



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Somerset

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

Healthwatch Somerset has had another busy year with a myriad of issues being shared with us. The main concern has been around the lack of NHS dental services in Somerset. One of our Board members represents the South West Healthwatch on a regional dental board.

Board Members, all volunteers, continue to play an important role representing Healthwatch Somerset at strategic meetings and giving the general public's views, thus ensuring they are taken into account when decisions are being made. We are increasingly asked to represent Healthwatch on various committees, and our role as an independent advocate is valued.

One of the advantages Somerset has is that the acute hospital trust, mental health, community services and hospitals, and Somerset Council are all represented on the one Integrated Care Board (ICB). This gives Healthwatch a unique understanding of the health and social care issues facing Somerset and the steps being taken to address these.

We are very fortunate that even though staff numbers are small we have a dedicated team, enabling us to produce the impressive volume of work in 2024/2025.



"I would like to thank everyone who has shared their experiences and feedback with us to help improve Somerset's health and social care services; you really have made a positive difference."

Judith Goodchild, Chair, Healthwatch Somerset

About us

Healthwatch Somerset 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.

To stay informed about our latest projects, community feedback, and developments in local health and social care, subscribe to our free newsletter:

<https://healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/#subscribe>



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:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We've supported more than 6450 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 5 staff and, our work is supported by 34 volunteers.

Reaching out:



5094 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1364 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as how they can find an NHS dentist and how they can make a complaint about their GP surgery.

Championing your voice:



We published 5 reports in 24/25.

Our most popular report was 'The Doctor will see you now', highlighting people's struggles in booking appointments with their GP's in Somerset.

Our key impacts:



We have represented your voice in dentistry, in meetings both locally and regionally, explaining how the lack of NHS dentists affects the people in Somerset.

We have listened to the experiences of residents in Somerset who tried to book an appointment to see their GP.

We have championed the importance of using different engagement formats when seeking public feedback.

Statutory funding:



We're nationally funded through Somerset Council and NHS Somerset ICB. In 2024/25 we received £212,012.00.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Somerset. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We created a People's Vote to help shape our workplan for the year. People from across the county shared their opinions.



In Carers week we supported events for unpaid carers throughout the county. We chair the Carers Strategic Partnership Board which is responsible for the Commitment to Carers.



Summer

We supported NHS Somerset ICB and Somerset Public Health with their campaign dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of regular blood pressure monitoring.



We published our report 'The doctor will see you now' which looked at booking an appointment with your GP in Somerset.



Autumn

We listened to people's experiences from different communities. Including the armed forces, young carers, and adults and children with special educational needs.



Our Enter and View report on the Diagnostic Centre in Taunton confirmed that people's experiences were positive, but travel can be challenging.



Winter

We promoted Somerset Council's Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, looking at pharmacy provision across Somerset. We created paper copies of the survey to ensure it was more accessible.



We continue to share the feedback that we are hearing around the lack of NHS dentists. This has helped to evidence the work being undertaken around urgent dental care.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in the South West region are heard by NHS Clinical Senate.

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Healthwatch make an invaluable contribution to the South West Citizens' Assembly (SWCA) and the work of the South West Clinical Senate (SWCS). The SWCS plays a crucial role collaborating with commissioners to define the best possible service structure that ensures high quality, long-lasting healthcare services. The SWCA is chaired by a member of the Healthwatch Somerset Board. The SWCS's purpose is to work in partnership with commissioners to establish the best possible delivery of services, to provide excellent continuing healthcare. To accomplish this, the SWCS creates inquiries related to specific service areas, and these questions are deliberated upon during SWCS Council meetings. Through this process, the SWCS aspires to become a valuable ally, offering essential insights and guidance to the entire healthcare system.

Our role is to bring together representatives with lived experience from Somerset to monitor and improve services across the South West and to identify opportunities for change at the highest level. As Chairs of the SWCS and the SWCA we appreciate the involvement of our Healthwatch colleagues in this mission.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



The members of the Citizens' Assembly reported challenges with accessing Patient Participation Groups (PPG's) and understanding how learning is shared. We invited the Chair of the Somerset PPG network, who is also the Vice Chair of Healthwatch Somerset, to explain the contractual requirement for GP surgeries to have a PPG, and to discuss how an increasing number of practices are merging and establishing joint PPGs. We recognise that not all practices have active PPGs, therefore we have asked the Clinical Senate to support and encourage active participation and shared learning among local practices.

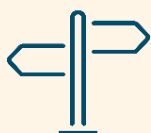
We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Sharing and learning from colleagues

The Advocacy People hold the service contracts for 7 Healthwatch; Hampshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Somerset, Southend, West Berkshire, and Wokingham Borough.



Making services better together:



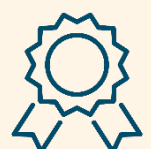
Healthwatch Somerset listens to what people think about local health and care services, like doctors and hospitals. We work with 6 other local Healthwatch teams, and we all get help from an organisation called The Advocacy People. They help us with things like staff training, HR, and paperwork, so we can spend more time talking to people in Somerset and helping to make services better. Our work and decisions are not influenced by the help we receive from the Advocacy People. We remain your independent local health and care champion.

Learning and working as a team:



We work closely with other Healthwatch teams to share ideas and learn from each other. This helps everyone improve their engagement in the community, doing research, and checking how well services are working. By working as a team, we can make sure people's voices are heard and help make real changes in health and care services.

Speaking up for the community:



One of our most important jobs is to listen to what local people are saying and share those ideas with the people in charge. We work with Healthwatch England and other local groups to make sure everyone's voice matters. Together, we speak up for people to help improve services now and in the future. We're proud to keep working for better care for everyone in Somerset.

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.

Here are some examples of our work in Somerset this year:

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



We joined a team of different organisations, that help children and young people, to create a report after a mental health advice service was closed. The goal was to find out how young people are now getting support for mental health issues. The results confirm what young people, parents, and professionals have said before: that it's still difficult to find clear and easy-to-understand information about available mental health support.

Getting services to involve the public



By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

We worked with Wellington Town Council to seek their opinion on a proposed new pharmacy service in their area. We were able to share their feedback with the NHS Commissioners. We also worked closely with the Patient Participation Group from Wincanton Health Centre to enable them to share their views on the proposed new pharmacy in their town.

Improving care over time



Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

In 2024, we ran a joint training session with the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust. This was a two-way training session to learn more about how the improved PALS service now works, which will help improve our signposting. At the same time, the PALS team learnt more about us, which will enable them to use our feedback more effectively to improve their services.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care tell us what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback to services and help them improve.



"The feedback local Healthwatch hear in their communities and share with us at Healthwatch England is invaluable, building a picture of what it's like to use health and care services nationwide. Local people's experiences help us understand where we – and decision makers – must focus and highlight issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. We can then make recommendations that will change care for the better, both locally and across the nation." **Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England**



Listening to your experiences

Making it easier to book an appointment with your doctor

Last year, we explored the ongoing problems people had when trying to get help from their family doctor.

Many people told us that booking a doctor's appointment was a big issue, making up almost half of our feedback about GP services. This raised worries about the effect on people's health and the wider health and care services.

What did we do?

We created a survey for the public to learn about how people book appointments at GP clinics in Somerset. To make sure many different people could take part, we offered the survey online, on paper, and by phone. We also promoted it in various ways, including through three local radio stations.

Key things we heard:



65%

of people contacted their GP surgery by telephone to access support.

60%

stated they were comfortable being triaged by a receptionist or administrator.

23%

were unable to make an urgent appointment with a GP on the first day they called the surgery.

Our work showed that better access to quick and regular doctor visits in Somerset requires more resources. We also found that using the phone is an important way to arrange appointments.

What difference did this make?

The Associate Director of Primary Care at Somerset Integrated Care Board has committed to developing an action plan on GP access in response to our report. This will include trialling a new phone system to increase access. We will be monitoring this progress over the year 2025.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Somerset. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Actively seeking out opportunities to speak to diverse communities by joining local events such as the 'Together' events. These are multicultural events which are held across Somerset.
- Employing BSL interpreters to support us at our annual report launch events.
- Chairing a group to ensure that the voices from your local community have been heard by local NHS leaders and Integrated Care Systems.



Hearing from all communities

Barriers to access: Veterans speak out

We heard from veterans at a local breakfast club about the challenges they faced in accessing GP appointments at a local surgery.

Many of the veterans expressed frustration with long wait times for a GP appointment. A concern was the difficulty of booking appointments via the NHS App, particularly for those who do not have access to a digital device. Several group members told us they preferred to visit the GP practice in person or call but reported long phone queues.

What difference did this make?

We shared the experiences of the group with local commissioners. We were pleased to hear that the surgery had invested in a new phone system which was implemented shortly after our visit to the group. The new telephony system will make it easier for patients to contact the surgery for an appointment and includes a call back feature for when telephone lines are busy

Listening to families: SEND group shares concerns

We worked with the Somerset Parent Carer Forum

We visited a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support group to understand their experiences of accessing health and social care. We heard about the challenges they experienced in getting prescriptions.

Families, especially those where both parents work full time, find prescription phoneline times inaccessible which makes managing repeat prescriptions stressful.

What difference did this make?

We promoted the use of the NHS App to the group to help them order repeat prescriptions. We shared the feedback that we heard in a report and at a strategic level. We also took the feedback to a meeting with the Community Pharmacy Association, and it has helped to inform a piece of work that Healthwatch Somerset will be undertaking in 25/26.

Information and signposting

Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us. This year 1364 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Befriending is a two-way relationship

Thanks to us, Mary had someone to talk to each week

Mary is a 92-year-old widow who lives alone. We were matched with this lovely lady for befriending, through the charity Somerset Sight and have been telephone friends with her for five years. We've phoned Mary every week, and talked about all sorts of things, including her journey with breast cancer, and how being visually-impaired affects her everyday life. We've helped Mary get her blue badge, visual impairment card, and encouraged her to employ a cleaner.



Mary said, "I am so grateful for the friendship and support I've been given over the years."

Challenges and experiences of an unpaid carer

Navigating healthcare and mobility challenges as an unpaid carer is a daily challenge.

Caring for a loved one with arthritis is a full-time commitment, a reality faced by Mr Smith, a 77-year-old carer for his wife. His days are filled with healthcare appointments, coordinating home visits, and managing the complexities of medical equipment. We were able to offer support by listening to his story and signposting him to the local carers group where he could meet other people in a similar situation.



"Healthwatch Somerset took the time to listen to what its like for me."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 595 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited local communities to promote our work.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views, enabling decision makers to hear local feedback.
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve by sharing recommendations such as the use of staff photo boards.



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

Our volunteer Jill can regularly be found at our public drop-in, her yoga group, or women's conversation class for non-English speakers.

"I believe you have to get out and listen to people to really understand what issues they might be facing"

After a career in the NHS as a nurse and Health Visitor Jill is passionate about local people having a voice and equity to access services.

"I told Healthwatch about the issues caused by the closure of pharmacies in my town. I feel I'm helping my local community"



"I have been volunteering with Healthwatch Somerset since 2017. I enjoy the challenge of hearing what the issues are and then working out how we can help to resolve them. Also supporting people by signposting them. As a volunteer I can make sure that our communities have a voice. A key issue in the County is around a proposed change of service relating to stroke services and I sit on the co-ordinating group to represent Healthwatch."

Judith



Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk



0800 999 1286



info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding through Somerset Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£212,012	Expenditure on pay	£128,047
Additional income	£1350	Non-pay expenditure	£26,159
		Office and management fee	£38,231
		Reserves	£22,410
Total income	£213,362	Total Expenditure	£213,362

Additional income is broken down into:

- £1,350 received from a local charity for joint work on two projects.

Future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will work together with partners and our Integrated Care System to help develop a culture where staff strive to listen and learn to make care better.

Our priorities for the next year :

- Investigating waiting lists for procedures, including the timing and method of patient contact during waiting periods for medical treatments.
- Holding an event in October 2025 focusing on accessible Information in Somerset health and care.
- Following up on the Healthwatch England pharmacy survey by looking at the pharmacy provision in Somerset.
- Working with Somerset Council to listen to people's experiences of working with micro-providers.
- Supporting our communities to understand the future NHS 10-year plan and it's recommendations. These include moving from hospital to the community, embracing digital transformation, and shifting from treatment to prevention.
- Following up on the recommendations that have been made in our work in 24/25.



Staff from Healthwatch Somerset and Judith, our Board Chair.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Somerset, Suite 12, Wellworthys Business Centre, Parrett Way, Bridgwater, TA6 5LB is hosted by The Advocacy People, an independent charity no 1080679 and registered company no 3963421. The registered office is Rock House, 49–51 Cambridge Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1DT.

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

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of seven members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our work plan priorities and the quality assurance framework. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, share with our stakeholders, introduce the report in two public meetings, one online and the other face to face and will produce printed copies that we will take out on our future engagement.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to NHS Somerset ICB, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, Somerset Council, Healthwatch England, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, NHS 111, Symphony Healthcare Services, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in NHS Somerset ICB. For example, we sit on the ICB Board, we chair the Citizens' Hub, and we are members of the Engagement Leads network and the Our Somerset communications group.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Somerset is represented on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board, known as the Somerset Board, by Judith Goodchild, Chair of Healthwatch Somerset.

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing feedback that we have received and representing our local communities as an independent voice.

Healthwatch Somerset is also represented on NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board by Judith Goodchild, Chair of Healthwatch Somerset.

Other activity

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Oakhill Surgery Radstock	To observe good practice in a rural surgery.	We wrote a report with recommendations – shared with the ICB.
Highfield House Residential Care Home	They asked us to visit as they had not had a CQC inspection recently.	We made a minor recommendation and asked if we could share some of the good practice we encountered.
Taunton Diagnostic Centre	This visit was part of a national piece of work on diagnostic centres run by Healthwatch England.	We shared our report with the local Trust and with Healthwatch England. This contributed to the following report; <u>A local diagnosis: Learning the lessons of Community Diagnostic Centres</u>

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
NHS Somerset ICB Citizens' Hub (We chair this meeting).	Able to influence the Public Health Stop Smoking Campaign.
VCSFE leaders group (We are a member).	Able to make connections between different VCSFE groups and the Foundation Trust enabling them to work together on a new project.
Working with Somerset Council and NHS Somerset ICB to support armed forces veterans in the County.	Contributing to the Armed Forces newsletter and promoting the Veteran accreditation scheme.
Member of the Personalised Care Board with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust.	Able to champion our local communities and promote the importance of communication.
Member of Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board.	Able to share public feedback.

Other activity

	Outcomes achieved
Working with the ICB and the Foundation Trust to support their stroke re-configuration work.	Healthwatch Somerset chairs the stakeholder reference group and is championing the concerns of the local community.
NHS Patient Safety.	We have been supporting Somerset's work on Patient Safety by managing and working with two NHS Patient Safety Partners, sharing anonymised public feedback with them to ensure that the patient voice is represented at quality meetings.
Working on a project around Acquired Brain Injury.	Presented findings at Headway Conference in Somerset and a conference on 'The Societal and Economic Impact of Acquired Brain Injury' in Exeter. This report will be published in 25/26.
Working on a project around information for unpaid carers.	Presented the work at a conference run by The Community Council for Somerset (CCS), who hold the contract in Somerset for unpaid carer support. This report will be published in 25/26.
Working on access to GP appointments in an area of Somerset.	Our work has been shared with the ICB. The report will be published in 25/26.
Working with Wivey Cares to evidence their effectiveness.	Wivey Cares is a local organisation that supports micro-providers in their rural community. We have been able to facilitate introductions to the University of Bristol, and they have submitted a research proposal.

Thank you

We want to thank everyone who has shared stories and feedback with us. Health and social care services need to know about your experience to understand what works well and what doesn't and to see how things could be done differently. Your feedback really does make a difference to services in Somerset and nationally so please continue to work with us to make health and social care better.

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