

**healthwatch**  
County Durham



**Annual Report  
2017-2018**



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# Message from our Chair



“Healthwatch County Durham is ensuring patients and service users have a voice”

This year we have been proud to be awarded the County Durham Volunteering Kite Mark in recognition of our supportive programme for volunteers. We are also on our way to becoming a dementia friendly organisation, with all staff and volunteers offered training to become “dementia friends”.

I hope you enjoy reading our report and trust you will find we have indeed tried to be the voice of the people for health and social care issues in County Durham. Be assured we share your feedback with Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission as well as local decision makers.

My sincere thanks to all staff, board members and volunteers for their dedication this year.

Best wishes,

**Brian Jackson**

**It has been a full and rewarding year for all at Healthwatch County Durham. This report showcases how we have made a difference by engaging with you on important health and social care issues in the county so that we can make recommendations for future improvements and change.**

Our work this year has ranged across a variety of local health and social care services from pharmacies and GP surgeries to cancer screening programmes. Healthwatch County Durham is delighted to be:

- + involved in making sure stroke patients get the right support to meet their needs after an existing service was decommissioned
- + supporting the success of cancer screening programmes by finding out what is stopping people from getting screened and how these barriers might be overcome
- + delivering a programme of Enter and View visits at local GP surgeries to identify and share good practice



# Highlights from our year

We've captured **2,045** people's views about health screening



We've reached **2,783** people on social media



Our volunteers have given **1,662** hours of support



We've given **234** people information and advice



We've engaged with **883** people at outreach events



We've tackled issues ranging from **pharmacies to stroke services** in our reports



We've engaged with **897** women on cervical screening



Our **26** volunteers have helped with everything from Enter and View visits to website design



# Who we are



**Healthwatch County Durham helps you and your family get the best out of health and social care services in County Durham. We share your experiences and views of services with providers to encourage them to act on what matters to you.**

As well as championing your views locally, we also share your feedback with Healthwatch England, who use your voice to encourage the government to put people at the heart of national health policy.

## **Our team**

The staff team are supported by a group of dedicated volunteers and board members and are passionate about making sure everyone's views are heard and making health and social care services the best they can be for everybody in the county.

The Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP), Durham Community Action (DCA) and Citizens Advice County Durham (CACD) are accountable for delivery of Healthwatch in County Durham.

“Healthwatch has achieved so much during 2017-18, with over 2000 views received on work plan items, volunteering hours increased by over 1000 from the previous year and the Information and Signposting service has received 37% more enquiries. Going forward we will aim to hear even more people's views so that we can continue to help shape health and social care provision effectively”

*Carol Gaskarth, PCP Chief Executive*

“The Board, Marianne and her team are to be congratulated. Healthwatch is now presenting the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) with very positive and constructive ideas about current issues in the NHS which means together we can improve services.”

*Feisal Jassat, Lay Chair, North Durham CCG*

# Meet the board



**Judi Evans**  
Board member

“A year which has seen the volunteers deservedly recognised through their Durham Volunteer Kite Mark award. The strong sense of purpose, and in particular the focus on the voice of the patient demonstrated by all elements of Healthwatch County Durham, in no small part has contributed to its achievements. The availability of the signposting service, enabling all members of the public to contact the team directly, has shown the team’s commitment to offering individual support and resolving people’s issues.”



**Chris Shore**  
Board member

“It has been another busy year for the staff and volunteers of Healthwatch County Durham. The team’s engagement work with vulnerable women has provided very useful background information about how safeguarding works, and is understood, around the county. Meanwhile, on a personal note, I have been delighted to be able to represent the organisation as a partner member on the Local Safeguarding Adults Board.”



**Zena Jones**  
Board member

“It has been exciting to be involved in such a wide variety of projects with the team this year. In particular, the work on stroke services has stood out particularly for me. I am also keen on digital developments so it has been great to see improvements in the website and Twitter feed. Most important, however, has been the celebration of our volunteers through the Kite Mark award. We could not have the reach we do without the support they give our brilliant staff team so a very big thank you to everyone involved!”

# Meet the board



**Lakkur Murthy**  
Board member

“Using my many years experience in the NHS I have continued to support Healthwatch, ensuring that residents in County Durham have been informed about, and able to influence, changes to health services in the county. I am confident we will continue this important work over the next year.”



**Mary Mitchell**  
Board member

“As one of the long-standing board members it has been rewarding to see the difference Healthwatch is making to the county. I’m especially interested in making sure residents in more rural areas have an opportunity to share their views about the way services are delivered.”



**Burnard Hume**  
Board member

“It has been an interesting year at Healthwatch and I have enjoyed supporting the NHS Quality Improvement Board for the Foundation Trust. Healthwatch is ensuring the patient, service user and carer voice is heard. The partnerships embedded in the work we do is helping to achieve positive change.”



**Jim Welch**  
Board member

“I have been a board member for Healthwatch County Durham over the past two years. The work and projects over that time have been relevant and interesting. In particular, I have enjoyed working on the Great North Care Record project with good support from other board members and members of staff. This project helped people from a variety of backgrounds, and with differing health needs, to understand where medical records are kept and how secure they are. It should give people confidence to ask more questions about their care records, especially people with visual impairments across the county.”

# Your views on health and social care



## Listening to people's feedback on pharmacy services

In summer 2017, we went out and about to gather people's views on local pharmacy services. Working alongside the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) and Public Health, we visited a range of pharmacies in both rural and urban locations, from large chains to independents. We also produced an online survey which we shared on our website and via a number of agencies, including Age UK and Investing in Children.



The people we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive about their local pharmacy, with almost 94% (367 out of 397 people) saying they found pharmacy staff polite and helpful. We also asked people what additional services they would like to access from their local pharmacy or GP practice dispensary and the three most requested services were:

- + extended opening hours
- + disposal of needles and sharps boxes
- + health checks, e.g. blood pressure monitoring

We made several recommendations for developing services based on people's feedback and the two that have been adopted by the LPC are:

- + to make sure all pharmacies have facilities for people to consult a pharmacist in private and also that these are clearly advertised
- + to develop a targeted strategy to encourage more young people to access pharmacy services

In addition, Public Health have confirmed that, as a direct result of our recommendations, one of the three key actions included in the ongoing action plan for pharmacy services in County Durham will be to raise awareness of the wider range of services that are available at pharmacies.

"Thank you again for working with us and community pharmacy to produce a really positive and informative account of community pharmacy services in County Durham."

*Greg Burke, chief officer of the Local Pharmaceutical Committee*

- 7 pharmacy visits
- 2 community groups
- 397 people

## Enter and View

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits where representatives visit health and social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations for improvements. In 2017-18 we carried out four such visits in our area at Great Lumley GP surgery in Chester-le-Street; Intrahealth Pharmacy in Chilton; John Lowe Pharmacy in Blackhill, and Bewick Pharmacy in Newton Aycliffe. We would like to thank the service providers, service users, visitors and staff for their contribution to the Enter and View programme.



“Thank you Healthwatch for visiting our practice. We hope you were able to take away information and ideas from viewing our practices and procedures that will be helpful in your future work and benefit other GP practices. Your visit has certainly helped us focus our minds not only on what we are doing well but also on areas where we knew we needed to improve. In addition, it has also highlighted further areas where we need to develop and improve our service to patients.

The whole experience, from the initial approach by Marianne [project lead] through to our involvement with Claire [volunteer support] and then the volunteers on the day, has been extremely pleasurable and informative. The staff here on the day have all been extremely complimentary of your approach and methods.”

*GP practice manager*

## Improving access to annual health checks for people with learning disabilities

Young people and adults with learning disabilities who need more health support are entitled to a free annual health check. However, accessing services isn't always easy, so we have been working with service users, the region's Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Durham County Council to increase the number of people taking up their health check.

We spoke to 100 people with learning disabilities about what they felt stopped them going for their health check. Based on what they told us we recommended:

- + all eligible patients should be contacted in an appropriate and user-friendly manner to offer them a health check
- + any letters should be sent in an easy-read format
- + GPs should be encouraged to share best practice to maximise the uptake of health checks

- + GP surgeries should consider using alternative venues for health checks which may be less intimidating for people with learning disabilities
- + the use of peer groups to promote health check uptake should be encouraged

**And our recommendations are already having an impact...**

- + Shinwell Medical Group is running a pilot scheme offering health checks in a community setting and we are monitoring patient feedback
- + an easy-read health check letter has been developed in partnership with the CCG and Durham County Council
- + all GP practices now have access to this gold standard invite to send to their patients

# Helping you find the answers



## Signposting you to the health and social care support you need

Our Information and Signposting team is available Monday to Friday to help people with their health and social care queries - whether it's finding a specific service or giving advice, for example on how to complain or get the most from your GP.

In the last 12 months, the team has supported 234 people with a wide variety of questions, covering topics including:

- + how to access emergency dental services
- + GP appointment systems
- + missing medical records
- + finding appropriate nursing care placements for relatives

### Case study: Helping a patient voice their concerns

We were contacted by a patient who was anxious because a prescription they needed was changing and would not be available for 48 hours. They were worried about the impact this might have on their health. We contacted the pharmacy on the patient's behalf to see if there was a solution. As a result, the pharmacy provided part of the prescription to cover the initial 48 hours with the remainder available to collect the next day. The patient was extremely happy with this outcome and the pharmacist was also pleased we had intervened as they had been unaware of the issue.

"Thank you for being so caring and professional. This is the first time that I've felt someone has listened to me."

*Signposting service user*

### Case study: Improving awareness of dental services

Following the closure of two dental practices in the county over the last year, we have supported NHS England in signposting patients to other dentists in the area. We have also made recommendations to NHS England on how it could improve its signposting in future, based on the calls we received from concerned patients in these instances. For example, we suggested that, in future, any letters informing patients of closures should include both details of practices accessible to patients with mobility issues and details of the County Durham domiciliary dental practice. NHS England agreed these details would be included in future letters as standard. We also suggested that, in future, NHS England should inform local surgeries of any dental closures nearby so they can prepare for a likely increase in calls. NHS England said it does telephone local dental surgeries, however, it agreed that written signposting information should also be mailed to all those likely to be affected.



# Finding health and social care services in County Durham



## Are you having trouble finding the right health or social care service?

We have compiled a useful list of services around the county to help people find the right health support to meet their needs. **This can be found on our website.**

If you cannot access the electronic version of this document, please contact us on 0800 304 7039 and we can arrange to send you the information in an alternative format.

**Keep up to date!**  
with local health and social care news,  
consultation and events, sign up to our e-bulletin  
at:

<http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/>

## Helping improve the county's online information portal for adult care and support

Locate is a website run by Durham County Council that provides information about adult care, support, and advice services in the region. Impressed by our previous work on improving local care home websites, the Locate team asked us if we would work with them to look at the effectiveness of the Locate website and how it might be improved. They felt we could help them get a realistic user's perspective on how well the website functions to meet people's needs and answer their queries.

A group of our volunteers have been working on the project for several months, using scenarios to help assess the website's effectiveness. They reported their initial findings to the Locate team in April and will be continuing to liaise with the council on this next year.

"It was great to meet Healthwatch and the volunteers Tony and Mervyn who kindly took on this project, which must have been time-consuming. We are always looking to improve Locate so thank you. Great partnership work!"

*Lesley Watson, Locate team, Durham County Council*



# Making a difference together



## Gathering views to improve maternity services

This year we spent time gathering views on maternity services at the request of health commissioners in North Durham and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield. We looked specifically at breastfeeding and smoking during pregnancy and spoke to mothers about their experiences and choices around deciding whether or not to stop smoking and how to feed their babies. We also spoke to healthcare professionals and agencies in other areas to identify any initiatives they felt were improving outcomes for mothers and babies where they worked that could be learned from.

Our research showed that, overall, new mothers in County Durham felt supported whatever way they chose to feed their babies. However, women told us their experiences of post-natal support were not always what they had been led to expect. With regard to smoking in pregnancy, it was clear most women understood the risks to themselves and their babies if they continued to smoke, however, as with all addictions, early intervention was the key to helping them stop.

We shared our findings and recommendations from this research with commissioners and partners in County Durham who welcomed our input and fed it into their own work looking at how to improve maternity services and reduce smoking in pregnancy.



“The biggest critic was myself. I hated the fact that I smoked but when I felt guilty it made me crave more.”

“Health professionals should be open to all ways of feeding.”

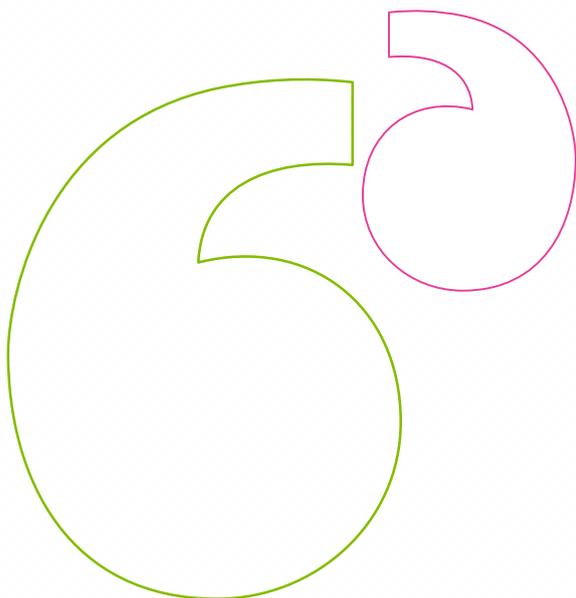
“Too many mums are left struggling with no support and made to feel guilty for using formula.”

“I was glad to receive daily telephone support from the maternity care assistants.”

*A range of mothers' views*

“The [Healthwatch] report did highlight that 40% of women who were referred did not want to access the stop smoking service, therefore the recommendation of early intervention and Nicotine Replacement Therapy will be something we will look into.”

*Vince Lacey, Senior Commissioning Support Officer NECS*



## Working to reduce barriers to health screening

A major part of our work this year has been researching the barriers that stop people from accessing potentially life-saving cancer screening programmes. Although County Durham's uptake is slightly higher than the average for England and the North East region, we wanted to find out if anything could be done to encourage even more people to participate. Improvements in uptake could mean more cancers detected at earlier, more treatable stages.

We focused our work on breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening programmes. We wanted to hear from people from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible, so as well as using online surveys and conversations with people at widely accessed locations, we also carried out a mini "project within a project" aimed specifically at engaging women in more vulnerable positions. We used focus groups and one-to-one conversations at trusted places to capture the voices of women that otherwise might not have been heard, including:

- + women with mental health issues
- + women at risk of homelessness
- + women who are carers
- + women who have experienced domestic abuse
- + women from Gypsy, Traveller and Romany communities



## Our impact

We made several key recommendations based on what people told us, including the need to better address some commonly held misconceptions about screening, such as that if someone is already being treated for one cancer they do not need to get checked for another. Our work has been well received by local CCGs and service providers and several changes to services are already being made as a result.

- + Public Health have secured funding for two new cancer awareness-raising posts and our findings and recommendations will be used in their work
- + Specialist cancer nurses in the area have also received our findings and will be working with patients to give them a better understanding of screening and the potential implications of choosing to be screened or not



"The screening detected my cancer very early and was dealt with incredibly well. It could have been so much worse had I not attended the screening."

"I am partially disabled and would only comment on the mobile unit that the steps are no good for me and some form of ramp could help"

"I am being treated for another cancer elsewhere, so I had assumed that I don't need to do this test as they will already have checked me for bowel cancer"



# Working with our partners



## Great North Care Record

The Great North Care Record is a programme to create a new way of sharing medical information electronically across the North East and North Cumbria - a region covering a population of approximately 3.6m people. The aim is to produce a platform to join up records in frontline care with an analytics platform that will be shared by the NHS, local authorities, universities, and other organisations relating to health and social care. It is hoped this will make the region the safest place in the world to receive care and the best place to do research.

All Healthwatch organisations within the North East and North Cumbria got involved with the programme. Our team hosted two events to help Connected Health Cities and Teesside University to engage with the public on the proposals. With these events we wanted to:

- + gather people's views on current and future models of consent for use of information
- + provide information on the constraints of current practice in information sharing at the point of care, and in planning and research, and potential issues these can cause
- + gain feedback on people's views and "tolerance levels" of how information sharing may develop in future

"The consultation was on data and information sharing for use in healthcare, including for planning and research purposes, and hence was a sensitive and (potentially) complex topic. Healthwatch worked closely with us to scope how this could be done. Our timescale was quite challenging (September to mid-December 2017) but Healthwatch managed to achieve this and we totalled 21 sessions to about 340 participants from a variety of backgrounds. Despite the logistical challenges we couldn't have envisaged the sessions going any better, and the level of participation and feedback received was invaluable in shaping our onward programme. To turn up to each session with everything ready, and the public participants fully informed, was way beyond our expectations!

At all times Healthwatch staff were very professional and extremely well organised. They also had great knowledge of the needs and expectations of the people we wanted to engage with and how to do this successfully. We look forward to collaborating with the Healthwatch network again."

*Mark Walsh - Operations Director,  
Connecting Health Cities*

it starts with  
**YOU**



When stroke patients found out a local support service was being decommissioned many turned to us for help. Our recommendations based on their feedback were well received and mean a new service will be better tailored to their needs.

### #ItStartsWithYou

Early in 2017, stroke patients in County Durham were surprised to be told their community support service was being decommissioned - without any clear word on what, if anything, would replace it. Many contacted us with their fears. We responded by securing an extension of the existing service from commissioners, who then asked us to help gather feedback from patients and carers to help shape a new service to support stroke survivors once they leave hospital.

We spoke to 155 people over a three-month period using a mixture of online surveys, postal questionnaires and face-to-face engagement. From this we made some core recommendations relating to:

- + developing clear support pathways
- + providing person-centred support plans
- + providing clear, informative literature, including details of local support such as voluntary groups
- + providing advice about healthy lifestyles and other measures to reduce the risk of further strokes

### A great result for patients

We published our report in November 2017 and were delighted when commissioners agreed to put in place new services for stroke patients provided by the Stroke Association that will incorporate our recommendations. They said our report was “influential” in their decision-making. Patients and carers were able to have a voice and influence service changes and as a result the new service should better meet their needs. A big thank you to everyone who gave us their views and so helped influence the service redesign in this way. It started with YOU!

“In terms of what will be different with the new service, the support offered by the Stroke Association will be a more integrated service including communications support, emotional support and safeguarding. The service will also undertake six-monthly reviews of stroke patients as recommended by NICE guidelines. This was not included in the previous service and helps to provide feedback on services received and required by the stroke survivor. The service will also support patients with their joint care plan, an area which was highlighted by the Healthwatch report.”

*Vince Lacey, Senior Commissioning Support Officer, NECS*



# Our plans for next year



## Your priorities are our priorities...

In February and March 2018 we gave everyone in the county the opportunity to help decide which health and social care services we focus on for the next year. First we identified six key areas of concern for residents from our signposting and partnership work. These were:

- +mental health support available for people with low level anxiety or stress
- +GP appointment systems
- +dementia support services - including referral processes
- +patient transport - specifically the quality of information available about this
- +support for those transitioning from children's to adult services
- +dental charging/treatment - understanding and accessing information about these

We then asked people which of these six areas they thought should be our priorities. More than 500 people gave us their views via an online survey and through face-to-face interviews at a range of venues. As a result, the top four choices that will be prioritised in our work through 2018-19 are:

- +mental health services
- +GP appointment systems
- +dementia services
- +transitions from children's to adult services

We will let you know when you can tell us your views about these services and keep you up-to-date with all our findings.

### Enter and View

We have an ongoing programme of Enter and View visits to GP surgeries. These visits are carried out with the support of individual surgeries and are an opportunity for gathering patients' views and identifying aspects of good practice that can be shared with other GPs.



- a) "It's really important our work is driven by the public, patients and service users. That's the way to ensure we prioritise what is important to them."

*Chris Shore, board member*

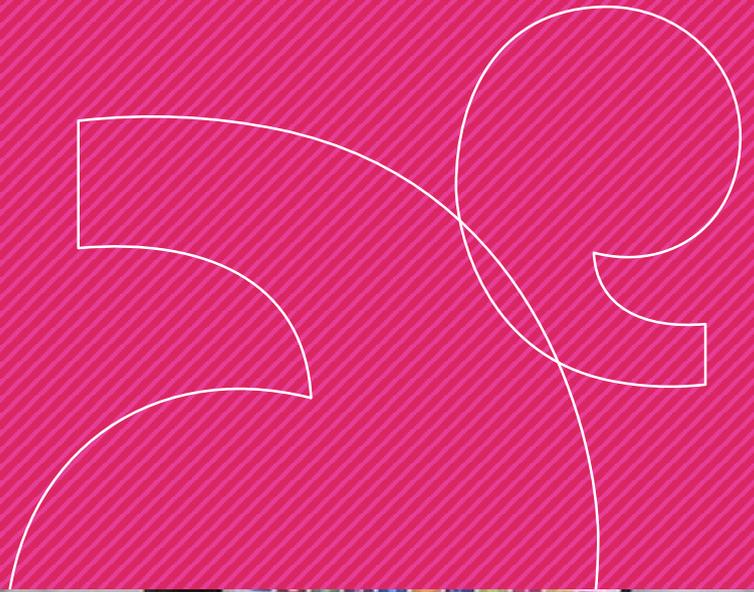
### Signposting

We will continue to provide high quality advice and support to those with health and social care queries, putting you at the centre of everything we do!

You talk.  
We listen.  
Together we  
influence!



# Our people



## Recognised for our quality work with volunteers

This year we were delighted to receive the County Durham Kite Mark for our work with volunteers. The Kite Mark is given to organisations that provide a high quality, positive and inclusive volunteering experience. Being awarded the Kite Mark is recognition of how hard we work to support our volunteers' development and to make them an integral part of everything we do.

One aspect of our volunteering programme that Durham Community Action, the awarding body, said particularly stood out was the training we offer. Abby Thompson, Volunteer Development Manager at Durham Community Action, said the range and quality of training we make available to our volunteers was impressive. The effort we make to ensure our training is as accessible as possible was also noted.

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

*Volunteer*

"I am in a position to see what really happens and I definitely believe in Healthwatch making a difference to people"

*Engagement volunteer*

"I'm really enjoying acquiring new knowledge and using this with the Healthwatch team."

*Research volunteer*



## Volunteers work to improve how care homes communicate online

Last year, our volunteers carried out some research into the quality of County Durham care home websites. They found many issues with access, navigation and the amount of information provided. In response they compiled a list of the information they thought all care homes should provide online to improve people's experience. This included:

- + an indication of fee levels
- + details of any specialisms a provider might have
- + information about how open the service was to visitors
- + what activity programmes were provided
- + addresses with directions and maps

We shared these recommendations with care home providers in County Durham and one provider, Kaydar, offered to help develop and pilot a new website based around the volunteers' recommendations. This website is well underway with input from Kaydar, Healthwatch volunteer Tony Bentley (right), and a local computer company, and we hope other care homes will use it as a good practice guide.

In response to this piece of work Durham County Council also changed their contract specification to make sure all care home providers put information on their services on "Locate", which is the Council's online directory of services, and keep this information up to date."



"We found Tony unbelievably helpful when discussing and developing our care home website. We cannot state enough how valuable Tony's input has been and very much appreciate, not only his personal input, but the sharing of the findings that his research work, through Healthwatch County Durham, showed as being important to users"

*Noreen and Angus Burns (Kaydar)*



# Our finances

Healthwatch County Durham has maintained its funding from the local authority. Below is a breakdown of how the funds have been allocated.

<b>Income</b>	<b>£</b>
Funding received from local authority to deliver local Healthwatch statutory activities	205,119
Additional income	1,950
<b>Total income</b>	<b>207,069</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£</b>
Operational costs	60,202
Staffing costs	115,249
Office costs	14,576
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>190,027</b>
Balance brought forward	17,042

# Contact us:

**Write:**

Healthwatch County Durham  
Whitfield House  
St Johns Road  
Meadowfield Industrial Estate  
Durham  
DH7 8XL

**Telephone:**

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

**Email:** [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)  
**Website:** [www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk)  
**Twitter:** @HWCountyDurham  
**Facebook:** Healthwatch County Durham



Our annual report will be publicly available on our website from 30 June 2018. We will also be sharing it with Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and our local authority.

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

**If you require this report in an alternative format please contact us at the address above.**

# healthwatch County Durham

Whitfield House  
St Johns Road  
Meadowfield Industrial Estate  
Durham  
DH7 8XL

Web: [www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk)  
Tel: 0800 304 7039  
Email: [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)  
Twitter: @HWCCountyDurham  
Facebook: Healthwatch County Durham

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