

Case Study

Mental health: Jane's Story

November 2025



MENTAL
HEALTH
SERVICES

Case study: Mental Health Jane's story

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, in collaboration with Starfish Health & Wellbeing, is highlighting the case of a young adult who struggled to access mental health support.

This case study reflects the joint efforts of both organisations to identify service improvements and support real change in mental health provision across Stockton-on-Tees.

The case was initially raised by Starfish, and through their trusted relationships with individuals in some of the most deprived communities, they were able to bring this issue to light.

This collaboration demonstrates the importance of community-rooted organisations in addressing health inequalities and ensuring that the voices of those most affected are heard and acted upon. The case was formally raised with the local mental health service, and the service response is documented below.

This case study highlights the experience of a young adult in Stockton-on-Tees who faced significant delays accessing mental health support, and the advocacy efforts to drive service improvements.

Jane's Experience

**This case study is anonymous, and the name of the young adult has been changed to protect confidentiality.*

Jane, a 19-year-old with a history of trauma, severe depression, and anxiety, sought help from Impact on Teesside (IoT). Despite being placed on a waiting list, she waited nearly two years without receiving talking therapy. She was unaware that her file had been closed due to a missed message, and struggled to access support due to poor communication and technical barriers.

Advocacy by Peter Mayes

Peter Mayes, Operations Manager at Starfish Health & Wellbeing, raised a formal complaint on Jane's behalf. He encountered repeated issues with IoT's phone system, lack of follow-up, and unclear discharge procedures. His persistence led to Jane being re-engaged with the service and eventually allocated to a senior CBT therapist.

Meeting for Service Improvements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Manager Natasha Douglas and Peter Mayes met with Laura Timms, Clinical Lead - IoT Alliance Psychological Services Ltd to explore opportunities for service improvement.

The meeting identified several key areas for development:

- Improved communication and discharge protocols.
- Review and upgrade of voicemail and phone systems.
- Development of an user-friendly trauma toolkit (pending funding).
- Enhanced training for professionals.
- Clearer referral routes and realistic wait time communication.

Findings from Complaint Response

- IoT acknowledged procedural errors and poor communication.
- Voicemail messages and phone system are being reviewed.
- Discharge procedures have been updated to ensure multiple contact attempts.
- Jane began CBT treatment in early March 2025.
- Workflow processes have been revised to prevent recurrence.

Recommendations for Service Improvement

This case highlights the need for service-wide improvements in mental health service delivery. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees recommend the following actions:

- Professional Communication and Referral Responsibilities: To ensure individuals receive timely and appropriate mental health support, it is essential that professionals making referrals have a clear understanding of the services available—including what they offer, their limitations, and expected wait times.

Communication between professionals is of paramount importance. Referrers must understand the constraints of different services and work collaboratively to ensure people are referred appropriately. This helps manage expectations and prevents individuals from feeling let down or lost in the system. Better co-ordination and shared understanding across organisations will lead to improved experiences and outcomes for those seeking support.

- Ensure multiple, accessible contact methods are used before discharging clients, including follow-up by phone, email, and post.
- Improve phone system reliability and ensure voicemail messages reflect actual operating hours.
- Provide clear, realistic information about waiting times and treatment pathways at the point of referral.
- Invest in community-rooted organisations like Starfish, who have trusted relationships with those most affected by health inequalities, to support outreach and engagement.
- Develop user-friendly toolkits and trauma-informed resources to support clients with complex needs.
- Strengthen complaint handling processes to ensure timely responses and learning from feedback.

“They don't have the energy to complain as they have no fight left anymore.”



Peter Mayes, Starfish Health & Wellbeing

Impact and Partnership: Strengthening Mental Health Access Through Collaborative Action

Following Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees' intervention in a complex case involving a young adult struggling to access mental health support, a series of service improvements have been introduced by the local NHS Talking Therapies provider, Impact on Teesside.

Under the clinical leadership of Laura Timms, the service has responded constructively to concerns raised, implementing changes that aim to improve access, communication, and personalised care. These include:

- Structured contact at key intervals (1, 6, and 9 months) for clients on waiting lists, with clear information about available support such as group therapy, employment advice, and the Wysa mental health self-help app.
- A review of post-discharge processes and personalised 'waiting well' recommendations for those awaiting one-to-one therapy.
- Updated telephony systems and admin capacity to improve call handling and responsiveness, alongside reflective practice support for staff in emotionally administrative demanding roles.
- Development of service scope documents to support professional referrals and ensure accurate understanding of the service remit.

Healthwatch will continue to follow up on this work to understand whether these changes are making a difference to those accessing support. This case highlights the importance of professionals having a clear understanding of service offers to support clients effectively and manage expectations.

As neighbourhood health continues to evolve, there is a valuable opportunity to work collaboratively across the area to ensure mental health services are responsive, equitable, and rooted in community needs.



What is NHS Talking Therapies?

NHS Talking Therapies and Alliance Psychological Impact Service

NHS Talking Therapies is a free NHS service that offers proven treatments for people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties, such as anxiety or depression. These therapies are based on national guidelines and usually involve regular sessions by phone, online, or face-to-face.

The service works best for people who:

- Feel ready to take part in therapy.
- Can attend regular appointments.
- Do not need extra help to start or keep going.

Locally, the Alliance Psychological Impact Service is part of NHS Talking Therapies. It supports people who have experienced emotional or psychological challenges, helping them manage symptoms and improve wellbeing.

What this means for you

- You can refer yourself or ask your GP to refer you.
- Sessions are free and confidential.
- Some support is offered through group sessions online, which can help you learn practical tools to manage anxiety or depression. These groups are designed to give coping strategies and build confidence.

Other Support – Social Prescribing

Because NHS Talking Therapies is very popular, waiting times can be long. If your symptoms are mild or you need help with things like stress, loneliness, or practical challenges, social prescribing might be a good option. Social prescribing link workers are based in GP practices across Stockton-on-Tees.

They:

- Take time to understand what matters to you.
- Connect you with local activities, community groups, and practical support.
- Can help with issues like isolation, money worries, or lifestyle changes.

You can ask your GP practice to refer you, or call Teesside Mind Social Prescribing on 01642 257020 for help.

This case study provides a very powerful example of the role of advocacy organisations in supporting people to access services that can provide life-changing help for them. As an NHS Talking Therapies service, we work actively with many different partners across Tees to try to ensure that our service is accessible to those who need and can benefit from it. Advocacy and community support organisations play an essential role in helping people access treatment through NHS Talking Therapies, where clients might otherwise struggle in some cases to manage the process of planning and organising appointments, especially where they have unfortunately faced a long wait for treatment.

I am very grateful to Starfish and Healthwatch for advocating for this client and am pleased we were able to act to address not just the inappropriate discharge by offering the next available therapy appointment, but to review our communication for clients on waiting lists and our discharge procedures. I am sorry that this inappropriate discharge happened and delighted that, as a result of Starfish's advocacy, the client was able to enter treatment.

Effective partnership working is essential to serving the public and it was great to meet Natasha and Peter to discuss the challenges we face with busy phonelines and ensuring the service has sufficient specialist clinical staff that can meet our local need, and to discuss some of the challenges in the wider mental health system locally and nationally. We are at the point of welcoming this year's round of clinical trainees for the service as a result of England-wide NHS investment in psychological therapies and delighted to be playing our part in growing the NHS Talking Therapies workforce locally.

Laura Timms, Clinical Lead
Impact on Teesside

"We are grateful to have received the Healthwatch report and look forward to working together as a whole system to better understand how to support people. The development of Neighbourhood Health in Stockton gives us a real opportunity to work differently. While change is never easy, we remain committed to doing the best we can for the communities we serve."

Karen Hawkins, Director of Delivery (Tees Valley)
North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Board



Acknowledgements & Looking Ahead

We would like to thank Jane for bravely sharing her story, Peter Mayes from Starfish Health & Wellbeing for his dedicated advocacy, and Laura Timms, Clinical Lead at Impact on Teesside, for her openness and commitment to service improvement.

This case study not only highlights the challenges individuals face when accessing mental health support, but also the power of working together to drive meaningful change.

As Neighbourhood Health continues to develop across Stockton-on-Tees, it is vital that professionals are equipped with clear referral pathways, realistic knowledge of waiting times, and an understanding of the added value community organisations can bring.

By strengthening collaboration, improving communication, and investing in shared learning, we can build a more responsive and equitable system, one that improves health outcomes and reduces inequalities for all.



Broader Context

Jane's case is one of many similar experiences reported across Stockton-on-Tees and the wider region. Healthwatch continues to hear from individuals facing long waits, poor communication, and lack of follow-up when seeking mental health support. These systemic issues highlight the urgent need for change.

Digital Support Transition: Kooth service ending in Tees Valley

As part of our commitment to improving mental health access for young adults, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees has been exploring the role of digital platforms like Kooth in supporting emotional wellbeing.

However, following recent communication from the NENC ICB, we have been informed that Kooth will no longer be available to children and young adults across Tees Valley after 31 December 2025. New registrations closed on 5 November, and existing users will be supported with exit plans and signposting to alternative services.

This change is part of a wider transformation, with a new Tees Valley-wide 'Getting Advice & Getting Help' Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing Service due to launch on 1 January 2026, which will include a refreshed digital offer. Kooth will remain available in other parts of the North East, including Durham.

Have you struggled to get mental health support or felt let down by the system? We want to hear from you.

As services change across Tees Valley, including the end of Kooth and the launch of a new digital offer, your voice can help shape what comes next.

- 👤 Share your experience.
- 💬 Help us understand what works and what doesn't.
- 👀 Keep an eye on our social media and website for ways to get involved.

If you would like to share your experience, please contact us on:

Telephone: 0300 180 0660

Email: info@healthwatchstocktontees.co.uk

Next Steps: Healthwatch's role across Stockton-on-Tees, Tees Valley & the wider NENC Network

Healthwatch throughout the region is well-placed to support this transition by:

- Raising awareness of the upcoming changes and ensuring young adults are informed.
- Testing the new digital offer once launched, gathering feedback from users to assess accessibility, effectiveness, and emotional safety.
- Amplifying voices of young adults affected by the closure of Kooth, ensuring their experiences inform future service design.
- Requesting a formal response from the ICB on how the new service will address gaps previously filled by Kooth, particularly around anonymity, immediacy, and peer support.
- Sharing learning across the wider NENC Healthwatch network, supporting a joined-up approach to digital mental health provision and youth engagement.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with partners to ensure digital mental health support is responsive, inclusive, and meets the evolving needs of young adults across Stockton-on-Tees, Tees Valley, and the wider North East North Cumbria region.

This report has been reviewed by Stockton Local Authority and Public Health teams ahead of publication. It will now be shared across local, regional, and national networks to amplify the voices of people who rely on these services.

At a time of significant transformation, listening to lived experience is critical. By committing to collaboration and shared accountability, we can turn challenges into opportunities, building a health and care system that is fairer, more responsive, and focused on improving outcomes for every community.



This case study is based on lived experience shared with Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees. Its purpose is to highlight challenges and inform service improvement, not to assign blame to any individual or organisation.

All feedback was shared with the relevant service for response before publication, and any changes noted reflect collaborative efforts to improve outcomes.



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Stockton-on-Tees

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