



May 2026

April 2026 in numbers

A brief summary of team achievements in April.



- **One** delivery of Enter and View training to another Healthwatch
- **Two** requests for our volunteer Readers Panel to review NHS documentation
- **10** Events
- **14** pieces of feedback recorded on our database
- **26** Meetings
- **204** direct engagements with people

These figures may be higher, as it can be difficult to record every contact and piece of feedback.

Don't miss your spring COVID-19 vaccination



Aged 75 or over? Check that you are up to date with all vaccines available to you including the spring COVID-19 vaccine.

If you are eligible for a spring COVID-19 vaccination, book your appointment now.

In Somerset, people aged 75 and over, people living in older adult care homes, and people with a weakened immune system are eligible for extra protection this spring.

You can book online, on the NHS App, by calling 119, or by visiting a walk-in site. For full details including the NHS England British Sign Language service go to the [NHS Somerset website](#).

We continue to work for you

The King's Speech on **Wednesday 13 May 2026** confirmed that the Government plans to introduce the **NHS Modernisation Bill**.

If this Bill becomes law, it could affect the future of **NHS England and Healthwatch across the country**. Full details and timescales have not yet been published. **The Bill must still go through Parliament**, and it could still be challenged or changed before anything is final.

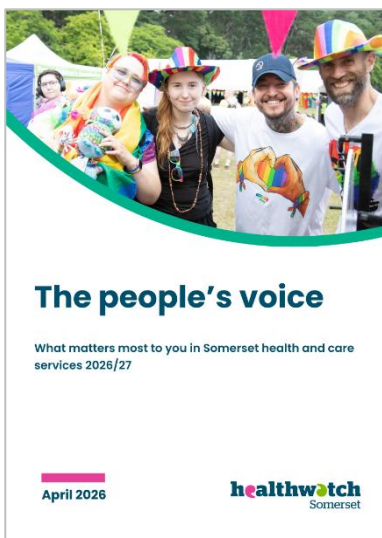
At this stage, there are still **many unanswered questions** about what any future changes could look like locally or nationally, including how people's experiences of care would be gathered in future.

While national discussions continue, **we want to reassure everyone that Healthwatch Somerset continues to operate as usual**.



Further information can be found on **Healthwatch England news pages**.

People in Somerset help choose our priorities for 2026/27



We are pleased to announce the launch of our People's Vote report.

161 local people have helped us decide which health and care issues to focus on in the year ahead.

We asked people across the county to vote on the health and care topics they felt mattered most. The results will help shape our work in 2026/27 and make sure local people's experiences stay at the heart of decision-making.

Your feedback gives an important picture of what matters most to people in Somerset right now. We will use this insight to guide our engagement and research work over the coming year.

Read the full report: **The people's voice: What matters most to you in Somerset health and care services 2026/27**

How the Without Borders Café brings people together

As part of **Refugee Week**, from 15 to 21 June 2026, we wanted to share the work of the **Without Borders Café in Taunton**. The café gives refugees, asylum seekers and local people a safe and welcoming place to meet, share food, and build friendships.

Run by **Charis** and partner organisations, the café helps people feel included, build confidence and connect with their community. It also **creates space to celebrate different cultures** through food and conversation.



When we visited the café, we met with a woman who we first spoke to months ago at a support session for women from Afghanistan. She told us then that she hoped to cook and share food from her home country.

It was lovely to see her now doing just that. Her story shows how **important welcoming spaces** like the Without Borders Café can be for people starting a new life in a new country.

More community events are expected across Taunton during Refugee Week. These usually include opportunities to come together, share food, music and culture, and show support for people seeking sanctuary.

For the **latest updates**, visit the [Taunton Welcomes Refugees website](#) or read about the [Vigil for Peace](#).

Changes to free prescription charge rules

NHS

Can you claim free NHS prescriptions?

Check if you're eligible

Scan the QR code or go to www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check

If you claim free NHS prescriptions when you're not entitled, you could have to pay a penalty charge of up to £100.

Check before you tick

From **15 April 2026**, some people in Somerset may need to check whether they still qualify for free NHS prescriptions.

This is because **Income Support** and **income-based Jobseeker's Allowance** will no longer count as exemption benefits after this date.

If you are moving onto **Universal Credit**, it is important to know that this does **not automatically mean you can get free prescriptions**.

If you are unsure, it is a good idea to check before collecting your medicines so you do not get a penalty charge. [Find out if you can get free prescriptions.](#)

NHS waiting times improve, but pressures remain across key services

According to [The Health Foundation](#), the NHS in England has met its main target for planned treatment waiting times, with **more people receiving care within 18 weeks**. This is a positive step and shows the hard work of NHS staff is making a difference.

However, the report says **performance is still falling short in other important areas**, including A&E waits, ambulance response times and cancer care. Millions of people are still waiting too long for treatment, and progress is uneven across services.

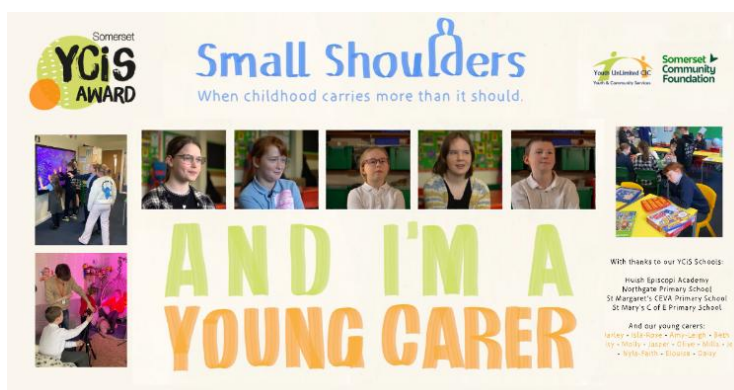
The Health Foundation says the **improvements are encouraging** but warns that long-term investment in staff, buildings, and equipment will be needed to deliver lasting change and improve patients' experiences across the NHS.

For more detail read [Progress – but is it enough? What the latest NHS waiting times mean for elective recovery – The Health Foundation](#).

New Somerset film helps young carers feel seen and heard

Young carers from schools across Somerset have helped create a new film about what everyday life can look like when you are caring for someone at home. Sixteen children and young people, aged five to 18, took part and shared their own stories, including the worries they carry and the hopes they have for the future.

We know **young carers are quietly doing so much** in families and communities across Somerset. It is important that they feel seen, listened to and supported. The film, [Small Shoulders: when childhood carries more than it should](#), gives young carers a chance to share what life can be like and helps others understand why the right support at the right time can make such a difference.



The [Young Carers in Schools](#) award helps schools recognise when a child may be caring for someone at home and respond with the right support. **In Somerset**, schools can get free guidance through the programme so staff feel more confident spotting young carers early and helping them

feel understood, included and able to do well at school.

The learning disability register: are you in?

Mencap's **I'm In campaign** is encouraging more people with a learning disability to join their **GP's learning disability register (LDR)**. Being on the register can help people get the right support, including a free annual health check from age 14.

Mencap says **people with a learning disability die, on average, nearly 20 years younger** than people without a learning disability, and many of these deaths could be avoided. If you or someone you support has a learning disability, you can find out **everything you need to know about the learning disability register** on Mencap's website. They also have an **Easy Read letter building tool** so you can communicate your request with your GP surgery to be added to the LDR.

We have signed up to support the campaign as an organisation and will be highlighting the benefits of joining your GP's LDR through our work.

A purple poster for the Mencap 'I'm In' campaign. At the top, it says 'Better healthcare, free health checks every year. Your needs respected.' Below that, it says 'That's what being on the Learning Disability Register could mean for you.' The main headline is 'Are you in?' in large white letters. Underneath, it provides the website 'mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-register' and the hashtag '#IMIN'. There are logos for 'mencap', 'I'M IN me', and 'Learning Disability Register'. On the right side of the poster is a photograph of a young man with a learning disability, wearing a red jacket and smiling with his arms crossed.

A welcoming space for dads in West Somerset



Dads in West Somerset are being invited to join **The Dad Club** a project from Home-Start West Somerset. The Dad Club **offers a friendly space** where fathers can meet, chat and support each other.

The group offers **relaxed activities** including seafront walks, pop-up barber sessions, trips out and one-to-one support, helping dads feel less isolated and more linked in to their community.

If you're a dad looking to meet others, have a chat or get some extra support, you can **contact Daniel James, Dad Club Coordinator**, on 07483 123652 or email dan@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk.

You can also **find out more** through their social media pages, the handle is @TheDadClubWestSomerset on Facebook and Instagram.

Feel good through the power of music



A new **music therapy group from the MHA** for people aged 55+ in Taunton, is offering a welcoming space to relax, connect, and enjoy music in whatever way feels right for you.

Music therapy is a structured, evidence-based activity led by trained therapists that **supports emotional wellbeing, communication and social connection**. Familiar music can help spark memories, lift mood and provide gentle cognitive stimulation, while shared sessions can reduce stress and create opportunities to meet others.

The best part? **You do not need any musical experience** and there is **no pressure to take part in a certain way**. Whether you sing along, try an instrument, tap your feet, or simply sit back and enjoy the music, everyone is welcome.

The sessions run on **Mondays from 2:00–3:00pm** at Lisieux Way Methodist Church in Taunton, with tea and coffee available.

Extra support and companionship coming to Yeovil Hospital

People receiving end-of-life care at Yeovil Hospital will now have access to extra support and companionship, thanks to the expansion of **Marie Curie's Hospital Companion Service**. The service has already been supporting people in other parts of Somerset and is now reaching more patients and families locally.

Trained volunteers offer a friendly presence, emotional support, and time to listen – helping people feel less alone during what can be a difficult time. The service can also give **families and carers** the chance to take a short break, knowing their loved one has someone there with them.



Small acts of kindness can make a big difference, and this expansion is a positive step in helping people receive compassionate support when they need it most.

Join us in June

Drop in and talk to us about your experiences or for information and advice about health and care services in Somerset.

Date and times	Details
June 2, 2026 10:30am to 12:30am	Taunton Library Paul St, Taunton, TA1 3XZ
June 4, 2026 10:00am to 12:00pm	South Petherton Community Library 3 St James's St, South Petherton, TA13 5BS
June 9, 2026 10:30am to 12:30pm	Porlock Community Library The Old School Centre, High St, Porlock, Minehead, TA24 8NP
June 12, 2026 10:00am to 1:00pm	Senior Citizens Fair St Mary's Church, St Mary Street, Bridgwater, TA6 3EQ
June 13, 2026 10:00am to 4:00pm	Collett Park Day Collett Park, Park Rd, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BP
June 16, 2026 11:00am to 1:00pm	Yeovil Library King George Street, Yeovil, BA20 1PY
June 19, 2026 10:30am to 12:30pm	Wells Library Union St, Wells, BA5 2PU
June 23, 2026 10:00am to 12:00pm	Waffle over waffles at The Waffle Hub Community Café Methodist Church, 35A College St, Burnham-on-Sea, TA8 1AS
June 25, 2026 11:00am to 1:00pm	Langport Library Whatley, Langport, TA10 9RA
June 27, 2026 09:30am to 4:30pm	Bridgwater Armed Forces Day Morganians Rugby Club, Chedzoy Lane, Bridgwater, TA7 8QW
June 30, 2026 11:00am to 1:00pm	Crewkerne Library Falkland Square, Crewkerne TA18 7JS

Other important dates

Date	What	Find out more
1 to 7 June	Volunteers week	https://volunteersweek.org/
8 to 14 June	Carers week	https://www.carersweek.org/
10 June	Age without limits day	https://www.agewithoutlimits.org/day
14 June	World blood donor day	https://www.blood.co.uk/
9 to 15 June	Men's health week	https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/mhw
15 to 21 June	Learning disability week	https://www.mencap.org.uk/LDWeek
15 to 21 June	Refugee week	https://refugeeweek.org/
22 June	Windrush day	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windrush_Day
1 to 30 June	Pride month	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride_Month

Want us to share your news?



Do you have any health and care news or events you would like us to include in our **June 2026** newsletter? If so, please send us your text with an accompanying image to info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk **before Friday 12 June 2026**.

Get in touch

Share your experiences of health and care services in Somerset so we can help influence change and make services better.

Have your say using our website contact form, or call us free on **0800 999 1286**.

Do you **have questions** about health and care 'jargon'? **We can help**, email your enquiries to info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk or call us free on **0800 999 1286**.

Our website

Visit our [website](#) to:

Find out what we do in a variety of accessible formats	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/about-us
Read our news and reports	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/newsandreports
Volunteer with us	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/volunteer
Contact us	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/contact-us

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[@healthwatchsomerset](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchsomerset)

If you have been forwarded this newsletter and would like to join our mailing list, please follow this [sign up to our newsletter](#) link.

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

The Healthwatch Somerset service is run by The Advocacy People, an independent charity - Charity No. 1080679 limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with Company No. 3963421. The registered office is at PO Box 375, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 9HU

Links in this newsletter

Page	Full URL
1	https://nhssomerset.nhs.uk/my-health/vaccinations-nhs-somerset/covid-19-vaccination/
2	https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-02/0009/260009.pdf
2	https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2026-05-14/healthwatch-here-you
2	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/post/the-people-s-voice-what-matters-most-to-you-in-somerset-health-and-care-services-2026-27
3	https://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk/
3	https://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk/vigil-for-peace-26-jun/
3	https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/hwhc-universal-credit
4	https://www.health.org.uk/
4	https://www.health.org.uk/reports-and-analysis/analysis/progress-but-is-it-enough-what-the-latest-nhs-waiting-times-mean-for
4	https://youtu.be/SuIIewV-nbw?si=rtUkj7Y6p0oY28Qj
4	https://youth-unlimited.co.uk/ycis-award/
5	https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns-and-activism/im-in
5	https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/learning-disability-register
5	https://www.homestart-westsomerset.org.uk/whatwedo/the-dad-club-west-somerset/
6	https://mha.org.uk/care-support/community-groups-activities/find-community-group/mha-communities-south-somerset
6	https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/?news=marie-curie-expands-hospital-companion-service-into-yeovil-hospital
6	https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/services/companion
7	https://www.ashleyfox.org.uk/news/ashley-fox-mp-host-senior-citizens-fair-bridgwater
7	https://helloshepton.com/events/shepton-mallet/family/collett-park-day-2/
7	https://bridgwaterarmedforcesday.co.uk/
8	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/
8	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/#:~:text=Sign%20up%20for%20our%20news%20letter