

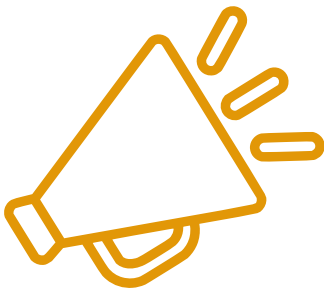


Swans on Bridgwater Canal

August 2026

July 2026 in numbers

A short summary of team achievements in June.



- **One** report launch
- **One** Advisory Board Meeting
- **Three** requests for our volunteer Readers Panel to review NHS documentation
- **28** Events
- **44** Meetings
- **55** Enquiries to our inbox or telephone number
- **643** direct engagements with people

These figures may be higher as it can be hard to record all contact and all feedback.

Local voices, real impact

After **hearing concerns** from local people about unexpected closures at some Urgent Treatment Centres and the Minor Injuries Unit in Burnham-on-Sea, **we took those concerns** directly to NHS Somerset.

As a result, NHS Somerset provided a **public response** explaining the reasons for the closures, the staffing challenges affecting services, and the action being taken to improve resilience.

Local feedback helped highlight how important accessible urgent care services are to Somerset communities and ensured these concerns were **heard by decision-makers**.

[Read the full story](#) on our website.

Sheila at carers event



Kindness, community, and care at Ivelhurst Nursing Home



We recently carried out an Enter and View visit to Ivelhurst Nursing Home in Yeovil to hear directly from residents, relatives, and staff about their experiences.

We found a welcoming, homely environment where residents told us they feel safe, valued and well cared for. Staff were observed treating people with kindness, dignity and respect, and there was a strong sense of community throughout the home. Residents enjoyed a range of activities, outings and opportunities to stay connected with local groups, schools and volunteers.

We also made several recommendations to support continued improvement.

To find out more about our visit, [download the full report](#).

Stay Well This Winter with Flu and COVID Vaccines

The NHS has opened bookings for **flu and COVID-19 vaccinations** to help people protect themselves before winter illnesses start spreading.

From 1 September, **flu vaccinations** will be available for pregnant women, young children, school-aged children, and children with certain health conditions.

From 1 October, the **flu vaccine** will also be available for people aged 65 and over, those with long-term health conditions, carers, care home residents, people experiencing homelessness, close contacts of people with weakened immune systems, and frontline healthcare workers.



COVID-19 vaccinations will be available from 1 October for people aged 75 and over, older adult care home residents, and people who are immunosuppressed.

Booking is quick and easy through the [NHS website](#), the NHS App or by calling 119. If you know you're eligible, **you don't need to wait for an invitation** before booking your appointment.

Image credit: [Paediatrician administering vaccine | Free Photo](#)



Who you gonna call...? Donna!

Say hello to Donna, the **friendly voice** behind our phone and email enquiries. Donna joined the Healthwatch team in June as our Information and Advice Officer, after volunteering with us since 2023.

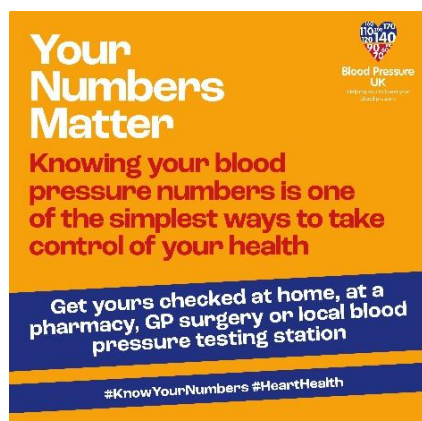
With a **background in health and care**, Donna brings a wealth of knowledge and a passion for helping people find the right support.



Whether you're sharing an experience, looking for information, or need help finding the right service, **Donna is often the first person** you'll speak to. She's here to listen, offer advice, and help make sure people's voices are heard.

Donna's favourite animal is a donkey and she's a big fan of Greek food, so we couldn't resist having a little fun with her staff photo and AI. Sorry, Donna! 🤖

Do you Know Your Numbers?



7 to 13 September is **Know Your Numbers! Week**, the UK's biggest blood pressure awareness campaign. **Somerset Healthier Lifestyles** Team is encouraging people of all ages to take a few minutes to get their blood pressure checked.

Around **1 in 3 people** have high blood pressure without knowing it because it often has no symptoms. Left untreated, it can increase the risk of serious health problems, including heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.

The good news is that checking your blood pressure is quick, easy, and free. **You can:**

- Borrow a monitor from your **local library**.
- Ask for a check at your local pharmacy.
- Use a monitor at your GP surgery.

Don't wait until you feel unwell. **Check your blood pressure** and speak to a healthcare professional if you have any concerns about your reading.

Are you part of a community group or workplace? The Healthier Lifestyles Team can visit to provide blood pressure checks and healthy lifestyle information. To arrange a visit, email workplacehealth@somerset.gov.uk or andrea.osborne@somerset.gov.uk

Could you help change a local child's life?

A great foster carer can change a child's story.

With support every step of the way, could fostering be right for you?

Find out more

fostering
in
Somerset



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Could you give a local child a **safe, stable home**, and help them thrive? Somerset urgently needs more foster carers, and even a small commitment can make a big difference.

As well as full-time fostering, there are **flexible options** such as short-stay or occasional care, which could involve welcoming a child into your home for just one weekend a month. This gives children the chance to build trusted relationships, enjoy new experiences, and feel part of a supportive community. Foster carers must be aged 21 or over and have a spare bedroom.

You do not need previous fostering experience, as full training, ongoing support from a dedicated social worker, and financial allowances are provided. **Find out more** about the different ways you can **help a local child**, visit www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk.

Have your say on the future of adult social care

The Casey Commission wants to hear what people think adult social care should look like in the future. This is **your chance** to share what matters to you, your family or people you support.

You can **take part online** by adding a proposal, voting on other people's ideas, or both. Each proposal must start with "we should..." and is limited to 140 characters, so keep it short and clear.

New proposals can be submitted until **9 September**. After this, the platform will move into a vote-only phase until **23 September**, giving people more time to respond to the ideas already shared.



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Find out more on the **Big Conversation on Care webpage**. If you need to contact the Casey Commission, use the **contact details** on the Casey Commission website.

Working Together for Veterans in Somerset



We recently attended the latest Armed Forces Strategic Forum, held in true military style outdoors under canvas at [Ark at Egwood](#).

The forum brings together organisations from across Somerset that are committed to supporting current and former members of the Armed Forces, as well as their families. Teri, [NHS Somerset's Armed Forces](#) Programme Lead, organises these meetings, which offer a great opportunity to share information, learn about new services, and make valuable connections.

We heard from **Armed Forces Link Workers**, who are meeting veterans across Somerset through a growing network of outreach hubs. There are currently [10 hubs running across the county](#), helping veterans access the services they need.

We also learned that Somerset Council has applied through the VALOUR programme to host a [recognised veteran's support centre](#), which could provide more help for local veterans in the future.

Several **useful local services** were highlighted during the meeting, including:

- A [Royal British Legion](#) volunteer visitor based at Yeovil District Hospital, **offering friendship and support** to Armed Forces community members who may be feeling lonely or isolated during a hospital stay.
- A programme from [Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership](#) for **children from Armed Forces families**, using sport, mentoring and group activities to bring young people together.
- [Green Spirit Retreat](#) on the Somerset Levels, run by former Royal Marine Paul, which welcomes veterans and military families seeking support and connection.

New Bridgwater diagnostic centre opens to help patients get faster tests

People across Bridgwater and Somerset can now get more health scans and tests closer to home thanks to the new Bridgwater Diagnostic Centre, which has opened next to Bridgwater Community Hospital.

The £17.8 million NHS facility is expected to provide almost **25,000 additional scans** each year, helping people get answers about their health more quickly.



The centre offers MRI and CT scans and will also be home to Somerset's first dedicated urology investigations unit later this year. The aim is to make it **easier for people to access** diagnostic services without having to travel to larger hospitals.

Adam Turner, Head of Imaging at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, said:

69

This facility will help us provide faster access to vital diagnostic tests, support earlier diagnosis, and make it easier for patients to be cared for closer to home.

The centre has been designed to provide a **modern, comfortable environment** with the latest diagnostic technology. It is also expected to help free up capacity at Somerset's acute hospitals, benefiting patients across the county.

How do I book a scan?



Most MRI and CT scans **cannot be booked directly by patients**. You will usually need a referral from a GP, hospital consultant or another healthcare professional. **If a scan is needed**, the NHS team caring for you will arrange a referral and you will be contacted about your appointment. The new centre is helping **increase local capacity** so that more people can be seen closer to home.

[Read the full story](#) on the Somerset NHS Foundation Trust website.

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New free CONNECTPlus app offers ADHD support for adults in Somerset

Adults in Somerset who are experiencing ADHD symptoms can now access free information, tools, and support through the new CONNECTPlus app. Developed by **Somerset NHS Foundation Trust** and **HCI**, the app is the **first of its kind** to be introduced by an adult ADHD service in England.

The app provides **reliable information** about ADHD, including myth-busting content, self-help resources, appointment tracking and note-taking tools. **Users can** also **access support** for wellbeing, mental health, financial wellbeing and local services. Content is tailored to **different stages** of a person's journey, with information on medication introduced after diagnosis.

Much of the information and support in the app can be helpful **whether or not** someone receives an ADHD diagnosis.

A member of our team investigated the app to test how easy it is to access and use, they said:

“

There is a lot of useful information, that may be difficult for some people to focus on. The content is labelled appropriately so you can click on topics of interest. I find it user friendly, though worth noting how others view the app that have or may have ADHD.

The app aims to **help people better understand** their symptoms, find useful information, and feel more confident about accessing support. It is **not a replacement** for professional healthcare or medical advice.



We would be interested to hear from local people who use the app and whether they find it helpful.

You can download the **CONNECTPlus** app to your mobile phone from App Store or Google Play, or scan the QR code.



Somerset Health and Care Academy: Investing in Somerset's future workforce

A new [Somerset Health and Care Academy](#) is **being developed** to help people start, grow and progress careers in health and care. Led by partners across the NHS, social care, education and local government, the Academy aims to make **training more accessible** and create clearer career pathways for local people.

A major part of the project is the **redevelopment** of the former Bridgwater Community Hospital site into a dedicated training hub, **alongside virtual learning** opportunities available across Somerset. The Academy is expected to deliver around **3,000** training sessions each year, supporting health and care staff to develop the skills needed to meet future demand.



[High angle adults studying together | Free Photo](#)

Development timeline

- **January 2023:** £19.7 million 'Levelling Up' funding announced.
- **2026/27:** First learning offer planned and development work continues.
- **2027:** Construction expected following planning approval.
- **2028:** Academy expected to open.

AI scribes in healthcare: what do patients think?



Artificial intelligence (AI) is playing a **growing role in healthcare**, including helping clinicians manage records, supporting diagnosis and treatment, and virtual receptionists.

One of the latest developments is the use of **AI scribes**, which can create notes and summaries during appointments, giving clinicians more time to focus on patients.

Healthwatch England recently explored what people think about this technology. While many recognise the **potential benefits**, the research found that trust, transparency and accuracy remain important. Most people **wanted to be told** when AI scribes are being used and asked for their consent, particularly during discussions about sensitive health issues.



[Read the full blog](#) to learn more about the findings and what they could mean for the future of NHS care.

Join Us for Walk for a Life 2026

This September marks a special milestone for **Walk for a Life**, with the **fifth annual walk in Taunton** and the **first ever Walk for a Life in Shepton Mallet**. The events bring people together to remember loved ones lost to suicide, raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage conversations about mental health and suicide prevention.

We have **proudly supported** and attended Walk for a Life since the very first event. We have seen first-hand how these walks create a **safe, welcoming space** for reflection, connection and hope.

The Taunton walk will take place on **Saturday 5 September**, starting from the Quaker Meeting House. The route is **accessible for wheelchairs and**

pushchairs and includes time for reflection and remembrance.



Tanya at Walk for a Life 2025

We are especially pleased to see the launch of the **first Walk for a Life in Shepton Mallet** on **Thursday 17 September**. Starting from Shepton Mallet Library, the walk follows an accessible route around Collett Park before participants return to the library for refreshments and an opportunity to connect with others, reflect, and find support.

[The Walk for a Life website](#) also provides a range of **helpful resources**, including personal stories, information to help people understand suicide, support resources, messages of hope, and a Book of Hope where people can share experiences and encouragement. These resources aim to help people **feel less alone** and encourage conversations about mental health and wellbeing.

Whether you are walking in memory of someone, showing support for suicide prevention, or simply want to be part of your community, **we would love you to join us**. Look out for our team at both events and come and say hello.

WALK FOR A LIFE

Suicide Prevention Awareness in Somerset

Taunton:
Saturday, 5 September 2026

Shepton Mallet:
Thursday, 17 September 2026



Speak to us in September 😊

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

Date and times	Details
September 1, 2026 11:00 am to 12:30 pm	Taunton Library Paul Street, Taunton, TA1 3XZ
September 2, 2026 10:30 am to 12:30 pm	Burnham-on-Sea Library 1 Princess St, Burnham-on-Sea, TA8 1EH
September 5, 2026 10:30 am – 1:00 pm	<u>Taunton Walk For a Life</u> Quaker Meeting House, 13 Bath Place, Taunton, TA1 4EP
September 16, 2026 10:30 am – 5:30 pm	<u>Women & Girls Health & Wellbeing Event – Minehead</u> Methodist Church, 31 The Avenue, Minehead, TA24 5AY
September 17, 2026 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm	<u>Somerset NHS Foundation Trust AGM Annual General Meeting and Marketplace</u> Somerset County Cricket Ground, Colin Atkinson Pavillion, Taunton, TA1 1JT
September 17, 2026 5:30 pm – 8:30 pm	<u>Shepton Mallet Walk For a Life</u> Shepton Mallet Library, 2 Market Place, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5AZ
September 22, 2026 10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Waffle over waffles at The Waffle Hub Community Café Methodist Church, 35A College St, Burnham-on-Sea, TA8 1AS
September 24, 2026 10:30 am to 12:30 pm	Somerton Library Cox's Yard, West St, Somerton, TA11 7PR

Other important dates

Date	What	Find out more
5 September	International Day of Charity	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Day_of_Charity
7 – 13 September	Know your numbers week	https://www.bloodpressureuk.org/know-your-numbers/know-your-numbers-week/
10 September	World Suicide Prevention Day	https://www.iasp.info/wspd/
13 September	World Sepsis Day	https://www.worldsepsisday.org/
17 September	World Patient Safety Day	https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-patient-safety-day
25 September	World Pharmacists Day	https://www.fip.org/world-pharmacists-day
1 – 30 September	Childhood Cancer Awareness Month	https://www.cclg.org.uk/childhood-cancer-awareness-month
1–30 September	Blood Cancer Awareness Month	https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-awareness/blood-cancer-awareness-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 **October 2026** newsletter? If so, please send us your text with an accompanying image to info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk **before Friday 18 September 2026.**

Get in touch

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

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:

Learn about our work in 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
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healthwatch
Somerset

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

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2	https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/
3	https://www.bloodpressureuk.org/know-your-numbers/know-your-numbers-week/
3	https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries/supporting-health-and-wellbeing-in-libraries/
3	https://oursomerset.org.uk/working-together/blood-pressure/
4	http://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/
4	https://caseycommission.co.uk/
4	https://make.org/GB/consultation/big-conversation-on-care/participate
4	https://caseycommission.co.uk/bigconversation/
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5	https://valour.campaign.gov.uk/valour-the-uk-wide-veteran-support-system/valour-veteran-support-centres/
5	https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/
5	https://www.sasp.co.uk/news?item=/blog/sasp-support-armed-forces-families
5	https://www.greenspiritretreat.co.uk/about
6	https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/?news=bridgwater-diagnostic-centre-officially-opens-this-week
7	https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/?news=new-digital-app-launched-to-support-adhd-patients-in-somerset
7	https://www.hci.digital/news/ADHD-Somerset/
8	https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/about-us/somerset-health-and-care-academy/
8	https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/blog/2026-07-16/what-does-public-think-about-ai-scribe-use-healthcare
9	https://walkforalife.org.uk/
10	https://fb.me/e/ksW3jFvEI
10	https://www.sasp.co.uk/event
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