
News update - February 2026



Welcome to the latest edition of the Healthwatch County Durham newsletter! This month, we're sharing a range of support and wellbeing services available across the county, from cancer awareness and training, to autism support, employment programmes and free debt and money advice.

Whether you're a service user, carer or professional, our aim is to connect you with the right support and keep you informed about opportunities, resources and initiatives that can make a real difference to your health, wellbeing and quality of life.

New Report:

Community Mental Health Transformation Evaluation

We've published a new report bringing together experiences from people using services and those delivering community mental health support across County Durham.

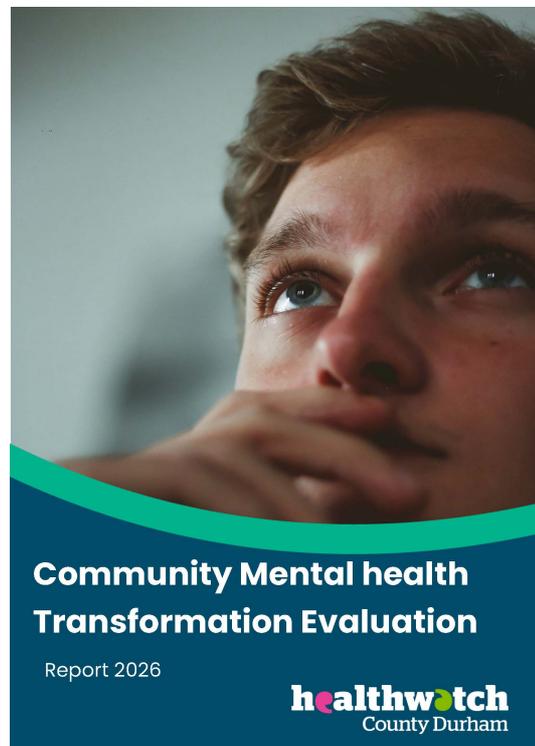
The findings show that while **progress has been made** (including better collaboration between services, improved awareness and a growing sense of shared purpose), the system is **not yet working consistently or in a fully joined-up, person-centred way**.

People told us they still face **significant barriers to accessing support**, such as long waiting times, unclear or fragmented pathways, poor communication and a lack of continuity.

Those with moderate to high mental health needs are particularly affected, often falling between primary and secondary care thresholds.

Professionals shared similar concerns, highlighting capacity and workforce pressures, inconsistent referral criteria and system gaps that can lead to delays, rejected referrals and unmet needs. While new approaches like multi-agency working and the Gateway show promise, awareness and uptake remain limited.

The report sets out clear recommendations to improve access, strengthen communication, simplify referrals, embed person-centred practice and ensure lived experience continues to shape future services.



[Read the full report](#)

Carers Support Group

Are you an unpaid carer looking for support, connection and a friendly space to talk?

We're launching a new local carers support group, offering a relaxed and welcoming environment where you can share experiences, meet other carers, take time for yourself and access local support and information

Every other month 3–5pm
Starting Wednesday 4th March

Other dates include:

6th May
1st July
2nd September
4th November
6th January

Where?

Hamsteels Community Centre
Western Avenue, Esh Winning
Co. Durham, DH7 9LS

Tea & coffee provided

**Contact for more info:
Julia Catherall**

Email: julia@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

Tel: 0191 916 9847

Mobile: 07761 205705

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk



New Enter and View Report:
Unity House, Peterlee

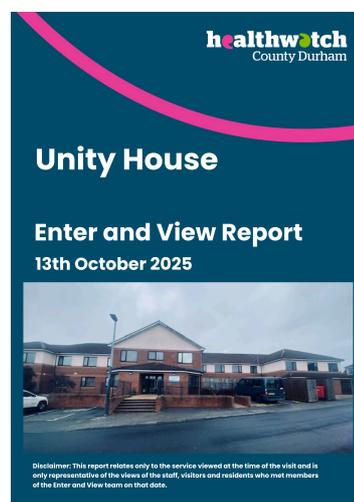
We recently carried out an Enter and View visit at Unity House, a residential care home for people with a learning disability in Peterlee. During our visit, we spoke with residents, staff and a family member and observed day-to-day life within the home.

Feedback was **overwhelmingly positive**. Residents told us they feel listened to, supported and involved in decisions about their care. Staff were described as friendly, caring and respectful, with strong relationships built through one-to-one support.

We also observed a clean, welcoming and homely environment, with personalised bedrooms and a wide range of communal spaces and activities.

Alongside the positives, the report highlights a small number of suggested improvements, such as maintaining comfortable temperatures, reducing noise in busy areas and ensuring consistency when agency staff are used at weekends. These are intended as enhancements to an already person-centred and effective service.

[Read the full report](#)



News & useful information

Joining the Dots Support after a cancer diagnosis

Joining the Dots supports people aged 18 and over in County Durham to live well after a cancer diagnosis whether you're newly diagnosed, going through treatment or living beyond cancer.

The service is there not only for people with a cancer diagnosis but also for immediate carers, helping them feel more supported and better able to care for their loved one.

Joining the Dots can help with a wide range of things, from small lifestyle changes that support wellbeing, to practical advice, including support to access the right benefits through [Macmillan Welfare Rights](#).

The poster features a teal background with a circular diagram of six colored dots (blue, purple, green, yellow, red, blue) connected by dashed lines. Below the diagram is a photo of a family. The text 'Macmillan Joining the Dots' is in the top left, and 'Cancer: What now?' is in the top right. A list of support areas is in the middle right, and contact information is at the bottom.

Macmillan Joining the Dots

Cancer: What now?

- Family support
- Physical
- Lifestyle/information
- Emotional
- Spiritual/religious
- Practical/money

Delivered by **wellbeing** Working together **MACMILLAN** **Durham** **0800 876 6887**
 cddft.joiningthedots@nhs.net

If you or someone you care for could benefit from extra support, find out more about Joining the Dots and how to access the service [here](#).

Durham Autism Support Service

Daisy Chain delivers the Durham Autism Support Service, a needs-led service for people aged 16 and over living in County Durham.

The flyer has a white background with a blue and yellow ribbon graphic. It includes the Daisy Chain logo, a title, a description, eligibility questions, service offerings, contact information, and a QR code.

DAISY CHAIN Durham Autism Support

Designed to provide support at every stage of your autism journey, from self-identification to diagnosis and beyond.

Is this service right for me?

- ✓ Are you over the age of 16?
- ✓ Do you have, or are you awaiting an autism diagnosis?
- ✓ Do you live in County Durham?

What will the service offer me?

- Information and advice
- Weekly drop in sessions
- Bookable 1:1 appointments
- Understanding Myself workshops
- Connecting to local support

How do I access support?

- Call the team on 01642 531248 (option 2)
- Email durham.support@daisychainproject.co.uk
- Visit our website by scanning the QR code.

Citizens Advice Centre, 71 High Street, Spennymoor, County Durham, DL16 6BB

SCAN ME

The service is available to people who:

- Are on a waiting list for an autism diagnosis, or
- Already have an autism diagnosis

Support is tailored to the individual and may include:

- Information and advice
- Peer support drop-in sessions
- Bookable 1:1 appointments
- Psychoeducation to help people better understand themselves

Support is available both in person and online, with weekly drop-ins at venues across Durham.

To find out more or book a 1:1 appointment:

Call: 01642 531248 (option 2)

Or email: durham.support@daisychainproject.co.uk

Connect to Work

Tailored employment support in the North East

Connect to Work is a new programme designed to support people into employment in a way that works for them. Funded by Government investment and delivered across the North East, the programme recognises that one size doesn't fit all.

The programme supports people who face barriers to employment, including those with long-term health conditions, disabilities or complex life circumstances, to find the right job, at the right time, with the right employer.

PARTICIPANTS

Triage
helping people succeed

CONNECT TO WORK
Funded by UK Government

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL.
And with Connect to Work, it no longer has to...

Connect to Work has been designed to support individuals with health conditions, disabilities, and barriers in finding the right job at the right time with the most suitable employer.

OPEN NEW DOORS
We work with individuals who want to work at some stage in the next 12 months - you might feel that you are only ready to do this come month 11, and that's ok. With the right support, we'll find you a job that excites you, with an employer who understands your needs.

EMPOWER YOUR CAREER
Our specialist and individualised approach means we won't disappear when you need us most. We offer ongoing, personalised support even after you start work - ensuring you're never left without help, especially during challenging times.

FIND YOUR FUTURE
Our low caseloads mean we can truly invest in our participants. With 12 months of support, we get to know not just your employment goals, but who you are - your likes, dislikes, and what matters most to you.

COUNTY DURHAM | GATESHEAD | NEWCASTLE | NORTH TYNESIDE | SUNDERLAND

NE North East Combined Authority | **Kim McGuinness** North East Mayor

Eligibility: Have a disability, longterm health condition or specified barrier. Email for full list.
Triage.net | chw@trriage.net

How the support works

People are offered personalised employment support through one of two approaches, depending on their needs:

- **Individual Placement and Support (IPS)**
Employment support is integrated alongside health and support services, helping people move into work while continuing to receive the care and support they need.
- **Local Supported Employment (LSE)**
A more intensive level of support for people with autism, learning disabilities, or higher support needs. Participants receive regular contact with an Employment Specialist and are supported in a holistic, joined-up way. Referrals may be made through partner organisations where appropriate.

Who can access Connect to Work?

You may be eligible if you:

- Have a disability or long-term health condition, or
- Are part of a group that may face additional barriers to work, including carers or ex-carers, people with lived experience of homelessness, care leavers, veterans, refugees, survivors of domestic abuse, people with substance dependency histories, and others.

Support is available whether you're:

- Looking for work yourself
- Referring someone to the programme
- An employer, GP or healthcare professional wanting to find out more

Find out more about [Connect to Work](#)

Cancer Awareness Workshops & Training

The [County Durham Cancer Awareness](#) Team offers free support for communities and workplaces across the county to help reduce cancer risk, encourage early detection, and promote healthier lifestyles.



Cancer awareness
be aware ✓ get checked ✓ make changes

Awareness Workshops

Spotting cancer at an early stage saves lives.

The County Durham Cancer Awareness Team is a free service available to communities and workplaces across County Durham.

We provide information about ways to reduce your risk of developing cancer, how to recognise the early signs and symptoms of some of the most common types of cancer, encourage you to contact a healthcare professional and provide guidance on self-examination.

The team deliver workshops and information stands in your community or workplace to raise awareness of these early signs and symptoms and to highlight the importance of attending the NHS Screening Programmes.

We can deliver awareness sessions in person or virtually. Contact the team and we will work with you to deliver what you need.

Contact us

✉ cddft.countydurhamcancerawareness@nhs.net

☎ 0800 876 6887

Follow us on socials

 Cancer Awareness Team County Durham  CancerAwareCoDurham

 Cancer Awareness Team County Durham  CancerAwareCD

They provide:

- Workshops and information stands in person or virtually
- Guidance on self-examination
- Information about early signs and symptoms of common cancers
- Support to attend NHS Screening Programmes

Become a Cancer Champion

Cancer Champions are volunteers trained to raise awareness in their communities. Training covers:

- How to reduce cancer risk
- Recognising early signs and symptoms
- How to have supportive conversations about cancer
- Reliable sources of cancer information

Training is free, delivered face-to-face or virtually, and uses Cancer Research UK's 'Let's Talk Cancer' resources.

For more information contact:

Email: cddft.countydurhamcancerawareness@nhs.net

Call: 0800 876 6887



Cancer awareness
be aware ✓ get checked ✓ make changes

Cancer Champion Training

One in two people are diagnosed with Cancer in their lifetime, cancer awareness is vital to ensure the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Cancer Champions are equipped with the knowledge needed to raise awareness about cancer, engage in conversations that could help to reduce the risk of cancer and encourage early diagnosis.

You can sign up for the free face-to-face or virtual awareness sessions.

All training materials are from Cancer Research UK's 'Let's Talk Cancer Training'

Topics covered:

- ✓ Where to find accurate and reliable information about cancer
- ✓ How to reduce the risk of cancer
- ✓ The importance of spotting cancer early
- ✓ If something isn't normal for you, tell your doctor
- ✓ The information and support services available

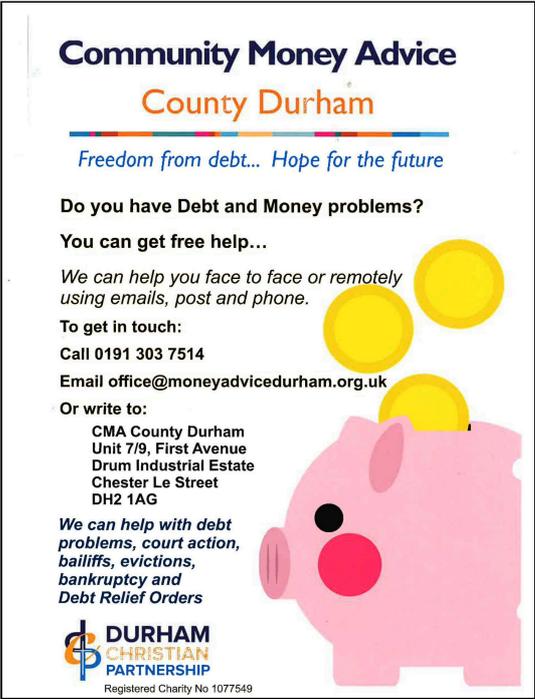
Contact us

✉ cddft.countydurhamcancerawareness@nhs.net
☎ 0800 876 6887

Follow us on socials

f Cancer Awareness Team County Durham
i Cancer Awareness Team County Durham
@ CancerAwareCoDurham
X CancerAwareCD

Free Debt and Money Advice in County Durham



Community Money Advice
County Durham

Freedom from debt... Hope for the future

Do you have Debt and Money problems?
You can get free help...

We can help you face to face or remotely using emails, post and phone.

To get in touch:
Call 0191 303 7514
Email office@moneyadvisedurham.org.uk

Or write to:
CMA County Durham
Unit 7/9, First Avenue
Drum Industrial Estate
Chester Le Street
DH2 1AG

We can help with debt problems, court action, bailiffs, evictions, bankruptcy and Debt Relief Orders

DURHAM CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIP
Registered Charity No 1077549

[Community Money Advice County Durham \(CMACD\)](#) offers free, confidential, face-to-face and telephone support for anyone struggling with finances, debt or managing money.

Debt can affect more than just your finances, it can impact relationships, health, housing and wellbeing. Getting support early can be life-changing.

Email:

office@moneyadvisedurham.org.uk

Call / leave a message: 0191 303 7514

What we offer:

- Advice on managing debt and finances

- Support with benefits, budgeting and food vouchers
- Drop-in sessions in Durham City and Consett with Louise for practical guidance
- Appointments at multiple venues across County Durham
- Home visits in special circumstances

All services are **free, unconditional, and confidential**, delivered in a way that suits you.

Locations and opening times:

- **Durham City:** Mon, Wed, Fri, 12:30–14:30 (Waddington Street URC)
- **Consett:** Mon, Wed, Fri, 10:00–12:00 (Consett Methodist Church)
- **Brandon, Chester-le-Street, Ferryhill, Newton Aycliffe, Spennymoor, Stanley, West Auckland, Willington** – appointments available.

CMACD is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority and affiliated with the national charity Community Money Advice.

💡 **Remember:** seeking help early can reduce stress, protect your wellbeing and help you regain control.

Share your experience with us

Our work starts with your story. You can share your feedback with us at any time — anonymously if you prefer.

- **Telephone:** 0300 180 0025
- **Email:** info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk
- **Website:** www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

If we're not available straight away, please leave your details and a member of the team will get back to you.

Thank you for reading!

Next month's edition will be in your inbox soon



Contact us:



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Crook Business Centre
New Road
Crook
County Durham
DL15 8QX

Call: 0300 180 0025 between the hours of 09:00
- 17:00 Monday to Friday

Email: info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

Making a complaint: Find out about
our [complaints process](#)



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