healthwatch Somerset

Seasonal support Somerset 2026

Information and advice to help you through autumn and winter:

- **Staying warm**
  - Financial support and energy advice
- **Staying safe**
  - Extreme weather and less daylight
- **Staying healthy**
  - Wellbeing for body and mind
- **Staying together**
  - Furry family members and community connections

Healthwatch Somerset can provide trusted advice and help you find support for your health and wellbeing all year round.

We listen and help you find support you can access in person, by phone, or online. You can choose what works best for you.

Call us free: 0800 999 1286

or email: info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk

Staying warm

Help with money, bills, and heating

If you are struggling with bills or an unexpected cost, the **Somerset Crisis and Resilience Alliance** may be able to help. It brings together voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations, led by **Citizens Advice Somerset**. The Alliance offers help with immediate money problems and support to avoid future hardship.

For advice about benefits, bills, energy costs, work and family issues, call Citizens Advice Somerset free on **0808 278 7842**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm. You can also **find advice on the Citizens Advice Somerset website**

If you are Deaf or have hearing loss, you can use Relay UK to get advice. Use the prefix **18001**, followed by **0808 278 7842**.

The support has **three stages**:

Receive: help with an immediate financial crisis. Get help if an unexpected cost leaves you struggling.

- Heating oil help
- Housing crisis payments
- Crisis payments

Recover: one-to-one support with money problems. Alliance partners can help you work through money difficulties and plan your next steps.

- **Age UK Somerset** helps older people get the money and support they are entitled to.
- **Citizens Advice Somerset** offers one-to-one help for people facing money problems. Its advisers can help with benefits, bills, energy costs, work and family issues.
- **Thrive**'s Crisis and Resilience Agents help people who have money problems or may face a crisis.
- **Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership** works with local primary schools and activity centres to support families by providing childcare before and after school during term time.

More services are being set up. You can ask any Alliance partner for help, and they will connect you with the right support.

Remain: longer-term support to stay financially secure. This includes stronger local services, community support and easier access to help.

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Get ready for Winter with Thrive Somerset

Thrive's Crisis and Resilience Agents support people across Somerset in financial crisis or who are at risk of crisis. They can help if you are worried about:

- energy bills
- keeping your home warm
- managing your money
- finding local services



For more information about the Crisis and Resilience Agents visit their **warm healthy home page**.

This autumn, Thrive is holding free '**Get ready for winter**' events bringing together local organisations who provide a variety of services who can **help you through difficult times**. There will be information, advice, and practical tips to help you stay warm, well, and connected this winter.

Get ready for winter events:

- **Yeovil**: 19 November, Westlands Entertainment Venue, Westbourne Close, BA20 2DD
- **Bridgwater**: 24 November, Bridgwater Baptist Church, St Mary's Street, TA6 3LY

Everyone is welcome.

More help to stay warm and well

The UK Government

You can read or download the government's **Keeping warm and well: staying safe in cold weather** advice. It is available in different languages, easy read, and as a British Sign Language video.

Somerset Council

Help with heating costs and staying warm website page has advice and information about a variety of support available with a directory of community warm spaces.



Healthy Somerset's **Staying Well This Winter** page has a free video and trusted advice to help you stay healthy, warm, and supported this winter.

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Did you know that all Somerset libraries are Warm Welcome Spaces? You can visit your **local library** to stay warm, use facilities, and access support information.

You can also find warm spaces online by checking **Warm Welcome | Find Community Spaces Near You** **or** **Find a Warm Welcome - Spark Somerset**

Some of Somerset Council's Libraries have a **Winter Coat Exchange scheme**, providing access to warm coats for anyone in need.



The scheme is simple:

- Take a coat without donating one.
- Donate a coat without taking one.
- Donate clean, good-quality coats for adults or children.
- Give donations to library staff.
- Check your local library is taking part before visiting.

You can **contact Somerset Council** online or by calling: **0300 123 2224**

If you are D/deaf, hard of hearing, or have trouble speaking, you can text them for help on **07862 122246**. This number is **only** to be used for this service.

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)



Heating your home is not just about staying warm, it helps **reduce damp** which can lead to mould. **Living in a home with damp and mould is bad for your health** and can be dangerous to vulnerable people.

The **CSE** have lots of **energy advice** online including how to keep your **home healthy**. Most of the information can be downloaded in a PDF format, and some is available in other languages and some accessible formats.

They also provide free advice to help you **reduce energy bills**, improve your home's energy efficiency, and understand available support schemes.

Call CSE on **0800 038 5730**, from 10am to 4pm, or **contact CSE online**.

Healthy home tips:

Keeping the lids on saucepans when you are cooking means you can turn down the setting and **save gas or electricity**. It will also reduce the amount of steam that is released into your kitchen which can **help reduce damp**.

Defrost your freezer often and keep it as full as possible. **Fill empty spaces** with boxes to help it use less energy. Ice makes the freezer work harder, while a full freezer stays cold more easily. **Both tips can help reduce energy use and bills**.

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Staying safe

Worrying weather

There are lots of organisations who can help you with extreme weather events like flooding.



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Somerset Prepared

Somerset Prepared helps communities get ready for emergencies, such as flooding or severe weather. It offers simple advice, support, and training to help people stay safe. They also have downloadable resources, templates, and online videos.

You can find tips for staying safe at home, at work and in your community.

Somerset Council

The council have information about **preparing for flooding**, **what to do during flooding**, and **what to do after flooding**. The information is regularly updated with the latest advice and details of who to contact on **their emergency contacts page**.

If you see someone sleeping rough during severe weather:

- **Phone:** 0300 123 2224 (Somerset Council)
- **Out of hours phone:** 0300 123 2327
- **Report online:** **StreetLink**

Please **provide as much detail as possible**, including the person's location and any immediate needs. Do not assume someone else has reported it, **every report matters**.

For more information about **support for people experiencing homelessness** in Somerset read the council's **emergency help in severe weather** website page.

The UK Government

The UK Government also have **flooding information** including an online **flood warning checker**.

Floodline provides flood information and warnings 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can **register to receive flood warnings** directly by text, phone or email by signing up online, by **calling:** 0345 988 1188 or using **textphone:** 0345 602 6340.

The Met Office

The Met Office **Weather Ready pages** have information and advice for all seasons, from protecting your property to vehicle checks before long journeys.

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Stay warm safely this winter

As the weather gets colder, make sure you heat your home safely. **Check your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms**, keep portable heaters away from anything that could catch fire, and never use outdoor cooking equipment indoors. **Take care with fires, electric blankets, heated items and candles**.



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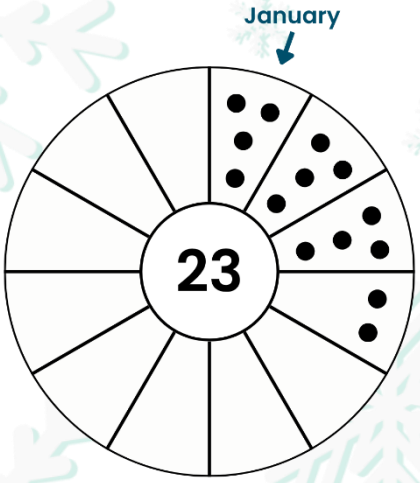
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's online home safety check takes about 15 minutes. It asks about your home and daily life, then guides you through each room to spot fire risks. Afterwards, you receive a personal safety plan to download and print. It may also suggest booking a home safety visit.

Read the full **Stay warm safely this winter** advice and complete the **online home safety check**.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service also offers fire safety advice for older people, disabled people, and carers.

Use your hot water bottle safely

Hot water bottles can help you stay warm, but **old or damaged bottles** may leak or burst and cause burns.



The **daisy wheel** is the round date mark on the bottle. The number in the middle shows the year it was made. The 12 sections around the wheel represent the months of the year. The dots in each petal represent the weeks of that month. This mark **helps you understand the bottle's age**, but replacement advice is usually based on when you bought it.

The diagram indicates a bottle made in the second week of April, (month four), 2023.

Let boiled water cool for at least five minutes. Fill the bottle no more than two-thirds, remove extra air, and tighten the stopper. **Always** use a cover, avoid lying on it and do not sleep with it in your bed.

Check the bottle often for cracks, leaks or worn areas. Manufacturers advise replacing bottles that are more than two years old, or sooner if damaged. Read the full hot water bottle safety advice.

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Staying healthy

Eating on a budget



[Healthy Somerset] is Somerset's public health website. It has helpful health and wellbeing information, including [low cost recipes] and tips to make your food go further.

Some recipes only need a kettle. Others are designed for older people who may find preparing and cooking food difficult. All recipes are **free to download**.

If you use the internet, you can search online for many more recipes and advice for cooking and eating on a budget.

Food banks, community pantries, and community fridges can help you access affordable food. Use the [Citizens Advice Somerset Food Resilience Map] to find support near you. Your **local parish or town council** may know about groups and support in your area that are not widely advertised.

Eat well this winter

Warming, healthy food can help you stay well and keep your energy up during winter. Try seasonal vegetables such as carrots, parsnips, cabbage, broccoli, and leeks. Apples, pears, and oranges are also good choices.



Simple winter meals could include:

- vegetable soup
- stews and casseroles
- lentil or chickpea curry
- cottage pie or vegetable pie
- porridge, brown rice, beans, and lentils

These meals can be affordable and simple to prepare. Choose a balance of fruit and vegetables, wholegrain foods like brown bread or brown rice, protein, and dairy or alternatives. Limit foods high in fat, salt and sugar.

During autumn and winter, the NHS advises **adults and children over four** to **consider** taking 10 micrograms of **vitamin D** each day. Some people may need different advice.

If you have a health condition or special dietary needs, speak to a healthcare professional.

The British Heart Foundation have lots of [healthy winter recipes] and information about [how to eat well].

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Helping you through the darker days

Shorter days and colder weather can affect how people feel. Winter can be difficult, and the added pressure and costs of festivities may leave some people feeling anxious, lonely, or overwhelmed.

Open Mental Health Winter Wellbeing kit

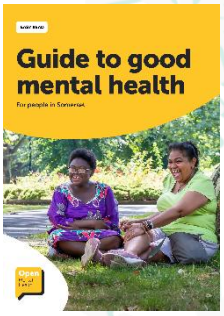
Open Mental Health offers a range of support across Somerset. Their **Winter Wellbeing Kit** includes practical advice, mental health resources, groups, and courses. It also suggests ways to look after your physical, financial, and mental wellbeing over the festive period and beyond.

You do not have to struggle alone. Open Mental Health is a group of local community organisations working with the NHS and Somerset Council. They offer support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, helping people find the right mental health support at the right time.

For people who are finding things **particularly difficult**, **Crisis Safe Space** offers one-to-one appointments. These may be face to face or online, depending on the location. Watch the **Crisis Safe Space video** to find out more.

To ask for support, call Mindline Somerset on **01823 276892** or freephone **0800 138 1692** and request a referral to Open Mental Health. You can also visit the **Open Mental Health contact page** and send a message

Open Mental Health can guide you to the right help close to home and they have a wide range of resources from informative articles to online courses. **You don't need to be in crisis to ask for help** or to access their services.



They have an **Easy Read Guide to good mental health** which is available to read online or download. This guide was **created with people who have learning difficulties**. They shared their experiences and ideas with Open Mental Health and Somerset Council. This helped make the guide **clear, useful and focused on what people need**.

Somerset public health

Healthy Somerset have other resources to **improve your wellbeing** including Easy Read version of their Little Book of Health and Wellbeing and a **Lifehacks** quick reference guide developed by young people in Somerset for young people.

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Choose how you would like to talk

Mind in Somerset is an independent local mental health charity. It helps people across Somerset find advice and support that meet their needs. Its services include one-to-one support, peer groups, counselling, art, and gardening activities. It has offices and groups across Somerset.

Sharing how you feel can be a helpful first step. Mind in Somerset offers two free services. Both are open **24 hours a day, seven days a week**.

Talk by phone

Mindline Somerset offers support by phone. A trained listener will help you find local mental health support.

Call **01823 276892** or freephone **0800 138 1692**.



Text or chat online

If you find it easier to write down how you feel, use **Mindline South West Text and Chat**.

- **Text HELLO to 80899**
- Use the **live-chat button** in the bottom-right corner of the Mind in Somerset website

A trained support worker will reply. They will listen without judging you and focus on the help you need.

Support is available in other languages, including **British Sign Language (BSL)**.

The service can also help you find local crisis services and longer-term mental health support.



Mindline South West Text and Chat is run by Mind in Somerset, working in partnership with local Minds across the South West of England.

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Keep moving this winter



Being active is good for your body and mind. It can keep you warm by helping blood move around your body. During shorter days, moving outdoors in daylight can improve your mood, fitness, and sleep.

When bad weather makes it unsafe to go outside, you can stay active indoors or join an online activity.

If you have not been active for a while, have a health condition, or are worried about your health, talk to your GP before you start exercising. **Choose activities that are right for your health and fitness level.**

Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) helps people across Somerset enjoy being active. It works with local groups to make sport and exercise easier to access. There are activities for people of all ages and abilities, **helping everyone move more** in ways that suit them. Visit the SASP website or call **01823 653990**.

The **NHS** have **exercise** guidelines and workouts to help improve your fitness and wellbeing.

We Are Undefeatable supports people living with long-term health conditions to be more active. It can help you find activities that work for you and your health. The campaign is led by 15 health and care charities and supported by Sport England.

Staying active as you get older

Staying active is important as you get older. Changes to your body may mean that gentler exercise is better for you. Age UK have many resources and guides for different kinds of exercises such as **functional fitness** and **staying steady**.

Joining a group can help you meet people as well as stay active. **Age UK Somerset** run '**Ageing Well - activities and exercise classes**' **across Somerset.** These include general fitness, strength and balance, chair-based exercise, swimming, fishing, yoga and tai chi. There is something to suit everyone! Call **01823 345624** to find out more.

Age UK Somerset is a local charity offering a wide range of services for older people across the county. Visit its website or call **01823 345610** to learn how they can support you.

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Staying together

Help with the cost of caring for your pet

Our furry family members can help keep us active, lower stress, combat loneliness, and provide comfort.

Money worries can make it harder to manage pet care, especially when your pet becomes unwell. But support and cheaper options may be available.



©RSPCA 2026

If you notice a change in your pet's health or behaviour, contact your vet as soon as possible. If you are unsure how quickly to contact a vet, you can check your pet's symptoms for free using Vet Help Direct's: **Online symptom checker**.

Getting advice early may help your pet recover sooner and could keep costs down. Be honest about what you can afford and ask whether there are suitable lower cost treatments or payment plans. You can also ask if a written prescription would let you buy medicine more cheaply elsewhere.

Never give your pet human medicine or try home treatments without speaking to a vet. Some medicines that are safe for people can be very dangerous for animals.

Depending on where you live and your circumstances, you may qualify for help with vet costs. The RSPCA webpage can help you **find support in your local area**.

Asking for help can feel difficult, but you are not alone. Speaking to your vet early is a caring and practical first step.

You may get PDSA help if you claim benefits and live near one of their Pet Hospitals or Pet Care Scheme vets. For general enquiries call: **0300 3737 224**.



They offer different services for household pets. The help you get depends on your benefits and where you live:

- Pet Hospitals give free and low-cost vet care and medicines to people who qualify.
- Pet Care Scheme vets offer low-cost vet care to people who qualify.

PDSA cannot give you money directly.

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Connecting with your community



Social connections are important to our mental and physical health. Whatever your age, interest, ability, or curiosity there will be like minded people out there ready to welcome you to their group.

We couldn't possibly list every community space and activity but here are a few suggestions where you can start.

Connect Somerset

Connect Somerset is a partnership between Somerset Council, NHS, VCFSE, Education and many more. They have an **events and activities page** which you can search by neighbourhood as well as a list of **community hubs** that offer support to families and residents.

Parish and Town Councils

There are 272 separate parishes in the Somerset Council area; your local parish council will have a good knowledge of their local community spaces, groups, and support. You can find your **local parish or town council contact details** online.

Thrive Somerset

Thrive Somerset has over 60 Village Agents who offer practical help across Somerset. They know your local area and keep what you share private. They can signpost you to groups and activities that interest you.

To get help, **fill in a referral form**, visit one of over **30 Talking Cafés**, or call **01823 331222**.

Volunteering



Volunteering provides significant mental, physical, social, and professional benefits for individuals while strengthening local communities. You may be surprised at the wide variety of opportunities from micro volunteering to roles which require more involved commitments.

Spark a Change is a digital volunteer platform that hosts a wide range of opportunities across Somerset and matches individuals looking to volunteer, together with organisations including charities and community groups.

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Important phone numbers

You can print this page so these numbers are close by. We have left some spaces for you to add your own important numbers like your doctor.

Emergency 24 Hour	Non-Emergency, 24 hour	Non-emergency, not 24 hour
Police, Fire, Ambulance and Coastguard		**999**
Gas (Transco)		**0800 111 999**
Western Power Distribution		**0800 365 900**
Scottish and Southern Energy		**0845 770 8090**
Bristol Water		**0800 801 011**
South West Water		**0800 169 1144**
Wessex Water		**0845 600 4600**
Environment Agency		**0800 807 060**
Floodline		**0845 988 1188**
Met Office weather desk		**0870 900 0100**
Police (non-emergency)		**101**
NHS (non-emergency)		**111**
Floodline		**0345 988 1188**
Mindline Somerset		**01823 276892 or 0800 138 1692**
Age UK Somerset		**01823 345610**
Mindline Somerset		**01823 276892 or 0800 138 1692**
Somerset Carers advice line		**0800 31 68 600**
Somerset Citizens Advice		**0808 278 7842**
Somerset Council (All enquiries)		**0300 123 2224**
Somerset Domestic Abuse Service		**0800 69 49 999 and choose option 2**
Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service		**0300 303 8788**
Thrive Somerset Village Agents		**01823 331 222**
Young Somerset		**01278 722100**

Other important contacts	
Who	**Contact number**

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And finally.....

Some services will have **reduced working time due to winter bank holidays**; this may affect your usual routines such as repeat medications.

Remember to order your prescriptions early so you have the medicines you need over Christmas and New Year. You can order through your GP surgery or the NHS App. Allow at least 7 to 10 days before you need your medicines. If you need them for Christmas, aim to order by Friday 11 December 2026.

Winter bank holidays

- **Friday, 25 December 2026**:
  Christmas Day (GP practices closed)
- **Monday, 28 December 2026**:
  Boxing Day substitute day
  (GP practices closed)
- **Friday, 1 January 2027**:
  New Year's Day (GP practices closed)



Thank you to everyone who contributed text and images towards the creation of this special.

Links in this document

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2	https://citizensadvicesomerset.org.uk/crisis-resilience-fund/
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2	https://www.ageuk.org.uk/somerset/
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3	https://www.somerset.gov.uk/care-and-support-for-adults/cost-of-living-support-in-somerset/help-with-heating-costs-and-staying-warm/
3	https://healthysomerset.co.uk/staying-well-this-winter/
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5	https://thestreetlink.org.uk/
5	https://www.somerset.gov.uk/housing-support/homelessness-and-prevention/emergency-accommodation-in-severe-weather/
5	https://www.gov.uk/browse/environment-countryside/flooding-extreme-weather
5	https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/
5	https://www.gov.uk/get-flood-warnings
5	https://weather.metoffice.gov.uk/warnings-and-advice/weatherready
6	https://www.dsfire.gov.uk/safety/home/stay-warm-safely-winter
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8	https://healthysomerset.co.uk/health-and-wellbeing-topics/support-with-your-mental-health/improve-your-wellbeing/
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9	https://www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/
10	https://www.sasp.co.uk/
10	https://www.sasp.co.uk/active-people
10	https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/
10	https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/
10	https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/exercise/functional-fitness/
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12	https://www.sparkachange.org.uk/

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