

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 5 November 2024

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 17 December 2024

Report of: Strategic Director Place

Title: The Final Report of the Devon Housing Commission

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report presents Members with a report by the Devon Housing Commission that sets out key recommendations for addressing the housing challenges facing Devon. A full copy of the report entitled 'The Report of the Devon Housing Commission' can be found [here](#).

1.2 This report summarises the key recommendations outlined in the report and how the council could take forward some of these recommendations to address housing issues in the city.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Council notes the content of the Report of the Devon Housing Commission including its recommendations in the context of addressing housing challenges in Exeter.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 To ensure that Members are kept informed of the significant housing challenges facing Exeter and Devon together with the work taking place to address these challenges.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources

4.1 This report is for information purposes. There are no resource implications including non-financial resources.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no additional financial implications for Council to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 This report is for information purposes. There are no legal aspects.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the content and recommendations of the Devon Housing Commission report. It raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 In May 2022, there was a declaration by the Local Authorities in Devon of a housing crisis. Team Devon (Leaders and Chief Executives of Devon County Council and District Authorities) decided to set up the Devon Housing Task Force. This is a member-led, cross-party group, looking at housing supply and demand challenges across the County. The Task Force in turn set up an independent Devon Housing Commission to investigate the issues further.

8.2 The [Devon Housing Commission](#) was hosted by the University of Exeter as part of the University's Civic University Agreement with Devon County Council. The University of Exeter provided secretarial support and data analysis and hosted an officer seconded from Homes England to support the work. The Devon Housing Commission was chaired by Lord Best, who has a substantial background in housing matters. The commissioners were drawn from a range of public and private sector partners.

8.3 The geographic areas covered by the report are the administrative regions of Devon County Council and Torbay Council as well as the eight Devon District Councils. The work was funded by the participating councils and the University of Exeter. Data on Plymouth City Council is not included in the report unless explicitly stated.

8.4 The Commission's purpose was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the various local housing markets and related socio-economic profiles, and model demographic change, to make the case for a step change in social and housing policy and pragmatic solutions to be delivered locally moving to the next decade.

8.5 The Commission undertook its work between May 2023 and June 2024. During this time six in-person meetings were held. The meetings were hosted by different Devon local authorities and explored issues raised by those local authorities as well as county-wide issues. In addition to these in-person meetings, online meetings were held throughout to explore issues in depth. Organisations and members of the public could submit evidence to the Commission. This was done through interviews with members of the Commission's research team, in writing and through an online call for evidence that was open to the public. Many people and organisations submitted evidence to the Commission, including 509 individual responses to the online call for evidence.

8.6 Exeter City Council submitted a response to the Commission's Call for Evidence, and this can be found at Appendix A. This response emphasised that providing the quantity, type and quality of homes that Exeter needs in the future will be achieved by building on brownfield land in the city and that the key to unlocking brownfield sites is by securing investment in infrastructure.

8.7 The submissions to the call for evidence have been used throughout the Commission's report. The report also draws upon the lived experience of Devon residents, data from a wide variety of national datasets as well as other published material.

The Commission's Final Report

8.8 The report was launched on 19th July 2024 and included a foreword from Lord Best. It is split into relevant chapters to set out the challenges faced across Devon and recommendations for how they can be addressed:

1. Lack of Affordable Housing.
2. Rural and Coastal Communities.
3. Cities and Coastal Towns.
4. Devon's Demography.
5. Supported Housing and Temporary Accommodation.
6. Healthy and Environmentally sustainable Housing.
7. Housing Need and Delivery.
8. Planning.
9. The role of the Combined County Authority.

8.9 The overarching recommendation of the Devon Housing Commission is:

"The Commission recommends that all local authorities in Devon, with the support of national government, give urgent attention to the need for additional affordable housing in the county. The shortages of secure, decent homes is leading to hardship for many households; rapidly rising expenditure on unsatisfactory Temporary Accommodation; the loss from Devon of young people, with consequences for public services and the economy; and extra challenges for hard-pressed care and health services."

8.10 The report then makes a series of recommendations to Devon's local authorities, the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, Homes England, Government and other bodies such as the Regulator of Social Housing.

Coverage of Exeter's housing issues and implications for future work

8.11 The Commission's Report identified a series of key recommendations which affect Devon and Exeter, and are intended to address the key housing challenges identified by the Commission, including:

- overall housing needs;
- the cost of housing, to buy and rent;
- a lack of affordable housing;
- the impact of an aging population;
- the evolving requirement for a range of accommodation types;
- the need for supported housing and temporary accommodation;
- the sustainability of housing;
- the poor quality of some of the housing stock;
- delivery challenges;
- planning issues and resourcing; and
- coordinating Local Plans to address shared challenges.

8.12 The report included two specific sections on Exeter and Student Accommodation in Exeter, and highlighted a series of specific issues facing the city, including:

- significant housing needs;
- considerable numbers on the waiting list for affordable housing;
- the complexities of brownfield development delivery;
- the need for robust planning policy framework and collaboration across Council boundaries;
- increases in homelessness; and
- issues associated with student accommodation and affordability.

8.13 The City Council has vital role in addressing these issues through the Exeter Plan and corporately across all services. Because Exeter has a tightly constrained geographic boundary, neighbouring Teignbridge, Mid-Devon and East Devon, there must also be a close relationship with surrounding districts. The recently developed strategy `Our Shared Coordinates` could act as strong foundation on which to build a collaborative approach. The Commission is highly supportive of collaboration in this way and hopes that any new devolution arrangements may help with a strategic approach in this area.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Plan?

9.1 Addressing the housing crisis in Exeter and Devon contributes to the following corporate priorities and plans:

Priority	Contribution
Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accommodate the housing requirements of Exeter. - Make efficient use of brownfield sites. - Deliver high quality development to support regeneration. - Maximise the delivery of affordable housing.
Prosperous Local Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boost the local economy and attract better paid jobs. - Support the ongoing vitality of the city centre.
Net Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimise the need for travel. - Delivery of development which meets appropriate standards.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 This report is for information purposes. No risks have been identified.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act’s Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people’s needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority

from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because this report is for information only.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 There are no direct implications of the recommendation to note the work of the Devon Housing Commission. More indirectly, the development of housing will have an impact on the city's carbon footprint but this is mitigated through planning policy and building regulations through which the Council is proactively pursuing the net zero ambitions of the Council.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 N/A

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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