



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Somerset annual report 2025/26

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**Healthwatch
Somerset Manager**
Kim Sadler

“

Every year, people across Somerset share their experiences of health and social care services with us. Their insights help drive improvements and ensure services better meet local needs.

This report highlights the difference your voices have made over the past year and our continued commitment to people-driven care.”

A message from our chair

This has been an exceptionally busy year for Healthwatch Somerset as we continued to make sure local people's voices were heard when decisions about health and care services were made.

It is with sadness that we look ahead to March 2027, when Healthwatch Somerset is expected to come to an end in its current form. Proposed changes to national legislation may bring significant change to the role of Healthwatch, both locally and nationally.

As this report shows, we have continued to work closely with partners including the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Somerset Council, while maintaining our independent role in representing local people. We carried out Enter and View visits to care homes on behalf of Somerset Council and supported public engagement alongside ICB staff. We also raised issues shared by local people with organisations including Somerset NHS Foundation Trust. These strong relationships have helped ensure that people's experiences are listened to and acted on.

While the future remains uncertain, we hope the importance of an independent public voice will continue to be recognised, so that local people remain at the heart of health and care services.



Chair
Judith Goodchild



“We would not have been able to successfully carry out our work programme without the hard work of our small team of staff supported by our volunteers.”

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.



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

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **2056** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **5** staff and, our work was supported by **35** volunteers.



Reaching out:

2056 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

3026 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as how the NHS use people's data and supporting relatives with multiple health and care needs.



Championing your voice:

We published **6** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like GP surgeries, neuro-rehabilitation, and information for unpaid carers.

Our most popular report was 'Who cares? Hearing how caregivers view available support and resources in Somerset', highlighting carers struggles accessing suitable support and information.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **Somerset Council**. In 2025/26 we received **£212,012** which is the same amount as last year.

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 helped students at Bridgwater College navigate available support, and heard what mattered most to them about health and care services.



We gathered feedback at Highbridge Medical Centre's Open Day, listening to local experiences and signposting people to alternative care pathways.



Summer

Our Enter and View report of Elliscombe House in Wincanton highlighted good practice within the care home community.



We took part in "Together" events in Chard and Yeovil, celebrating and supporting Somerset's diverse communities.



Autumn

We listened to women at Glastonbury's Well Woman Event and offered advice on health, wellbeing, and support.



For the fourth year, we worked with mental health organisations to deliver "Walk For A Life", helping to mark World Suicide Prevention Day.



Winter

We launched a People's Vote to shape our annual workplan, engaging residents across the county to ensure community priorities drive our focus.



At Burnham-on-Sea's pensioners' fair, older residents prioritised accessible services, clear information, and being listened to.



Working together for change

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

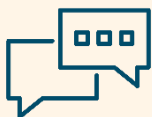


This year, we've worked with seven Healthwatch under The Advocacy People's infrastructure across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Somerset, Southend, West Berkshire, and Wokingham Borough to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

The Advocacy People have provided consistent infrastructure, governance, and operational support to the seven hosted Healthwatch, enabling them to work both locally and collectively. This includes shared leadership, senior guidance, and coordination across contracts. We have created space for collaboration, ensured consistency where needed, and supported each service to retain its distinct local voice.



A big conversation:

The seven local Healthwatch hosted by The Advocacy People have worked closely together in the last year. We have been proactive in our learning objective which was to understand the changing landscape for Healthwatch in response to Government proposals announced last July to transfer the functions of local Healthwatch to Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

The Advocacy People supported the seven Healthwatch to lead meaningful community conversations by providing practical tools, coordination, and strategic oversight. This included enabling shared knowledge, supporting engagement planning, and facilitating the exchange of approaches and learning. We ensured local teams were equipped to respond to community priorities while linking these insights into a broader, coherent narrative at a regional level.

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:



Helping improve access to Pharmacy services

Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

Through our ongoing work with the Patient Participation Group (PPG) in Wincanton, local people told us they were having difficulty accessing pharmacy services and often needed to travel outside the town to collect prescriptions. We raised these concerns by sharing feedback and facilitating communication with Community Pharmacy Somerset and the NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board. In January 2026, a new pharmacy opened in Wincanton, improving local access to pharmacy services.

We also spoke to people across Somerset about their experiences of the Pharmacy First service and local pharmacy provision, helping us identify what works well, where barriers remain, and the valuable role pharmacies play in supporting community health and wellbeing.



Making health and care information easier to understand and access

We work behind the scenes with services to improve how information is shared so it is inclusive and accessible to everyone.

Our work with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust's "Improving Accessibility Working Group", ensures the public voice is brought into their information. Clear, plain language is promoted; alongside highlighting challenges people face when accessing alternative formats such as Easy Read.

Involvement in Somerset Council Local Offer, Contact Centre, and SENDIAS meetings supports improvements to Local Offer webpages and processes. This helps parent carers access and understand Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) information more easily.

Thinking Together: Making a difference in the community



On Wednesday 22 October 2025, we brought together Somerset residents and 13 health and care organisations to develop how information is shared and accessed.

The event focused on turning learning into action. Partners shared practical approaches to making information clearer, more inclusive, and easier to use. This included improving plain language, meeting the Accessible Information Standard, and thinking beyond written information to how people access services.

As a result of the event:

- Organisations increased their understanding of accessible communication and how to apply it in their work.
- Good practice was shared across the system, including tools like Wordski on Wheels and approaches to improving websites and services.
- We strengthened connections between organisations, creating opportunities to work together on accessibility.
- We heard directly from people with lived experience, including young people with SEND, helping services better understand what works and what needs to change.

In the afternoon, discussions between residents and organisations helped identify common barriers, such as unclear information and limited formats. These conversations also highlighted simple improvements, like clearer language, better signposting, and offering information in different formats.

The event helped build momentum across Somerset to improve accessible information. Partners are now better equipped to make practical changes so more people can understand and use health and care services.

69

“It was a really great event – good location, interesting stands, useful networking, and informative presentations. Well done for arranging it all, so many moving parts to sort but it was very slick. I made so many notes, wrote down so many ideas, and had great conversations.” **Health and Care professional.**

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 communities across Somerset. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



"Feedback from Healthwatch is invaluable in ensuring the voices of patients and carers are heard." **Somerset NHS Foundation Trust:**
Krystle Pardon, Head of Patient Engagement and Involvement



Who Cares? Putting carers' voices at the heart of support in Somerset

Last year we championed unpaid carers in Somerset, highlighting the complexity of their role.

Unpaid carers were the top priority in our 2024/25 People's Vote. We listened to understand whether carers can easily find clear, useful support and information across health, care, and voluntary services.

What did we do

We collected 14 carers' stories using a semi-structured interview form and over 70 comments from 39 groups and events. We reached out to different types of carer communities including armed forces and veteran carers, parent carers, and young carers.

Key things we heard:



70%

were not offered information about caring by medical or social care services.

43%

did not find information they were given suitable to their needs.

Our work uncovered that health, and care services are not providing information in a clear and consistent way. It was noticeable that some of the information available was not written in plain language and some was overwhelming. We also learned that digital only formats were not suitable to everyone and that carers want paper handouts with key contacts and information.

What difference did this make?

Following our recommendations, a new 'What is a carer?' poster has been created for GP surgeries. Services linked to the Somerset Carers Strategic Partnership Board are also making their support easier to find and reviewing their information to make it more accessible.

Bridging the gaps: Raising awareness of acquired brain injury (ABI)

ABI survivors told us stronger communication and coordination between hospitals and community support organisations is essential.

We spoke to 20 people with ABI through Headway Somerset, and to healthcare professionals, to understand what neuro-rehabilitation is like across the county. People described serious challenges in how Somerset's health and rehabilitation services support people with ABI.

Key things we heard:



40%

of people with ABI highlighted barriers in rehabilitation, support, and long-term recovery

45%

of professionals told us Somerset's neuro rehab pathway has gaps.



"Having a structured discharge plan would have greatly helped our family, reducing significant strain through better communication and planning between support organisations and the hospital."

Headway Somerset reported that 86% of ABI survivors and carers face low public understanding, affecting daily life, access to services, employment, relationships, and full participation in their communities

What difference did this make?

Our report 'Neuro-rehabilitation in Somerset for people with an acquired brain Injury (ABI)' shone a spotlight on the experiences of people living with an ABI and identified gaps in local services. By sharing these findings with healthcare providers, commissioners, stakeholders, and the wider public, the report raised awareness of the challenges faced by patients and their families.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for everyone in Somerset. That's why we work hard to reach people whose voices are not always heard and ensure their experiences shape health and care services.

Everyone should be heard and able to help shape services. This year, we strengthened Somerset relationships and listened in ways communities prefer.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Communicating with veterans and people with additional needs.
- Using face-to-face, paper, and digital engagement methods.
- Presenting community feedback at Somerset Board meetings, ensuring residents' voices influence NHS and Integrated Care System (ICS) decisions.



Understanding the needs of the Armed Forces community

We visited ARK at Egwood to learn about the support available for veterans and local people

We heard how its welcoming environment helps people build confidence, reduce isolation, and improve their wellbeing through tailored activities and peer support.

What difference did this make?

We provided information about veteran friendly GP practices across Somerset and recorded a positive experience of receiving prompt care at Chard Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) following an injury.

All the feedback we record is shared with the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board and relevant service providers.

Inclusive healthcare: Reaching underrepresented people

We spoke with local refugees to better understand the hurdles they face when using health and care services.

To make healthcare easier to use, we helped people navigate local GP practices and find transport support. Because the NHS can be confusing for those who speak little English, we also provided easy-to-follow visual guides for booking appointments and understanding prescriptions.

What difference did this make?

By listening to these underrepresented communities, we have helped reduce barriers to care. This means more people can now get the vital support and advice they need to stay healthy.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year 3026 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

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



Guidance through an overwhelming time

Ashley found practical support at a difficult time, helping him contact the right services and feel less alone.

Caring for someone at the end of life can mean making difficult decisions while trying to understand many services and processes.

Following our compassionate guidance, Ashley contacted Somerset Carers and Thrive. Both responded quickly and offered support which he found encouraging.

This gave the family next steps, more confidence, and reassurance that help was available from local organisations when they needed it most.



“Having someone who could explain the available support and signpost the appropriate services made a significant difference at a time when clarity was desperately needed.”

Life after brain injury: the support that helps recovery

Mr R's story shows the need for clear help after discharge, ongoing rehabilitation, and community organisations like Headway in recovery.

After a severe car crash left Mr R with a brain injury, he woke from a coma to face intensive surgery and rehabilitation. Upon discharge, poor care planning left him facing homelessness and isolation.

Fortunately, Citizens Advice helped restore his financial stability. Referral to Headway Somerset then provided vital neuro-rehabilitation and peer support. Mr R continues to rebuild his confidence while managing ongoing seizures and mobility challenges.



“Headway is my lifeline. Without them I would struggle to manage day-to-day life, stay connected, and keep moving forward after my brain injury.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 536 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.

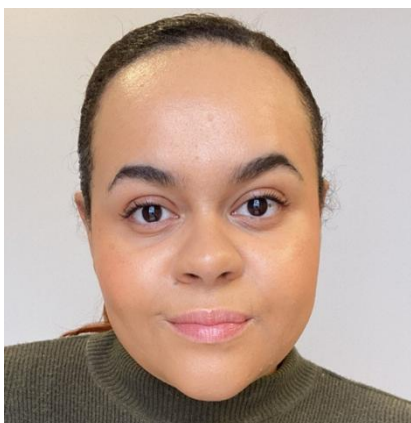
This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Our Readers Panel reviewed NHS leaflets, surveys, and questionnaires for readability and plain English



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.



Lydia

"I joined Healthwatch to get involved in making a difference in my community and to speak up for people's healthcare.."

Lydia joined us last year after struggling to access dental care. She has shared her NHS experiences and walked for suicide prevention in memory of her younger brother.

"I struggle with my own mental health and thought that this would stop me from volunteering. However, being able to help others has definitely been a positive experience. I'd highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get involved and make a difference in their community."

After a career in the NHS as a researcher in mental health and dementia, Jane is one of our newest volunteers.

She is an Enter and View volunteer and part of the Readers Panel.

Jane is looking forward to visiting services and care settings in the community.

"I think I will find the experience very rewarding, and I am glad to be an independent voice for residents, their families, and the workforce in the care sector."



Jane

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 from 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	£136,098
Additional income	£16,486	Non-pay expenditure	£21,200
		Office and management fee	£34,617
Total income	£228,498	Total Expenditure	£191,915

Additional income is broken down into:

- £16,486 received from NHS Somerset ICB for the Patient Safety Partners.

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

We will continue working with partners across the Somerset health and care system to build a culture where listening to people's experiences improves care.

Our top priorities for the next year are:

1. Focusing on community health and wellbeing by gathering experiences of post-discharge care to influence neighbourhood health hubs.
2. Reviewing whether recent national changes have improved the NHS referral process, using feedback to identify gaps.
3. Increase our engagement with young people and those with learning and other disabilities.
4. Supporting communities to understand the NHS 10-year plan and its focus on community care, digital access, and prevention.

Statutory statements

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

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 2025/26, 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 2025/26, 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, and produce printed copies to distribute during our face-to-face 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 our commissioners, the Somerset Board and the Public Health Team to share feedback we have received about services

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Somerset Integrated Care System through the Somerset Board which is made up of representative from across the health and social care system in Somerset. 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 Board (formerly the Health and Wellbeing Board) by Kim Sadler, Healthwatch Somerset Manager and Judith Goodchild, Advisory Board Chair, Healthwatch Somerset.

During 2025/26, our representatives have effectively carried out this role by sharing feedback that we have received and participating in system development workshops.

Healthwatch Somerset, through Kim Sadler, also represents all associated Local Healthwatch organisations on the new ICB Cluster Board covering Somerset, Dorset, and BSW (Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire).

Other activity

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Elliscombe House Care Home Wincanton	Invited by the home in support of their service improvement initiative.	Our report highlighted good practice within the care home. Residents told us how safe and well cared for they felt. The home promoted our report widely on their social media.

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Member of The Somerset Board	Connecting with different system leaders and ensuring the independent patient voice is heard.
NHS Patient Safety	Managing and working with two Patient Safety Partners, sharing anonymised feedback so people's experiences are heard at Quality Meetings.
Member of the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board	Able to share public feedback.
Member of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) ICB with Dorset ICB and Somerset ICB Cluster	Representing Local Healthwatch for Somerset, Dorset and BSW regions
Member of the VCFSE Leaders Group	Able to make connections between similar groups and connect with the Foundation Trust.
Member of Somerset Armed Forces Strategic Forum	Working with partners to support the armed forces and veteran community, sharing experiences heard at outreach hubs and breakfast clubs.

Other activity

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Community Conversations	We brought local community groups together to share their thoughts with the NHS, making sure public views are used to make health research easier for everyone to understand.
Pharmacy First services project	This report will be published in 2026.
Working with Somerset NHS for the Somerset Linked Data Platform	We hosted a survey asking local people about NHS data sharing and created a web page to answer early questions and concerns.
Member of the Carers Strategic Partnership Board	Supporting partners to deliver the Somerset Commitment to Carers 2024.
South West Clinical Senate Citizens Assembly	Chaired by one of our Healthwatch volunteers.
Somerset NHS Foundation Trust Digital Patient Forum	Two volunteers contribute the patient voice to discussions.
Enter and View Training	Delivered to three Healthwatch volunteers so they can assist with visits.
Volunteers' information and development day	A day of connection and learning. We heard from guest speakers, shared information, and exchanged ideas.
Stroke Co-ordination Group	A member of our Advisory Board attends this group ensuring the independent patient voice is heard.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone in Somerset who shared their experiences with us. What you told us helped us speak up for local people and influence improvements in health and care services.

We also want to thank our Advisory Board, volunteers and the many organisations that supported our research and engagement work. Working together helps us champion an independent public voice, so people's experiences are heard clearly and can shape services that local communities can trust.

Healthwatch Somerset
Suite 12, Wellworthys Business Centre
Parrett Way
Bridgwater
TA6 5LB



www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk



0800 999 1286



info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk



bsky.app/healthwatchsom.bsky.social



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