



Annual report 2019-20

Guided by you

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Message from our chair



Robert Upshall
Healthwatch Darlington Chair

We at Healthwatch need your help as members of the public. If you have an issue (or a notable positive experience) with any health or care service, please tell us. We can only respond to your concerns if we know about them. We are very careful with the information you provide for us and we respect your confidentiality – but if we don't know, we can't help.

Welcome to our Annual Report which has been produced by our CEO, Michelle Thompson BEM on our behalf. I wish to record immediately the gratitude of the Board for the dedication of the whole team, which Michelle leads, for the way in which they have served the citizens of Darlington. Since the announcement of Lockdown due to Covid 19 staff have been working from home and this is likely to prove a challenge. It does mean that some of our activities, like face to face community engagement and enter and view visits won't be possible for a while. And of course Covid will create unique health and social care issues itself.

We continue to have to face a tight financial environment delivering our statutory duties, which we do by collecting information from users, signposting people to sources of help and support and influencing those able to make decisions in the NHS and the local authority.

But in addition to our statutory work we have been able to carry out project work for other bodies which has helped financially and given staff and volunteers different challenges.

Increasingly we are working with our neighbouring Healthwatch across the North East in order to mirror the increasing collaborative working in the NHS. Darlington CCG is now part of an amalgamation of CCGs in the Tees Valley and the various provider trusts are working together in the Integrated Care System and its constituent Integrated Care Partnerships which is explained in more detail in this report.

We have a small team of part-time staff on the payroll who have achieved so much this year and this would not have been possible without our considerable number of Health Connectors including our Youthwatch volunteers who visited GP practices and produced social media campaigns to help make communication with young people easier.

Our report contains details of the many areas of influence in which we operate. This may give you information which will encourage you to email, 'phone or write to us – the means don't matter, your concerns and compliments do. We are here for you and for the people for whom you care.

Our priorities

Last year 1,966 people told us about the improvements they would like to see health and social care services make in 2019-20. These are our six priorities for the year ahead based on what you told us.



- Engagement on the NHS Long Term Plan which sets out what the NHS wants to do better, including providing better support for people



- Listen to the needs of patients and carers regarding Continuing Healthcare (**CHC**) and the issues people face with leaving hospital to home.



- Review the mental health needs of children & young people including disadvantages and inequalities



- Ensure young people are aware of their rights and understand where to seek help for health, care & emotional needs



- Act upon the views, experiences and needs of people accessing bereavement services



- Tackle health inequalities associated with Black, Asian, Ethnic and Minority Groups (**BAME**)

 Healthwatch Darlington have been an excellent source of information for not only my team but also our participants. Very well organised and very helpful and accommodating staff . Well done and Thank you from all at Step Forward Tees Valley Darlington

About us

Here to make care better

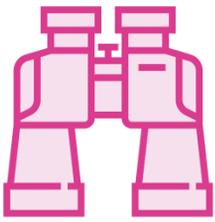
The network's collaborative effort around the NHS Long Term Plan shows the power of the Healthwatch network in giving people that find it hardest to be heard a chance to speak up. The #WhatWouldYouDo campaign saw national movement, engaging with people all over the country to see how the Long Term Plan should be implemented locally. Thanks to the thousands of views shared with Healthwatch we were also able to highlight the issue of patient transport not being included in the NHS Long Term Plan review – sparking a national review of patient transport from NHS England.

We simply could not do this without the dedicated work and efforts from our staff and volunteers and, of course, we couldn't have done it without you. Whether it's working with your local Healthwatch to raise awareness of local issues, or sharing your views and experiences, I'd like to thank you all. It's important that services continue to listen, so please do keep talking to your local Healthwatch. Let's strive to make the NHS and social care services the best that they can be.

 I've now been Chair of Healthwatch England for over a year and I'm extremely proud to see it go from strength to strength, highlighting the importance of listening to people's views to decision makers at a national and local level.

Sir Robert Francis, 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 who 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.



How we find out what matters to you

People are at the heart of everything we do. 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



Find out more about us and the work we do

Website www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Twitter: @healthwatchDton

Facebook: @healthwatchdarlington

Facebook Youthwatch: @youthwatchdarlo

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchdarlington/>

Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and the way we have engaged and supported more people in 2019-20.



Health and care that works for you



25 volunteers

helping to carry out our work. In total, they gave up **1340** number of hours.

We employed

5 part time staff

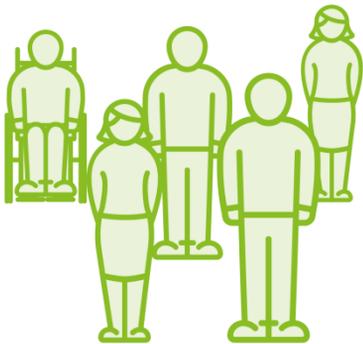
'Overall their commitment is equivalent to 66% of full time which is 8% up on the previous year.

We received

£73,000 in funding

from our local authority in 2019-20, this is the same as the previous year.

Providing support



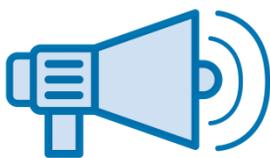
1,966 people

shared their health and social care story with us, 14% more than last year.

305 people

accessed Healthwatch advice and information online or contacted us with questions about local support, 9% more than last year.

Reaching out



543,420 People

716 people subscribed to our weekly e-newsletter, throughout the year our social media posts reached 539,568 people and 3136 people engaged with us at community events.

Making a difference to care



We published

11 reports including 5 joint reports

about the improvements people would like to see with their health and social care, and from this, we made **44** recommendations for improvement.

How we've made a difference



Speaking up about your experiences of health and social care services is the first step to change.

Take a look at how your views have helped make a difference to the care and support people receive in Darlington.

Service users told us about their experiences when being discharged from hospital.

We spoke to service users, carers and their families by conducting a survey and focus groups which consisted of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) patients and patients with a head injury. We also felt it was important to speak to staff members within our local hospitals.

People told us about their frustrations around the lack of rehabilitation beds available in the town and the lack of communication and information sharing. Many carers feel left out of the process and wished to be more involved.

With this in mind we checked the local Trust's discharge policy which only mentions carers briefly. The 'your ticket home' features no mention of carers throughout the document.

There were inconsistencies with service delivery, with some patients reporting a timely discharge, lots of post discharge information and effective referrals, whereas others reported a somewhat negative experience in comparison and feel completely abandoned once safely home.

As a result of the feedback we received, we recommended the policy and 'your ticket home' was reviewed to ensure best practice is being adopted when dealing with both patients and carers during the discharge process.

We also suggested staff training should be considered to help staff understand the different discharge pathways for patients that need both their physical health and mental wellbeing addressed.

The full report can be accessed here [Hospital Discharge Report](#)

This research has provided our local Trust with an opportunity to work with local carers to improve information sharing. Following on from the publication of this research we have decided to build on these findings and to highlight good practice within our local hospitals focusing on the discharge process during the Covid pandemic.

A relative was recently discharged from hospital during the pandemic. We were happy with the process, everything went smoothly and we had no problems.



Hospital discharge process

Healthwatch Darlington research the provision of local bereavement services after funding cuts to Cruse.

We conducted an online survey aimed at people who have recently been bereaved including GP Practices, to understand their experiences of the current situation in Darlington where bereavement services have ceased. We also contacted Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group and Cruse to understand the decision surrounding the withdrawal of funding.

Our research showed that a service is needed and appreciated by people who are bereaved and although many people manage to cope with the help of social support, some do need additional help.

GP's in Darlington confirmed that the need isn't always being met satisfactorily because of the absence of a dedicated bereavement support service.

Statutory funding does not appear to be available at present for a dedicated bereavement service in Darlington, so it is clearly for Cruse to decide whether it is feasible for them to operate in Darlington without public sector funding. We have established that there is no bar to them operating other than a financial one.

We believe it is the responsibility of all organisations provided they are given the correct tools such as leaflets reassuring people of the symptoms of grief and what is "normal". We established that grief is an emotional issue not a mental issue for most people, so current mental health



Bereavement Counselling is needed in Darlington

counselling services such as Talking Changes are not always appropriate. We also know that if a person is not given the right help and support at the right time, grief can manifest itself into a mental or physical health issue which needs expertise. This will create more expense than providing resources for the initial guidance and training that is needed at the start of the grieving process.

We have shared our report with commissioners and providers in the hope that our research is acknowledged and acted upon. During the pandemic in March 2020 our report findings were referred to by local commissioners and partners as they considered their provision for bereavement in Darlington. The full report can be found here:

[**Bereavement Report**](#)

Thank you for sharing the draft Bereavement Services Report with the Clinical Commissioning Group. It's an important topic and the report was interesting and easy to read.

— Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group



Information and Signposting

Service users share their experiences and understanding of NHS Continuing Health Care

Our research highlighted the lack of understanding of what CHC actually means. The process is not clear and further support is needed for those struggling to understand the process.

Our full report is here: [Continuing Health Care Report](#)

My relative had Alzheimer's and cancer. I had power of attorney. During her need for care within a care home we were unaware of NHS CHC and we were not offered any help towards care costs. All of her money was sucked up dry. — Family member, Darlington

In response to our report Darlington Borough Council said *"There is often a lack of clarity regarding the process for both service users and their carers. Clearer information which is readily available from the Clinical Commissioning Group would be helpful. It is very concerning that the process caused some individuals such a high level of distress"*

Following our recommendations, Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group said *"We will review the information we give to those involved using that which is available nationally and signposting to other agencies for guidance."*

Healthwatch Darlington will be monitoring the information & signposting that service users in Darlington receive.

This research has drawn attention to the NHS Continuing Health Care process across Darlington which has increased service user awareness.



Share your views with us

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

Website: www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Telephone: 01325 380145 or 07525 237723

Email: info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Enter and View visits in care homes across the Borough

We conducted a series of care home visits throughout the year to ascertain the quality of life and choices of care home residents.

Our key observations were of residents being very happy with the respective homes they lived in and relatives feeling that their family member was looked after. The interaction between residents and staff was very kind and caring in all the homes we visited and we were welcomed warmly. The manager or senior member of staff greeted us and introduced us to the environment, staff, visitors and residents.

The cleanliness of all the homes was very good although some décor was a bit dated, but on entering we were pleased to see that all the homes were displaying our information of the visit and communal areas notice boards were up to date.

In some of the homes there were dementia memory items for residents to use and play with, which was pleasing to see, and visits from the hairdresser took place in some of the homes, with residents chatting about what they are going to have done.

"I was present at three of the visits, it was great to be able to chat to residents and listen to their comments. Staff were welcoming and it was lovely so see the care and understanding they showed to their residents"

Being able to report on good practice across Darlington is always a pleasure for us and we really appreciate the response we had from all residents, family members and staff. In order to further enhance the service provided across Darlington we would recommend the promotion of ratio of staff to number of residents so that the staff



Quality of life for care home residents

delivering the service, the residents receiving the service, and relatives of residents visiting understand the requirements needed.

If possible we would like to see staff spend more time with residents giving a better 1 to 1 service including time for residents to get out doors in the fresh air either in the garden or by trips out. In addition staff listening to or being aware of small housekeeping and meal time issues can make a big difference to residents if rectified quickly.

"This care home is a very nice home to work in and we have some good staff and great residents and families. There is a lot going on and residents are treated with respect and dignity"

We were pleased to share our findings with the Care Homes involved as well as the Care Quality Commission, Darlington Borough Council Commissioning Team and the public.

"I have been in the home a while and the care I receive is very good, staff are pleasant and cheerful. My room is clean, tidy and very spacious."

Our full report is here: [Care Home Report](#)



Vascular Services in Darlington and County Durham

Service users told us about Vascular services in Darlington & County Durham

Working collaboratively with Healthwatch County Durham we were asked to facilitate engagement events, capture feedback and collate the responses to a patient survey in an independent report on behalf of County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.

We received 272 responses to the survey, which was available on-line, by post and at our engagement events. 170 of the responses were from men and 102 from women. The results of the survey will allow NHS England and Improvement to identify what is working well currently for patients and where they might be able to improve the service with their revised service delivery plans.

In Darlington most people felt they knew enough about what they needed to do before their operation or procedure and were provided with enough information beforehand. They were likely to travel by car to hospital but did have access to good information about travel options available including public transport.

Since the work we carried reflected the views patients had about the current vascular surgery services, we would strongly recommend to the relevant NHS decision makers that the survey is repeated and distributed in approximately 12 months' time to patients who undergo surgery under the revised service provision. This will enable the NHS to evidence that the surgical provision they recommended has maintained the same or improved satisfaction levels.

The full report can be found here: [Vascular Services Report](#)

Smoke Free NHS

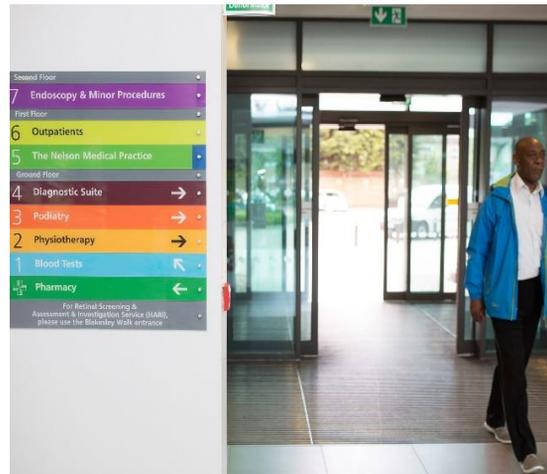
In collaboration with Healthwatch County Durham we captured the views of patients, visitors and staff about County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trusts smoke-free policy - "change is in the air".

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) asked Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) and Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) to lead a programme of patient, staff and visitor engagement to support the organisation's ambition to become a smoke-free organisation from 1st October 2019.

There were many positive responses to the new policy. Overall people were in agreement with the policy and felt it was the right thing for the Trust to do. In the survey, 30 people specifically mentioned that they thought it was a good idea. A small number of people wanted the Trust to go further by banning e-cigarettes on site too, so this may be an area where the Trust can provide more information about why they are a vape friendly site.

We heard from a number of people that they were still witnessing smoking on both hospital sites, although we cannot be sure if it was on the current visit to the hospital or previous visits before the policy came into operation.

Because our visits were just a snapshot in time, we are unable to say how effective deterrents to smoking on site are and we are concerned that if there are not effective and consistent approaches made to people smoking, then others will be encouraged to follow suit and the policy will be less successful.



Smoke Free Hospitals

The majority of patients and staff had been advised about the new policy and understood what it meant for them. There was less certainty about whether it would help smokers in their ambition to stop smoking.

"It's much nicer walking into hospital without going through plumes of smoke"

Our key considerations for the Trust are:

- How the Trust will "police" the smoking on site moving forward, including identifying what are the most effective deterrents
- How the positive message about e-cigarettes can be shared, given the element of uncertainty that has arisen with adverse publicity
- Whether waste bins should be provided at entrances to hospital grounds for cigarettes
- Whether signage on site needs to be extended to other areas in the hospital grounds
- To ensure staff are clear about their role in enforcing the policy
- To consider the safety of staff when approaching smokers

You find the full report here:

[**Smoke Free Report**](#)



Digital Technologies

Social Care Digital Pathfinder Out of Hours Health Call

Reducing inappropriate and unnecessary hospital admissions from the care home setting is a key target for both social and healthcare. Up until now there has been no mechanism for care home staff to be able to provide real time clinical observation data to healthcare professionals.

Health Call Digital Care Home is the digital system that enables trained Care Home staff to send clinical observation data for an unwell resident to relevant clinical staff so that a clinical decision can be made regarding the resident.

Along with Healthwatch County Durham, we were asked by Durham County Council (DCC) and County Durham & Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) to undertake visits to four care homes each to carry out independent observations and seek the views of the staff that work night shift. We spoke to 20 staff members across the care homes, the staff were either care workers or senior care workers.

"Need to feel more confident that tasks have been put through and dealt with during the day when night staff have gone home"

Staff told both Healthwatch that most of the calls made, were completed by senior members of staff. We are not aware if individual homes have decided this or whether it is a general requirement. Staff felt happy with using the system although additional training could also be beneficial to help make staff feel more confident on a night shift.

"Health Call is working well during the day shifts, but because it is reduced staffing on night shifts, this makes staff feel slightly more vulnerable when making decisions about who to call."

We recommended that care homes that have the Health Call system are utilising it at all appropriate opportunities and ensuring that all relevant staff are trained including refresher training and training for new members of staff. It needs to be reinforced with staff who they can contact on a night shift for advice rather than calling 111 and staff need to receive feedback on the difference the system is making to residents and the pressure on healthcare professionals and systems.

We hope to receive an update in the near future to confirm these recommendations have been put in place.



Asking your views

CCG Mergers - Collaborative working in Durham and the Tees Valley

In 2018, NHS England and NHS Improvement told Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) that they would be reducing their administration costs by 20% by 31 March 2020.

In turn, they asked all CCGs to reduce their own running costs by 20% in the same timescale.

Whilst the reduction does not apply to the health services that they commission (and therefore will not affect frontline patient services), it does apply to CCG staffing arrangements.

The County Durham and Tees Valley CCGs approached Healthwatch Darlington to help

gather the views of local people during July 2019 regarding proposed mergers in Durham and in the Tees Valley.

We have an excellent track record in working with our neighbouring Healthwatch in the North East and Cumbria due to our previous work with the Great North Care Record in 2018 and our more recent collaboration across the North East for the NHS Long Term Engagement Plan 2019

In collaboration with our five neighbouring local Healthwatch who cover County Durham and Tees Valley, we gathered our populations views and opinions and they were taken into account and presented to the five CCG Governing Bodies to help them decide on a proposal to create a new CCG/s.

As a result two new CCGs are due to be formed officially on 1st April 2020. Tees Valley CCG and County Durham CCG.

Long

Term

Plan

#WhatWouldYouDo

Highlights



More than 40,000 people shared their views nationally with Healthwatch.



Our network held over 500 focus groups reaching different communities across England.



Healthwatch attended almost 1,000 community events.

"I waited a long time for eventual diagnosis, going through many different departments & appointments. After diagnosis Initial support was only for one appointment then more or less left to manage the condition myself. I feel I could at the very least have been offered follow up appointments & more advice on how to cope with distressing symptoms. "I feel very isolated with this issue & struggling to cope with physical symptoms my mental health is now suffering also."

NHS Long Term Plan

Following a commitment from the Government to increase investment in the NHS, the NHS published the 'Long Term Plan' in January 2019, setting out its' key ambitions over the next 10 years.

Healthwatch launched a countrywide campaign to give people a say in how the plan should be implemented in their communities.

The coordinating Healthwatch for the North East was Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) and we agreed engagement priorities with Head of Communications and Engagement for our North East Integrated Care System (ICS) regarding the NHS Long Term Plan.

The area consists of four Integrated Care Partnerships (ICP) – North Cumbria, North,

Central and South. For the purpose of this large scale engagement, North Cumbria ICP joined their Cumbria colleagues and the North, Central and South ICP's were split into two areas:

- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Durham
- Durham, Darlington, Teesside, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby

We liaised and co-ordinated the engagement activities with 13 Healthwatch colleagues in the relevant North and South ICP areas and produced two reports bringing together all the evidence and insight in the North and in the South, gathered by each individual Healthwatch who were all contractually obliged to carry out this engagement work.

#WhatWouldYouDo



In total, there were 1143 surveys collected by local Healthwatch in the **south** of the region and 1337 in the **north** of the region. We wanted to understand how local people felt they could be supported to live a healthy life. We asked people what element was the most important when considering a range of aspects regarding access to information and treatment to live healthily. In addition to the surveys, all local Healthwatch held focus groups and events based on the NHS Long Term Plan priorities using Healthwatch England discussion guides.

Following analysis of the survey responses within each local Healthwatch area, the most important requirement for people when it comes to living a health life was **"Access to help and treatment I need when I want it"**. Every local Healthwatch in the region reported that this was voted most important. However, **"professionals that listen to me when I speak about my concerns"** and **"easy access to the information I need to help me make decisions about my health and care"** were noted as close second in the importance ratings.

In Darlington the need for carers to be supported, involved and listened too is a priority. Carers have been identified regularly throughout Healthwatch Darlington's engagement work in the past 18 months. A prevalence has been highlighted across research into mental health services, hospital services, NHS Continuing Health Care, Healthwatch Darlington's last two consecutive annual 'What's important to you' surveys and in the general NHS Long Term Plan survey.

Both full reports can be found here: [LTP South Report](#) [LTP North Report](#)

Both North and South reports were sent to the Integrated Care System (ICS) team as well as the more local Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) teams to give them an insight into areas that need more attention and highlighting possible steps of prevention to reduce future pressures. Regionally all local Healthwatch are aware of the emerging ICS work streams and we are working hard to ensure we are involved in each of them as the independent local consumer champion for health and social care, to ensure that the voices and views of local people are part of the process. The NHS is expected to undertake its own public engagement work. The activity of local Healthwatch aims to complement and support this work by reaching out to specific communities or helping the NHS to get insight which they do not have.

"Family / friend carers must be able to take time off. Currently this is a major issue and most carers get no breaks or much needed holidays. There must be an easier way to access intermediate care if the carer is ill or has their own health needs. People can become over dependent on their carer's and intermediate care to get them back to doing basics with support may mean people stay supported by family carers longer"
[Darlington resident]

Integrated Care System Response

"Thank you all for your work on the NHS Long Term Plan engagement surveys and focus groups for the development of the North East and North Cumbria long term plans, and place-based plans for each of our localities. It is really positive to see that local Healthwatch colleagues have come together to give their thoughts on how their local priority areas for engagement such as mental health and GP access have aligned to priorities for our Integrated Care System (ICS). We look forward to reading the report findings.

Our ambition is to develop an outstanding ICS which is continuously improving health and care outcomes and delivering safe and sustainable services. Achieving this will be dependent on high quality engagement with the public, and colleagues across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham, Darlington, Teesside, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby will find the report very useful when planning any further engagement work needed at a local level.

We will take forward the report findings which demonstrate that we have been able to involve patients and communities at the earliest stage possible when we talk about our plans and priorities. We will build upon your sound approach in seeking out and hearing the patient's voice and working with a range of hard to reach and diverse groups."



Helping you find the answers

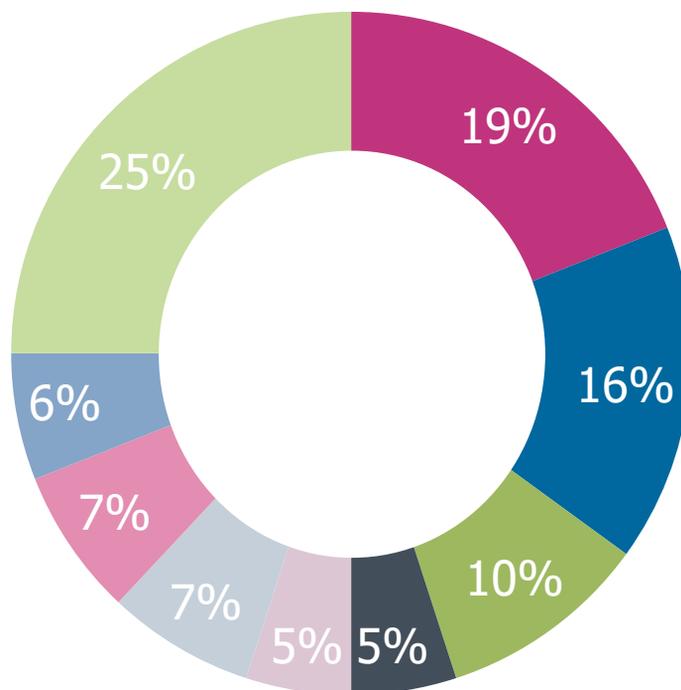


Finding the right service can be worrying and stressful. Healthwatch Darlington plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care and find services that will provide them with the right support.

This year we helped **4,157** people get the advice and information they need by:

- Sharing advice and information articles in our e-newsletter which went out to **716** people
- Answering **305** people’s queries about services over the phone, by email, or online.
- Talking to **3,136** people at community events.
- Promoting services and information that can help people on our social media.

Here are some of the areas that people asked about.



- GP
- Hospital
- Dentist
- Elderly Support
- Other
- Mental Health
- Pharmacy
- Equipment services
- MSK service

Information and Signposting Weekly E-Newsletter

Our weekly e-newsletter currently goes out to 716 subscribers each week, we not only share information about our own activities, projects and events it also includes a wide range of local community news, health & social care updates, resources and information.

Since just before the start of lockdown we have been working hard to ensure we share regular news updates throughout each working week and we have established a newsletter that now goes out three times a week.

We encouraged organisations, community groups and projects to share information about any service changes or community help and support available for individuals and families living in Darlington

"The newsletter is a comprehensive guide to what's going on locally and nationally. A really useful document."

Organisations that are part of the **Darlington Organisations Together Network Meeting (DOT)** which is facilitated by Healthwatch Darlington have continued to share updates throughout the year at their quarterly meetings. The DOT Network is FREE to join and encourages organisations from all areas of health & wellbeing to join together to discuss all current events, news and service updates. It gives organisations a chance to work together, promote, and showcase all their work and news.

"Just a quick note to thank you for the latest newsletter - very informative as ever. We are bombarded with information but your contribution to making the people of Darlington aware of what's on offer in terms of support is invaluable - thanks so much."

"It is a very good quick overview of what's going on; and as a "retired practitioner" it is invaluable in helping me to remain aware of changes which are being made and what's going on generally"

Healthwatch Darlington also help to maintain the **Livingwell Darlington Directory** to ensure that up to date voluntary and community sector groups and organisations information is available. Livingwell Darlington is a service provided by Darlington Borough Council that provides information and signposting to a wide range of services, activities and organisations in Darlington, to help everyone find the support they need to live healthy independent lives.

"I find it really useful. I appreciate Healthwatch sharing information about health organisations and that they have shared our information."

"Thank you for all your hard work sharing information and making people aware in our community about all of the available resources that there is out there to support them – you are doing a fantastic job!"



Dementia Services

A person telephoned us to find out about Dementia sessions available in Darlington for her husband. We contacted the Dementia support manager at the Alzheimer's society who suggested the 'Games for the Brain' sessions. We then arranged for the manager to contact the family to arrange a referral letter to be sent to them to confirm sessions.



Young People Services:

A parent who had concerns with their child's anxiety and needed help finding services to help cope and improve skills without having to deal with large personal groups. We were able to provide contact details for YoungMinds and Kooth, and suggested they speak to mental health worker in regard to educational needs.



Mental Health Services:

A female contacted us via email to ask if we could provide details of free mental health support and counselling for her friend. We provided her with the contact details for Darlington Mind and Talking Changes so that she could contact them on behalf of her friend.



Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health or social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

Website: www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Telephone: 01325 380145 or 07525 237723

Email: info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Volunteers



At Healthwatch Darlington we are supported by 25 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what people would like to improve, to services in their communities.

This year our volunteers:

- Raised awareness of the work we do at events, in the community and with health and care services.
- Visited services to make sure they are providing people with the right support.
- Helped support our projects and research.
- Listened to people's experiences to help us know which areas we need to focus on.

Volunteers improve mental health services for those with a drug and/or alcohol addiction in Darlington

Thanks to the hard work of our volunteers instrumental changes have been made to the information available within mental health services for those with a drug and/or alcohol addiction in Darlington.

Our volunteers visited a drug and alcohol service called NECA to speak to service users about their concerns, after people with drug and/or alcohol addiction contacted Healthwatch Darlington to share their experiences of using local mental health services.

In 2019 our volunteers conducted focus groups with service users and providers to coproduce a new leaflet for those who use mental health services with a drug and/or alcohol addiction. They raised concerns about:

- Information being overwhelming
- Information sharing missing important advice about care plans, medication and where to go for extra support.



“Volunteering with Healthwatch Darlington is really important to me, because like everyone, I need to feel useful and able to make a contribution to my community.”

In response to these concerns, local providers have implemented the newly codesigned leaflet within mental health services across Darlington and County Durham.

With our volunteers' help, we're keeping an eye on what people think of local mental health services and working with those in charge to make sure people's views inform changes.



Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch at Healthwatch Darlington.

Website: www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Telephone: 01325 380145 or 07525 237723

Email: j.austin@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Youthwatch

DARLINGTON

At Healthwatch Darlington 7 of our volunteers make up our young volunteering group called Youthwatch Darlington. Our young volunteers aim to improve health & care for young people living in the town.

Young volunteers from Youthwatch Darlington improve information for young people across Darlington.

Thanks to the hard work of our young volunteers from Youthwatch Darlington changes have been made to the waiting areas of GP surgeries. Not only this but our young volunteers have raised awareness and come up with creative ways to share information with young people living in Darlington.

Our young volunteers visited three GP surgeries after a practice manager asked for their input. They have created display boards within the waiting areas to provide young patients with more information. They also identified that information on the surgeries website could be improved.

Their good practice has meant that earlier in 2020 they were invited to attend our local child & adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) to share ideas on how they can make improvements to their waiting area.



In response to their findings within GP surgeries and further evidence from our 'Children & young peoples mental health' Work, our young volunteers raised awareness and shared information with 1000's across media platforms, within schools/colleges and in other local settings.

With the help of our young volunteers we will continue monitor information sharing with young patients and we look forward to seeing more of Youthwatch Darlington's creative ideas to raise awareness.



Are you aged 14 to 25? Do you want to make a difference?

Volunteer with us

Website: www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Telephone: 01325 380145 or 07525 237723

Email: j.austin@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

Our volunteers

We could not do what we do without the support of our amazing volunteers. Meet some of the team and hear more about why they volunteer.



Lorraine, Health Connector

I know I have skills and lots of experience that I have gained but in my retirement, opportunities to share my skills and experience are very limited. But not with Healthwatch Darlington. I feel I can and do make valued contributions to our discussions and research. Everyone is great at recognising and acknowledging everyone's opinions and talents.



Faith, Health Connector

Volunteering at Healthwatch complements the Health Psychology MSc that I am currently studying for at Teesside University; being a Health Connector has given me a fantastic opportunity to interact directly with patients and the public in Darlington, hearing their views and better understanding about the services that are available in our locality.



Ross, Health Connector

As a fellow autistic I am very creative and self-sufficient being a volunteer allows a lot of pride and exquisite thought when providing help and experience to a cause. I enjoy giving back to the community whilst gaining experience to follow new and exciting job opportunities.

Our volunteers

We could not do what we do without the support of our amazing volunteers. Meet some of the team and hear more about why they volunteer.



Amy, Youthwatch

Hey there! Amy here, and I am very excited to be volunteering with Healthwatch Darlington. I am volunteering for Healthwatch Darlington because, even though I know a few things, I want to learn and experience so much more!



Jess, Youthwatch

Hi, I'm Jess. I am a psychology graduate and after completing a health module at university I realised how important it is to improve health services that fits the views of the public. There are so many issues that need exploring and I am excited to be working with Youthwatch to reflect the views of health service users and to improve the support that we all need.



Gill, Board member

I went on a course at the college and so I didn't have to pay for it, I signed up to do 60 hours voluntary work. It was amazing, I felt such a sense of achievement after the first session I helped with. It set me on a path of self discovery that is continuing to this day. I have now retired by choice but I'm still passionate about voluntary work and the benefits it provides to the community and on a personal level.

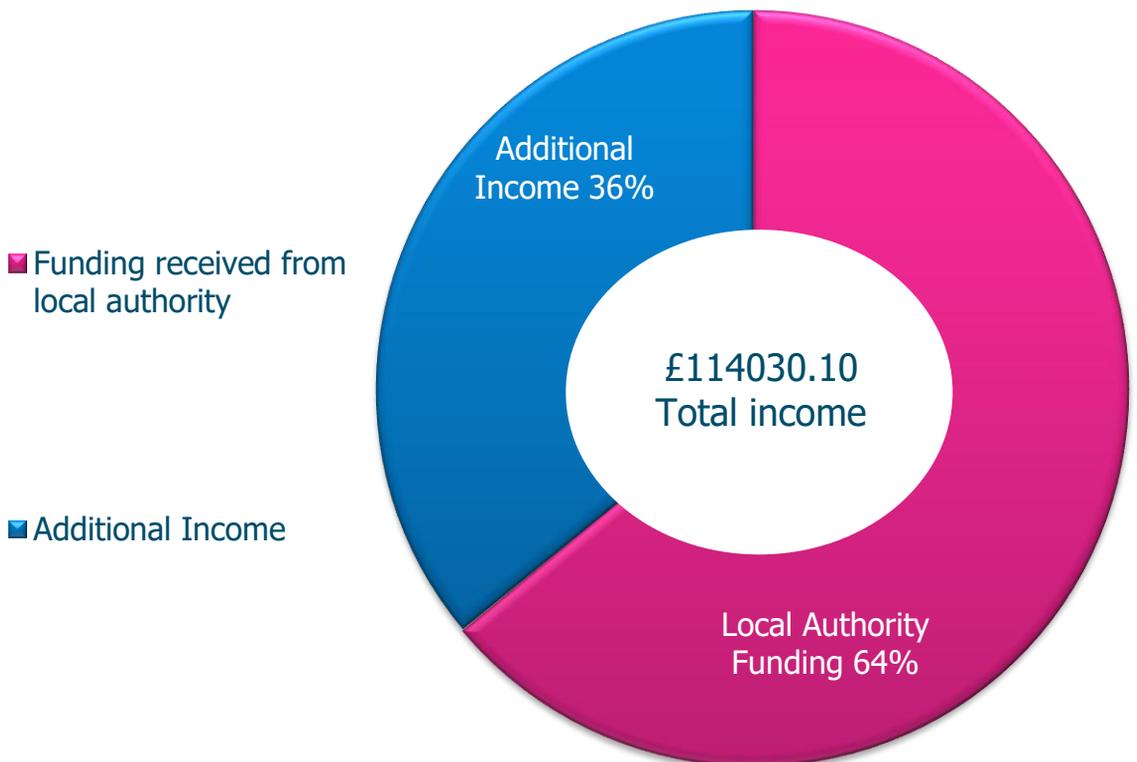
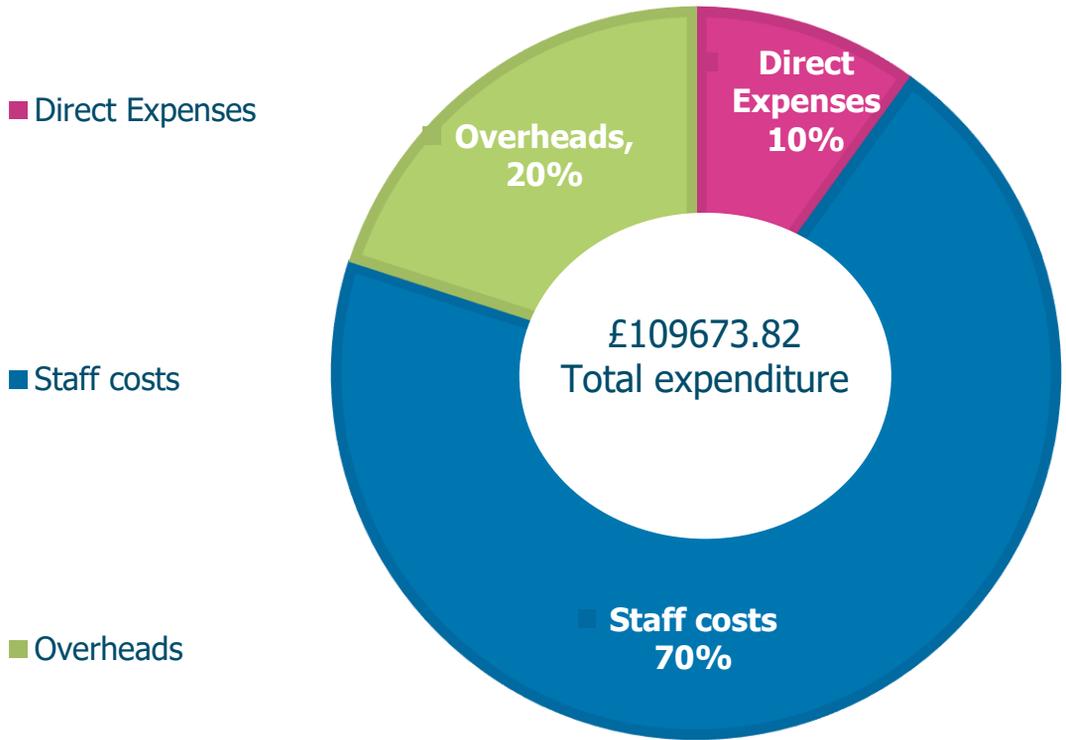
Thank you for all your hard work sharing information and making people aware in our community about all of the available resources that there is out there to support them – you are doing a fantastic job!



Finances



We are funded by our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act (2012). In 2019-20 we spent £109673.82.



Our plans for next year



Message from our Chief Executive Officer

Looking ahead

I'm proud to be able to showcase the achievements of our small but dedicated staff team during the last year, supported by our Board members and loyal and enthusiastic, Health Connectors and Youthwatch volunteers. I know how lucky we are to enjoy such a committed Healthwatch family and I can't thank them enough, not only for their skills and dedication but for the joy and laughter they bring to our team.

As we go into the Covid lockdown we know how important it is to ensure our staff and our volunteers are supported during these uncertain times as well as our wider community.

We have had to quickly change our work plan for the year into a 6 month plan due to the uncertainty of lockdown and what the future may hold for our traditional ways of community engagement. Digital means of communications are fast becoming a priority not only within primary care to ensure patients can still access services but in our everyday life with family and friends. In the coming months we will need to understand how Covid will affect our population, how digital communications are used and how our planned priorities for the year are affected. We had already planned to look at primary care, mental health, hospital discharge, digital transformation and BAME health inequalities and these may well be very relevant to the Covid experiences over the coming months.

Our report evidences how we have been working collaboratively with all of our Healthwatch neighbours in the North East and Cumbria and how we have formed strong relationships especially across the Tees Valley. This has not gone unnoticed by commissioners and providers who are also working to integrate health and care services in a much more economical and efficient way and have looked to the Healthwatch network to help reach out to our population and really listen to views and experiences.



Chief Executive Officer
Michelle Thompson BEM

Darlington is a small town with many voluntary and community sector organisations who are facing uncertain times as we enter the Covid pandemic. Due to our good relationship with the voluntary and community sector we are naturally positioned as the go to place for reliable information and signposting for health and care services. We have recently set up a thrice weekly e-newsletter to ensure that organisations can forward their help and support to the public and other organisations during lockdown and it is becoming increasingly popular so please do sign up, we are here to help.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has helped and supported us during the year. We have worked with some amazing people and organisations, especially those who have shared their experiences. We simply couldn't do what we do without you.

Thank you all and keep safe.

Thank you

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

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us
- All our amazing staff and volunteers
- The voluntary and community organisations and groups that have contributed to our work
- Darlington Borough Council
- Commissioners, regulators and providers of local and regional services
- All 13 local Healthwatch in the North East who work with us regularly
- Healthwatch England



Staff and volunteers celebrating volunteer achievements.

Contact us

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