

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Somerset  
Annual Report 2021–22



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**Healthwatch Somerset** is the county's health and social care champion. We are part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across England. We cover the geographical area of Somerset County Council, which includes the districts of Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton.

# Message from our Chair

**This has been another difficult year regarding COVID which curtailed our ability to talk face-to-face with the public. However, we have covered an extensive programme of work and made sure your views were heard by health and care decision makers to inform positive change in the services you use.**

This is directly due to the hard work of our small team and the fantastic volunteers who assist them, led by our new manager Gillian Keniston-Goble, who has a wealth of experience in social care and education.

Unfortunately, due to COVID, we were unable to carry out visits to health and care premises this year to gather people's feedback about services. We continued to listen to the public voice in other ways and to follow up their concerns.

For example, we asked people about the length of time they were waiting for surgery and how this affected them. The report we produced, in collaboration with Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Somerset NHS Trusts, identified the need for more communication with patients and concerns about the fact that some patients felt their condition had deteriorated while waiting for care. Both Trusts have taken our findings on board and are working with patients to address them.

Another concern people raised with us this year was around difficulty contacting GPs during the pandemic and not being able to arrange appointments, and we are actively working with partners on this issue. We have also been collaborating with other Healthwatch to address common concerns and informing Healthwatch England of issues that are arising, such as access to NHS dentistry.



**The Somerset Integrated Care System (ICS) comes into power in July 2022. This will change the health and care decision making process, so it's more important than ever that we work with the public, voluntary and community sector, and our health and care partners, to make sure the system acts on what they hear from local communities.**



The Healthwatch Somerset Board has a good working partnership with Somerset CCG and the Somerset NHS Trusts. Our board members are represented on many of the strategic decision-making groups, both locally and in the South West, and we are also represented on the new ICS. We look forward to positive and productive partnership working, and to representing the views of patients and the public in the years ahead.

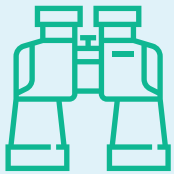
Judith Goodchild  
**Healthwatch Somerset Chair**



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Somerset is your local health and social care champion. From Exmoor to Frome and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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

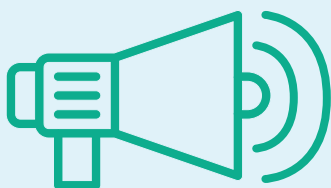
- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering**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



# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**1,903 people**

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

**996 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as dentistry, mental health and COVID-19.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**5 reports**

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

Our most popular report was about

**The Young Listeners Project**

highlighting the need for better communication between young people's health and care services and with young people.

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**35**

outstanding volunteers, who gave up **92 days** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021–22 we received

**£190,000**

We currently employ

**1 full-time & 3 part-time staff**

who helped us carry out this work in the previous year.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring

We advised Somerset's District Nursing Service that while most people are very happy with the care they get at home, they want the transformed service to offer weekend and evening visits and many people are cautious about digital consultations.



We continued to hear from local people about difficulties accessing NHS dentistry in Somerset, so we provided up-to-date information, and shared feedback with Healthwatch England and local services.



Summer

We supported young people to speak up and influence change and improvement in the health and social care services they use, including better communication and more joined up services.



We supported the Healthwatch England #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people from across the country come forward to share feedback about the issues they faced with services.



Autumn

We alerted the NHS in Somerset about the impact on people's lives of long waits for surgery, informing their improvement planning around patient support and communications.



As COVID continued to have a significant impact, we once again supported the local community, providing reliable information, signposting to local services, and worked with our volunteers to support the vaccination programme.



Winter

We investigated patient experiences of NHS 111 in Somerset and Devon a year after our initial research, highlighting ongoing areas for improvement, including long call-back times and a simpler, more effective process.



West Somerset is beautiful but remote, and transport links can make it difficult to access services. We asked people about their experiences of same day urgent and emergency care and shared our findings with the CCG.



# 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 feedback to services to help them improve.





## Improving support for patients waiting for surgery

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of waiting for surgery in Somerset, we've shown the NHS that patients need more support and better communication while they are waiting.

Somerset's NHS leaders wanted to understand how people are affected by waiting for surgery to inform their work to improve support for patients. In summer 2021, 72 people told us about their experience of waiting for treatment at Musgrove Park and Yeovil District Hospitals.



### 65% of people

had been waiting over 40 weeks\* for surgery and many didn't know how long they had to wait.

\* NHS performance standard is max 18 weeks from referral to treatment.

We found some common themes in what people told us.

- A lack of communication with patients by specialists, so people felt forgotten and anxious.
- Many people felt their condition had deteriorated while waiting, including reduced mobility and mood changes, which impacted on their daily lives.
- 50% of people had to rely on family or friends to manage daily tasks.

We recommended frequent communication with patients by specialist teams; patients should be told how they will be cared for while they wait and about other support that's available; and support for patients and their carers should be based around individual needs, with more regular checks and timely interventions.

### What difference did this make

We shared our findings and recommendations with Somerset CCG, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, Yeovil District Hospital, and Healthwatch England.

Somerset's NHS leaders are developing more support for patients waiting for treatment. A new pilot scheme is offering exercise to patients waiting for joint replacements to help maintain mobility. We are helping the Trust create information materials to support patients on waiting lists, and they now contact people on the waiting list to check on them.



We acknowledge the importance of communicating well with our patients and, since the report was concluded, we have taken a number of steps for those waiting the longest, with plans to develop this further, while balancing the demands on our services.

**Somerset NHS and Yeovil District Hospital Foundation Trusts**



## Driving positive change in young people's services

By sharing their health and care experiences and their ideas for change, young people in Somerset helped us highlight the need for services to communicate better in order to care better for young people.

Between January and July 2021, we recruited and trained a group of volunteer Young Listeners aged 12–18. They designed and delivered a peer-to-peer engagement project to find out how young people in Somerset want to improve the health and care services they use.

In summer 2021, they gathered feedback from 65 young people. They heard about a lack of communication between services and poor communication with young people, while they are being cared for and around promotion of the services and support available.



### 41% of young people

had to repeat their symptoms and story to every service they used, even if they had been referred.



No emails or calls, I felt left alone. I nearly gave up.  
It felt like being a minor made me not listened to.  
When I found the services they offered brilliant support, it was just a matter of finding the support.



Our Young Listeners recommended that health and care services should:

- Evaluate and improve how they communicate, with each other and their young patients.
- Provide more training to help schools direct young people to the right services.
- Promote services in ways that are appropriate and accessible to young people.
- Regularly involve young people in planning and decision making.

### What difference did this make

Our report was well received by Somerset's Health and Wellbeing Board, health and care commissioners and service providers. They will be using the young people's feedback to help shape services so that they "properly meet the needs of children and young people." We have set up a Young Listeners Reading Panel to help services produce information that is appropriate and accessible to young people.



This will help us understand how we best deliver the NHS Children & Young People's Transformation Plan, which looks at how we improve the accessibility and quality of a whole range of paediatric services in Somerset.

**Becky Applewood, Deputy Director Women's & Children's Health, Somerset CCG**



## Three ways we have made a difference for 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 the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences, and the impact on people's lives. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.**

Waiting for surgery can affect people in many ways. We told the story of 85-year-old Sybil who suffered physically and emotionally while waiting 17 months for a hip replacement. This resulted in national and local news coverage, including an interview with Sybil on BBC TV regional news, which helped raise awareness of the issues. We also recorded an audio story, telling the difficult experience of a young woman waiting for surgery and the impact on her and her family. We shared this with the CCG and the Elective Care Board, who said it confirmed the need for continuing their new approach to 'safety-netting'.



### Getting services to involve the public

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

It's essential that information produced for patients and the public about health and care service is easy to understand and appropriate for the people using it. It's also important that services make sure people with communication needs are given information in the way they need it.

Our volunteer Readers Panel provides advice to Somerset CCG to make sure their documents are well written, clear, and easy for the public to understand, without the use of jargon. This year, they worked on a variety of documents including the Children's Continuing Care Transitions Factsheet and the Petition Protocol.



### Improving care over time

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.**

There are over 60,000 unpaid carers in Somerset. Our staff and volunteers contribute to boards and groups that meet behind the scenes working to improve support for carers, and we regularly attend carers meetings to offer signposting and to hear feedback. We run the Carers Strategic Partnership Board which enables networking across the various organisations that support carers in the county. We recently contributed to Somerset NHS Foundation Trusts' work around supporting unpaid carers while their cared for person is in hospital.



# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Somerset is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we will listen and can provide confidential, free information and guidance to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding a local service or discovering how to make a complaint – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need.



## Supporting people through COVID

With the arrival of the pandemic, the need for accurate information and community support became even more vital. Many of the enquires we received last year were around COVID-19.

Our Information and Signposting Administrator trained to be a Somerset COVID Community Champion. She makes sure people get up-to-date and accurate information to help them make the right choices to stay healthy, and she directs them to other health and wellbeing support. She attends regular meetings to get the latest information and to share feedback, which goes to Public Health at Somerset County Council.

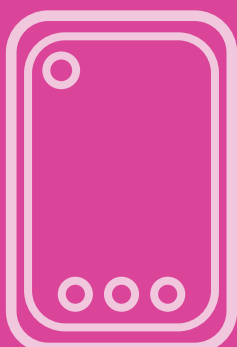


## Signposting people who need NHS dental care

The lack of dentists taking on new NHS patients in Somerset and across the country has been a continuing area of concern and enquiry since the start of the pandemic. Over the past year, 22% of public feedback was about dental services, with many people unable to get NHS treatment.

We regularly share this feedback with the South West Dental Network, and we keep up to date with the latest information so that we can give local people current, accurate and reliable advice.

Direct Commissioning South West, NHS England and Improvement, recently announced that people living in Somerset who are not registered with a dental practice should call NHS 111 if they need urgent treatment or advice. The day after this announcement, we attended a Spring Fair in an area where the lack of NHS dentists is an issue. We were able to share up-to-date information about the new dental advice line with over 30 people, and we also shared the information via our social media channels.



### Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health or social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Healthwatch Somerset is here for you.

 [healthwatchsomerset.co.uk](https://healthwatchsomerset.co.uk)

 0800 999 1286

 [info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk)



# Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say, carrying out feedback interviews over the phone, online and in person.
- Co-produced our project on young people's health and care services.
- Promoted our work at community events and via their networks.
- Helped make NHS public information easier to understand.
- Represented Healthwatch Somerset at meetings with health and care organisations.
- Responded to the call for volunteers at COVID vaccination centres.







### Elizabeth & Sarah: training other volunteers

Like all local Healthwatch, we have the power to 'Enter & View' publicly funded health and care premises, such as care homes or GP surgeries, to speak to people about their experiences of the service. This work is carried out by our trained and authorised representatives. Our volunteers Elizabeth and Sarah are highly experienced in this work, so they train other volunteers.

"I enjoy meeting the volunteers and hearing their varied experiences. Sarah and I work as a team. We bring our shared understanding and experiences of visits to the training and this benefits the participants." **Elizabeth**

"Volunteers sometimes ask us challenging questions which can result in an interesting discussion that we can all learn from." **Sarah**



### Sara: recruiting NHS nurse apprentices

Somerset NHS Foundation Trust asked our volunteers to help interview applicants for their new nursing degree apprenticeships.

"It has been so interesting - what great schemes, particularly the degree apprenticeships - an opportunity for candidates to progress and develop a career. It was well organised, I was given a clear brief and made to feel very welcome."



### Gill and Tony: our new Board Members

Gill and Tony joined the Healthwatch Somerset Board in September 2021.

"I am really enjoying being on the Board as it covers the whole of Somerset. So far, I feel the work I have been involved in really benefits patients and local people. I am delighted to be part of such a good organisation." **Gill**

"I hope to make use of my six years' experience as a Yeovil Hospital NHS Trust governor to maximise the impact of Healthwatch on Somerset's health and social care service provision, particularly as we transition to a formally established ICS." **Tony**



### Do you feel inspired?

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



[healthwatchsomerset.co.uk](https://healthwatchsomerset.co.uk)



0800 999 1286



[info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

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

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£190,000	Staff costs	£102,882
		Operational costs	£29,583
		Support and administration	£57,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£190,000</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£189,465</b>

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

In 2022–23 we will focus on the following areas to make the biggest difference in the communities we serve:

- **Reducing the barriers people face when accessing services** – particularly access to face-to-face appointments, following on from our 21–22 project looking at digital access.
- **Championing the voices of those who often go unheard** – including young people in need of mental health support.
- **Influencing decision makers on a local level as services in our county evolve** – including working with the newly formed Integrated Care System (ICS) and looking at people’s experiences of being discharged from hospital to intermediate care or back to their own home.

## Championing better care for everyone

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard. Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or race.



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Somerset, Woodlands House, Woodlands Business Park, Bristol Road, Bridgwater, TA6 4FJ.

Healthwatch Somerset is run 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 Somerset Board consists of seven members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the board met five times on a formal basis and made decisions on matters, such as instigating a review and revisit plan to follow up on projects, and agreeing the Quality Assurance Framework. We also introduced informal board meetings which allow board members to network outside of formal meetings. This promoted information sharing between board members and staff and gave us the chance to invite external speakers to our sessions.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by using insight received from the public over the year, along with information gathered by staff and volunteers at the meetings we attend.

### Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities, and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, running focus groups with care leavers and people with sight impairment, and getting our posters translated into Polish and Romanian, which are two of the most common languages in Somerset other than English.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website, promote it to the press and on social media, and we share our report with partners across health and social care in Somerset.

### Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers responded to requests for information or recommendations. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to the Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

### Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Somerset is represented on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board by Judith Goodchild, Board Chair. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by regularly attending meetings and promoting Healthwatch. Gill Keniston-Goble, manager, is a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board Executive and discussed our work with decision makers within the system. This has led to presenting at the Board and submitting 'Member information sheets' to highlight work; we also have a standing agenda item to report on a regular basis.



## 2021–2022 Outcomes

Read all our reports: [healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/reports-publications](https://healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/reports-publications)

Project/activity area	Changes made to services
<p><b>District Nursing Service:</b> What do people think of the service and how could it be developed and improved? (<a href="#">Report, June 2021</a>)</p>	<p>Our report is being used to inform Somerset NHS Foundation Trust's transformation plan for the District Nursing Service. This may include, for example, changes people want to see such as evening or weekend visits.</p>
<p><b>Young people's health and social care services:</b> What changes do young people want to see to improve the care and support they receive? (<a href="#">Report, November 2021</a>)</p>	<p>Somerset CCG are using the insight from this report to inform delivery of the NHS Children and Young People's Transformation Plan.</p>
<p><b>Waiting for surgery:</b> How are patients affected and what more could be done to help them manage their health and wellbeing? (<a href="#">Report, November 2021</a>)</p>	<p>There is a new NHS pilot scheme in Somerset offering exercise to patients waiting for joint replacements to help them maintain mobility. We are helping Somerset NHS Foundation Trust create information materials to support patients on waiting lists. The Trust now contacts people on the waiting list to check on them.</p>
<p><b>NHS 111 service:</b> Patient experiences of the service in Somerset and Devon. (<a href="#">Report, March 2022</a>)</p>	<p>We informed the service provider, the Care Quality Commission, CCG and the NHS in Somerset and Devon, of common and continuing areas of concern. The CCG in Devon have recommissioned the NHS 111 service and said local people played a role in this decision.</p>
<p><b>Same day urgent care services in West Somerset:</b> What do local people know about these services and how do they think they should be provided and promoted? Work commissioned by the CCG. (<a href="#">Report, June 2022</a>)</p>	<p>Findings have gone to Somerset NHS Fit for My Future Board to inform the ongoing review of how NHS urgent care is provided in Somerset.</p>
<p><b>Why do people attend hospital Emergency Departments?</b> This was a joint piece of work with the CCG.</p>	<p>Our findings informed the CCG communications and campaigns asking people to 'Choose well' before they attend A&amp;E.</p>
<p><b>Digital access to primary care:</b> People's experiences of using GP websites to access information about health and wellbeing. (Report due summer 2022).</p>	<p>This project began in Spring 2022, at the end of this reporting year, but it was delayed due to the local elections in May 2022. Our findings will be used by the CCG to inform work to improve GP websites.</p>

## Thank you

We want to thank everyone who has shared their stories with us this year, and asked us for information, advice, and support. Health and care services need to know your experiences to understand what works well and how to make positive changes. Your feedback really does help to improve health and care in Somerset and nationally, so do please continue to get involved.

We also want to thank those who work in health and social care, for providing such vital services, for valuing the voice of local people and patients, and for contributing your insight and experience to help make care better.



Healthwatch Somerset have had another successful 12 months, continuing to gather comments and feedback from the public on health and social care, representing those views at a large number of forums, professional meetings, and Boards, completing a range of activities and projects from their workplan and returning to face-to-face public engagement as COVID restrictions ended.

Highlights this year, have been the arrival of Gillian as manager, completion of the Referral to Treatment and NHS 111 projects, publication of the Young Listeners report to the Health & Wellbeing Board and ongoing engagement with the ICS.

**Rachael Pringle, Contract & Quality Assurance Officer,  
Adult Social Care, Somerset County Council**



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