The value of listening

Healthwatch Somerset
Annual Report 2023-2024

healthwatch
Somerset

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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England

Message from our Chair

It is evident over the past year that the public profile of Healthwatch Somerset has been raised because we have seen an increase in the number of people we have heard from and been in contact with.

This public feedback and involvement, along with other sources of evidence, has helped us deliver impactful work this year and formulate a work plan for the coming year.

For example, this year, almost 1,180 people told us about their experiences of dental care which we reported to NHS Somerset to help guide their development work. People have also expressed concern about the number of pharmacies that have closed in their area, and this will be part of our work in the coming year, together with bringing this to the attention of decision-making bodies.

We continue to engage and network across Somerset to ensure we represent as wide a range of society as possible, including to the Somerset Board which held its first meeting this year. The membership includes local councillors, the Police and Fire Service, and the Citizens Advice Bureau. Its focus is on the implementation of the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to improve the quality of life for Somerset residents.

We continue to work alongside other Healthwatch groups where possible. The Citizens Assembly which represents Healthwatch groups across the South West is now Chaired by a member of our Board and another Board member attends the South West Local Dental Network meetings on behalf of other Healthwatch groups.

Our staff and volunteers are the core of the work we do; we are very fortunate to have such a hardworking and committed team and I want to thank them. I also want to thank everyone who has shared their experiences and feedback with us to help improve Somerset's health and care services; you really have made a positive difference.

"We continue to engage and network widely across Somerset to ensure we represent as wide a range of society and as many of our local communities as possible. Our Board bring attention to the issues from the meetings they attend, and we report our findings and recommendations at all levels to influence positive changes for local people."

Judith Goodchild, Healthwatch Somerset Board Chair

About us

Healthwatch Somerset is your local health and social care champion.

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

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.

Our mission

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

Our values are:

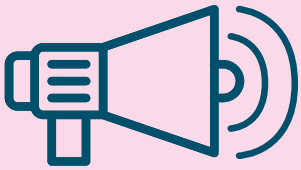
- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Year in review

Reaching out:

2,621 people

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



4,325 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.

Making a difference to care:

We published

8 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Dentistry in Somerset

which highlighted the struggles people face accessing NHS dental treatment.

Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

35

outstanding volunteers who gave up 126 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2023-24 we received

£191,912

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

5 staff

who help us carry out our work.

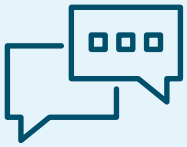
How we've made a difference this year

Spring

We published a report on supported transfer of care from hospital,, evaluating people's experiences to help shape improvements in care.

We undertook Enter and View visits to a local hospital and care home to observe the quality of service and collect evidence of what works well.

Summer



We spent time in our local communities at fun days, fetes and events, talking to people about their experiences to help influence decision makers.

We supported a local college by talking to their nursing students about Healthwatch and the importance of communicating with patients.

Autumn

We supported NHS Somerset by working with them to find out how people had arrived at A&E.

We championed the voice of young people by sharing their experience of mental health support in Somerset.

Winter

We heard that people were struggling to see their GP and things were particularly difficult in one of the more rural areas, so we visited local community groups to hear their experiences.

We talked to people about their experience of accessing treatment with an NHS dentist in Somerset.

Your voice heard at a wider level

We ensure the experiences of people in Somerset influence decisions made about services at Somerset Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked to achieve:

Achievement one

We shared case studies from people with acquired brain injury about their experiences of neuro-rehabilitation to support a business case for change.

Achievement two

We supported the development of a new Citizen's Hub Group and now chair the Board meetings. This work is particularly important as it enables NHS Somerset to hear the voice of seldom heard groups and for those groups to challenge at a strategic level.

Achievement three

We have been active members of the Stroke Stakeholder Reference Group as they plan for change within our county. We have shared some of the concerns that we have heard about the changes at a strategic level.

Achievement four

We joined professionals from across health and social care to undertake a piece of work around UTI's (urinary tract infections) which can be a source of much discomfort and potential hospitalisation. We presented lived experience stories from unpaid carers at the UTI conference, and our volunteer Readers Panel assisted with creating a poster promoting the importance of hydration.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Young people's mental health services

The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) has been investigated nationally and regionally. During 2023 we heard about long waits for support and gaps in the provision of mental health and wellbeing services for CYP in Somerset.

We asked CYP which services they knew about and how effectively they think the services are promoted and delivered. This work was welcomed by many youth related organisations and our young volunteer supported us through promotion and attending several youth groups and events.

80%

of young people felt the need for emotional support in the past year.

What did you tell us about mental health support for young people?

- Schools are a crucial source of information and signposting for young people and adults.
- 47% of young people who felt they needed support did not ask or look for it.
- We recommended that services improved communication and promotion surrounding the types of available support, and highlighted why certain types of support, for example CAMHS, may not be right for some young people.

"The waiting time can be lengthy, but the support is lengthy and worth the wait – but if you were in desperate need, it could be a difficult time."

Young person interviewed by Healthwatch Somerset

What difference did this make?

- Somerset Council and NHS Somerset are working on re-shaping the support available to children and young people.
- More funding has been allocated to providing mental health support in schools.
- NHS Somerset are working with the voluntary and community sector to ensure that the opinions of young people are being heard to help shape the support available.

Exploring the dental desert in Somerset

In January 2022, we reported on the concerning shortage of accessible NHS dental care in Somerset. 35% of calls we received from residents expressed concerns about the cost of dental care and a desire for more affordable fees in private dentistry, due to the unavailability of NHS options.

We wanted to understand people's current experiences of dental care in Somerset, including what care and treatment people require, availability via the NHS, and what prevents people from accessing the dental care they need. We also wanted to find out what people are doing to maintain good oral health and hygiene.

1,178 people shared their feedback. Residents reported difficulty in finding NHS dentists accepting new patients, with waiting lists extending up to eight years.

71%
of people reported difficulties trying to see an NHS dentist in the past year.

"Being pregnant I am eligible for free dentistry, but I have to pay for all my appointments and any work carried out because my private dentists will not take any more NHS patients."

Mother-to-be interviewed by Healthwatch Somerset

What difference did this make?

- Our report has been welcomed by the Local Dental Committee and NHS Somerset who now commission dentistry services in Somerset.
- While we were undertaking our project, we were able to share some of our initial findings with NHS Somerset. They have now published a briefing detailing how the dental recovery plan for Somerset will be implemented.

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.

We host the Carers Strategic Partnership Board in Somerset. This Board enables people with lived experience to collaborate with professionals from the local council and the voluntary and community sector to enhance the services available to carers. This year we supported the creation of Somerset's new Commitment to Carers strategy.

Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

Our volunteers were invited to join Commissioners from Somerset Council in recommissioning preventative services in the county. They were able to craft a question for the potential service providers reflecting the things that were important to them.

Improving care over time

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

In 2023, we were invited by Somerset Council Adult Social Care to join a new 'Working Together' Board. The aim is to ensure that social services are designed and improved with the participation of people who use those services and those who speak for them.

There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback, make sure their voice is heard and that services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Joining local events run by groups who celebrate diversity.
- Visiting community and support groups.
- Chairing meetings that ensure the voices from our local community have been heard by local NHS leaders and the Integrated Care System.

Listening to people who are deaf or hearing impaired

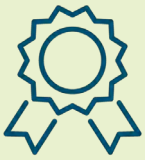
We heard about the challenges people face accessing health services, but we also heard about good practice.

Accompanied by BSL interpreters, we joined two sessions with local clubs supporting people who are deaf and hearing impaired, to find out about their experiences of using health services.

As a result of what people shared, we followed up with the South West Ambulance Service Trust to find out how they communicate with deaf and hearing impaired people - they use an App on their tablets.

Three of our staff and two volunteers undertook and passed the BSL training course for front line workers. They are now able to communicate more effectively with our deaf and hearing impaired community. We were also able to add a BSL signed greeting to our YouTube channel.

Hearing from veterans in West Somerset



NHS Somerset signed the Armed Forces Covenant in May 2023, which recognises the value and service of the whole Armed Forces community, both serving, families, veterans and reservists.

At the beginning of 2024, we visited West Somerset to speak with veterans about their experience of accessing health care. We also wanted to find out how much they knew about the Veteran Friendly Accredited GP surgeries, which provide enhanced support.

Members of the group told us about difficulties getting same-day appointments and feeling uncomfortable explaining their medical issues to the GP receptionists. Seeking advice from friends with medical backgrounds was common among the group, reflecting concerns about same day appointment availability.

Awareness of the Veteran Friendly Accreditation Scheme was lacking, but efforts are underway to explore its implementation in Minehead, Watchet, and Williton. We reported our findings to NHS Somerset to encourage renewed promotion of the Accreditation Scheme.

Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. 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 we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust.
- Helping people access the services they need.
- Advising people when they are unable to access NHS dentistry.
- Supporting people to look after their health by signposting to community groups.

Somerset Dementia Wellbeing Service

The Dementia Wellbeing Service is a collaboration between dementia services who are working together in Somerset to improve diagnosis, enhance support in the community and provide an excellent consistent service for people with dementia and their carers.

We joined other organisations to promote the Somerset Dementia Wellbeing Roadshows, which provided information about local services and support for people living with dementia, their friends and families, and those concerned about a loved one or themselves.

The roadshows were attended by dementia services from the NHS, Somerset Care and voluntary sector support groups.

We were also able to share feedback and experience around website content to help inform the new Somerset Dementia Wellbeing Service website.

Pharmacies in the community

Being the local voice

As an 'Interested Party', we are often notified by NHS England about changes to local pharmacies within Somerset. We are a rural county and when a pharmacy closes it can mean people need to make a considerable journey to get a prescription.

Feelings about pharmacy closures in Somerset have been running quite high in some places. We have therefore started working with local Patient Participation Groups, Parish Councils, Town Councils and other interested parties, and used our Interested Party duties to feedback about these changes and make sure local voices are heard.

"The Parish Council are very grateful that Healthwatch Somerset gave them the opportunity to put forward their views and the views of our residents regarding the closure of our pharmacy in the village. It was a great loss as our village has grown to twice its size over the last few years and the pharmacy was greatly missed. We sincerely hope with the help of this organization a new pharmacy can be persuaded to fulfil the void."

Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Joined us on engagement projects.
- Collected people's experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve.

Volunteers Carole and Shirley joined us in 2023. Carole had worked in care homes and is passionate about how people are cared for. Shirley lives with mobility issues so can talk to people with real empathy. They both bring experience and laughter to their volunteer roles.

Carole said: "I love getting out to meet and talk to people, especially visiting care homes. I was very nervous about the BSL course and thought I'd never be able to do it, but we did!"

Shirley said: "Volunteering gets me out – I've really loved it. It has given me confidence to do other things; I'm volunteering at a COPD patient group and we did a Christmas charity fancy dress dash. It feels good to help other people understand what living with pain and reduced mobility is like."

Volunteers Carole & Shirley were delighted to pass the BSL exam

Willow is one of our young volunteers. When she leaves college, she hopes to work in the emergency services.

Volunteering has given Willow experience of talking to people about services and it has contributed towards her Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award.

Willow, our young volunteer, at a community engagement event.

Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

Healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/contact-us

0800 999 1286

info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Somerset Council	£191,912	Expenditure on pay	£125,503
		Non-pay expenditure	£42,321
Additional income (see next page)	£37,706	Office and management fees	£61,857
Total income	**£229,618**	**Total expenditure**	**£229,681**

Additional funding

Additional income is broken down by:

Purpose of funding	Amount
Funding received from NHS Somerset ICB to support the Engagement Officer (ICS) post.	£35,000
Funding received from NHS Somerset ICB for work on a project to support consultation of their Somerset Five Year Joint Forward Plan.	£1,479
Funding received from Healthwatch England for work on a project to support their Enter and View visit programme to Diagnostics Centres.	£875
Funding received to cover costs of translation services.	£352

Next steps

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 also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Care at home
2. Unpaid carers
3. Pharmacies.

Statutory statements

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

During 2023-2024, Healthwatch Somerset was hosted by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 08464602. The registered office is at Unit 2, Hampton Park West, Melksham, SN12 6LH.

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 eight members who work on a voluntary basis 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 2023/24, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our work plan and the stroke consultation within Somerset.

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 2023/24, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending 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, promote it through our social media, we will take copies when we are out and about. We will also hold an annual meeting and invite the public to attend.

Responses to recommendations

We had one provider who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so 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 that have been shared with us.

In our local Integrated Care System area, which includes the NHS and Somerset Council, we take information to the Somerset Board (Health and Wellbeing/Integrated Care Partnership), the NHS Integrated Care Board, Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board and the Somerset Quality Group. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and View

This year, we made three Enter and View visits. We made six recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
West Mendip Hospital	Our work on supported transfer of care	Wrote a report and did a follow up visit to a local care home, both of whom offered support for patients coming out of hospital. This allowed the local Council to do a direct comparison of the services.
The Old Police House, Nunney (care home for people with learning disabilities)	Part of our ongoing partnership working with Somerset Council and NHS Somerset to support quality monitoring of residential homes in the county.	Wrote a report with recommendations including considering a picture board to aid with communication for the residents.
Newholme Care Home, Ruishton (care home for people with learning disabilities)	Part of our ongoing partnership working with Somerset Council and NHS Somerset to support quality monitoring of residential homes in the county.	Wrote a report and followed up with the local Council about accessing support that the home raised with us.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Somerset is represented on the Somerset Board (combined Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership) by Judith Goodchild, Board Chair. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing feedback that we have received, sharing our reports and representing our local communities as an independent voice.

Healthwatch Somerset is also represented on the NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB) Board by Judith Goodchild.

2023-2024 Outcomes

In addition to the work and outcomes summarised in this report, this year, we also used patient and public feedback to help shape services in the following ways.

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Same Day Urgent and Emergency Care	We worked in partnership with Evolving Communities to find out about people's experiences in all areas of Somerset to ensure patient feedback is used to inform development of NHS services.
Personalised care planning	We shared people's feedback with Somerset NHS and piloted the training provided to local NHS staff.
NHS Patient Safety	We began 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 the patient voice is represented at quality meetings.

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 experiences 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.

healthwatch Somerset

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