

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>NHS SOMERSET INTEGRATED CARE BOARD ICB Board Part A</b>	<b>ENCLOSURE:</b> H
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	<b>28 November 2024</b>	
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>Somerset's Big Conversation</b>	
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<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>SELECT</b>
<b>Approve</b>	To formally receive a report and approve its recommendations, (authorising body/committee for the final decision)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Endorse</b>	To support the recommendation (not the authorising body/committee for the final decision)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Discuss</b>	To discuss, in depth, a report noting its implications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Note</b>	To note, without the need for discussion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Assurance</b>	To assure the Board/Committee that systems and processes are in place, or to advise of a gap along with mitigations	<input type="checkbox"/>

**LINKS TO STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**  
(Please select any which are impacted on / relevant to this paper)

- Objective 1: Improve the health and wellbeing of the population
- Objective 2: Reduce inequalities
- Objective 3: Provide the best care and support to children and adults
- Objective 4: Strengthen care and support in local communities
- Objective 5: Respond well to complex needs
- Objective 6: Enable broader social and economic development
- Objective 7: Enhance productivity and value for money

**PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION / ENGAGEMENT**

N/A

**REPORT TO COMMITTEE / BOARD**

Somerset's Big Conversation is a large-scale public engagement initiative designed with three objectives:

- Promote the NHS in Somerset and Be Visible
- Convene the System for Prevention and Awareness Campaigns
- Engage with the Somerset Community to Generate Insight for Strategy and Planning

Launched in 2024 and aimed at continuously engaging with the people of Somerset to gather insights into their views on local health and care services. This will be an ongoing effort to better understand public attitudes, expectations and priorities. By gathering this valuable feedback, we aim to inform and shape the delivery of NHS services in the region, ensuring they align with the needs of the community. This initiative will further be developed in 2025 and beyond to foster a deeper, more responsive connection with the public and enhance service delivery.

This report sets out:

- The background to, and objectives of, Somerset's Big Conversation
- A summary of the findings and outcomes from the four main engagement activities and methodologies
- How the outcomes will inform future iterations of the NHS Somerset Integrated Care Strategy
- Next steps and intentions for Somerset's Big Conversation in 2025, including ensuring that feedback is acted upon

### **Background and objectives:**

Somerset's Big Conversation was launched as part of the NHS Somerset's strategic approach to patient and public involvement in health and care transformation.

Its objectives were:

- **To promote the NHS in Somerset and its role by being visible:** by actively engaging in the community, the campaign aimed to raise awareness of NHS Somerset and the work we do
- **To convene the system to promote and deliver relevant prevention and awareness campaigns:** the initiative brought together system-wide partners to deliver targeted prevention and health awareness campaigns, targeting key health priorities
- **To engage with the Somerset community to inform strategy and planning:** Through meaningful interactions, Somerset's Big Conversation gathered community insights on healthcare needs and expectations, to help ensure future strategy and planning efforts align with the genuine needs of residents

### **Objective 1: Promote NHS Somerset and Be Visible**

As part of Somerset's Big Conversation, NHS Somerset prioritised community presence across the county to increase visibility and engagement. Over the course of the campaign, NHS Somerset staff and representatives attended **26 events**, and through these events, we engaged in **2,021 conversations**, providing valuable face-to-face interactions which helped build trust and raise awareness of who NHS Somerset are.

We established successful partnerships with local organisations, community groups and stakeholders, fostering strong relationships that enhanced our reach and allowed for collaborative event hosting. These partnerships not only improved turnout but also allowed us to connect with trusted local contacts who provided insights into community needs and helped promote the events. We placed particular emphasis on engaging with rural and coastal communities, as well as seldom-heard groups, to ensure that all voices were represented. To achieve this, we worked with Diversity Voice, an equality, diversity and inclusion charity based in Somerset.

Throughout the campaign, we gathered intelligence on the demographics and priorities of each area visited. This demographic information provided us with a better understanding of regional health priorities, such as access to mental health resources, transport for medical appointments and availability of local health services. This localised insight will be invaluable for tailoring our services to meet the needs of Somerset's diverse communities.

The approach of direct engagement, combined with local partnerships, successfully elevated the profile of NHS Somerset and helped build a foundation of trust and familiarity within communities.

### **Objective 2: Convene the System for Prevention and Awareness Campaigns**

Through Somerset's Big Conversation, NHS Somerset successfully brought together system-wide partners to deliver impactful prevention and awareness campaigns. By uniting multiple health initiatives under one community engagement banner, we were able to maximise reach and

effectiveness, leading to significant health interventions and positive outcomes for the public and participating teams.

As part of the **'Know Your Numbers'** campaign, clinicians providing free blood pressure screenings attended 19 of the events. A total of 982 tests were conducted, offering vital, accessible health checks directly to the public in a convenient location. Through these screenings, several attendees were identified with high blood pressure, 2 of them being advised to attend Emergency Departments immediately and many of whom were previously unaware of their condition. This early detection highlights the impact of taking services to the people and enabling individuals to seek timely medical advice and potentially prevent more serious health issues.

Other collaborations and campaigns highlighted throughout 2024 were:

- Women's Health
- Cancer Support Services Somerset Foundation Trust  
*"The Summer Engagement events went well for my team and me, and over 5 events we had 208 engagements to discuss cancer screening entitlements and Macmillan's offers. These discussions also informed the next steps we need to take to raise awareness e.g. several people believed that cervical screening also checked for ovarian cancer. The events were a very worthwhile opportunity for staff to network and forge new partnerships with other professionals which will in turn improve patient experience at both hospitals in the Trust. "Gill Harrison – Cancer Information Officer*
- Diabetes
- Carers Support
- Planned Care and Cancer  
*~In my role as Commissioning Manager for Planned Care and Cancer, I wanted to volunteer and take part in Somerset's Big Conversation as I feel it is important to see and hear from those who access and use our services. All too often we can focus on the negatives, the improvements that are needed, performance target we aren't achieving and yes, we can also do better, but, there are so many people experiencing the help, support and kindness of the NHS every day ~ Carly Jackson – Commissioning Manager*
- Healthwatch
- Armed Forces Team  
*~Over the course of this summer, I was able to join the Big Conversation as it travelled across Somerset to engage with the public. As the Armed Forces Lead, I have a particular interest (no surprise) in the Armed Forces community. However, being part of the wider team enabled me to engage with other members of the public and to hear their stories too. Sometimes, someone starts talking to you about a cancer diagnosis or some form of treatment, then that changes direction and you end up talking about how their parent did military service. Sometimes, there is no connection at all to the military, but you can engage with people and listen to their story. Some of these were incredibly moving, others funny, but I left every event with an overwhelming pride in what we are doing here in Somerset. We don't always have to fix things, but just being there to listen, to empathise and to give a hug can be all that's needed. I learned so much more about the NHS and about colleagues and departments I will never meet, but who also shared my values of care and compassion. If you have the chance to go along to any of the events, please do, it was fun, enjoyable and reinforces why we do what we do and the public really do care about the NHS and maintaining this national treasure~ Teri Underwood – Armed Forces Project Manager*
- Diversity Voice
- Sustainability
- Supervised Tooth Brushing

The integration of multiple campaigns proved particularly effective, and this was highlighted by higher engagement numbers when services like blood pressure testing were offered. Data showed a correlation between higher event attendance and the availability of direct health checks, confirming the draw and effectiveness of offering preventative services alongside awareness campaigns.

The coordinated campaign model delivered wide-reaching benefits:

- For the public: immediate access to health services, increased awareness of health and services available and actionable feedback which encouraged proactive health management
- For the Engagement Team: The campaign allowed the team to strengthen community ties, gain real-time insights into public health concerns, build credibility and continue our continuous engagement
- For participating teams: Each team gained firsthand insight into the community's health priorities, fostered trust with Somerset residents and had the opportunity to share campaigns directly with residents across the county

This collaborative approach demonstrated that convening the system benefits the public, engagement teams, and campaign partners alike, fostering a united effort toward a healthier Somerset.

### **Objective 3: Engage with the Somerset Community to Generate Insight for Strategy and Planning**

Somerset's Big Conversation was designed to engage the community through multiple channels, gathering diverse insights that inform NHS Somerset's strategic planning. This comprehensive engagement approach included a survey of local residents, face-to-face events across the county, a collaboration with Diversity Voice, and a robust social media campaign to ensure broad and inclusive participation.

- **Survey of Local People:** An online survey, promoted at the Somerset's Big Conversation engagement events, through NHS Somerset communications channels and social media, attracted 269 responses. Darmax Research, an independent research agency, was commissioned to undertake the analysis of the responses received. A summary of the responses is provided below.

Responses were coded into key themes to identify prevalent issues and priorities:

**Overall satisfaction with living in Somerset:** 47% of respondents were satisfied with how happy and healthy they feel living in Somerset, 31% felt indifferent, and 22% were dissatisfied.

**Helping children achieve the best possible start in life:** Respondents emphasised the importance of early years support, including access to maternity services, health visitors, access to Sure Start centres and affordable childcare. Access to quality schooling and education was also mentioned. Key themes also included the need for accessible mental health support for children, improved dental services, and education on healthy living.

**Supporting people and communities to live well and stay healthy:** Maintaining health and wellbeing across the community was identified as a high priority. Respondents highlighted challenges with GP access, particularly in rural areas, and called for more localised healthcare facilities, such as community hubs and community hospitals should be used. Respondents advocated for regular health checks and screenings as well as education around diet and exercise. Access to affordable weight management and physical activity programmes was also a recurring theme.

**Helping people live independent lives for longer:** Independence in later life was a key concern, with respondents highlighting the need for better social care, home care support, and community services. Respondents commented that better access to GP services, local community health hubs, and social care support to help maintain independence should be a priority. Respondents also advocated for proactive health checks and lifestyle education to prevent long-term conditions from escalating. Addressing social isolation through community activities and home visits was seen as essential for supporting the elderly and vulnerable.

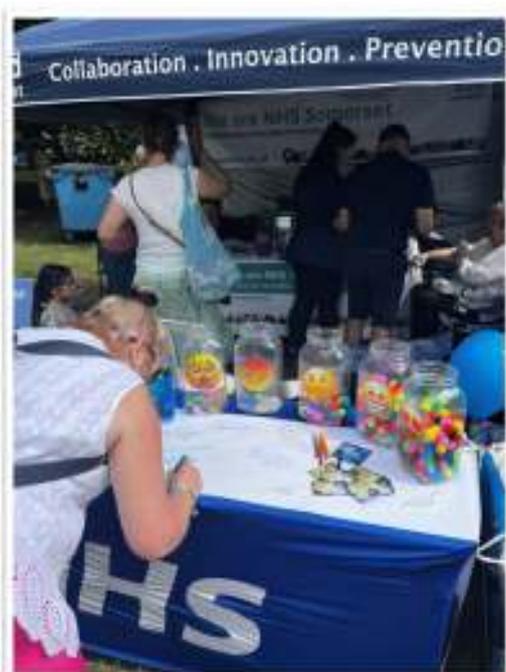
**Helping people access services at the right place and right time:** Access to healthcare services when needed was a significant concern. Respondents cited long wait times as a major barrier, called for shorter waiting times, quicker referrals, and access to services in more rural or isolated areas. Respondents also emphasised the need for improved communication between healthcare providers and patients, including better information on available services and appointment scheduling. Respondents called for better public transport links and more local services to reduce travel difficulties, especially for elderly or disabled patients.

**What has gone well and what could be improved:** Positive feedback focused on the quality of care provided once accessed, particularly in A&E services and specialist departments. Respondents appreciated the dedication of healthcare staff despite resource challenges. However, access to care, especially GPs and NHS dentists, was a major area of dissatisfaction. Positive experiences were also reported in cancer screening and women's health. Many respondents noted issues with long wait times, difficulty accessing GP appointments, and a lack of available NHS dentists. Communication and follow-up were also identified as areas for improvement.

**What NHS Somerset needs to address as a priority:** Respondents called for better access to GPs and NHS dentists, faster referrals, and more localised healthcare options. Respondents highlighted the need for more preventive care services, including screenings and health education. Adequate staffing, particularly in primary care and mental health services, was identified as a critical area for improvement.

In terms of demographics, no responses were received from anyone under the age of 25, 74% were over the age of 55, about three quarters of respondents were female, and 32% of people who completed the survey said they had a disability.

- **Face to Face Events:** Direct engagement with residents at events allowed for in-depth conversations and real-time feedback. These personal interactions added depth to our understanding, capturing community concerns and suggestions that are often difficult to gather through surveys alone.



During the campaign period, the Engagement Team attended 26 events during which they held 2,021 conversations with Somerset residents.

A recognised engagement technique was used to initiate conversations by asking people to put pom-poms in jars indicating their response to the simple question: 'how happy and healthy do you feel living in Somerset?'.

NHS Somerset representatives then encouraged respondents to expand on their answer and gained further qualitative insight from the ensuing conversations.

Respondents were also encouraged to share their thoughts and feedback in brief by adding comments to a large sheet set out on a table (see photo).

The outcomes from the pom-pom question jars, forms and comment sheets have been analysed in detail A summary of the outcomes is included here:

- Key areas identified as important from the 976 handwritten responses included access to primary care; the need for mental health support; the need for clear communication about services available and between different parts of the health service (to avoid patients having to repeat themselves); location of services; access to hospital services and praise for hospital teams; positivity about the county of Somerset as a place to live; the need for adequate funding

for the NHS and pleas not to let the NHS be privatised; and general comments about other public services.

- Comments themed around social wellbeing and local communities attracted most feedback with the fewest responses received for both mental health and communication – the majority of these were categorised as ‘room for improvement’

**Note:** Shortly after Somerset’s Big Conversation was launched, a general election was called. Due to the requirement on the NHS not to undertake any activities that could be viewed as political, the project methodology was changed, and a very general question was asked as the main entry point to conversations (how happy and healthy do you feel living in Somerset?). Naturally, this led to a range of answers, not all of which encompassed health and care, which was our primary focus.

- **Collaboration with Diversity Voice:** NHS Somerset commissioned Somerset equality, diversity and inclusion charity Diversity Voice to gain insight from people from “protected characteristic” groups (according to the Equality Act 2010).

211 responses to the Somerset’s Big Conversation survey were collected over 12 events including Pride events, carnivals, Welcome Hubs, and more targeted groups

- Engagement efforts included interactive conversations using the pompom jar approach to capture attention and directing individuals to the online survey. A Ukrainian interpreter was made available on one occasion and Google Translate was also utilised at others to assist with communication. Additionally, budget was used to translate the survey into British Sign Language (BSL) to ensure broader accessibility. A summary of Diversity Voice’s findings is given below.



- **Overall satisfaction with living in Somerset:** The majority of conversations and feedback indicated a strong sense of satisfaction with living in Somerset. Marginally, the African mums group indicated they felt indifferent or sad living in Somerset which was possibly due to the fact many were 3-12 months post-partum, first time mums, living far from home and family support.

**Helping children achieve the best possible start in life:** Respondents emphasised the need for good affordable food to be available, access to dental care to avoid long-term health issues and promote good oral hygiene habits early on and education around the dangers of substance abuse, fostering resilience and creating safe spaces where children feel comfortable discussing their issues. Teaching children about diversity, inclusion and respect for others’ differences from a young age to foster empathy, understanding and a sense of belonging.

**Supporting people and communities to live well and stay healthy:** Focus needs to be on both physical and mental well-being, as well as creating an inclusive environment for all. Addressing obesity and alcohol abuse were seen as key, together with help to stop smoking and vaping. Respondents also highlighted the need to reduce the stigma around sexual health to ensure everyone feels comfortable seeking care and information. Lack of support for mental health issues was also a concern with accessible services to help people manage stress, anxiety and depression seen as a priority. A well-connected transport network is seen as key to improving access to healthcare, employment, education and social activities. Respondents also highlighted the need to improve access to healthcare services, whether through digital platforms, mobile health units or local clinics to reduce health inequalities

**Helping people live independent lives for longer:** Respondents emphasised the need to know where support can be accessed and the need to have access to translators for appointments. A strong family network was considered essential for a long and independent

life. Addressing lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption was also considered essential for maintaining long-term health. It was also noted there was a need to raise awareness around cancer prevention, early detection and treatment in diverse communities to save lives. Ensuring timely access to healthcare is essential particularly for older adults who may have complex health needs

**Helping people access services at the right place and right time:** Respondents once again highlighted the need for reliable and accessible transport options which are crucial for those in rural or underserved areas and for individuals with mobility issues. Shift patterns were seen as an issue for many who were unable to access appointments or telephones to make appointments with long waits for both. It was also noted clearer guidance and communication is required on how to access translation services and a better understanding and respect for diverse religious beliefs is needed.

**What has gone well and what could be improved:** Respondents noted positive progress in the social acceptance of same sex relationships. Hospital cleanliness was highlighted as good although the lack of consideration for the dietary requirements of people from diverse religious backgrounds needs improvement. There is a need for more mid wives and support for those who are pregnant or have just had their babies. Respondents emphasised the NHS 111 service provides good information and is readily accessible.

**What NHS Somerset needs to address as a priority:** A need for reassurance and good communication for those whose first language is not English is needed together with respect for differences – to reflect the comment ‘we are all people’. Practical and emotional support for carers was seen as essential and waiting times, especially those for gender identity clinics need addressing

- **Digital Engagement:** Digital engagement played a pivotal role in extending the reach and accessibility of Somerset’s Big Conversation. Through online platforms, residents were able to participate in surveys and virtual discussions significantly increasing engagement from those unable to attend events. As well as providing a direct opportunity for users to feedback their views, social media posts were used to promote the online survey (see above). A summary of activity, reach and engagement can be seen below:



**Overall satisfaction with living in Somerset:** A series of polls asking the question ‘how happy and healthy do you feel living in Somerset’ were posted on Next Door and Facebook community boards, as these achieve the most reach. The aggregated results were as follows:

Some 52% of respondents were satisfied with how happy and healthy they feel living in Somerset, 22% felt indifferent, and 26% were dissatisfied. On posts relating to the poll, users were also asked to give their reasons for their answer. This resulted in 260 comments.

**Commentary:** The standout themes from online comments were about access to GP practices and dentists. Users expressed their frustration at not being able to access NHS dentistry for themselves and their families, particularly their children. One talked about travelling more than 100 miles to access a dentist and commenters also complained about having to pay for private treatment when they had already 'paid' for NHS care through taxes/national insurance. There was recognition that this is also a national issue.

Comments also reflected difficulties getting a GP appointment or having to wait weeks for one. Reservations were also expressed about sharing personal information with practice receptionists. However, there was also praise for all surgery staff from support staff to doctors and nurses. There were also complaints about the interface between primary care and secondary care and issues getting test results.

In terms of access to hospital services, comments reflected known issues around delays for ambulances, waits in Emergency Departments and long waits for planned care.

Many people talked about the benefits of living in Somerset - its beautiful countryside, coasts and hills.

## Next Steps

- **Sharing insights and preparing for 2025:**

The insights gathered from the 2024 Somerset's Big Conversation have already been shared with the Management Board, and we plan to further disseminate these findings with teams across the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the wider system. For 2025, we anticipate continuing with the 3 core objectives:

- 1. Be Visible and Promote the NHS in Somerset:** we will maintain a strong community presence to raise awareness of NHS Somersets role and initiatives. Feedback from 2024 highlighting key community priorities, we will share actions and their impacts with the public to demonstrate our responsiveness to their concerns.
- 2. Convene the System for Prevention and Awareness Campaigns:** to drive impactful prevention and awareness efforts in 2025, we will strengthen system-wide partnerships and collaborative campaigns including: Know Your Numbers, Smokefree Somerset and Dental
- 3. Engage with Our Communities:** to deepen our engagement with Somerset's communities and align our efforts with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) priorities, we will collaborate with ICB teams and System Partners, including the Somerset VCFSE Collaborative to identify key priority areas where further community insight and engagement are needed. This collaborative approach will ensure our efforts are responsive to current needs and aligned with broader strategic goals. Emphasis will be placed on engaging CORE20PLUS5 communities to address health inequalities and ensure all voices are heard.

For each identified priority area, we will design tailored engagement plans to connect with the most relevant community groups. This targeted approach will help us gather meaningful insights into specific needs and preferences, ultimately guiding service planning and improvement. Current topics being considered include the 3 shifts in the 10 Year Plan, neighbourhoods and dentistry

ENDS

**IMPACT ASSESSMENTS – KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED**  
(please enter 'N/A' where not applicable)

<b>Reducing Inequalities/Equality &amp; Diversity</b>	N/A
<b>Quality</b>	N/A
<b>Safeguarding</b>	N/A
<b>Financial/Resource/ Value for Money</b>	N/A
<b>Sustainability</b>	N/A
<b>Governance/Legal/ Privacy</b>	N/A
<b>Confidentiality</b>	N/A
<b>Risk Description</b>	N/A