Newsletter

Our Monthly Update

healthwatch County Durham

November 2026


advice
in county durham
The future of Ageing Well
in County Durham Conferen
Thursday October 22nd

In this edition, we're exploring what the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag is and what it means for patients and sharing our latest three-month feedback report, You Told Us.

Plus, we have a chat with our Volunteer Coordinator, Claire about the importance of the Enter and View programme and ahead of International Men's Day, a new campaign to celebrate men becoming more active.

As always, thank you for your continued support — your feedback helps us make a real impact. 💛

healthwatch
County Durham

YOUR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL
CARE CHAMPION

THE VENUE

Monthly Drop-In, Stanley



Our engagement team host a monthly drop-in so we can hear **your experiences** of accessing health and social care and help **signpost** towards services, advice and guidance.

The Venue, DH9 6AH

Next Drop In:

Thursday 26th November, 1.30pm -3.30pm

Healthwatch to be Retained and Strengthened



The Government has announced that Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch organisations - which includes Healthwatch County Durham - will be retained and strengthened.

The Health and Social Care reform bill had proposed to abolish Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch organisations, which raised concerns about how the independent voice of patients

This means for residents of County Durham, they can be assured that we remain here for you;

- Listening to your feedback.

and social care users would be represented in future.

However the Department of Health & Social Care have now said the Health Bill clauses relating to both the abolition of local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England are to be withdrawn.

- Engaging with people across our communities.
- Understanding your experiences.
- Using your voice to help shape and improve local health and social care services.

Chris Cunnington-Shore, Chair of the Board at Healthwatch County Durham welcomed the decision.

"Healthwatch plays a vital role in ensuring that the voices and experiences of local people are heard and help shape improvements to health and social care services"

"The past 18 months have brought considerable uncertainty for Healthwatch organisations across the country, and we recognise the impact this has had locally on our staff, volunteers and Board members. I want to thank everyone at Healthwatch County Durham for their commitment, resilience and continued belief in the importance of our work throughout this period. I would also like to thank the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board and members for their overwhelming support."

"While there is still more to learn about what this decision will mean in practice and how we move forward, this is very welcome news. We look forward to understanding the next steps and continuing to working and championing the voices of people who use health and social care services across County Durham."

- Chris Cunnington-Shore, Healthwatch County Durham

Find Out How Your Feedback is Making a Difference



Every three months, Healthwatch County Durham publish our regular ‘You Told Us’ report.

This brings together feedback, experiences and concerns shared by local people about health and social care services across the county.

It highlights what is working well, identifies areas where improvements are needed, and helps ensure that residents' voices are heard by service providers and decision-makers.

The report also helps shape Healthwatch County Durham's future engagement work, focusing on the issues that matter most to local communities.

Our latest You Told Us report for the period covering July, August and September is now available to read and download on our website. You’ll also find it linked on social media feeds too.

In this edition, we cover the areas of feedback we've heard most about during this quarter – the top three service areas that you told us about were – GP services, Dentistry and Adult Social Care.

Meanwhile, our word on the street series hears about concerns around the use of AI and ensuring data security for patients.

Read the Report


Available to listen now
Spotify
amazon music
Apple Podcasts
YouTube
Monthly updates, your experiences and reports on health and social care in your area.
healthwatch
County Durham
PODCAST

Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag



Many people experience barriers when accessing healthcare, whether that's needing

By recording and sharing these needs across NHS and publicly funded care services, staff can

information in a different format, extra time to communicate, or support in busy environments.

The Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag is a national marker on a person's health and care record that highlights any adjustments they may need, such as easy-read information, a British Sign Language interpreter, or a quieter waiting area.

better understand how to support individuals and make healthcare more accessible.

The flag is not a diagnosis or part of someone's medical record; it simply helps services recognise and plan for reasonable adjustments.

This can reduce the need to repeatedly explain requirements and help improve experiences of care.

People can ask their GP surgery or healthcare provider to record any support needs on their health record and include them in the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag.

If adjustments are not provided, individuals are encouraged to raise this with the service or contact Healthwatch County Durham for further support.

A Day in the Life of an Enter and View Visit

Enter and View is one of the statutory powers given to Healthwatch County Durham and other local Healthwatch across the country.

It allows trained Healthwatch representatives to visit health and social care services to see how they are being delivered and speak with people using the service plus relatives and staff about their experiences - good or bad.



Our Enter and View Representatives are largely volunteers – giving their own time freely to help gather real feedback from people who are using services.

Our Enter and View programme is led by Claire Sisterson who we accompanied on a recent Enter and View visit alongside two of our Volunteer Enter and View representatives Rosemary and Anne.

Play the video above

NHS

Your voice matters

Have your say on how health and care records are used for research and planning







Chance to win a £50 LOVE2SHOP voucher

North East and North Cumbria
SECURE DATA ENVIRONMENT

Coming Up in November

Our engagement team are always out and about listening to your experiences of health and social care services attending community hubs, events and more. Here's where you might see us this month:



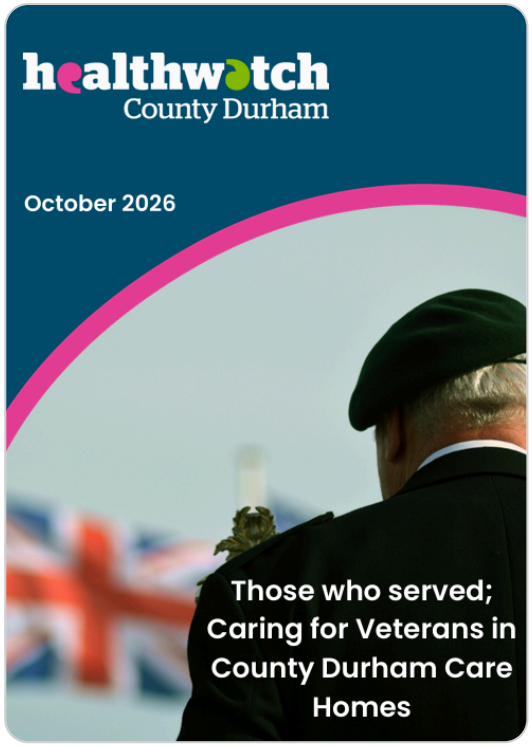
- **Hamsteels Community Centre, Carers Support Group, Esh Winning, DH7 9LS, Wednesday 4th November, 10:30am-12:30pm**
- **Blanchland Village Hall, Lunch Club, Blanchland, DH8 9UA, Tuesday 10th November, 12pm-2pm**
- **Shildon Alive!, 91–95 Church Street, Shildon, DL4 1DT, Tuesday 17th November, 12:30pm-2:30pm**
- **Willington Methodist Church, Willington, DL15 0AG, Wednesday 18th November, 10am-12pm**
- **Freeman Hospital Education Centre, Deaflink Forum, Newcastle, NE7 7DN, Thursday 19th November, 2pm-5pm**
- **Shotton Community Hub, Carers Rights Roadshow, Shotton Colliery, DH6 2PQ, Friday 20th November, 11am-2pm**

- **Sedgefield Parish Hall, Neurodevelopment Family Support drop-in, Sedgefield, TS21 3AT, Monday 23rd November, 9:30am – 11:30am**
- **St Andrews, SPA Group, Brandon, DH7 8QG, Tuesday 24th November, 9:30am-11:30am**
- **Community Hub, Breakfast Club, West Cornforth Community Centre, DL17 9LA, Wednesday 25th November, 10am-12pm**
- **The Venue, Wear Together, Stanley, DH9 6AH, Thursday 26th November, 1:30pm – 3:30pm**
- **East Durham Trust, Hart Gables LGBT, SR8 5DP, Friday 27th November, 1pm – 3pm**

Caring for Veterans in County Durham Care Homes

Healthwatch County Durham has published the findings from its Veterans in Care Homes project, which explored how veterans are identified, supported and recognised within residential care settings across the county.

Working with eight local care homes, we spoke with staff about the care and support provided to



veteran residents. While we found a strong commitment to supporting veterans, the project also highlighted opportunities to improve how veteran status is identified, recorded and acknowledged.

In response to these findings, we are continuing to work with partners to increase staff awareness, strengthen support for veteran residents, and promote veteran-aware care across County Durham.

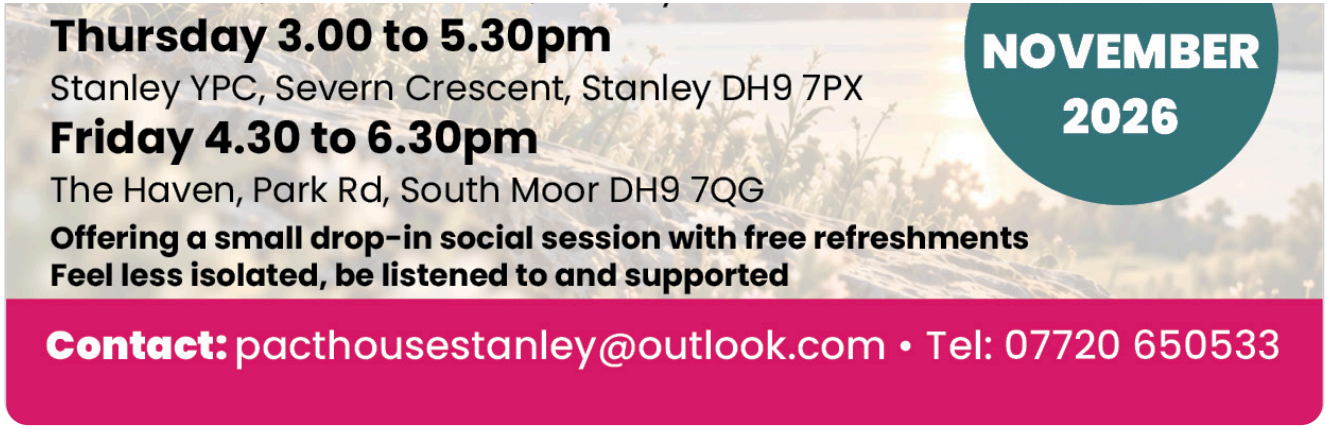
Our final report, ***Those Who Served: Caring for Veterans in County Durham Care Homes***, is now available to read and download from our website.

The report explores our findings in greater detail, outlines our recommendations, and highlights the key themes identified throughout the project.

Read the Report

We would like to thank everyone involved, including Veterans for Veterans in Care and East Durham Veterans, their support, expertise and ongoing commitment to veterans across County Durham have been invaluable in helping this work make a difference.

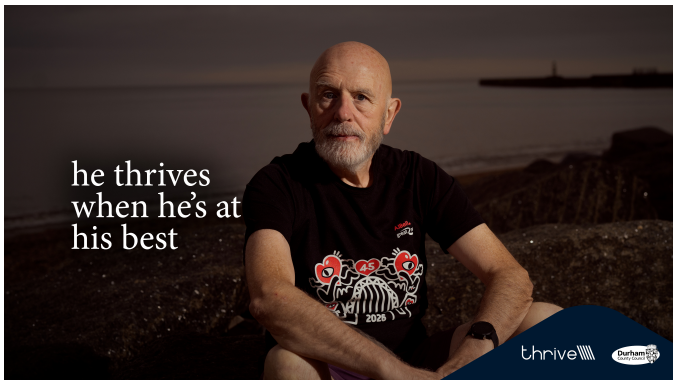

Breath
SLOW DOWN AND TAKE STOCK
NOW YOU'RE TALKING...
Connect
LISTEN, SHARE AND SUPPORT
Belong
BE YOURSELF AND FEEL ACCEPTED
Well-being and Mental Health
Drop-in Support Sessions
Wednesday 5.00 to 7.00pm
PACT House, 39 Front Street, Stanley DH9 0JE
STARTING



International Men's Day - He Thrives

International Men's Day takes place on 19 November and this year's theme, ***Supporting Men and Boys***, aims to encourage positive conversations around men's health, wellbeing and the challenges they may face.

To mark the occasion, Durham County Council's Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure team is launching **he thrives**, a campaign celebrating men across County Durham who take part in physical activity and the positive impact it



can have on health and wellbeing.

The team, who operate the county's leisure centres, are working with local clubs, organisations and community partners to shine a spotlight on men being and becoming active.

Throughout November, the campaign will highlight opportunities for men to get active, build confidence and strengthen connections with others. A range of activities, taster sessions and events will be available across the county, encouraging participation regardless of age, background or experience.

The campaign also aligns with Movember, the global men's health movement held every November, which raises awareness and funds for issues affecting men's health.

By sharing real experiences and promoting accessible opportunities, November aims to be a month of support for men of all ages to improve and support their physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Whilst, also highlighting the importance of community and connection in leading healthier, more active lives.

Click here to visit the Thrive website

A Tribute to Pam Spurrell

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of a dear member of our Healthwatch County Durham team - a volunteer, colleague and friend, Pam Spurrell.

Pam gave countless hours of her time helping support communities, residents and more and has a long standing association with us here at Healthwatch with many of our team sharing fond memories.



Jim Welch, who is one of our Board Members here at Healthwatch County Durham, shared his thoughts with us:

- ***"I have known Pam for over 20 years, and she became a good friend. She was a dedicated person within the community of County Durham, taking up issues for local people. I am sure she will be remembered by a lot of***

people, as well as myself, for being kind, able to listen to others and take positive action."

Meanwhile our Volunteer Coordinator, Claire, shares this tribute below:

"Pam was a truly remarkable woman who worked endlessly throughout her life to improve services for people. Her commitment to her community was extraordinary."

"Many will know Pam for her close work with the local police constabulary, where she gave her time and insight to help tackle so many issues at a community level. She was also a passionate and hands-on volunteer with Healthwatch County Durham and with LINK before that, always championing the voice of local people and working to make services better, fairer and more caring."

"More than all of her important roles, Pam was a friend to so many people. She was a connector, a listener, and someone who genuinely cared."

"Even in her latter years, her dedication never wavered. She continued to send us updates, to circulate surveys and information through her wide networks and local community in order to gather feedback, and to share anything she saw about health and care that she thought would be relevant and helpful for us to understand."

"She kept in touch with everybody, and everybody was better for knowing her."

"She was a very special woman — thoughtful, generous, tireless and kind. She gave so much of herself to others, and she will be very, very sorely missed by all

who had the privilege of working with her and knowing her."

"Thank you, Pam, for everything you did and everything you were. Your legacy lives on in the stronger, more compassionate community you helped to build."

- Claire Sisterson,
A Tribute to Pam Spurrell

Our thoughts are with Pam's family, friends and all who loved her.





Share Your Views

Tell us your experience of health and social care services

Contact us:

Healthwatch County Durham
Unit 3
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

View email in browser

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