



The people's voice

What matters most to you in Somerset health and care services 2026/27

April 2026

healthwatch
Somerset

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At a glance

This report shares what people in Somerset told us matters most about health and care services in 2026–27.

- 161 people voted
- People chose their **top 2 priorities**
- The results help decide what we will focus on this year

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to: info@healthwatchesomerset.co.uk

You can download this publication from our website: healthwatchesomerset.co.uk

About us

Healthwatch Somerset is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve health and social care.

We're completely independent and impartial and anything you say is confidential. We also offer information and advice to help you to get the support you need. Our service is free, simple to use, and can make a real difference to people in Somerset.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Somerset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the unitary local authority area of Somerset Council.



Important information about the future of local Healthwatch

In June 2025 the government announced plans to end local Healthwatch services and bring them under control of the Local Authority and the Integrated Care Board.

However, this change is **not yet law** and until any legislation is passed, **we remain fully active and independent.**

We will continue to listen to your experiences, use your anonymous feedback to influence change, and help you find and use health and care services.

Independent organisations that speak up for the public about health and care services have had support from Parliament since 1974.

Any changes to Healthwatch will need Parliament's approval and new laws to be passed. At the moment, these changes are not expected to happen before Spring 2027.



Any future model must enhance – not weaken – the system’s capacity to hear, understand and respond to people’s experiences. It needs to maintain a level of independence from the health and care system to ensure that whatever is put in place can speak truth to power and raise difficult messages where necessary.

Key point from *The King’s Fund* report – [*The future of patient voice: learning from the Healthwatch model*](#)

Background

How we hear about local health and care services

Each year, we find out how local health and social care services are working by listening to people across Somerset. We do this in different ways, including:

- Collecting feedback from people through our online and freepost forms
- Carrying out focused research and Enter and View visits as part of our annual work plan
- Talking to people at public events and visiting community groups to talk about our work and hear people’s views
- Working with organisations who encourage their service users to share feedback with us
- Attending meetings and events held by local organisations
- Taking part in governance boards and meetings



How our key projects are decided

We use the feedback we gather over the year, along with national priorities, to help decide what our key projects should be.

Our [Advisory Board](#) discusses possible topics and looks at local plans and strategies, including the [Somerset Integrated Care System \(ICS\) Health and Care Strategy](#). From this, they agree a shortlist of projects.



We exist to represent the voice of the people. To make sure our work reflects what matters most, we share the shortlist publicly each year. People are then invited to vote for their two preferred topics.

This short report explains what we did and what people told us.

What we did

We created a public survey which included information about the vote and our work.

We also created a poster with a QR code and images for social media to help promote the survey. (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the paper survey.)

The survey explained the **four shortlisted projects** and asked people to choose their two preferred topics. People did not need to rank their choices.

The four topics were:

- A. Community health and wellbeing support
- B. Has the NHS referral process improved?
- C. Men's health and wellbeing services
- D. Support for parent carers of adult children

People could also suggest other topics.

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Your voice shapes services

Tell us what topics you want us to focus on in the next 12 months

Call us free to vote: **0800 999 1286**

Voting closes:
Sunday 8 March 2026

Cast your votes online:
www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/PeoplesVote2026/

Scan me

Our staff and volunteers promoted the vote through their networks, at meetings, and events they attended, including:

- An **email campaign** sent to **135** contacts inviting them to participate in, and to share, the survey.
- A **news article** in our monthly newsletter and a page on our **website**.
- A **poster** for people to download and share.
- **Meetings** attended by our staff and volunteers.
- **Face to face** at various events between 6 January and 22 March 2025.
- Posts on our **social media** channels.

The vote was open from Friday 2 January to Sunday 22 March 2026 and could be completed on paper, online, or over the phone.

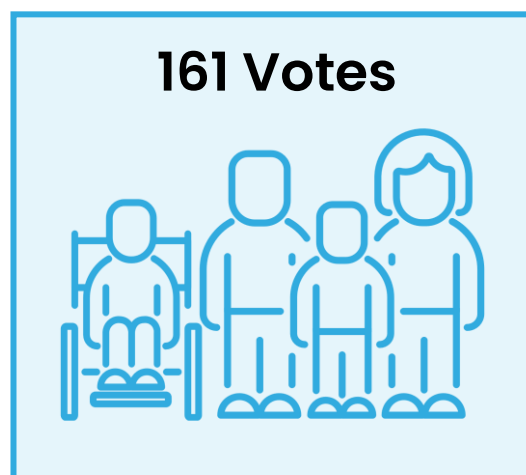
Who we spoke to

There were **161 responses** to our survey from people across Somerset.

The most responses came from people in the Taunton town postcode area.

Our online survey was opened by 25 people from the email campaign.

A full breakdown of responses by post town can be seen in Appendix 2.

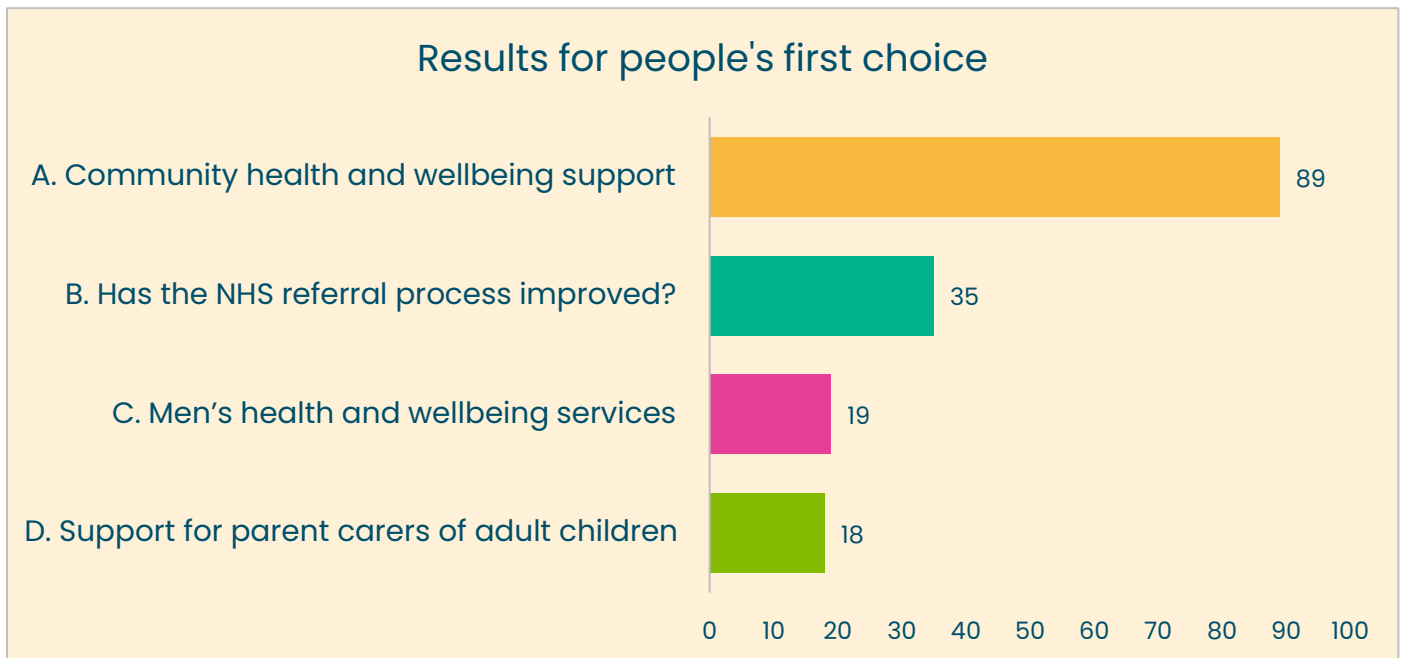


Postcode district	Taunton town coverage	Number
TA1	Taunton, Comeytrowe, Bishops Hull, Holway, Wilton, Lambrook	19
TA2	Taunton, Norton Fitzwarren, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Kingston St Mary, Monkton Heathfield, West Monkton	10
TA3	North Curry, Isle Abbots, Stoke St Mary, Stoke St Gregory, Fivehead, Churchinford, Trull	5
TA4	Bicknoller, Bishops Lydeard, Crowcombe, Milverton, West Bagborough, Williton, Wiveliscombe	9
	Total	43

What people told us

What people chose first

Many people chose **Community health and wellbeing support** as their first choice (89 votes).



What people chose second

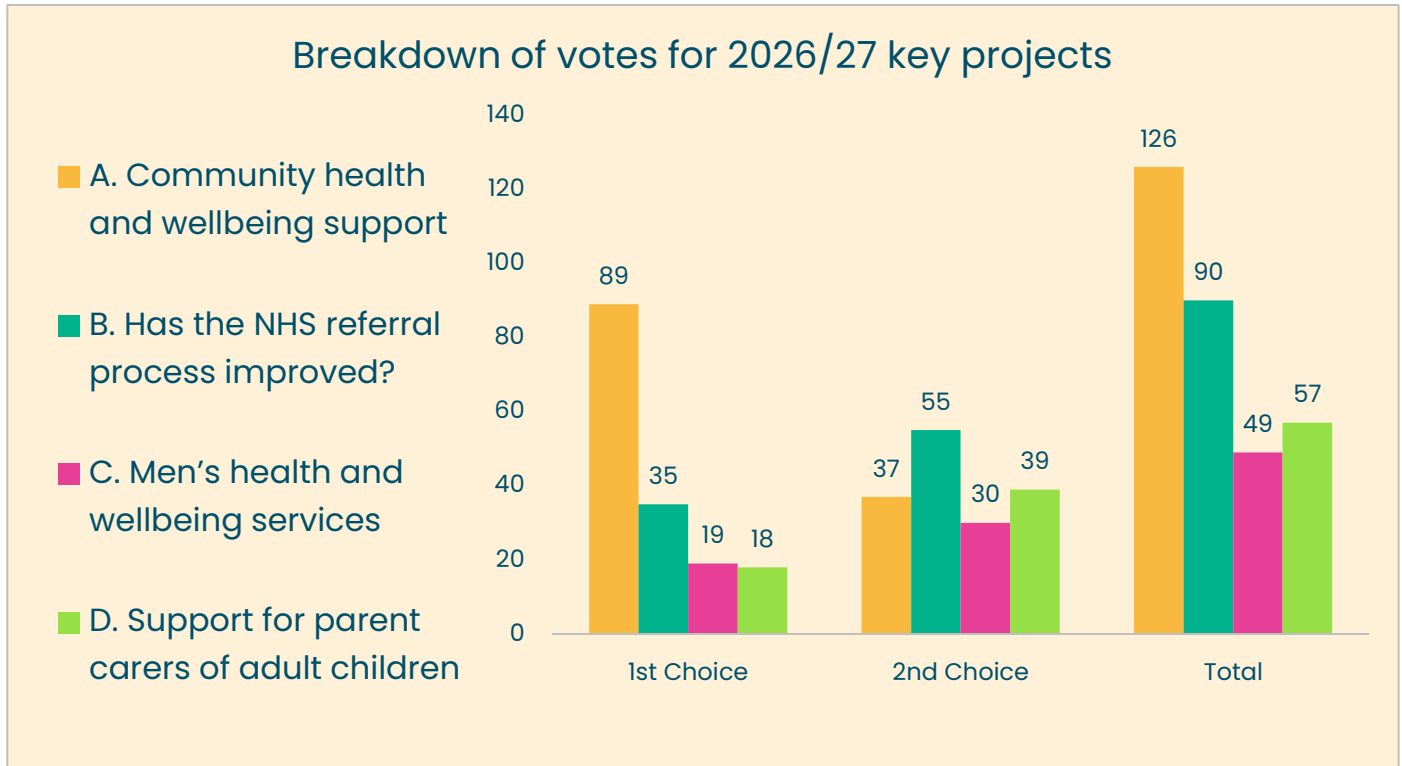
Some people chose **Has the NHS referral process improved?** as their second choice (55 votes).



What people chose overall

Out of 161 votes, 126 people (39%) chose **Community health and wellbeing support**.

This was the most popular topic overall.



Other things people told us

We asked people if they would like to suggest any **other projects** for us to consider, 41 people responded with a total of 50 suggestions.



Mental health services was the most common issue people raised in suggestions. Four of these suggestions were specific to **children and young people's** mental health.

People told us they were worried about **dentistry, GP surgeries, and digital exclusion**.



I use google instead of the doctor as ANIMA is so obstructive. Bring back the old system where you talk to a human.



Anima is an NHS-approved system that lets you contact your GP surgery online.

Conclusion

Listening to the people's voice has given us an **important understanding** of what the people of Somerset would like us to focus on in 2025/26.

Because of proposed changes to how Healthwatch may work in future, we will be careful about committing to large projects this year.

This year we will ensure that your **most voted for topics** will be at the **heart of our engagement** and research but we may not produce our traditional key project reports.

We will ensure that we keep you updated of important information connected to your two most voted for topics through our newsletter, digital communications, and face to face at events and meetings.

Thank you

We would like to thank the **people of Somerset** for taking part and using their voice to help shape our workplan in 2026/27.

Thank you also to all the **organisational contacts and networks** who helped us reach out to people and highlight the vote across the county.

Finally, we would like to thank our **Advisory Board and volunteers** for their ongoing support in all our work.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Paper version of the vote

Thank you for taking time to cast your vote.

Use the information on the previous page, to select your **first** choice. Please mark **one** box **only**.

1. A. B. C. D.

Use the information on the previous page, to select your **second** choice. Please mark **one** box **only**.

2. A. B. C. D.



Are there any other subjects you might like us to consider?
Please limit this to two suggestions only.

.....

Please provide the first part of your postcode:
(This will help us to identify any trends in specific locations).

If you would like to receive our regular newsletter directly to your inbox, please enter your email address below:
.....

You can view our privacy policy on our website at:
<https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/privacy>

Your voice shapes services
Help us decide what matters most in 2026/27.

Together, we can make health and care better for everyone in Somerset.

Call us free to vote: **0800 999 1286**
Voting closes: **Sunday 8 March 2026**
Cast your votes online:
www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/PeoplesVote2026/

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Your vote matters

Every year, we make a work plan for the next 12 months. **This plan is shaped by your feedback** and what we've learned about health and care services in Somerset over the past year.

We've picked four possible subjects for 2026/27 and want your help in choosing which topics you'd like us to focus on.

Cast your vote online, or call us free: **0800 999 1286**

You can return this paper vote by posting it to:
Healthwatch Somerset,
Suite 12, Wellworthys Business Centre,
Parrett Way,
Colley Lane,
Bridgwater,
TA6 5LB

Who we are

Healthwatch Somerset wants your feedback on local health and social care. We listen to what matters to you, and everything you share is confidential and independent.

We also offer free, trusted information and advice.

Last year, we helped **over 6500** local people speak up and get support. Learn more on our website:
www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk

A A common theme in your feedback during 2025 was the **quality of care** provided by GPs and nurses. We are **committed to including** this in our work during 2026/27. Here are our **four other** possible topics to choose from.

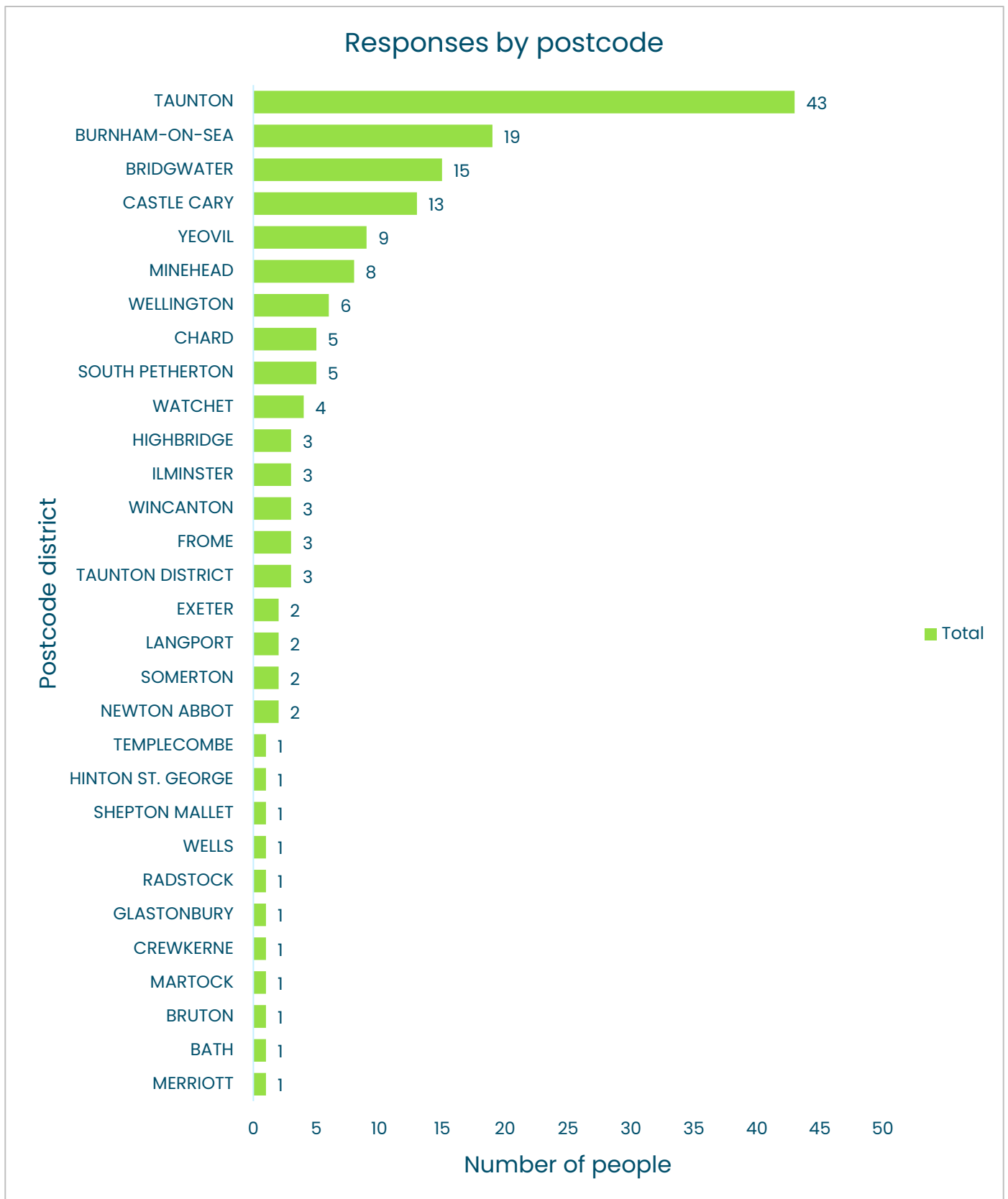
A. Community health and wellbeing support
Your feedback shows us gaps in community support, causing some people to return to hospital because post-discharge care isn't reliable. We will gather your experiences of post discharge care and use them to influence the structure of Neighbourhood Health Hubs.

B. Has the NHS referral process improved?
In 2025, you told us NHS referrals were often delayed or lost, and that communication while waiting was unclear. We will look at whether recent national changes have improved the process and use your feedback to help shape services.

C. Men's health and wellbeing services
Following the launch of the first Men's Health Strategy in 2025, we want to hear from men in Somerset about their health and wellbeing needs. Their views on services will help improve care and reduce health inequalities and barriers.

D. Support for parent carers of adult children
Our work with carers has highlighted difficulties that parent carers of adult children with learning disabilities and complex neurodiversity face. We aim to understand these challenges and use your insight to improve support services and care for families.

Appendix 2: Chart showing responses by post town



Appendix 3: Other suggestions/comments

No.	Suggestion/Comment
1	Lack of NHS Dentists - this has been done before but still poor level of service/no access from NHS
2	1: Supporting maternal, fathers or partners mental health.
3	2: Support for infant mental and physical health.
4	NHS App how can I use it more?
5	Children's mental health
6	GP appointments
7	Ease of communication with Adult Social Care
8	The need for prostate cancer screening
9	dental care -NHS
10	Support for Carers.
11	Improved access for dental treatments.
12	Role of Community hospitals
13	Micro-Provider Services
14	GP appointments
15	more free physical activity options for residents
16	More preventative work in the community, use providers who already do work in the community like AGE UK-e.g. assisting Falls Prevention schemes that already exist
17	a local screening programme for prostate cancer. Or support for charities that offer this already
18	sexual health in the LGBTQ+ community
19	Part of the neurodiversity issue - young adults currently NEET due to mental ill health
20	My support of overseas nurses to help them settle in after their initial excellent arrival scheme. Ideas available from Erica Adams Public Governor. Isobel Clements is aware of this suggestion.

21	PSA testing for men available more readily.
22	Mental health services
23	Educate/Extend/Improve Carers Champion initiative into more GP surgeries and Community hubs across Somerset.
24	Mental Health
25	IBS and bowel cancer screening
26	intercranial hypertension
27	Child mental health is over stretched and inadequate.
28	NHS dentist
29	To still have old route for GP and pharmacy services-whereas all changing to online technology
30	Lack of NHS dentists. I'm entitled to free care but can't get an NHS dentist.
31	Pain support - Lucky to find this group pain cafe in Priorswood, who have been very supportive and very educational.
32	Lack of pharmacy provisions.
33	Lack of NHS dentists.
34	How many elderly are isolated when it comes to technology e.g. prescriptions
35	Mental Health Support for people with a lifetime diagnosis e.g Schizophrenia
36	More outreach opportunities to engage with the public outside of GP surgeries
37	Women's menopause
38	More mental health services in Somerset
39	My husband was discharged from hospital too early, had to return 3 days later after a paramedic call out.
40	Well women's clinics to be more available
41	In June/July 25 had a blood test no results to date, and told too old. Berrow - BOS Medical Centre

42	Free up staff in hospitals to treat the whole person, not just the disease
43	GP Appointments - no diagnosis just sent bloods and then no follow up if bloods are ok
44	More support for the elderly, support for people to stay in their own homes.
45	Why does it take so long for referrals
46	Hospital car system, people who need the service are not driving anymore, because of age and therefore possibly demand is greater.
47	Please dump Anima. It is the biggest obstacle to getting health care ever devised. It is useless for anything complicated, or for patients with chronic illness. I use google instead of the doctor as ANIMA is so obstructive Bring back the old system where you talk to a human
48	Dementia
49	Parkinson's
50	GPs and opening online consultation times.

Website links in this report

Page 2	Advisory Board	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/advisorygroup
Page 2	Health and Care Strategy	https://oursomerset.org.uk/about-us/our-vision/

Image attributes

Cover	A group of four people at an outdoor festival, dressed in colourful rainbow-themed clothing.	© Healthwatch England
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**Healthwatch Somerset
Suite 12, Wellworthys Business Centre
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TA6 5LB**

**healthwatchsomerset.co.uk
0800 999 1286
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