



# Somerset innovation project

## NHS 10-year plan shift: hospital to community

### Problem

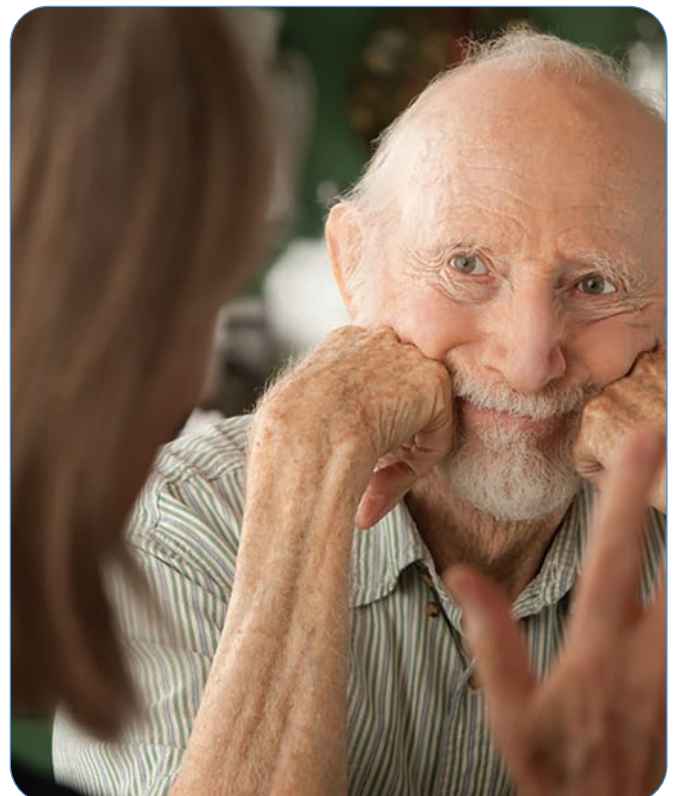
Dealing with increased demand across a large rural county, Somerset's standardised prevention and support services can struggle to reach people living in rural areas, or offer the information and services needed to maintain their independence. Traditional services often bypass the ideas and capacities of local people and communities. This means that local visions and contributions for good care are not heard or supported.

### Innovation

Somerset has used the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) funding to implement a new grants system for investment targeted at community-rooted organisations. This has been created to support the scaling or diversification of activity that connects those who draw on care to hyperlocal information, advice and support.

*"We all recognise that adult health and social care funding and provision are in crisis and we believe that the only sustainable answer to this is a more localised model of care... One which gives hope, purpose and control to people who draw on care and the communities that surround them."*

Coalition of grassroots organisations in Somerset



## Project overview

As the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) provided non-ringfenced funding (with no formal conditions, while certain criteria had to be met), commissioners in Somerset had the flexibility to decide to use an assets-based community development model, moving away from 'traditional' commissioning. This model takes a 'hands-off' approach, empowering communities to have ownership over the design and delivery of their local services and support. The council wanted to provide finance to grassroots and volunteer-led associations, helping them accelerate their impact and outcomes in small communities.

Due to the rigid procurement systems to which local authorities are bound, Somerset Council partnered with a local community infrastructure organisation, SPARK, to help establish the grant, along with the application and distribution process. This complexity of this process did lead to some delays.

The award is based on the principle that people who draw on social care and families should be at the centre of designing and delivering local solutions, services and support in their areas. All beneficiaries are required to be led by unpaid carers and/or people who receive care services.

*"The beauty of the ARF is that you haven't put excessive parameters, it's about learning. It allows us to test approaches... As a commissioner, we put specs and tenders out to deliver the things we need to meet our statutory responsibilities. The way it is structured often excludes smaller or grassroots actors and energies or local visions. [The ARF] is the first time I've been able to work in a way that supports local plans and designs. This has turned commissioning on its head and has opened up an opportunity to be better partners to Somerset's communities."*

Rhys Davies, Service Manager – Community Enterprise and Workforce, Somerset Council



## Key project activity

- Communications campaign launched to promote the new grant
- Collective vision statement, produced by a coalition of grassroots organisations, to demonstrate their passion for the sector and need for funding
- Monthly meetings with Connect Somerset steering group, with representatives from voluntary, care, and health sectors, to update on workstream
- First round of grants distributed to 12 organisations
- Second round of grants, involving larger awards for more developed plans as well as smaller pots to those who want to test new community rooted approaches to social care, will be distributed in August 2025
- Successful awards are offered organisational health checks through SPARK, encouraging them to think about sustainability and potential funding models
- Network of grant beneficiaries formed, who meet fortnightly to share updates, challenges and connect

## Emerging learnings and insights

- Local models of support can meet community needs and fill gaps in services.
- Simplifying procurement processes will support innovation goals.
- Non-ringfenced funding allows for testing and makes room for innovation.
- Buy-in from senior leadership enables project success.

*“To achieve the future we all want, we need investment in our activities and our priorities. Long-term funding perpetually going to larger national or regional organisations reinforces inequalities and gaps in provision, and favours centralisation rather than a place-based approach.”*

Coalition of grassroots organisations in Somerset

*“It is impossible for us to give money out at [grassroots] level, our procurement system doesn't allow it... These organisations have never ever had a look in around funding. They have always been told their governance isn't good enough, or their policy and procedures aren't strong enough. They have always been deemed not worthy of funding until now.”*

Rhys Davies, Service Manager – Community Enterprise and Workforce, Somerset Council

## Emerging impact

Stronger collaboration between the local authority and grassroots care organisations is leading to improved services for residents. While precise cost savings are hard to measure, the thousands of volunteer hours being delivered across the ICS area are clearly having a positive impact reducing council spending. This is also reducing travel, as care is being provided closer to home, helping the environment and continuity of care. People are being supported by neighbours and familiar faces, which also boosts wellbeing and community trust.

One grant recipient, WiveyCares, supports 160 local people and has used their money to hire a fundraising officer, helping them move toward a more sustainable and robust model. They've introduced a voluntary £20 monthly contribution and have achieved 100% uptake.

With the grant now in place, local care models are gaining momentum, sparking wider interest and new initiatives across Somerset.

*"All the hours of work that are now happening, if we'd have commissioned it, it would have cost the local authority millions of pounds. This activity is already happening, and for the first time we can make useful investments to help them build it."*

Rhys Davies, Service Manager –  
Community Enterprise and Workforce,  
Somerset Council

