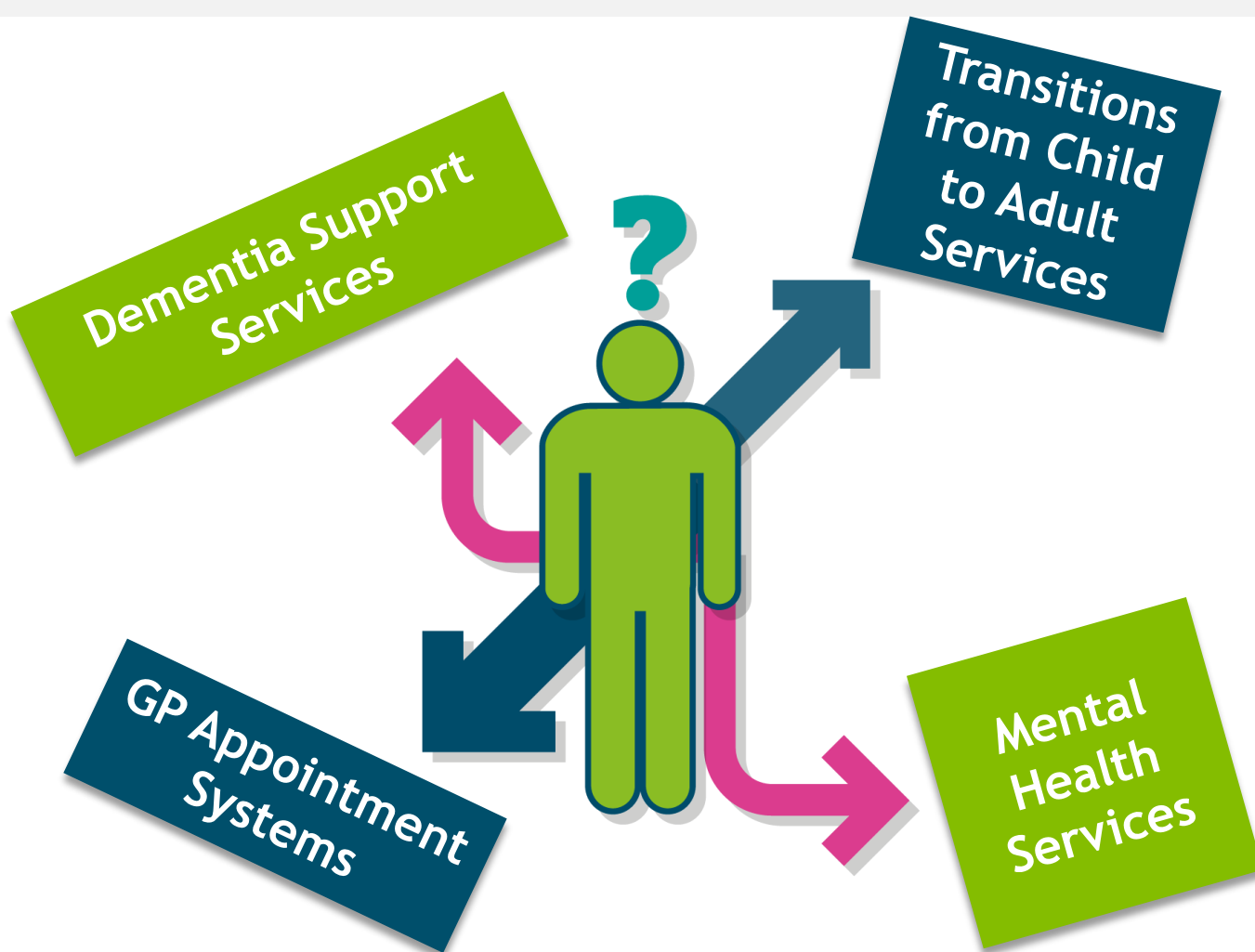
As a result, Family Action has added a new commitment to the Schools Young Carers Charter to make sure teachers put in extra support for young carers who are transitioning between schools or from school to college.

Opening up our 2018-19 priorities to public vote

We strive to ensure our work focuses on the services and issues that matter most to people in County Durham. So, we decided to hold a public vote to enable residents to choose the four main health and social care services we would look at in 2018-19 by rating six services in order of priority.

More than 600 people took part in the vote, either online, by post or by speaking to one of our volunteers. We gathered contributions from a huge range of groups, including: young parents; young carers; residents supported by the Alzheimer's Society and cancer patients.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their views and to our volunteers who spent many hours meeting people and collecting surveys. The four services that were selected to be the core of our work this year are shown below.



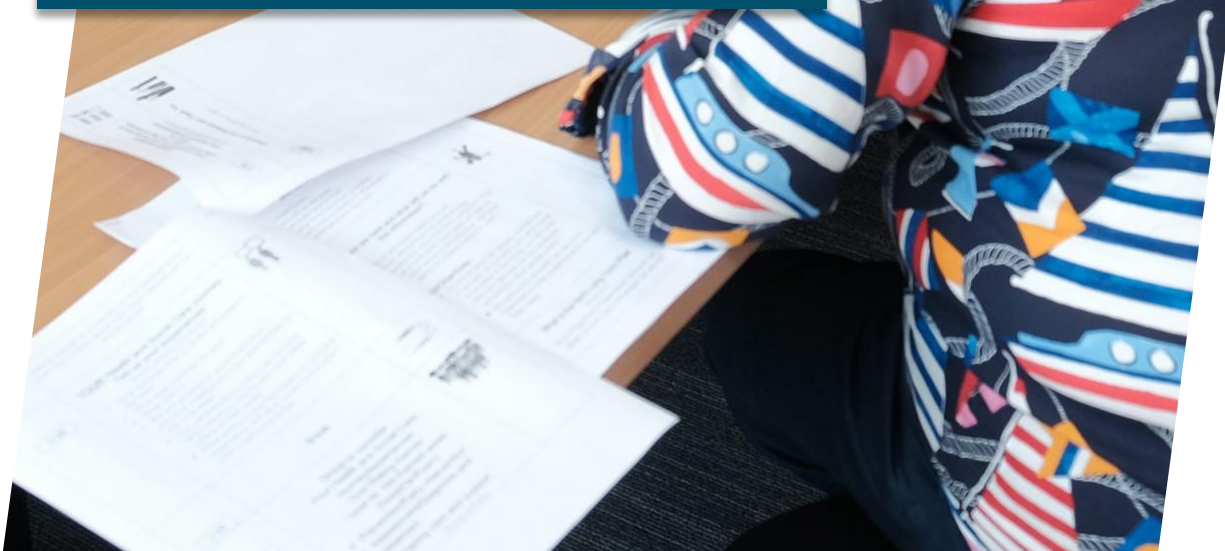
As well as our research in these four areas, a number of ongoing pieces of work also formed part of our work-plan for 2018-19:

- + Volunteering.
- + Information and signposting.
- + Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs).
- + Enter and View visits.

We also delivered meaningful engagement for a number of other organisations about services that are undergoing or facing change. These included vascular services and care navigation.



**How we've made
a difference**



Transitioning from children's to adult services

Young people's transition from children's services to adult health and social care was selected by residents of County Durham as one of the priority areas they wanted us to examine this year.

To find out how well transition processes are working we used a variety of methods to engage young people and their parents and carers. These included an online survey, face-to-face meetings, and consultations with relevant groups. We asked whether people felt supported through the transition process and if they believe the right services are actually available to support young people at this key time.

Our findings showed that while there is support to ensure good transitional care this can be patchy and inconsistent - echoing the national picture. Unfortunately, a poor transition can have serious consequences for the young person, including: broken relationships with health and social care practitioners, disengagement with services, and deteriorating health (Watson, 2005; Singh, 2009).

We made a series of recommendations based on our findings (see below). These are underpinned by the NICE Quality Standard QS140 (2016), which covers the entire transition period.

- + Young people should be put at the centre of a well-planned and integrated transition process to ensure they remain engaged with health and social care providers.
- + An integrated approach to commissioning services should be adopted jointly by children's and adult services.
- + Children's and adult health and social care services should plan transition together, to ensure the young person's transition is personalised to meet their needs.
- + More information needs to be available and easily accessible - 100% of respondents felt it would be a good idea to have information about what to expect when a young person moves to adult services.
- + The young carers we talked to felt a website would be a better way to access information as leaflets can get lost.

"We were grateful to receive the report from Healthwatch in relation to services for young people transitioning from children's to adult services. It highlighted there is significant work for the Integrated Steering Group for Children to consider. As a result of this we have set up a sub group under the leadership of Martyn Stenton to move forward with this important area of work."

**Durham County Council
Integrated Steering Group for
Children**



Working to improve GP services for everyone

We have worked hard this year to improve people's experiences of GP services, as it is clear this is a high priority for many living in the county.



In particular, people have told us that not being able to access a timely GP appointment when they need it is a major concern for them.

It is the subject our information and signposting team receives the highest number of calls about and has been raised repeatedly in all of our Enter and View visits to GP practices. It was also chosen by residents as one of the four priority areas of health and social care they wanted us to focus on this year.

In light of these concerns, we carried out extensive research with patients to help us develop a number of practical recommendations we could share with GPs for improving their services.

We spoke to 539 people about GP appointment systems, including more than 100 conversations with patients during Enter and View visits at local GP surgeries. Our volunteers, and many local patient participation groups, did a great job in encouraging people in their communities to have a say.

We produced a report of our findings that highlighted examples of good practice and developed a [simple checklist](#) that GP practices could use to help them identify ways to improve patient experience.

“The work of Healthwatch in County Durham is extremely valuable in helping the CCGs to understand the views of staff and patients. The work they have done on our care navigation system has helped us to influence the development of the next phase and we have welcomed their constructive and collaborative approach.”

“We view Healthwatch as an important partner in helping us gather the information we need to improve services for patients in challenging times... I see Healthwatch as a vital part of informing commissioning.”

Joseph Chandy, Director of Commissioning, Strategy and Delivery (Primary Care), North Durham and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgfield CCGs

Enter and View

As well as our work on appointment systems, we have continued our programme of Enter and View visits to GP practices. These are designed to gather information about what patients feel works in a service and what needs improving.

A summary of our findings and recommendations from our [Enter and View](#) visits this year was shared with all GP practices in the county. Improvements are already being seen by patients as a result of these recommendations, including:

- + A practice presenting their Enter and View report during their Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection and improving their rating from “good” to “outstanding”.
- + A review of screens in one practice to make the reception more accessible.
- + Changes to car-parking bays at another practice to make it more accessible to people with disabilities.
- + A practice employing more nurse practitioners to reduce waiting times for appointments.

“We found the whole experience of Enter and View to be a positive one. Staff that were interviewed felt it was a very professional yet friendly and stress-free experience.”

“As a practice we found it a very useful source of independent feedback, which we presented at our recent CQC inspection, where we improved our rating from ‘good’ to ‘outstanding’. I would strongly recommend Enter and View to all practices.”

**Dr Jonathan Smith, Silverdale
Family Practice**

The CCGs and local authority have welcomed our recommendations for improving GP services and have helped us to disseminate them to GPs. A letter, signed by the CCG Director of Quality and CCG Director of Nursing, has been sent to all GP practices advising them to use our checklist and recommending our Enter and View visits as a valuable way to gather independent patient feedback. We have also shared our insights with other strategic organisations, including the CCG Joint Quality Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee GP review group.

Care navigation

Our work this year to improve GP services has also included an independent evaluation of the new [care navigation system](#) introduced by local CCGs to address the challenges people have reported about getting an appointment. The CCGs asked us to carry out this work and we spoke to over 350 patients and 115 staff at nine GP surgeries about the new approach. The CCG has developed an action plan to address our recommendations based on this research, including offering grants for improvements to GP premises so they can provide greater confidentiality.

We are delighted with the positive response that all our recommendations have received and hope GP practices will continue to use our checklist and Enter and View visits to improve their services in future, making it easier for patients to see the right health professional first time.

For more information:

Checklist for GP practices: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/news/helping-gps-help-you

Care navigation report:

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/care_navigation_report.pdf

Collaborating with mental health service users and providers to improve support in County Durham

We have spent a lot of time this year looking at how well mental health services are working in the county, after it was highlighted as a key priority for residents by our public vote.

Our project gathered views and experiences from more than 300 mental health service users and professionals. People could contribute their thoughts via an online survey or one-to-one conversations.

We held information stands at various venues around the county to make it as easy as possible for people to speak to us. These included the county's two specialist mental health hospitals, Lanchester Road Hospital in Durham and West Park Hospital in Darlington. We also collected 13 detailed case studies from service users with the support of different mental health groups.

Our recommendations to improve services based on the information we gathered from service users included:

- + To consider implementing interim services to support patients while they are waiting for treatment.
- + To offer a regular text or email service for service users that provides practical support and advice.
- + To introduce a direct referral route to debt advice and/or advocacy services to help people manage the financial hardship that often accompanies mental health problems.

We are liaising closely with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust to ensure our recommendations are delivered wherever possible for the benefit of everyone - patients, carers, relatives and staff. We will continue to collate information on the experiences of mental health service users and to work with local support services to ensure those with poor mental health receive the right support and advice to improve their mental wellbeing.

“What one thing...?”

We strive to engage people from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible in our research. On this project, we quickly realised our detailed survey was too challenging for some people with poor mental health to complete. We did not want to exclude their views, so to overcome this we adopted an approach of asking one simple question - *What one thing could have improved your experiences of mental health services?* - to make it easier for them to contribute.



Highlighting the experiences of mental health staff

As well as researching service user experiences, we also wanted to know how mental health professionals thought their work affected their own mental health. The majority of staff surveys were completed by NHS professionals (81%) but we also received responses from workers at mental health charities and independent organisations.

Some staff reported positive thoughts about mental health in the workplace, e.g. citing supportive teams and good teamwork. However, almost half of respondents felt mental health was not adequately supported with comments including: “needs more awareness and resources”, “there is stigma”, and “burnout from intense caseloads is a problem”.

Suggestions for improving support included: reducing caseloads, flexible working, and managers really listening to staff concerns.

How does work affect your mental health?



38 people (41%) have taken time off work due to work-related stress



62 people (67%) say that their work impacts negatively on their mental health



58 people (62%) stated that their workload is too high compared to 33 people (36%) who said that their workload is just right.

From survey to signposting - how we have continued to help one of the contributors to our research

We carried out 13 detailed [case studies](#) as part of this project, which are included in the final report (see below). Client X was one of those who contacted us. They told us about the difficulties they had encountered when moving between local authority areas and NHS Trusts as the criteria for support is not always the same across all areas.

Client X has complex mental health needs and has received support for a number of years. When they moved they had to wait for some of the services they required and worried their mental health would deteriorate so they would be unable to look after their young family. They felt they had to look for more

support themselves to prevent this - and after we had met them we were able to help.

We have been in contact with the client for over a year and have signposted and referred them to a number of agencies and offered practical advice and support.

Each time we help someone we learn more about the long-term conditions people are living with, what services and support are available, and how people can access them. All of this information is then collated and used to make recommendations for how to improve services, while also enabling us to make our own service more effective.

For more case studies:

Full report: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_services.pdf

Making engagement more meaningful

We want as many people as possible in County Durham to have their say on the services they use. However, with a population of more than half a million, and a team of only 4.5 staff, we can't reach everybody on our own, even with 22 fantastic volunteers. So...

...this year, as well as our direct engagement work, we have encouraged and supported other health and social care organisations to engage with patients and services users in a more meaningful way about service quality and improvement.

We shared our [meaningful engagement statement](#) with everyone we believe should be engaging with patients and service users and published it openly on our website. We wanted our partners to be absolutely clear about Healthwatch expectations for engaging with us and the local community in an effective manner.

As a result, several key organisations asked for our advice on carrying out meaningful engagement.

- + **NHS England** asked for our views on how best to speak to patients about changes to vascular services. We gave feedback on the letter and questionnaire it was planning to send to patients and hosted six information and listening events for the organisation. 290 people shared their views with us at these events and NHS England will be using our findings to make sure the new service model meets patients' needs.
- + **The local foundation trust and CCGs** invited us to help them gather patients' perspectives on the proposals to [close a ward](#) at Bishop Auckland General Hospital. We already had a good working relationship with the trust after our programme of [Enter and View](#) ward visits at two hospitals with Healthwatch Darlington, so when our Chair contacted them about patients' concerns they were keen to work with us to gather more information.
- + **Northern Cancer Alliance** has been keen to learn more about our engagement model and has asked us to join its regional Public Involvement Forum, which has been set up to make sure patients are at the heart of all decisions.

By using this collaborative approach - influencing how other organisations understand and implement engagement - we have been able to make sure many more people across the county have had a say on the future of services than we could have done alone.



"We asked Healthwatch to use their skills and resources to undertake this patient engagement to help pinpoint areas where we're getting things right and things they would like to see changed or improved. We're delighted that, overall, the feedback was very positive. The engagement was also helpful in that it revealed some patients found it difficult to sleep at night due to noise on the wards, prompting us to initiate our Invest in Rest Charter. This commits us to ensuring wards offer a restful environment at night."

Jason Cram, Associate Director of Nursing, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust

More on our Hospital Enter and View visits:

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/ev_executive_summary.pdf

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/news/improvements-being-made-wards-following-our-enter-and-view-visits

Leading by example

Alongside our partnership work we have continued to provide opportunities for patients and public to share their views about services with us directly and to use these to influence those who provide them.

Our key areas of focus this year were decided by public vote, to make sure they really fitted with people's core concerns. The vote was advertised in Durham County News (which is delivered to every household), in social media, local press, and through voluntary sector partners, to make sure it reached the widest audience.

Over the year, we have tailored our engagement methods to reach different communities and enable them to have their say.

- + We visited all the memory cafes and dementia friendly events in the county to enable 50 people living with dementia to have their say on [dementia services](#).
- + We spoke to almost 100 young people and their families at events and through partner agencies to highlight the challenges of [transitioning from children's to adult services](#).
- + We offered a range of ways for [mental health](#) service users to engage with us, recognising it might be especially difficult for them to share their experiences. These included detailed, one-to-one conversations which were included as case studies in our report_ online and paper surveys, and comment cards asking "What one thing would have made your experience better?" for people at hospital drop-ins who found it difficult to do more.
- + We used an anonymous survey for mental health staff to talk about their own mental health. Altogether, more than 300 people shared their views of mental health services in the way that was best for them.

We have been pleased to see all of these views being listened to by the people who can make services better. We will continue to deliver meaningful engagement and to encourage others to do the same and hope it will soon become standard practice in County Durham.

"We invited members of Healthwatch County Durham to speak at the Northern Cancer Alliance public involvement learning and sharing event in March 2019. This provided attendees with an opportunity to hear how the Healthwatch team had worked with their local community to understand the barriers to attending for cancer screening appointments. This excellent piece of work illustrated a best practice approach to engaging with local communities and the impact that this type of work can have on local services."

Jo Mackintosh, Engagement and Co-design Project Manager at Macmillan

"Their meaningful engagement statement has been helpful in the development of our refreshed primary care strategy and in our engagement plans for possible service changes."

Joseph Chandy, Director of Commissioning, Strategy and Delivery (Primary Care), North Durham and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgfield CCGs

For more information:

- + Meaningful engagement statement: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/meaningful_engagement_statement_september_2018.pdf
- + Our response to concerns for closing ward 6 at Bishop Auckland General Hospital: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/news/update-bishop-auckland-general-hospital-ward-6

Assessing access to dementia services and networks

Investigating access to dementia support services was another key area of focus for our team in 2018-19, following the public vote to set our priorities.

Taking a lead from the priorities in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2018-21, we directed our efforts to finding out more about referrals to dementia support services, including:

- + *Were referrals being made?*
- + *Were they timely?*
- + *Were there any significant variations across the county?*
- + *Could we identify and share any good practice?*

We received 50 responses to our surveys. The majority of the people who completed the survey were happy with the way in which they had been referred into services.

Some of the key messages from patients were:

- + Early diagnosis is important - for a significant number of patients it had taken more than four weeks for a referral to relevant services.
- + Timely advice about, and referral to, support networks helped patients, carers and families through difficult and challenging times.

“Clearly the main issue to come out of this for future work is the need for speedy referral into support services and the role of the NHS in that process - either GPs or clinics, etc. To see some focus on improvement there is not a surprise and, though we have done quite a lot of work on that already, we definitely need to make sure we keep the focus on it in future as a priority.”

Neil Jarvis, chair of the Dementia Strategy Implementation Group

Good support networks

Over the engagement period we visited a number of excellent, well-attended support groups in the county. These included memory cafes, singing for the brain, and games for the brain. All the groups run by the Alzheimer’s Society are also supported by volunteers.

Making pharmacies more accessible

Our research last year into local pharmacy services is still having an impact.

One of our recommendations, based on your experiences, was to make pharmacies more accessible - and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC), which represents all NHS pharmacy contractors in the area, took this on board.

As part of the LPC’s response, Chief Officer Greg Burke visited Durham’s Blind Life group to talk to members about the support available at pharmacies for people with visual impairments. These include a “talking label” that can tell people what is in their medication.



A Community Pharmacy Awareness Group has also been set up by the LPC and Public Health in response to our finding that many people do not know about the full range of services pharmacies can provide.

We will continue to support the LPC during 2019-20 and are specifically looking at ways to engage with young people to find out more about their experience and knowledge of pharmacy services.

Improving cancer screening for all

Our research into the barriers that stop people accessing cancer screening has continued to have an impact this year. In August 2018, representatives from key organisations, including NHS England and local NHS Trusts, came together with cancer survivors to consider our findings.

A lot of time was spent discussing our recommendations for improving screening programmes - all based on the feedback that members of the public gave us about their experiences of them.

It was great so many people were able to attend and several commitments were made by attendees to take forward our ideas for making screening more accessible (see right).

We were also pleased to learn our reports have been shared with the Cancer Services Manager at County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and with the Cervical Screening Programme Board.

Some key outcomes from the meeting were:

- + A representative from NHS England agreed to check that information about when patients should expect to be called for screening (including age criteria) is included in invite letters and information leaflets so that patients are clear what the criteria is for each programme.
- + Clear messages on the importance of accessing all screening, regardless of other treatment or testing, will be reiterated by cancer specialist nurses to patients.
- + Weardale Practice is in the top ten nationally for cervical screening uptake and has been shared as an example of good practice on what should be done if patients do not attend their screening appointments.
- + Public Health are keen for screening promotion to take place throughout the year, not just during national campaigns, to build long-term consistent messages.



Delegates sharing ideas at our cancer screening stakeholder event



Service users from the Options Project with the new postcard

Spreading the Healthwatch word with more accessible information

We are always striving to make sure our service is accessible and that our research engages people from all communities.

With this in mind, we created an easy-read postcard for people with a learning disability or difficulty that outlines how we can help if they need advice about health and social care.

The postcard is now being given to every new recipient of a care package in the county who has a learning disability or difficulty.

Our thanks to Paul James from Durham County Council, and staff and service users at the Options Project at the Pioneering Care Centre (above), for their help with this project.

Did you know..?

The Accessible Information Standard (AIS) was introduced by the government in 2016.

The standard aims to make sure people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are provided with information they can easily read or understand, and with whatever support they need to communicate easily with health and social care services.

All organisations that offer NHS or adult social care must now follow the Accessible Information Standard by law. This includes doctors, dentists, hospitals and social workers.

(Source: www.mencap.org.uk)



Have your say

Share your ideas and experiences so service providers know what is working, what isn't, and what you would like from care in the future.

w: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

t: 0800 304 7039

e: healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net



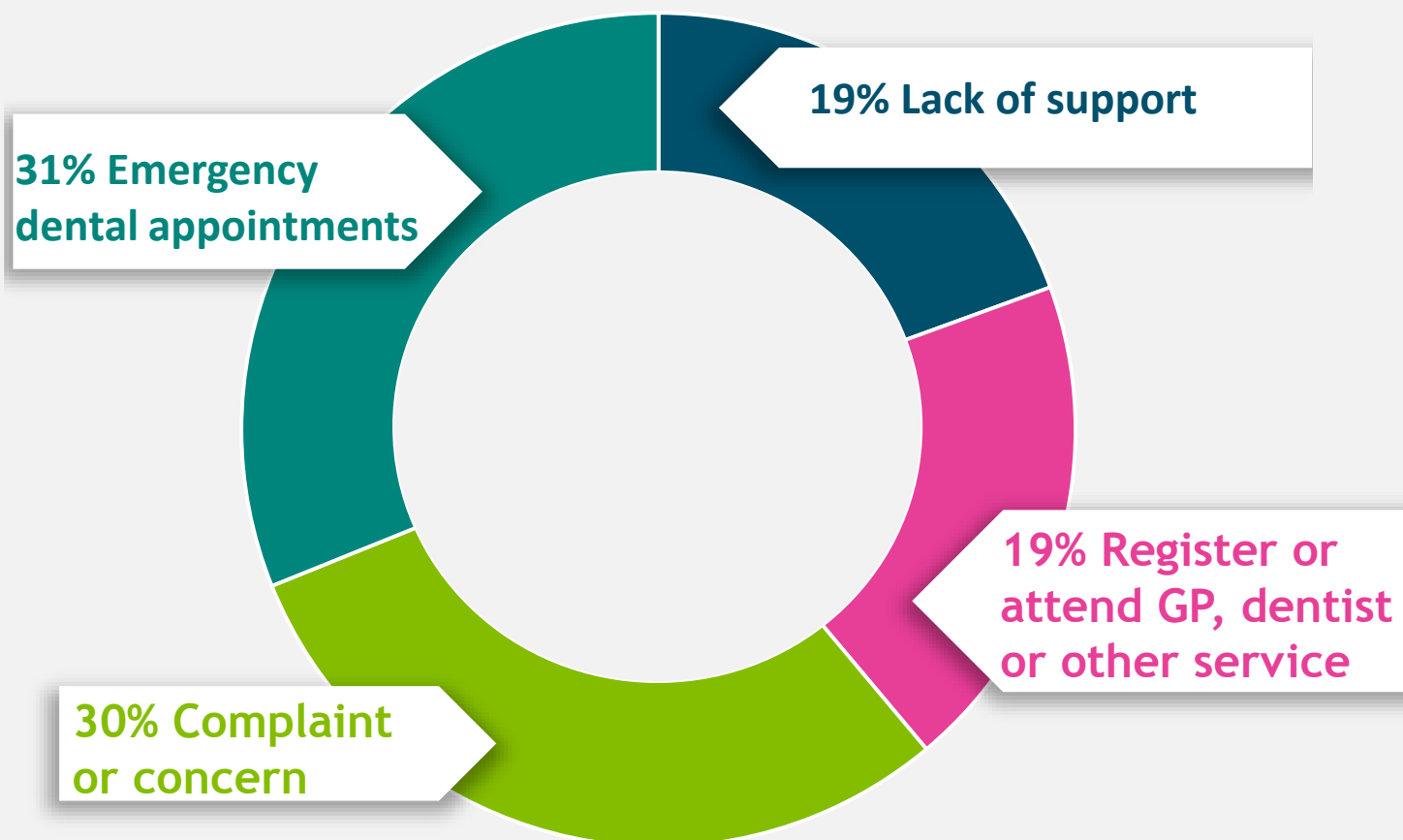
Helping you find

the answers

What services do people want to know about?

People don't always know how to get the information they need to make decisions about their own health and care. Healthwatch plays an important role in providing advice and pointing people in the right direction for the support they need.

Here are the most common things people ask us:



Are you looking for advice?

Our information and signposting team can help if you have a question about a health or social care service or you need help to identify where you can access the right support. Please get in touch and don't struggle on alone.

w: www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

t: 0800 304 7039

e: healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net

Signposting you to the advice and information you need

There are many organisations providing care and support in County Durham but sometimes it can be difficult to know how to find the right one for you. Last year, we helped 304 people in the region access the advice and information they needed.

If you need advice and information you can access our team in a number of ways, including:

- + Calling us on our Freephone number.
- + Sending us a text or email.
- + At community events.
- + Via social media, where we also post useful local information.
- + At networking meetings and focus groups.

Making you aware of your rights

One of the clients who contacted us this year was worried they hadn't been given a choice of hospital when they needed to see a consultant.

We called the GP's secretary who confirmed the client had been referred to the hospital with the shortest waiting list. We advised the client they could change to their preferred hospital but there would be a longer wait to see a consultant. The client then contacted their GP's secretary directly to make a decision that best suited their circumstances.



Did you know...?

In some cases you will have more than one clinic or hospital to choose from. The list of options will be the same whether you decide to book online or over the phone.

In most cases you have the legal right to choose the hospital or service you'd like to go to, including private hospitals as long as they provide services to the NHS.

(Source: www.nhs.uk)

Helping you access the right support for you

Another client who contacted us this year was having difficulty accessing the support they needed for their mental health needs.

The client had been discharged from a long-term support programme and a re-referral to the service by their GP had been refused. They felt their mental health was declining as a result and that they needed continual support to maintain living independently, with which their GP agreed.

Our signposting team spoke with the client and agreed to refer to the specialist Rethink Mental Illness Advocacy Team, which has been able to support them to access the services they need to ensure their mental health continues to improve.

"Thanks for your help ... speaking to you has kept me in control of managing my life."



Raising patients' concerns over possible ward closure at Bishop Auckland General Hospital

In October 2018, we were contacted by many members of the public concerned about the reported closure of ward 6 at Bishop Auckland General Hospital.

We immediately contacted County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, which runs the hospital, to make them aware of these concerns and to ask for clarification of their plans.

We also attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Durham County Council where the trust's plans were discussed at length. At this meeting, the trust's executive director, Carole Langrick, confirmed ward 6 would stay open while its future was considered.

The trust has acknowledged the process could have been managed better and decided to hold

a public consultation on the ward's future after further discussions with staff.

We shared our **guidance on meaningful public engagement** with the trust in the hope it would help ensure people's views were really listened to in the public consultation. Then in February 2019 the CCG approached us to carry out an independent engagement project to review ward 6 and identify ideas for potential future service models.

We spent time at the hospital between April and June 2019, gathering the views of patients and their families. Once we have analysed this information we will share our findings with the trust and CCG to help them develop options for future models of care that will best meet people's needs.

"I was reassured to hear the ward will remain open until there has been appropriate engagement with staff, patients and the public, and that the findings and proposals for the future of ward 6 will be shared with partners and stakeholders."

Brian Jackson, Chair of Healthwatch County Durham



Healthwatch County Durham at Bishop Auckland General Hospital in November 2018

“It’s such a privilege to volunteer for Healthwatch County Durham and to work as equals in our roles with such a wonderful, professional team.”

Healthwatch County Durham volunteer

Our volunteers



National and local recognition for our hard-working volunteers

We are always grateful for the contributions our volunteers make to our work but this year we have also been thrilled to see their efforts recognised further afield.

Volunteer Tony wins a national Healthwatch award

In October 2018, our volunteer Tony Bentley received the #ItStartsWithYou Healthwatch England award.

This award recognises an individual or group that has worked passionately to improve health and social care services for their community - which Tony certainly has.

Tony spearheaded the development of a best practice website that care homes can refer to in order to make sure their own sites have all the information the public could need. This involved close work with a local care home provider, Kaydar, and computer company Consett Computers.

The finished website is now live and Durham County Council have contacted every care home provider in the region to encourage them to learn from it.



Tony Bentley (L) with Norreen and Angus Burns from Kaydar at their website launch



Volunteer Celebration Week

In June 2018, another of our volunteers, Paul Stokes, was recognised for his hard work with our team at a celebration of volunteers at Durham Cathedral.

The County Durham Volunteer Awards 2018 acknowledged that Paul had “been recognised for his dedication and commitment in volunteering his time to help others”.

The event was held as part of Volunteers’ Week and recognised volunteers from many different organisations. As well as the award ceremony, attendees were given tea and cake and a tour of the cathedral, including the Open Treasures exhibition.

Left: Paul Stokes with Marianne Patterson, Project Lead for Healthwatch County Durham

What do our volunteers do?

Our 22 volunteers help us in a huge variety of ways. We couldn't have the impact we do without their support. They help us make care better for everyone in their communities. Some of the work they do includes:

- + Raising awareness of the work we do in communities around the region.
- + Visiting services to make sure they are meeting people's needs.
- + Supporting our day-to-day running, e.g. governance.
- + Collecting people's views and experiences of services, which inform our reports.



Volunteers attend a focus group workshop to share their views and influence changes in their area

A chance to develop and learn new skills

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and each brings a different insight to the work we do. In return, we are committed to giving them the best support we can and providing opportunities for personal and professional development.

The training attended by volunteers during 2018-19 has included sessions on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), safeguarding and first aid.

A group of volunteers also attended a dementia friendly workshop with the staff team, run by representatives from the Alzheimer's Society.

At Healthwatch County Durham, we share a commitment to being dementia friendly and include this in service recommendations as part of our wider work during visits to care homes, hospitals, GP practices, and other health and social care providers.

“We are always accompanied on visits and given lots of team-working opportunities with the immediate coordinator, her manager or associated leads, and, where necessary, with the team as a whole.”

Volunteer



Our finances

and

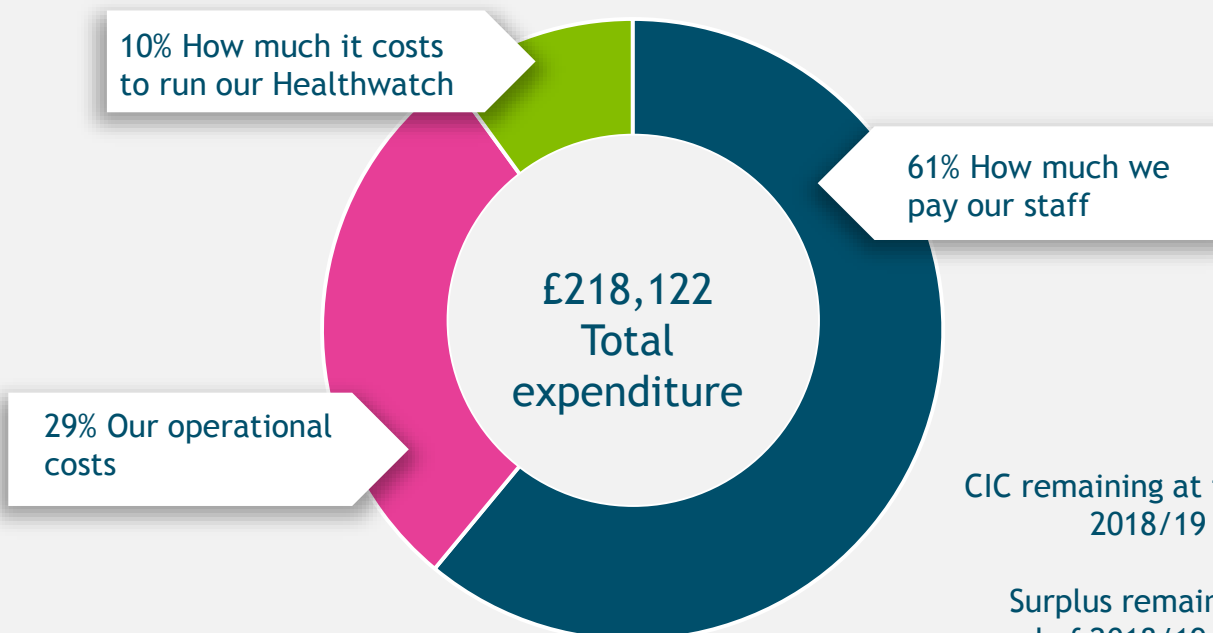
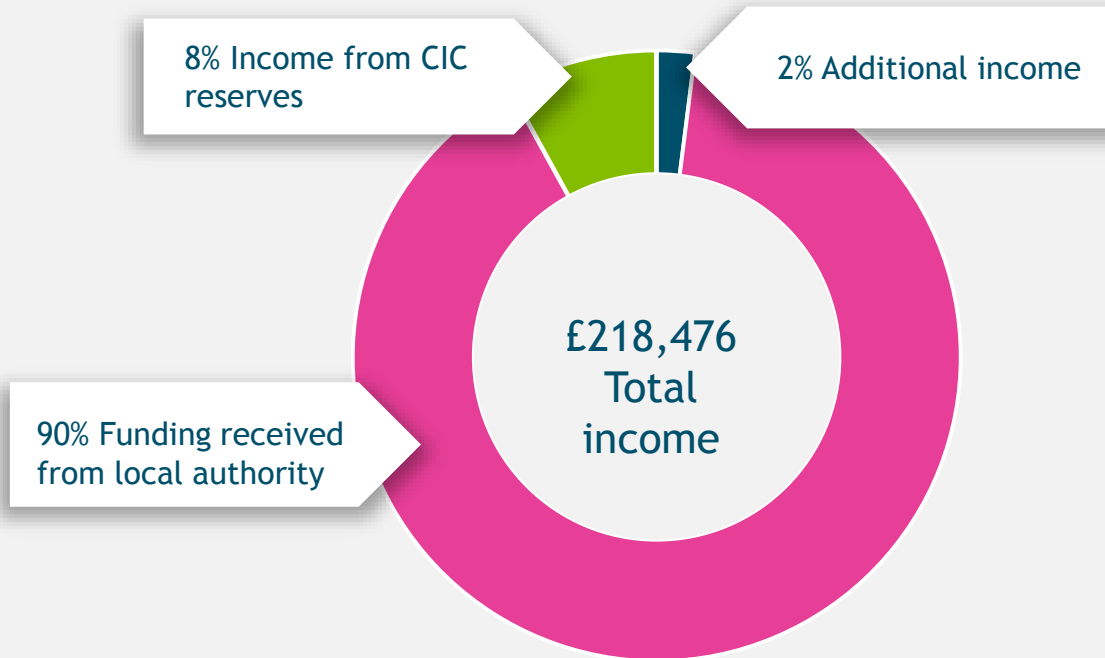
our plans for

next year

How we use our money

To help us carry out our work, we are funded by our local authority. In 2018-19 we spent £218,122.

We also received £3,800 of additional income from NHS England and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield CCG.



CIC remaining at the end of 2018/19 is £24,224

Surplus remaining at the end of 2018/19 is £17,453

Message from our Chief Executive

I am delighted that Healthwatch County Durham continues to develop, engaging more local people year-on-year to better understand local issues and concerns and inform future thinking around health and social care service design.

Looking back

- + Access to GP appointments continues to be high on the agenda and the ongoing programme of GP Enter and View visits has led to system improvements.
- + The inclusive and responsive approach to engagement has proved to be very successful. Use of social media surveys, in addition to traditional engagement techniques to support public voting, has worked well.
- + 2018 was an award-winning year with national recognition of two Healthwatch County Durham projects.
- + The Information and Signposting service saw an increase in take-up of 30% on the previous year, demonstrating the need for impartial access to support.

Thank you

Healthwatch County Durham could not achieve so much without the support of local people and communities, so I would firstly like to thank them for helping to shape the 2018-19 work-plan and for continuing to tell us what is important to them.

Healthwatch County Durham benefits from a strong volunteer team, which dedicated more than 2,000 hours in support of our work this year - an increase of 24% on the previous year. The work they do is vital to help us reach across the whole of County Durham.

The independent board's oversight and focus on health and social care issues helps to effectively direct the work of the staff team. I would like to thank both the board and staff team for their continued drive and passion without which Healthwatch County Durham would not achieve so much.



“Healthwatch County Durham works tirelessly to engage with people and communities so their work can truly reflect issues that are meaningful locally.”

Carol Gaskarth
Chief Executive - Pioneering Care Partnership

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who is helping us to put people at the heart of health and social care, including:

- + Members of the public who have shared their views and experiences with us.
- + All of our amazing staff and volunteers.
- + The many voluntary and community organisations that have contributed to our work, including: Pioneering Care Partnership, Citizens Advice County Durham and Durham Community Action.
- + Partners and organisations we have worked with during the year including: NHS England; Durham County Council; North Durham and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield CCGs; County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust; North East Ambulance Service (NEAS); GP surgeries; the Local Pharmaceutical Committee; and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.
- + The patient participation groups and patient reference groups that support our work.

“I would like to thank Healthwatch County Durham, and in particular Marianne Patterson and Chris Cunningham-Shore, for their continued work with the committee and their commitment to ensuring that patients’, families’ and carers’ views and experiences of health and social care services are communicated during engagement and consultation processes.”

Councillor John Robinson, Chair of Durham County Council’s Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview Scrutiny Committee



Contact us

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Telephone:

- + 0191 378 1037 (office landline)
- + 0191 378 7695 (volunteer support)
- + 0800 304 7039 (Freephone signposting)
- + 07756 654218 (text)

The organisation holding the local Healthwatch contract as of 31 March 2019 is the Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP), Carers Way, Newton Aycliffe, DL5 4SF.

- + 01325 321234
- + enquiries@pcp.uk.net

We confirm that we are using the Healthwatch Trademark (which covers the logo and Healthwatch brand) when undertaking work on our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

Registered Charity: 1067888
Company Limited by Guarantee No: 3491237

Our annual report will be publicly available on our website from 30 June 2019. We will also be sharing it with Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and our local authority.

We share all of our reports with Healthwatch England and the people who are responsible for the service.

If you need this report in an alternative format please contact us.

healthwatch County Durham

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© 2019 Healthwatch County Durham is run by the Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP), Durham Community Action and Citizens Advice County Durham



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