



# Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch North Yorkshire  
annual report 2025 to 2026

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**Chairperson of our trustees**  
Pat Southgate



The past year has been one of the busiest and most significant in Healthwatch history. It has also been a year of change and uncertainty across health and social care.

During times like these, listening to the experiences of people becomes even more important. As an independent organisation, Healthwatch helps ensure those voices are heard and used to improve care.

The stories throughout this report show the difference listening can make. They demonstrate how local people's experiences have influenced decisions, improved communication and supported positive change.

I would like to thank our staff, volunteers and everyone who shared their experiences with us over the past year. Your willingness to speak up helps ensure local people's voices remain at the heart of health and social care and continues to make a real difference.

# A message from our CEO, Ashley Green

**Thank you to everyone who has shared their experiences of health and social care with us. Every conversation, survey and story has helped shape our work and influence improvements.**



**Chief Executive  
Officer**  
Ashley Green

This year has not been easy for us at Healthwatch. The Government's proposals to abolish local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England as part of wider changes to the NHS have created uncertainty for our staff, trustees, volunteers and colleagues across North Yorkshire.

I would like to thank the many people who have expressed their support for Healthwatch. Your kind words and appreciation have meant a great deal to us. For now, nothing changes. Healthwatch North Yorkshire remains open, independent and committed to listening to local people's experiences.

Despite this uncertainty, I am extremely proud of everything we have achieved over the past year.

Our projects and reports have helped bring about meaningful improvements by making it easier for people to access the right care at the right time.

This report highlights just some of those achievements, from improving access to healthcare for farming communities and supporting people with disabilities to helping ethnic minority communities access adult social care.

Working together has also remained central to everything we do. This year, we have supported North Yorkshire Council with its Adult Social Care Quality Assessment, contributed to strategic work with the Humber and North Yorkshire Cancer Alliance, and worked alongside York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to help develop its Patient, Carers and Families Experience Framework.

Whatever changes lie ahead, we remain dedicated to making sure local people's voices are heard and are part of every conversation about how health and care is planned, delivered and improved across North Yorkshire.

# Who Healthwatch is

Healthwatch is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



## Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



## Our mission

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



## Our values are:

**Fairness:** We believe everyone deserves to be heard and treated fairly. We listen with compassion, value different experiences and work to make sure no one is left behind.

**Working together:** We build positive relationships and work alongside local people, volunteers and organisations, including the NHS and North Yorkshire Council. By listening to each other and sharing ideas, we can help improve health and social care together.

**Impact:** We are committed to making a real difference. We turn people's experiences into meaningful action and work to make sure feedback leads to positive change.

**Independence:** Our work is driven by the experiences of local people. We provide an independent voice that celebrates what is working well while constructively challenging services where improvements are needed.

**Truth:** We are open, honest and transparent in everything we do. We listen carefully, report what people tell us accurately and use evidence to help shape better care.

# Our year in numbers

In 2025 to 2026 we supported more than **4,500** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **7** staff and our work was supported by **24** volunteers.



## Reaching out

**2,578** people shared their experiences of health and social care with us, helping identify issues, highlight good practice and influence improvements.

**2,003** people contacted us for information and advice on topics including mental health support, GP practices, hospital care and NHS dentistry.



## Championing your voice

We published **14** reports based on what local people told us about their experiences of health and care, highlighting improvements people wanted to see in areas including care homes, patient transport, healthcare accessibility and adult social care.

Our most widely read report explored the barriers farmers face when accessing healthcare, helping bring rural health inequalities to the attention of healthcare organisations, charities and decision makers.



## Statutory funding

We're funded by North Yorkshire Council. In 2025/26 we received £180,000.

# Our digital reach

We've continued to connect with people through our website, social media and email newsletters, helping them find information, share experiences and stay up to date with our work.

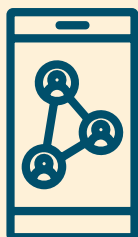


## Website

Our website remains one of the most updated in the Healthwatch network. Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, it received **56,431** page views from **31,839** people.

People most often visited our homepage, browsed our news and reports, searched for information, visited our contact page, and read advice articles on topics including meningitis symptoms, GP booking rule changes, pharmacy opening times and patient transport.

The popularity of our advice articles and reports shows people are using our website as a trusted source of independent health and social care information.



## Social media

Between 1 April and 31 December 2025, our Facebook content was viewed **242,957** times and generated **1,823** clicks to our website. Our Instagram content received **48,290** views and reached **23,472** people.<sup>6</sup>

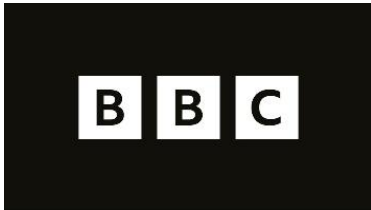


## Email newsletters

We sent **21** email newsletters and campaign updates to around **1,300** subscribers, keeping people informed about local health and care services, opportunities to have their say and the impact of our work.

# Media coverage

We secured widespread media coverage across local, regional and national media, helping raise awareness of local health and care issues and ensuring people's experiences were heard.



# Healthwatch in the headlines

Throughout the year, our work featured across television, radio, newspapers and online media, helping bring local people's experiences to wider audiences.

Coverage of our work helped raise awareness of Healthwatch and local health and care issues. It encouraged public discussion and ensured the experiences of people across North Yorkshire reached decision-makers and wider audiences.



## THE YORKSHIRE POST

### A 'comprehensive failure' of Government policy

**REPORT**  
 THE Government's attempts to improve access to NHS dentistry in recent years "have been a complete failure", a major report has found, with some measures actually "worsening the picture".  
 The Dental Recovery Plan has "comprehensively failed", according to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), amid warnings that vulnerable patients "continue to suffer the most".  
 The recent PAC report also said the dental contract "remains unfit for purpose", with current arrangements only sufficient for about half of England's population to see an NHS dentist over a two-year period.  
 The Dental Recovery Plan was unveiled in

February 2024, by the previous government, with a pledge that it would fund more than 1.5m additional NHS treatments or 2.5m appointments.  
 This included a new patient premium (NPP), with practices receiving credits for each eligible new patient they saw, a 'golden hello' recruitment scheme which introduced £20,000 incentive payments for dentists, and mobile dental vans targeting communities.  
 But the PAC found the NPP - which has cost at least £88m since it was introduced last March - has resulted in 9 per cent fewer new patients seeing an NHS dentist. The 'golden hello' scheme had appointed fewer than 20 per cent of the expected 240 dentists by February 2025, the report added, while mobile dental vans had since been dropped.

Ashley Green, pictured, the chief executive of Healthwatch North Yorkshire, said he hadn't heard of more dentists arriving in the underserved parts of the county due to the bonus system.  
 And Healthwatch was unaware of any instances of the mobile vans visiting the rural and coastal areas of North Yorkshire.  
 PAC chairman Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown said: "This country is now years deep in an avalanche of harrowing stories of the impact of dentistry's system failure."  
 "It is utterly disgraceful that, in the 21st century, some Britons have been forced to remove their own teeth.

"Last year's Dental Recovery Plan was supposed to address these problems, something our report has found it has signally failed to do. Almost unbelievably, the Government's initiatives appear to have actually resulted in worsening the picture, with fewer new patients seen since the plan's introduction."  
 The PAC warned that without proper remuneration, more dentists would move to the private sector.  
 Sir Geoffrey added: "NHS dentistry is broken. The Government could hardly fail to agree on this point, and indeed I am glad that it is not in denial that the time for tinkering at the edges is over. It is time for big decisions."



# A year of making a difference

Every improvement starts with people sharing their experiences. Here are just some of the ways local people helped shape change across health and care in North Yorkshire this year.

## **NHS records**

You told us that inaccurate or incomplete NHS records were causing frustration and affecting your confidence in care. We shared these with Healthwatch England and local NHS, leading to reviews of local processes and improvements aimed at making sure important information is recorded accurately, kept up to date and shared appropriately.

## **ADHD assessments and support**

People waiting told us about long waits, uncertainty and the impact delays were having on their lives. By sharing these experiences with the NHS, we helped keep the issue on the agenda and contributed to plans for clearer communication, improved support and action to reduce waiting times.

## **Social care for ethnic minority communities**

People shared their experiences of accessing adult social care, highlighting barriers including language, awareness and understanding of available support. Feedback helped shape practical improvements, including plans to simplify information, improve staff awareness and make support easier to access when people need it most.

## **Health information**

People told us that information was not always available in formats they could access or understand. We shared these experiences with GP practices and hospitals, helping improve awareness and supporting changes that make information easier to understand and use.

## **Life in local care homes**

Residents, relatives and staff shared their experiences of life in care homes. What we heard helped providers celebrate good practice, identify areas for improvement and continue delivering care that reflects what matters most to residents.

## **Finding advice and information**

We went to venues, libraries and hospitals to help people find reliable information, understand their options and access the support available to them.

## **Wellbeing in North Yorkshire**

More than 700 people shared what affects their health and wellbeing, from transport and green spaces to loneliness, kindness and access to local support. Their experiences provided valuable insight into the everyday factors that shape people's health and quality of life.

## **Awareness of cancer symptoms**

People shared their understanding of cancer symptoms, screening and early diagnosis. Their feedback helped identify gaps in awareness and informed work to improve information, encourage earlier conversations and support more people to seek help when needed.

# Working together to improve care

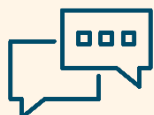
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to make sure people's experiences of health and social care in North Yorkshire help shape decisions across the Humber and North Yorkshire.

Together, we've helped make a difference in several ways. The examples below show how local people's experiences have influenced local decisions and contributed to positive change.



## People's experiences shaping priorities

We brought together what people told their local Healthwatch across North Yorkshire, York, Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire about using health and social care. The report highlighted common challenges including accessing care, getting the right support, communication, the organisation of care and financial pressures. It was presented to NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board's Quality Committee, where it helped shape priorities for the year ahead.



## Improved access and communication

People across the region told Healthwatch they faced barriers accessing healthcare, including interpreter services, accessible information and reasonable adjustments. We shared this feedback through the NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Experience of Care Forum, helping influence improvements including more accessible patient information, Easy Read and large print materials, greater consideration of reasonable adjustments and new training for frontline healthcare staff.



## Cancer awareness, signs and symptoms

Working with York St John University and the Humber and North Yorkshire Cancer Alliance, Healthwatch heard from 1,800 people about their awareness of cancer symptoms, risk factors and screening. The findings helped shape initiatives including a more targeted Cancer Champions programme, a cancer screening incentive scheme for GP practices and standard urgent cancer referral forms across the region to help support earlier diagnosis.

# Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Every conversation helps build a clearer picture of what is working well and where care could be improved.

Throughout the year, we shared local people's experiences with NHS organisations, councils and other decision-makers to help shape services and influence change.

The following examples show how listening to local people has helped improve healthcare, information and support across North Yorkshire.



# Making healthcare information easier to understand

**People told us health information was often difficult to find, understand or use. We worked with healthcare organisations to improve accessibility, promote plain English and help more people find the information they need.**

Local people regularly told us that healthcare information could be difficult to find, hard to understand or unavailable in formats that met their needs. For some, this made it harder to access care, understand their options or make informed decisions about their health.

Throughout the year, we shared people's experiences with NHS organisations and local councils to improve the accessibility of health and care information across North Yorkshire. This included reviewing information materials, identifying barriers and highlighting practical improvements.



**“Healthwatch helped organisations better understand what people need from health information, supporting clearer communication and more accessible care.”**

Our work helped improve GP practice websites, making important information easier to find and navigate. We also worked with organisations to improve patient information by promoting plain English and accessible formats, including Easy Read resources.

We also shared examples of good practice, encouraging organisations to learn from one another and consider accessibility across all their communications. By highlighting what worked well alongside the barriers people experienced, we helped support a more consistent approach to providing clear, inclusive information for patients and local communities.

By sharing what local people told us, we helped organisations recognise that accessible information is about more than producing leaflets or updating websites. It is about giving everyone the confidence to understand their healthcare, know where to turn for support and make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.

By sharing local people's experiences, we helped organisations strengthen their focus on producing clearer, more accessible information, helping more people find the support they need and access healthcare with greater confidence.

# Keeping healthcare local in Upper Swaledale

**When proposed changes threatened access to local healthcare, we made sure residents' experiences were heard by NHS decision-makers. Their feedback helped inform discussions and contributed to plans to keep healthcare available in Reeth.**

When plans emerged that could have left people in Upper Swaledale travelling long distances to access healthcare following the retirement of a local GP and the closure of Reeth Medical Centre, residents contacted us to share their concerns.

People told us they were worried about travelling to appointments in Hawes, Leyburn or Richmond, particularly older residents, people with long-term health conditions and those without access to transport. They also raised concerns about accessing medicines, longer journey times and the wider impact on a rural community that relies on local healthcare.



**"When local people were worried about the future of their GP practice, Healthwatch gave them a trusted place to ask questions, share their concerns and be heard."**

We shared these experiences with NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, North Yorkshire Council, local councillors, elected representatives and other decision-makers. We also helped raise awareness through media interviews, public updates and community networks, ensuring local people's experiences remained part of the discussion.

The feedback highlighted the importance of maintaining healthcare close to where people live and the challenges rural communities face when local services change.

Following these discussions, the NHS confirmed that Central Dales Practice would continue providing healthcare from Reeth Medical Centre through a branch surgery arrangement. Plans include GP appointments and nursing services being available locally, helping maintain access to care for around 1,600 registered patients.

While local people, community groups and elected representatives all played an important role in securing this outcome, Healthwatch helped ensure residents' experiences were consistently heard throughout the decision-making process.

# Healthcare appointments that work for everyone

**More than 200 people shared their experiences of reasonable adjustments and the barriers they faced when accessing healthcare. Their feedback helped drive improvements to how healthcare organisations identify, record and support people's needs.**

Disabled people, carers and people with long-term health conditions told us that healthcare appointments were not always meeting their needs. Many described having to repeatedly explain their circumstances or arriving at appointments to find agreed support was not in place.

More than 200 people across North Yorkshire shared their experiences. 82% said they had never been asked what reasonable adjustments would help them, while 86% said their needs were not always recorded. Many also described having to repeat information at every appointment.



**"Healthwatch gave more than 200 people the opportunity to share their experiences, helping drive improvements to how GP practices, dentists and hospitals identify and support people's needs."**

We brought these experiences together in our report, Making healthcare appointments work for everyone, and shared our findings with healthcare organisations across North Yorkshire.

Our recommendations focused on asking people about their needs earlier, recording reasonable adjustments more consistently and ensuring staff understood the support available.

In response, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, Millfield Surgery in Easingwold and Spa Surgery in Harrogate all outlined actions they had taken or planned to take. These included reviewing appointment processes, improving how people's needs are recorded, strengthening staff awareness and exploring ways to make healthcare more accessible.

By sharing local people's experiences, we helped place accessible healthcare higher on the agenda and supported improvements that could benefit thousands of patients across North Yorkshire.

# Listening to your experiences

Those funding, planning or providing care can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

During the past year, thousands of people shared their experiences of health and care with us. Some told us about difficulties accessing support, while others highlighted examples of care that made a real difference to their lives and wanted to say thank you.

By bringing these experiences to healthcare organisations and decision makers, we have helped influence improvements across North Yorkshire and ensure local voices remain at the heart of change.



# Helping people get to healthcare when transport is a barrier

**People's experiences of travel difficulties led to practical changes, including better information, improved transport options and new ways of organising appointments to reduce unnecessary journeys.**

More than 200 people shared their experiences of travelling to healthcare appointments across North Yorkshire by patient transport. Their feedback highlighted how transport difficulties can affect access to care, particularly in rural communities, and helped bring about practical improvements to information, transport options and how appointments are organised.

## What did we do

We listened to patients, carers and families about the challenges of travelling to healthcare appointments and brought their experiences together in a report shared with the NHS and decision makers.

## Key things we heard:

- Long distances, limited public transport and travel costs made attending appointments difficult.
- Some people cancelled appointments because they could not afford the journey or had no suitable transport.
- People often faced multiple journeys for appointments that could potentially be coordinated more effectively.

## What difference did this make?

Following our report, NHS organisations introduced a range of improvements. These included clearer information about travel cost support, free parking for volunteer drivers and plans for additional wheelchair accessible transport and new rural bus links.

Healthcare providers also began reviewing how appointments are organised, increasing telephone appointments where appropriate, developing one stop clinics and coordinating care more closely to reduce unnecessary journeys.

The findings have also helped keep the need for long term transport solutions firmly on the agenda across North Yorkshire.

# Helping healthcare and support fit around farming life

**Listening to farmers and farming families has helped bring healthcare closer to rural communities and shaped new ideas to make support easier to access.**

Farmers, farming families and people working in agriculture told us that accessing healthcare often did not fit around the realities of farming life. We listened to their experiences to better understand the barriers they face when seeking support.

## What did we do

220 people shared their experiences with us. We brought their feedback together and shared it with the NHS, GP practices, and farming charities.

## Key things we heard:

- Farmers often delayed seeking help because of long working hours, seasonal pressures and the difficulty of leaving the farm. Many said standard appointment times did not fit around farming life.
- Many people experienced ongoing physical and mental health concerns, including muscle and joint pain, stress, anxiety and sleep problems, but stigma and isolation made it harder to ask for help.
- People wanted healthcare and support brought closer to rural communities, including more flexible appointments, support at livestock markets and better understanding of farming life from healthcare staff.

## What difference did this make?

The experiences shared have helped shape new ways of bringing healthcare closer to the farm and making support easier to access.

GP practices have established rural health teams and regularly attend farming auction marts where they deliver health checks, blood pressure checks, health support & advice.

The Humber & North Yorkshire Cancer Alliance has used our findings to shape new rural health initiatives, including expanding health checks at auction marts and improving cancer awareness through trusted farming organisations.

GP practices have begun to code farmers, farm workers and farming families on their patient records to improve communication and patient monitoring.

# Breaking the taboo around bladder and bowel health

**By listening to people's experiences of continence care, Healthwatch helped shine a light on an issue many people struggle to talk about and encouraged practical improvements focused on dignity and support.**

The work helped give people confidence to speak openly about how continence care affects everyday life, independence and wellbeing.

## What did we do

We listened to people about their experiences of continence care, including accessing products, getting advice and the impact on daily life. We shared people's experiences with NHS organisations and decision makers to help improve understanding of the challenges people face and the need for more joined up, compassionate support.

## Key things we heard:

- Many people felt embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about continence issues, which often delayed them seeking help or support.
- People described difficulties accessing the right products and advice, with some feeling they had little choice or flexibility based on their personal needs.
- Continence problems had a major impact on people's confidence, mental wellbeing and ability to leave the house, with some people feeling isolated or losing dignity.

The feedback showed that continence care is about far more than products or appointments, with many people describing the emotional and social impact on their daily lives.

## What difference did this make?

Following our report, hospitals, GP practices and community continence teams began introducing improvements to continence care. These included earlier continence assessments in hospital, better information and support for people with bladder, bowel and stoma needs, strengthened staff training and more proactive conversations in some GP practices.

By helping people speak openly about their experiences, we helped challenge stigma and encourage more respectful, personalised continence care focused on dignity, confidence and quality of life.

# From “Mum’s the word” to mums are heard

## **Listening to women’s experiences of maternity care helped highlight the importance of feeling listened to, supported and involved in decisions during pregnancy and after birth.**

Women and families shared both positive and difficult experiences of postnatal care, helping build a clearer picture of what matters most during pregnancy, birth and the early weeks of motherhood.

### **What did we do**

Women and families shared their experiences of postnatal care with us, including communication, support, access to appointments and whether they felt involved in decisions about their care. We brought these experiences together and shared them with NHS organisations, North Yorkshire Council and maternity leaders.

### **Key things we heard:**

- Many women said compassionate communication and feeling listened to had a huge impact on their overall experience of care.
- Some people described feeling anxious or uncertain when information was unclear or when they did not feel fully involved in decisions about their care.
- Women valued continuity, reassurance and being able to build trust with healthcare staff throughout pregnancy and after birth.

### **What difference did this make?**

The report helped shape practical improvements to postnatal care across North Yorkshire. These included stronger mental health support through therapeutic listening visits, improved links with specialist perinatal mental health teams, new specialist perinatal mental health midwives in several hospitals and the development of birth reflection services.

Healthcare organisations also strengthened support for recovery after birth, including improved pelvic health care, clearer information and more consistent advice to help women recover with confidence

By sharing women's experiences, we helped ensure postnatal care better reflects what mothers and families told us matters most after birth.

# Hearing from all communities

We're here for all people locally. That's why we've worked hard to hear from communities whose experiences are not always reflected in discussions about health and care.

Everyone should have the opportunity to share their experiences and help shape health and care around what matters to them.

## **This year, we have reached different communities by:**

- We spoke with Afghan women refugees through translated materials and interpreter support to listen to their experiences of NHS services, adult social care, and maternity care. It helped us to better understand the barriers they face when accessing health and care and ensuring their experiences informed our work.
- We continued to hear directly from autistic people through our engagement activities and participation in the North Yorkshire Autism community of interest group, where we worked with commissioners and providers of autism services to ensure people's experiences help to shape local services.
- We listened to carers across the county through dedicated carers' groups, helping decision makers better understand the challenges carers face and the support they need.



# Making adult social care easier to access

## We highlighted barriers to accessing adult social care in North Yorkshire through a mystery shop.

Healthwatch volunteers anonymously tested North Yorkshire Council's adult social care service by contacting it online, by phone and in person. While the overall experience was positive, they found that long phone waits, confusing website information and inconsistent face to face support could make it difficult for people to find the help they needed, particularly during stressful times.



"It wasn't obvious where to start or who to contact. I had to look in several places before I found the right information. If the website had been clearer and it had been easier to speak to someone, it would have saved a lot of time and worry. I'm pleased changes are being made to make it easier for people in the future."

## What difference did this make?

North Yorkshire Council welcomed our findings and has already introduced a range of improvements to make adult social care easier to access.

The council has reviewed and redesigned its adult social care webpages to make information easier to find and navigate, with ongoing user testing helping ensure they remain accessible. Work is also underway on a new telephone system that will reduce waiting times, provide queue updates and introduce a call back option so people no longer have to wait on the line.

Customer service staff are receiving enhanced training from adult social care specialists to improve the support people receive, while all adult social care leaflets have been reviewed, updated and distributed more widely through places such as GP surgeries, pharmacies and foodbanks. Additional training is also helping staff better support people visiting council offices, with private video booths being introduced so people can speak directly with specialist advisers.

These improvements will make it easier for people, carers and families to get clear information, understand their options and access support more quickly when they need it most. Healthwatch will continue working with North Yorkshire Council to monitor progress and make sure people's experiences continue to shape future improvements.

# Making social care work better for ethnic minority communities

## We explored how people from ethnic minority communities experience adult social care.

We spoke to people from a wide range of ethnic minority communities across North Yorkshire to better understand their experiences of adult social care.

People told us about language barriers, difficulties finding information and concerns that care did not always reflect their cultural, religious or personal needs. Some delayed asking for help because they were unsure what support was available or lacked confidence that their needs would be understood.



"Healthwatch's findings have helped us better understand the barriers people face and are shaping how we improve adult social care for diverse communities within our county."

**North Yorkshire Council**

## What difference did this make?

North Yorkshire Council accepted our recommendations and is developing an action plan based on what local people told us. This includes improving communication, providing information in different languages and formats, strengthening the use of interpreting services and making adult social care easier to understand and access.

The council is also reviewing staff training to strengthen understanding of different cultures and communities, improving online information and working more closely with community and faith groups to help people access support earlier. It also recognises the importance of sharing positive experiences of adult social care to help build trust and confidence within communities.

Most importantly, local people's experiences are helping shape future improvements to adult social care across North Yorkshire. Healthwatch will continue working with North Yorkshire Council to monitor progress and make sure people's voices remain at the heart of future improvements.

# Helping people find the right support

Whether you're struggling to access care, need help raising a concern, or are looking for support, we're here to help you find reliable information and understand your options.

**This year over 2,000 people contacted us for information, advice and support. These conversations not only get people the help they need, but they help us understand where and how health and social care could work better.**

**This year, we've helped people by:**

- Providing trusted information about local health and care options.
- Helping people understand their rights and the choices available to them.
- Supporting people to raise concerns and share their experiences.
- Signposting people to NHS, social care and community support.
- Identifying common issues and feeding them back to organisations that can make improvements.



# Helping you get the right support at your GP practice

**Accessing a GP practice should be straightforward. However, local people regularly told us they found it difficult to understand how practices work, book appointments and get the right help.**

People shared concerns about booking appointments, understanding the different healthcare professionals available, knowing their rights as patients and finding clear information about what to do when they needed help. We also heard that unclear communication and confusion about how GP practices operate could make accessing care more stressful than it needed to be.

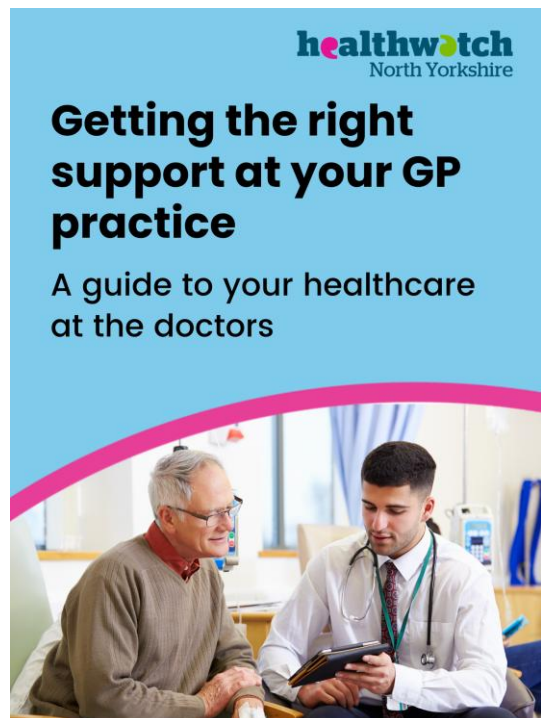
In response to this feedback, we developed a practical guide to using your local GP practice. Produced with support from Healthwatch volunteers, GP practice staff and healthcare professionals, it explains how GP practices work, how to book appointments, when to see different healthcare professionals and where people can go for help or advice.

The guide has helped people better understand how GP practices work and where to go for support, making it easier to access the most appropriate help and reducing unnecessary frustration. It has also helped reduce misunderstandings and encourages people to use the right route for their needs, supporting GP practices that continue to face significant demand.

By turning complex information into clear, practical advice, we have helped people navigate GP practices with greater confidence and access the support they need more quickly.



“I always thought the pharmacy was just somewhere to collect prescriptions. The guides helped me understand how much support is available, from advice on minor illnesses to contraception and repeat prescriptions. It saved me time, helped me get the right advice more quickly and gave me confidence to use my local pharmacy instead of automatically trying to see my GP.”



# Helping people make the most of their local pharmacy

**Local pharmacies play a vital role in helping people stay well, access advice and get treatment quickly. However, many people are unaware of the range of support available from their pharmacy or are unsure how prescriptions, contraception and other pharmacy-based care work.**

To help address this, we worked closely with local pharmacists and Community Pharmacy North Yorkshire, which represents NHS pharmacy contractors across North Yorkshire and York, to develop a series of practical guides covering common pharmacy questions and concerns.

The guides explain topics including repeat prescriptions, prescription charges and exemptions, contraception, Pharmacy First, outpatient pharmacies and the wide range of health advice available from community pharmacies.

By bringing together expert knowledge and local insight, we created clear, reliable information to help people better understand the support available from their local pharmacy.

The guides have helped people understand when a pharmacy may be the most appropriate place to seek help, how to access support more quickly and where to turn when problems arise. This has helped to reduce confusion, saved time and helped people get the advice or treatment they need without an unnecessary appointment elsewhere.

The guides have also helped people understand when a pharmacy may be the best place to seek help, how to access support more quickly and where to turn when problems arise.

By making information clearer and easier to understand, we have helped people make informed decisions about their care and access support with greater confidence.



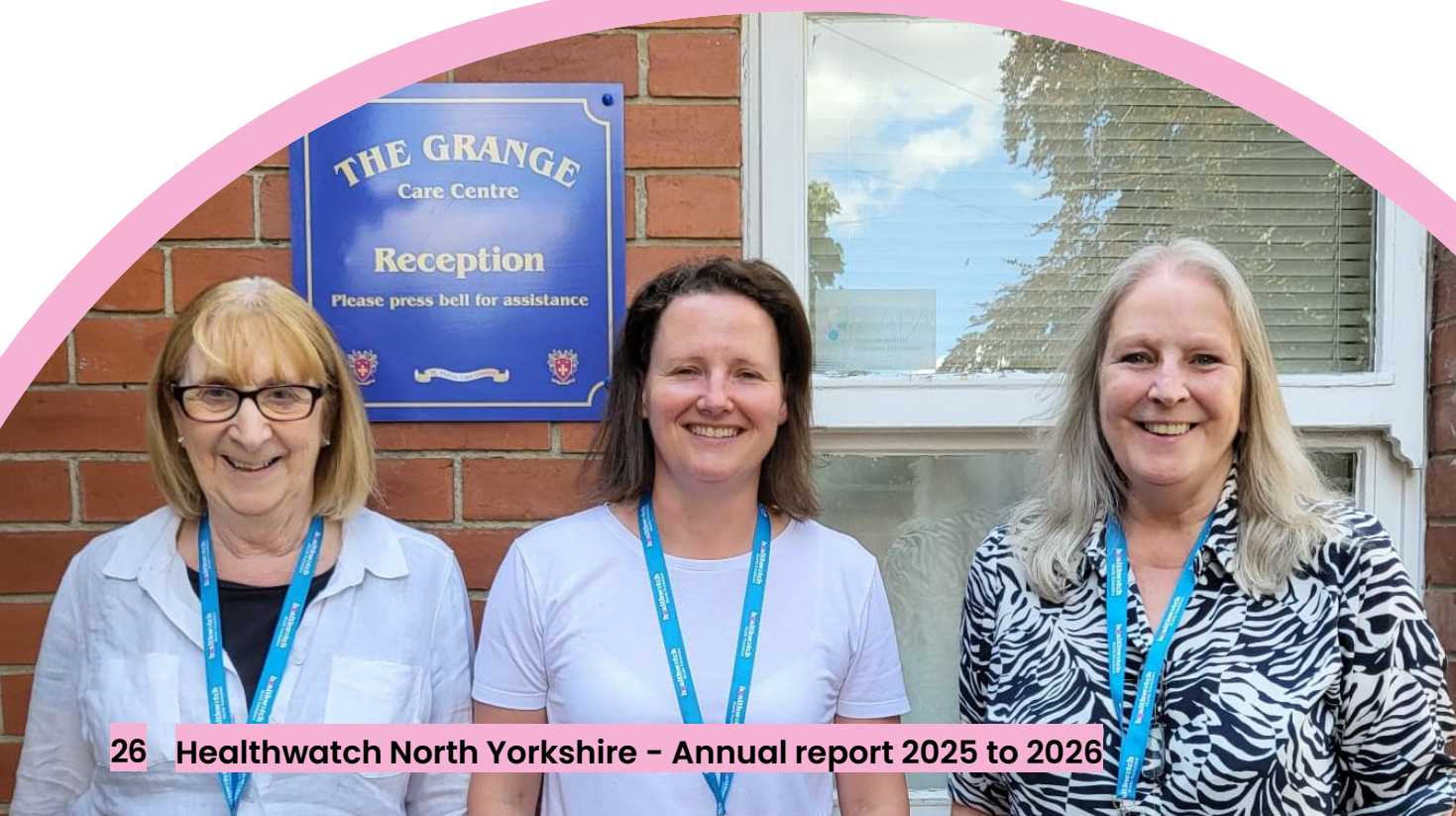
"I wasn't sure how my GP practice worked or who I needed to see. I often assumed I had to book a GP appointment, even when someone else could have helped. The guide explained everything in plain English and made the different roles much clearer. It also showed me how to book appointments, when to use a pharmacy or another healthcare professional, and what my options were. I now feel much more confident about getting the right help at the right time, and it's taken away a lot of the uncertainty I used to have."

# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given up their valuable time to support our work. Thanks to their dedication, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in health and social care

## This year, our volunteers:

- Our volunteers have given 428 hours to support our work this year. Through conversations with local people, care home visits, research projects and community events, they have helped ensure people's experiences influence decisions about health and care across North Yorkshire.
- Gathered people's experiences of health and social care, helping ensure local voices are heard by decision makers.
- Visited care homes, attended community events, reviewed GP practice websites and spoke with local people about what is working well and where improvements are needed.
- Helped improve appointment information, website accessibility, communication and access to care through the feedback they gathered and shared.
- Supported major projects on farming health, patient transport, adult social care, women's health and accessible healthcare, helping local experiences shape future improvements.



# Making sure local voices are heard

**Through conversations in communities, hospitals, libraries and care homes, our volunteers help make sure people's experiences help shape health and social care locally.**



Wendy

Wendy enjoys meeting people across her local community and helping make sure their experiences of care are heard. Volunteering with Healthwatch North Yorkshire has allowed her to continue using skills developed through years working across the public and voluntary sector.

She speaks to people in libraries, community groups and care homes, listening to experiences of health and social care and gathering feedback about what is working well and where improvements are needed.

"The people I meet really appreciate having a friendly face to listen to them," says Wendy. "Gathering this information leads to real action being taken to develop new services."

Sally joined Healthwatch North Yorkshire wanting to use her skills in a meaningful way and help improve care for local people. Through volunteering, she has found purpose, connection and the opportunity to help make sure people's voices are heard.

At community events and listening activities, Sally speaks to people about their experiences of health and social care. The feedback she gathers helps shape reports and highlight issues affecting people across North Yorkshire.

"Sometimes people just need someone to listen properly," says Sally. "It feels good to know that the time I give is helping something important."



Sally

# People are at the focus of what we do

**From listening to people's experiences to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have played a vital role in championing community concerns and improving care across North Yorkshire.**



Sheena

After 40 years working in the NHS, Sheena wanted to keep helping people after retirement. Volunteering with Healthwatch gave her a way to stay connected to healthcare and support local people.

Sheena volunteers at hospitals, libraries and care homes, listening to people's experiences and helping them access trusted advice.

"Volunteering has filled a void left by retirement after 40 years in the NHS," says Sheena. "Representing the people makes it so worthwhile."

"After retiring following a career in healthcare, Lynn wanted a role where she could still contribute without the pressures of full-time work. Volunteering with Healthwatch North Yorkshire gave her the chance to stay connected and continue making a difference locally.

Lynn speaks to people from a wide range of backgrounds, helping ensure experiences of health and social care are heard and understood. The feedback she gathers helps highlight people's needs and shape improvements across North Yorkshire.

"I feel it is important that everyone has a voice," says Lynn. "It is rewarding to feel of value, and I would describe my role as joyous and sobering in equal measures."



Lynn

## Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can volunteer for us.



[HealthwatchNorthYorkshire.co.uk](https://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk)



01423 788 128



[Hello@hwny.co.uk](mailto:Hello@hwny.co.uk)

# Finance

We receive funding from North Yorkshire Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

## Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from North Yorkshire Council	£180,000	Expenditure on pay	£212,177
Additional income	£11,600	Non-pay expenditure	£22,553
		Office and management fee	£17,050
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£191,600</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£251,780</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

- £4,560 from Humber & North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership – Health Equity Fellowship support
- £1,900 from North Yorkshire Council – Conversations with people using Adult Social Care

Our expenditure reflects a planned spend from our reserves, together with restricted expenditure from income brought forward from the previous financial year.

## Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across West Yorkshire receive funding from the local NHS to support working together, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
For continued work to listen to the public's experiences in Craven and ensure the public's voice is heard at meetings with the NHS	£5,000

# Future priorities

The experiences people shared with us this year will continue to shape our work in the year ahead.

## **Next year, we'll continue listening to local people and working with health and care organisations to make sure their experiences lead to real improvements across North Yorkshire.**

We'll build on the progress already made and focus our work where local people tell us change is needed most. By working alongside the NHS, North Yorkshire Council and other organisations, we'll continue turning people's experiences into positive improvements for local communities.

### **Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027 include:**

- **Supporting farmers' mental health** by delivering our 12-month pilot project to raise awareness, reduce stigma and help more people access support. The project is funded by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority.
- **Improving access to healthcare in rural communities** by building on our farming work and continuing to work with those planning and delivering health and social care services.
- **Supporting improvements following our reports** by working with health and care organisations to help implement recommendations from our reasonable adjustments and midlife women's alcohol reports.
- **Improving access to GP services** by listening to people's experiences and working with GP practices to identify practical improvements to communication and access.
- **Improving access to healthcare through better transport** by continuing to raise awareness of the challenges people face travelling to appointments and encouraging action based on our non-emergency patient transport work.

Together with local people, volunteers and our partners, we'll continue listening, influencing and helping shape health and social care so it better meets the needs of communities across North Yorkshire.

# Statutory statements

Healthwatch North Yorkshire, 55 Grove Road, Harrogate, HG1 5EP

**Healthwatch North Yorkshire uses the Healthwatch trademark when undertaking its statutory activities under the licence agreement.**

## How we work

### **Volunteers and local people help shape our work**

Our Board consists of nine volunteer members who provide strategic direction, oversight and scrutiny of our work.

The Board helps ensure our priorities reflect the experiences and concerns of local people, while overseeing governance, finance and organisational performance.

During 2025 to 2026, the Board met five times. They made decisions on matters such as HR and governance policies, finance, and our future work priorities, helping ensure our work continues to reflect the experiences and needs of local people.

## How people share their experiences with us

People can share their experiences with us in many different ways, helping us build a clear picture of what is working well and where improvements are needed.

During 2025/26, people contacted us by phone, email, through our website and social media, and by speaking to us at community groups, events and meetings across North Yorkshire.

We publish our reports and annual report on our website, share them directly with organisations responsible for planning and delivering health and social care, and promote them through community networks, events and meetings so that as many people as possible can access our work.

# Statutory statements

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

A key part of our role is making sure the experiences people share with us influence decisions about health and social care.

We present our findings to NHS organisations, North Yorkshire Council, local care partnerships, hospital trusts, mental health services, scrutiny committees and voluntary and community organisations.

We also contribute to regional NHS groups across Humber and North Yorkshire, including the Experience of Care Forum, the Quality Committee and the York and North Yorkshire Quality Committee. We share evidence with Healthwatch England to help highlight issues affecting people both locally and nationally.

We also publish reports, provider responses and impact updates so local people can see how their experiences have helped bring about change.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch North Yorkshire is represented on the North Yorkshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Ashley Green, Chief Executive Officer.

From 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, Healthwatch representatives also contributed to a range of local and regional partnership boards and committees, including the Humber and North Yorkshire Population Health and Prevention Committee, North Yorkshire Mental Health, Learning Disability and Neurodiversity Partnership Board, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Adults Board, and the Humber and North Yorkshire Partnership Steering and Oversight Board.

By taking part in these meetings, we ensure local people's experiences are considered when decisions are made about health and social care across North Yorkshire.

# Statutory statements

## Enter and View

**Enter and View visits give us the opportunity to hear directly from residents, relatives and staff, celebrate what is working well and identify opportunities to improve people's experiences of care.**

Healthwatch has a legal power to visit health and social care settings to hear directly from people using services, their families and staff. Unlike a Care Quality Commission inspection, our Enter and View visits do not inspect or regulate care.

Instead, we observe day-to-day life, talk to residents, relatives and staff, and look at people's experiences of care. This includes communication, activities, mealtimes, dignity, the environment and how people are supported.

We share our findings with the care homes, celebrating good practice and making recommendations to help improve people's experiences and support continuous improvement.

### **Southlands Care Home, Harrogate**

#### **Why did we visit?**

Southlands was last inspected by the Care Quality Commission in August 2017, when it was rated **Good**. As part of our Enter and View programme, we visited to hear directly from residents, relatives and staff, observe day to day life in the home, and identify both good practice and opportunities for improvement.

#### **What did we find?**

Residents and relatives consistently praised the caring staff, welcoming atmosphere and quality of care. People spoke positively about activities, meals and feeling safe and respected. We also observed warm interactions between staff and residents throughout our visit.

#### **What difference did this make?**

Unlike many Enter and View visits, we made no recommendations for improvement. Our report recognised the high standard of care being delivered and highlighted the dedication of the staff team.

# Statutory statements

## Enter and View

### Hillcrest Care Home, Catterick Garrison

#### Why did we visit?

Hillcrest was last inspected by the Care Quality Commission in February 2022 and had **not yet received a rating**. We carried out an Enter and View visit to understand residents' experiences and identify opportunities to further improve the service.

#### What did we find?

Residents spoke warmly about the kindness and dedication of staff. We also identified opportunities to improve signage, odour management, mealtime support and flooring safety.

#### What difference did this make?

The home introduced an action plan that included clearer signage, improved cleaning routines, enhanced mealtime support and work to reduce potential trip hazards, helping create a safer and more welcoming environment for residents and visitors.

### Leeming Bar Grange Care Home, Northallerton

#### Why did we visit?

Leeming Bar Grange was last inspected by the Care Quality Commission in February 2021, when it was rated **Good**. We visited to hear directly from residents, relatives and staff and identify both strengths and opportunities to further enhance people's experiences.

#### What did we find?

Residents and families praised the caring staff, welcoming atmosphere, activities and leadership. We also identified opportunities to strengthen staffing and activity provision for people living with dementia.

#### What difference did this make?

The home increased staffing in the Memory Lane community and expanded activity opportunities, helping ensure more residents, including those who preferred spending time in their own rooms, could take part in meaningful activities.

# Statutory statements

## Enter and View

### The Millings Care Home, Bedale

#### Why did we visit?

The Millings was last inspected by the Care Quality Commission in February 2021, when it was rated **Outstanding**. We carried out an Enter and View visit to understand residents' experiences and identify opportunities to build on the home's already high standards of care.

#### What did we find?

Residents, relatives and staff described a caring home where people felt safe, respected and treated with dignity. We also identified opportunities to improve visitor access, signage, communication and support for outings.

#### What difference did this make?

The home introduced an action plan that included reviewing visitor access arrangements, improving signage, strengthening visitor communication, maintaining transport for resident outings and providing additional support for staff during organisational change.

### Ashfield Court Care Home, Harrogate

#### Why did we visit?

Ashfield Court was last inspected by the Care Quality Commission in February 2021, when it was rated **Good**. We visited to hear directly from residents, relatives and staff and identify opportunities to further improve people's experiences.

#### What did we find?

Residents, relatives and staff shared largely positive experiences of care. We also highlighted practical improvements around signage, visitor information and seating for visitors in residents' rooms.

#### What difference did this make?

The home agreed an action plan that included improving fire evacuation information, introducing clearer signage, developing better visitor information and reviewing seating arrangements to improve comfort and accessibility for visitors.

# Statutory statements

## Reports published between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026

Report name	Link to report/impact
Accessing adult social care: ethnic minority communities	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-03-27/accessing-adult-social-care-ethnic-minority-communities">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-03-27/accessing-adult-social-care-ethnic-minority-communities</a>
Getting to healthcare: what people told us about patient transport	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-05/getting-healthcare-what-people-told-us-about-patient-transport">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-05/getting-healthcare-what-people-told-us-about-patient-transport</a>
What Healthwatch heard about health and care	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-04/what-healthwatch-heard-about-health-and-care">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-04/what-healthwatch-heard-about-health-and-care</a>
A closer look at life at Ashfield Court Care Home in Harrogate	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-04/closer-look-life-ashfield-court-care-home-harrogate">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2026-02-04/closer-look-life-ashfield-court-care-home-harrogate</a>
"Well, well, well" - What matters to your health and wellbeing?	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-12-08/well-well-well-what-matters-your-health-and-wellbeing">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-12-08/well-well-well-what-matters-your-health-and-wellbeing</a>
Behind the doors: What life is like at the Millings Care Home	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-11-26/behind-doors-what-life-millings-care-home">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-11-26/behind-doors-what-life-millings-care-home</a>
What Healthwatch heard about healthcare	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-10-30/what-healthwatch-heard-about-healthcare">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-10-30/what-healthwatch-heard-about-healthcare</a>
Listening, learning and improving care at Leeming Bar Grange Care Home	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-26/listening-learning-and-improving-care-leeming-bar-grange-care-home">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-26/listening-learning-and-improving-care-leeming-bar-grange-care-home</a>
What we heard about health and social care	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-21/what-we-heard-about-health-and-social-care">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-21/what-we-heard-about-health-and-social-care</a>
What's awareness of cancer like across North Yorkshire?	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-20/whats-awareness-cancer-across-north-yorkshire">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-08-20/whats-awareness-cancer-across-north-yorkshire</a>
Listening and learning at Hillcrest Care Home, Catterick Garrison	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-07-11/listening-and-learning-hillcrest-care-home-catterick-garrison">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-07-11/listening-and-learning-hillcrest-care-home-catterick-garrison</a>

# Statutory statements

## Reports published between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026


Report name	Link to report/impact
What we heard about your health and social care	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-05-01/what-we-heard-about-your-health-and-social-care">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-05-01/what-we-heard-about-your-health-and-social-care</a>
Ploughing through barriers in farming and healthcare	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-04-23/ploughing-through-barriers-farming-and-healthcare">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-04-23/ploughing-through-barriers-farming-and-healthcare</a>
Life inside Southlands Care Home, Harrogate	<a href="http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-04-02/life-inside-southlands-care-home-harrogate">www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk/report/2025-04-02/life-inside-southlands-care-home-harrogate</a>

# healthwatch

North Yorkshire

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