

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Darlington  
Annual Report 2021-22



**healthwatch**  
Darlington

Your  
**Voice**  
Counts

Have your say about Health & Social Care in Darlington

Strengthening the public and patient voice. Ensuring local services are centred around what matters to those who use them.

01325 380145 visit [www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk)  
info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk

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**Social Prescribing**

Personalised Care and Wellbeing

Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs) connect people with local community activities, resources and services that can help improve health and wellbeing. SPLWs give you time to focus on what matters to YOU and will work with you to co-produce a personalised wellbeing plan.

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Darlington

Information and Signposting

01325 380 145

**Darlington Young Carers Service**

Do you know aged up and caring for a parent, grandparent, another relative or friend?

As a young carer, we can support you in your caring role.

Support your family with a worker who understands what other Young Carers need.

**humankm**  
DARLINGTON YOUNG CARERS SERVICE

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# Message from our chair

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our annual report for 2021 to 2022. It has once more been a challenging year. Covid is still present in the community and has affected many more people during this year than earlier on in the pandemic. However, because of vaccination and changes in the virus it hasn't put quite the same demands on secondary care services as happened in 2020 and in the first half of 2021.

In addition to the consequences of the pandemic, with long waits for care in some cases, and some illnesses presenting late with a worse prognosis, the NHS is leading up to a big change in how it is organised. The NHS Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG's) are ceasing to exist from June 30th and the commissioning of NHS services will be overseen, in our area, by the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care System (ICS). All of the 13 Healthwatch organisations in the ICS footprint are working together to ensure the interests of patients, carers and the public are represented at the ICS level as well as continuing at a local level. This is affecting all Healthwatch organisations and has taken up a considerable amount of my time and that of our CEO Michelle Thompson.

At Healthwatch Darlington we already have a track record of working with other Healthwatch organisations across the region including the coordination of regional projects. Our most recent collaboration was with our Healthwatch colleagues in the Tees Valley in partnership with the Tees Esk and Wear Valleys (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trust for mental health services. We jointly carried out an engagement exercise for TEWV asking people how they would like to access mental health services in the future and the findings within our report are now influencing their Community Transformation plans both locally and regionally.

In addition we worked with eight other Healthwatch organisations across the North East and North Cumbria to understand the experiences of dental care services during the period from the first lockdown to date. This was due to the amount of people contacting Healthwatch trying to access appointments. This is still an ongoing concern and we are using the information gathered within our report to support the national work that Healthwatch England is leading on, and also as a collective local Healthwatch, influence the NENC ICS to improve services locally.

We also work closely with our local voluntary and community sector, in particular we facilitate our local Darlington Organisations Together (DOT) network which encourages updates and collaborations within the local area. Our collaboration with local counselling and support service Arcus enabled us to understand the experiences encountered by the LGBT+ community in Darlington when accessing healthcare services. This has led to awareness training within local NHS services.

## Message from our chair continued...

Our Digital Exclusion report included our collaboration with the Darlington Primary Care Network who helped us liaise with patients, carers and professionals to establish an understanding of the impact the Covid -19 pandemic had on accessing GP services in Darlington. This led to a greater understanding of the barriers faced by people with a sensory impairment and we have carried out further work on specific experiences.

Our Maternity report is a great example of collaboration with the County Durham and Darlington Maternity Voices in Partnership which provides insight into the experiences of those who use maternity services in Darlington. Our findings were presented and influenced decision making at the Tees Valley CCG Quality Committee.

We are also very proud of our Youthwatch Darlington Healthy Eating and Exercise Project. This was as a result of attending the Darlington Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and hearing about the rise in young people consuming unhealthy food and drink and increasing screen time. Our young volunteers were inspired to deliver a campaign to raise awareness and promote positive lifestyle choices. They worked in collaboration with the Public Health team for Children and Young People and the Rotary Club of Darlington. The many strands of the campaign successfully raised the profile of healthy eating and exercise in a fun, appealing and interactive way with young people and their families in Darlington.



Robert Upshall  
**Healthwatch Darlington Chair**



*“Finally we have had challenges here in Healthwatch Darlington due to staff changes and staff sickness but have managed to still do sterling work. We are very fortunate to have a group of dedicated volunteers and Board members who have helped and supported our small team with all our projects, focus groups, events and meetings through a difficult time, and for this I extend my sincere thanks for their commitment and enthusiasm”*

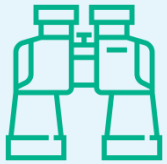
**Robert Upshall, Healthwatch Darlington Chair**



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Darlington is your local health and social care champion. From Barmpton to Whessoe and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



### Our vision

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



### Our mission

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



### Our values

Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard. Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.

Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.

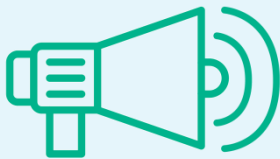
Acting on feedback and driving change.

Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**384 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**197 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as dentistry, GP access, mental health services and Covid 19.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**7 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

**TEWV Community Transformation Report**

which highlighted the struggles people have with mental health issues.

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**12** outstanding volunteers, who donated their time to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

**£74,460**

Which is **2% more** than the previous year.

We also currently employ

**3 staff**

who help us carry out this work.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



Your feedback to us on monitoring blood pressure at home supported the national picture to deliver better future experiences for people who use these devices.



We delivered our Digital Exclusion Report to Darlington Primary Care Network who committed to review our findings and make changes where possible.

Summer



Our Healthy Eating and Exercise initiative led by Youthwatch inspired families throughout the Borough.



Darlington Community Hub committed to working collaboratively, co-production with local communities and raising awareness of support as a result of your involvement in our Mental Health Report.

Autumn



Our Maternity Experiences Report was warmly welcomed by the Hospital Trust and helped them understand the needs and concerns of new and expectant parents.



Our Youthwatch continues to inspire and support young people, interviewing NSPCC and Kooth for Children's Mental Health Week 2021.

Winter



Your feedback helped us support both the national and regional call for improved access to dentistry.



Our LGBT+ Experiences of Health Services report encouraged the Hospital Trust to promote greater awareness of the HIV testing campaign within the Borough through training.

# Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve





## Supporting transformation of mental health services in the community

Thanks to local people sharing their experience of community mental health services with us, we've helped our local hospital trust understand the needs of our communities, which will help make mental health services more accessible and deliver patient centred care.

We wanted to gather insight into what matters most to the people of the borough of Darlington in terms of mental health support in the community. We heard from over 120 local people during our campaign and used this feedback to recommend areas the Darlington Community Hub Transformation Working Group should consider in their redesign and reorganisation of core community mental health.



**39% of people we heard from felt the current mental health support offered to them did not meet their needs.**

We made the following recommendations based on what you told us what important to you:

1. Develop a communications strategy to support the implementation of a town centre wide awareness campaign to reduce stigma and raise awareness of the community provision available.
2. Refine existing signposting pathways making best use of the resources available in the town which are delivered by the community and voluntary sector so that patients wellbeing needs can be met holistically.
3. Consider how to best use the Local offer and Living Well Directory hosted by Darlington Borough Council.
4. Work across sectors to offer new community activities (which are accessible) that offer local patients the opportunity to meet others who they can relate to, improve their wellbeing and connect with nature.
5. Ensure services delivered by the voluntary sector, NHS and local authority (such as social care) are working together to address all needs of local patients by working collaboratively and joining together through networks.

### What difference did we make?

Darlington Community Hub Transformation Working Group committed to:

- Working collaboratively to overcome the barriers faced by our local communities in accessing and receiving mental health support.
- Co-producing new ways of working in relation to the Community Mental Health Transformation with local people and communities.
- Raising awareness of what mental health support is already available across Darlington and how to access services.



*“As your independent health and care champion, we will continue our offer to work with TEWV and the Tees Valley Mental Health Alliance as they develop their new mental health offering, to ensure the voice of local people is listened to when designing health and care services.”*

**Michelle Thompson B.E.M.,  
Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Darlington**



## Youthwatch - Reaching young people and families

Hearing about the rise in young people consuming unhealthy food and drink and increasing screen time, our young volunteers in Youthwatch were inspired to deliver a campaign to raise awareness and promote positive lifestyle choices, in relation to eating and exercising, with families and young people in Darlington.

They created resources which were shared on our Healthwatch Darlington website, encouraging young people and families to attend innovative activities and providing healthy eating ideas.

They also ran a competition encouraging young people and families to share their healthy food creations, helping to raise awareness along the way. Well done to all who took part.

They created engaging graphics to inspire their peers to keep fit and engage in active hobbies.

They developed the Fruit & Vegetable Gang - a fantastic idea to encourage young people to eat healthier food. This was supported by local shops and community venues and our local Public Health Portfolio Lead for Children & Young People, Kelly Rose.



*“I think it did make a difference because it encouraged families to work together to think about eating healthier choices and could have possibly influenced children to think about what they eat.”*

**Ellie, Youthwatch Darlington volunteer.**



### Seed and wellbeing boxes

Darlington Rotary Club awarded our young volunteers a grant of £250 for a project to make a difference to young people in the town. Our young volunteers used this grant to create ‘Little Box of Herb’s’ - a free seed and wellbeing kit containing a healthy recipe card, herb seeds, bag of soil, planting pots, wellbeing checklist, stickers, and character pencil. The boxes were delivered to families and organisations in Darlington reaching more than 50 children.

The boxes were designed to inspire children to think about healthy ways to create food using ingredients such as fresh herbs which can easily be grown from home and offer ideas on how to improve overall wellbeing by taking simple steps such as drinking more water, reducing screen time and spending time outdoors.



*“The volunteers involved in this project were a credit not only to Youthwatch but the wider community and their peers. Here is an example of young people delivering a hugely worthwhile project that connected with their communities and promoted healthier lives in a simple but effective manner. They are a credit to society, and we are extremely proud of our association with them.”*

**Rotarian Kevin Robinson, Chair Rotary Youth Services Committee.**



## Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

### Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

**It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences, and the impact on people's lives.**

Our work with Maternity Voices in Partnership (MVP) and a group of those experiencing maternity care in Darlington, highlighted three areas critical in ensuring the highest level of care is available to all.

- Communication - letting patients know what will happen, when and how.
- Effective planning and communication of business continuity – recently experienced through the pandemic.
- Recognising when staff need support themselves to give supportive, empathetic, and understanding levels of care.

Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group committed to seek assurances on these areas highlighted in our Maternity Experiences report via their Quality Committee



### Getting services to involve the public

**Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.**

During a year of unprecedented times, NHS GP services have had to make extraordinary changes to how they manage access to their services whilst maintaining the safety needed for patients and carers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to grant funding from Healthwatch England and Darlington Primary Care Network, we looked at the impact of moving to remote appointments on the population of Darlington.

Darlington Primary Care Network committed to implement changes where possible in order to improve access to general practice and continue their work to reduce inequalities and improve access for all.



### Improving care over time

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.**

Healthwatch England is at the forefront of campaigning for reform of the NHS dental contract alongside the British Dental Association (BDA). This year, Healthwatch Darlington joined forces with eight other local Healthwatch to support the national picture as well as informing local service providers of the experiences of their patients.

We will continue to monitor this area, support local community voice and provide advice to those who are experiencing difficulties with dental care.



# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



## Signposting people who needed additional support

Our Dentistry Report highlighted the challenges and frustrations local people are experiencing in finding a dentist and receiving timely treatment.

We found clear indicators of areas where improvements could be made including ensuring NHS Choices website contained up to date information, providing supportive advice to patients who are on waiting lists and often in discomfort, and improving NHS 111 advice and information.



We suggested improved communication from dental practices to keep patients up to date with what is happening, and to provide immediate advice and support for those on waiting lists where they are experiencing pain would be welcomed by the public.

We used your feedback to support regional and national campaigns as well as improving services locally.

We worked with other local Healthwatch teams, who also saw a significant increase in concerns around getting to see their local dentist.

We recognised there were some common myths and mis-understandings circulating around how dental practices work, and together with our local Healthwatch partners, we created a **'Myth Buster'** leaflet to dispel the most common rumours relating to NHS dentistry.

The Myth Buster included advice on:

- Registering at a practice.
- NHS vs Private treatment.
- Routine dental procedures.
- Emergency appointments.



You can find our Myth Buster online here: [Dentistry Myth Buster](#)

# Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch Darlington. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Created digital content on our website and social media.
- Carried out website and telephone reviews for local services on the information they provide and assessing their accessibility.
- Assisted as part of 'Readers' Panels' – checking local services' publications to make them more people focussed and easier to read.
- Continued to help with the local volunteering efforts supporting those who were self-isolating.





## Jamie Odgers

"I volunteer to try and give something back to the local community. It gives me confidence to know that I may be helping others and enables me to feel like a valued part of the community having moved to Darlington 5 and a half years ago"

## Jamie Clark

"I've been volunteering with Healthwatch for around 3 years now. I first started in the office in Darlington before Covid, then have still been involved through Zoom at home. I have really enjoyed my time with Healthwatch and will continue to do so in the future, it's been great to meet new people and be part of something which helps me and others, especially towards the mental health side of things. I look forward to being involved with Healthwatch in the future, and it's a great team and service to work with.."



## Val Douglas

"After an extremely difficult time for everyone during the Covid 19 pandemic, during which us Healthwatch Darlington volunteers still felt valued and supported, the world started to 'venture out' into a new very different post pandemic environment. Involvement in the 'Pandemic' research, seeking the public views on various Covid 19 topics helped me regain some normality, and begin to look forward. This year despite the workforce issues the Darlington team has endured, face to face contact and Healthwatch promotion has been resumed which offers continued support and encouragement to volunteers, but ensures engagement with the public and raises the profile of an independent organisation. Although I have been unable to take part in much of the recent work, I have really appreciated the zoom volunteer contact sessions and the interaction between us all. The regular email communications with information and requests for opinion/feedback has been greatly valued by me and I look forward to future involvement."

## Anonymous

"I volunteer for Healthwatch Darlington because I enjoy what I do for Healthwatch Darlington and I believe that if there is a problem with any part of healthcare services then there should be improvements made so other people aren't affected by the same problem. I also know that people aren't aware of some services that can help them so I'm pleased that Healthwatch Darlington can signpost them to the correct service to help them."



## Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

[info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk)  
01325 380145

# Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Income		Expense	
Funding received from local authority	£74,460	Staff costs	£73,049
Additional funding	£65,059	Operational costs	£66,270
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£139,519</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£139,319</b>

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Mental Health Services
2. GP Access
3. Dentistry

## Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our strategic aims are:

- To help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, regardless of where you live, income or race.
- To empower you to voice your worries and concerns and help local and regional decision-makers to act upon them to improve local services.
- To provide you with accurate, reliable, relevant and useful information about local services, when you need it, in a format that meets your needs.
- To continue to develop effective strategic partnerships with statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations and established special interest groups, in order to identify any patterns or trends and take appropriate collaborative action.
- To deliver an effective service for the public and provide maximum public benefit in return for the investment made in our activities



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Darlington, **Sterling House, 11 St Cuthbert's Way, Darlington, DL1 1GB**

Healthwatch Darlington uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.



## The way we work

### **Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making.**

Our Healthwatch board consists of four members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the board met 12 times and made decisions on matters such as organisational structure, policies and procedures and priority setting based on feedback from service users.

Alongside our fantastic volunteers, we ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by regularly logging all information and signposting enquiries as well as gathering feedback from members of the public which gives us a real insight to what matters to people in Darlington. We attend community events, hold various focus groups throughout the year, hold surveys and reach out via social media communications to ensure we have real time information which we can use to influence health and care services.

### **Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.**

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it online via our website, newsletter and social media channels.

### **Responses to recommendations and requests**

We thank all providers who responded to requests for information and to our recommendations.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

Our dentistry feedback and recommendations escalated by our regional Healthwatch network to Healthwatch England (HWE) has contributed to HWE making renewed calls on NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to put a reformed dental contract in place before formal responsibility for dental services passes to the 42 new Integrated Care Systems in April 2023.



# healthwatch

Healthwatch Darlington  
Sterling House  
11 St Cuthbert's Way  
Darlington  
DL1 1GB

Website: [www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk)

Email: [info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk)

Tel: 01325 380145

Twitter: @healthwatchDton

Facebook: @healthwatchdarlington @youthwatchdarlo

Instagram: @healthwatchdarlington @youthwatchdarlington

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/channel/UC-mVUiDs78wgqkzKpLtPCVw>