

Healthwatch Darlington Update
September 2013 to January 2014

Social Enterprise

The Board are now Directors of Healthwatch Darlington Ltd, a company limited by guarantee and are awaiting charitable status with the Charity Commission. Meetings are being held with the Carers Federation and DBC to ensure a smooth exit process. The Board hope to be floating independently by 31st March 2014 at the latest.

Healthwatch Darlington is the first in the North East to be at this stage and are now meeting with other Healthwatches in the region to share good practice, encourage partnership working and suggest future sustainability ideas.

Local Healthwatches are required:

- To be established as an independent corporate body
- To operate as a social enterprise
- To be able to employ its own staff and involve volunteers
- To keep accounts and make annual reports available to the public

Healthwatch England (HWE)

Meetings have been held to introduce Local Healthwatches regionally and look at ways of working together and supporting each other. The local representative from HWE has reported back to Head Office issues and concerns that have arisen and these are being addressed.

Webinars and further regional and national consultation events have been arranged to aid in the communication and support required between HWE and Local Healthwatch Chairs, Board members and participants.

Work Plan

The Board have also been working hard on developing the Healthwatch Work Plan. Planned task groups include:

- **Enter & View Task and Finish Group**
Monitor quality of services and work closely with others to raise any issues and to avoid duplication of visits to hospital wards and care homes.
- **GP Access Task and Finish Group**
Responding to current concerns and improving services for patients.
- **Data Intelligence Task and Finish Group**
Responding to current concerns and improving service to patients and the public. Highlighting trends and potential concerns
- **Equality and Diversity Task and Finish Group**
To discover what barriers/issues/concerns/good practice are experienced in different cultures concerning Health and Social Care Services. Ensuring everyone has a voice.

- **Cancer Services Task and Finish Group**
To improve survivorship intelligence within cancer services. To improve outcomes and understand the costs of meeting those unmet needs for people living with cancer and/or the effects of cancer treatment as well as others with Long Term Health Conditions.
- **Mental Health Task and Finish Group**
To promote services that help to reduce the suicide rate in Darlington and improve support for those affected by suicide. Looking at ways to ease the pressure on the Crisis Team in Darlington and ensure residents are supported when other services are closed.
- **Children and Young People Task and Finish Group**
Understanding the needs and concerns of children and young people focusing particularly on those experiencing disadvantages and inequalities and ensuring they have a voice.

Volunteer Training

Two welcome and induction sessions were held in October for current and new volunteers to meet the Chair, Board members, support staff and other volunteers and to sign up to the various Healthwatch task groups and training opportunities.

In house Enter and View training has also taken place for volunteers to become 'authorised representatives' of Healthwatch Darlington to enter, view and observe health and social care services.

Safeguarding Training was provided by DBC in November for volunteers and staff to be able to recognise the signs and symptoms of neglect/abuse and knowing what to do in response.

Networks/Meetings

Healthwatch Darlington are continuing to work closely with the current Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Darlington Aging Well, Children and Young People and Darlington Organisations Together network meetings. This helps coordinate activities and establish an effective feedback mechanism between key organisations and service users, carers and the public in Darlington.

Staff and volunteers have been attending many meetings both locally, regionally and nationally to establish good relationships with public and third sector organisations to ensure meaningful consultation and engagement methods are being utilised for patients, carers and the public. A full list of activities can be obtained from the HWD office.

Access Points - Information and Signposting

Louise Haymer our information and signposting officer left for a full time post in December and we have now employed her replacement who will take over the running of the 4 monthly access points. These are going very well with more people approaching HWD each time. Future planning includes looking at the possibility of attending more coffee mornings to raise awareness in other areas not covered by access points including the involvement of volunteers to help us deliver the service.