News & views

healthwatch Somerset



Cale Park, Wincanton

October 2026

Note from the editor

Due to staff shortages, we were unable to bring you the September issue of our monthly newsletter. We hope that this did not cause you too much disappointment.

Never fear, this October issue is packed full of our work, information, advice, and important health and care news. We are also releasing a 'Seasonal Support' special in early November to help you prepare for your wellbeing through winter.

Two months in numbers

A short summary of team achievements in August and September.

August	September
• **One** report launch	• **One** report launch
• **Three** requests for our volunteer Readers Panel to review NHS documentation	• **One** Advisory Board Meeting
	• **One** request to our volunteer Readers Panel
• **Five** new website pages	• **One** account to the **Somerset Board**
• **11** Events	• **Four** stakeholder meetings attended by volunteers
• **15** Meetings	• **18** Events
• **56** Enquiries	• **84** Enquiries
• **4910** Views of our Facebook page	• **1957** Views of our Facebook page

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

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Healthwatch is here to stay!



We're delighted to share some great news. On 28 October, the government announced that local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England will be kept and made stronger. Your independent voice in health and care will **remain protected by law**.

the advocacy people®

Our host organisation, **The Advocacy People**, said:

> We warmly welcome this decision and the commitment to protecting the independent voice of patients, service users and communities.

What does this mean for you?

We can continue to:

- **listen** to your health and care experiences in Somerset.
- **use your experiences**, without using your name, to help shape services and help make changes.
- **be guided by what you tell us**, helping change happen **with you, not to you**.
- **offer free information and advice** and help you find the health and care services you need.

Every year, thousands of people share their experiences with us. **Your voices help** shape services and make change happen where it matters most.



We are excited to continue supporting everyone in Somerset and providing a **trusted, fair, and independent service where you can speak openly and honestly**.

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Our new report reveals experiences of Pharmacy services



We have published a **new report** exploring how pharmacy services are working for people across the county.

The report is based on feedback from **more than 400 residents** gathered through surveys and community conversations.

> **76%** of people we spoke to had asked a pharmacist for advice about a medical issue or health concern.

We found that **people value their local pharmacies** and often describe staff as caring, approachable, and supportive. Many people reported positive experiences using Pharmacy First and welcomed the convenience of getting advice and **treatment closer to home**.

However, **people also told us** about ongoing challenges, including **low awareness** of Pharmacy First, concerns about privacy, difficulties accessing medicines and frustration with prescription waiting times.

The report shares **local stories**, highlights examples of good practice, and sets out recommendations to improve awareness, access, and confidence in pharmacy services across Somerset.

Read the full report and find out how local people's experiences are helping shape pharmacy services for the future.

Pharmacy First update

During September 2026 **NHS announced** that the Pharmacy First scheme is to include five new conditions as of Autumn 2026. They are:

- **Acne**: young people and adults
- **Ear infections:** adults aged 18 years and over
- **Migraines:** adults aged 18-64 years
- **Rhinitis:** children aged 4-11 years
- **Scabies:** all ages



Availability will vary at first so it is important to check that your pharmacy is involved before visiting.

Find your nearest pharmacy using the NHS Service finder.

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Speaking up for young carers



Children in school: Free photo on Pixabay

Proposed cuts to **young carers' groups** and the **Young Carers in Schools** programme in Somerset have been withdrawn.

We joined families and local organisations in raising concerns about the impact of losing these vital services. Our evidence shows that young carers already face challenges and gaps in support.

Somerset Council has now taken the proposed savings off the table. This is welcome news for young carers and their families—and shows why speaking up about local services matters.

In response to our statement of concern Councillor Heather Shearer said:

> We have listened carefully to the views of young carers, families, partners and councillors, and concluded this was not a proposal we wished to take forward at this time.

Read the full story and find out how people's experiences helped inform our action.

Meet Soluna by Kooth

Kooth, the free and **safe mental health support** service for young people, has evolved into Soluna by Kooth. Young people can be connected to a mental health expert through the mobile app or online.

Working with the NHS and local councils, Soluna helps young people deal with everyday challenges. These might include exam stress, anxiety, friendship worries or simply feeling overwhelmed.

It's free, you don't need a referral and there's no waiting list.

Soluna offers:

- Support from trained professionals
- Helpful, expert advice and resources
- A safe space designed for young people

Want to find out more? Visit **SolunaByKooth.com** or scan the QR code above.

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Help make a difference in your community



Cancer Awareness and Support Cafés (CASC) are looking for friendly volunteers to help at community events. CASC offers welcoming spaces where people **affected by cancer**, including families and friends, can talk, share experiences, and find support from others who understand.

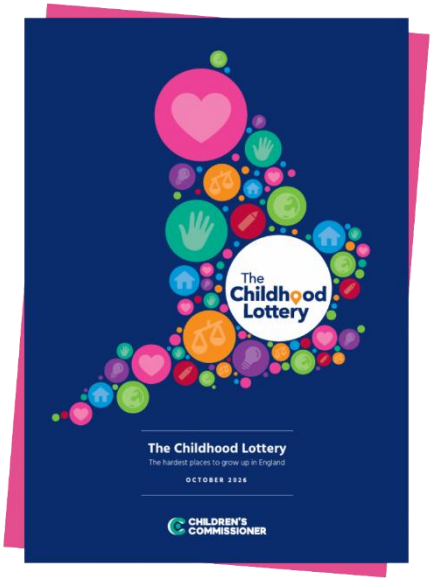
If you have been through cancer yourself, helped a loved one through cancer, or supported people living with cancer in a professional role **your experience could help others** feel heard, understood, and less alone.

By giving your time, you can help create welcoming spaces where people affected by cancer can connect and find peer support. Whether you have lived experience of cancer or simply want to support your community, **CASC would love to hear from you**.

Find out more and get involved go to their **website page**, or for an informal discussion about the role email: **hello@cascorg.info.**

What is it like to grow up in Somerset?

A new report from the **Children's Commissioner for England** ranks Somerset as the **11th most challenging place in England to grow up**.



The Childhood Lottery looks at children's experiences across health, education, care, housing, safety, and opportunities to play. It highlights where children may struggle to get the care, support, and opportunities they need.

Somerset's strongest result was providing independent advocacy for vulnerable groups. The biggest concern was access to dental care.

The report is **not a judgement** on Somerset or its communities. It helps show where services could improve and where leaders need to work together to tackle inequality.

Share your experiences with us and help shape better local services for children and families.

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Make Christmas Sparkle for local young people

The **Christmas Sparkle Project** brings the community together to support local families. Its aim is to give a Christmas present to every child and young person aged 0–18 who is living in difficult circumstances in Taunton or Wellington.

You can help spread some joy this Christmas by:

- Donating money or a gift between 1 November and 6 December. Donate through **Just Giving** or bank transfer, order from the **Amazon Wishlist** (which will deliver directly to them), or leave a gift at a local **donation point**.
- Shopping online through the project's **Christmas Sparkle Easyfundraising** link, (the project will get a share of the money).
- Hosting a donation point.
- Volunteering at a gift **wrapping event**.

For more information go to their **website** or **Facebook page**, or email: **info@christmas-sparkle.org**

Health and care inequalities are still widespread

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) says growing demand is putting England's health and care services under increasing pressure.

There have been some improvements, such as more GP appointments, shorter waits for planned care, and new ways of working. However, services are not improving quickly enough, and access to good care still depends too much on who you are and where you live.

Children and young people are particularly affected. More than 80,000 have waited over a year for a community health appointment, while the number waiting for their first contact with mental health services has risen by 31% in two years.

Adult social care is also changing quickly. Financial pressures and differences in local planning could reduce the choice and availability of support, especially for people who rely on council-funded care.

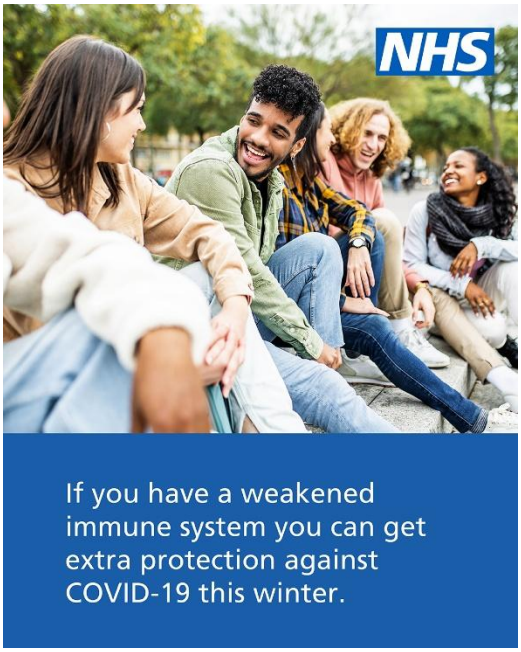
Read the CQC's **State of Care report** and **full news item**.

Alternative versions of the report in audio, British Sign Language, and Easy Read are available.

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Protect yourself and others this winter

Flu vaccination in 2025–26 is estimated to have prevented more than 100,000 hospital admissions and 7,000 deaths in England.



Most healthy adults will not need a winter vaccination. However, **free NHS vaccinations are available to many people who may be at greater risk**. This includes some children, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions.

Some frontline health and care workers, unpaid carers, and people who live with or have close contact with someone with a weakened immune system may also be eligible.

Winter vaccinations include flu, COVID-19, RSV, and MenB for eligible groups. Check the **NHS vaccination guide** to find out what you may be offered.

You can receive vaccinations in several places, including some community pharmacies. If the NHS invites you, then don't overlook it, **make sure you book it,** to help protect yourself and others.

Let's Talk SEND & Inclusion Yeovil

Somerset Parent Carer Forum (SPCF) is teaming up with **Yeovil 4 Families** to bring you Let's Talk SEND & Inclusion Yeovil, on **Thursday 19 November**.

This **inclusive event** is designed to bring parent carers, families, local services, and SEND professionals together for **a day of connection, conversation, and support.**

Discover what support is available in your local area, access advice and information, and meet organisations that can help your family. There will also be a discussion area, bookable 1:1 SEN Clinics and free taster activities.

This free event is open to all parent carers of children and young people aged 0-25 years with additional needs and/or disabilities. **A formal diagnosis is not required** to attend. **For more information** go to the SPCF website.

To book a confidential 1:1 SEN session call 01458 259384 or email: **admin@somersetparentcarerforum.org.uk**

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New NHS facilities improving care across Somerset

Somerset NHS Foundation Trust (SNHSFT) has recently opened several new facilities designed to improve local care. Here are some highlights. You can read the full stories and find more updates on the **SNHSFT news pages**.

New surgical centre at Musgrove Park Hospital



The King's Building opened in early September and includes eight operating theatres, six endoscopy rooms, and a 22-bed intensive care unit. It offers modern facilities for patients and staff, as well as extra capacity to help reduce waiting times for treatment.

New mobile breast screening units

Two ageing mobile units have been replaced with modern scanning units. They travel between communities across Somerset, making breast screening more accessible and reducing the need for long hospital journeys.



Finding cancer early can improve treatment outcomes. In Somerset, you can **refer yourself** for checks for some cancers without first seeing a GP.

New outpatient pharmacy at Musgrove Park Hospital



Patients can now collect medicines prescribed during outpatient appointments from the hospital's new pharmacy. It is in the Duchess Building, on the right as you enter the main hospital building from the multi-storey car park.

New urology unit in Bridgwater

A dedicated urology investigations unit has opened at Bridgwater Diagnostic Centre. Patients can now have more appointments, tests, and procedures in one place, reducing the need to visit different parts of Musgrove Park Hospital.



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What would you like from cancer peer support?

Cancer Awareness & Support Cafés (CASC) want to hear what matters to people affected by cancer.



Their 10-minute survey asks what you would like from peer support and how to make it easier to access. Your feedback will **help improve existing groups and plan future activities**. You do not need to have attended a group to take part.

Find out more and complete CASC's survey to help shape cancer peer support in Somerset.

Natter with us in November 😀

Come and share your experiences or ask us about Somerset health and care services.

Date and times	Details
Find us at the **Thrive** '**Get ready for winter**' events this November. See our **Seasonal Support** special for dates and locations.	
November 3, 2026 11:00am to 12:30pm	**Have a chat with Healthwatch** Taunton Library**,** Paul Street, Taunton, TA1 3XZ
November 16, 2026 10:00am to 12:00pm	**Have a chat with Healthwatch** St John's Church, High Street Glastonbury, BA6 9JQ
November 21, 2026 11:00am to 15:00pm	**Bridgwater Together** 11-13 Castle Street, Bridgwater, TA6 3DD
November 24, 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
November 26, 2026 10:30 am to 12:30 pm	**Have a chat with Healthwatch** South Petherton Library, 3 St James's Street, TA13 5BS

Other important dates

Date	What	Find out more
11 November	Remembrance Day	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day
14 November	World Diabetes Day	https://worlddiabetesday.org/about-wdd/
19 November	Carers Rights Day	https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/our-campaigns/carers-rights-day/
1 – 30 November	Movember (Men's Mental Health Awareness)	https://movember.com/mental-fitness
1 – 30 November	Lung Cancer Awareness Month	https://roycastle.org/about-us/campaigns/why-not-me/
1 – 30 November	Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month	https://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/

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Want us to share your news?



Do you have any health and care news or events you would like us to include in our **November 2026** newsletter? If so, please send us your text with an accompanying image to **info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk** **before Friday 13 November 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**.

Find out more:

Our website	**https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/**
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**
Contact us	**https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/contact-us**

Follow us on social media:

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3	https://www.england.nhs.uk/2026/09/patients-to-get-quicker-treatment-for-migraines-acne-and-3-other-everyday-conditions-at-pharmacies/
3	https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy
4	https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/the-local-offer/find-send-services/?q=young+carers+group
4	https://youth-unlimited.co.uk/ycis-award/
4	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/post/young-carers-support-saved-after-local-concerns-are-heard
4	https://solunaapp.com/uk
5	https://cascorg.info/
5	https://cascorg.info/news-%26-blog/f/casc-is-seeking-volunteers-to-help-at-our-community-events
5	https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/
5	https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/the-childhood-lottery/
6	https://www.christmas-sparkle.org/
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6	https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/3DOIGPU5XOYIU?ref_=wl_share&fbclid=IwY2xjawVIPQ9leHRuA2FlbQIxMQBwZG9mAXNydGMGYXBwX2lkEDIyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR4tD9jBRJuDVyVBlp3HBAa1hKPO31ZsXOwyqZIdZ5OS5QIuMqOy4AjcAH6z4Q_aem_0ZGSuHX3wQk-RszpMwt0oQ
6	https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/christmassparkle/
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7	https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/
7	https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/
7	https://somersetparentcarerforum.org.uk/
7	https://yeovilcommunitychurch.co.uk/yeovil-4-family/
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Page	Brief description
1	Cale Park, Wincanton
2	Montage banner and staff images
3	Somerset county map with Somerset Dragon

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