



**Report for:** CABINET

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Date of Meeting: 04 February 2025

Subject: **DEVON HOUSING COMMISSION REPORT**

Cabinet Member: Councillor Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Property

Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe, Head of Housing and Health

Exempt: None

Wards Affected: All

Enclosures: Annex A – Presentation to Homes PDG 19 November 2025

### **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

The Devon Housing Commission Report published in July 2024 provides a comprehensive analysis of the housing challenges faced in Devon.

The report highlights issues creating a current housing crisis within the County including; affordability, lack of adequate social housing and the growing demand for rental properties with reduction in supply. It emphasises the need for sustainable development, the role of local authorities in addressing these challenges and the importance of balancing housing supply with environmental and community needs. The report offers recommendations including increasing affordable housing options, improving planning processes and better support for community-led housing.

At the September 2024 meeting of the Homes PDG, the Head of Housing and Health provided a short presentation summarising the 7 key findings of the commission alongside some local context in terms of the current Mid Devon position.

It was requested that the presentation be circulated to the Group after the meeting and that the Devon Housing Commission Report be brought back to the next meeting for further discussion and debate with potential for the Group to make recommendations

into Cabinet if they wish to do so. Accordingly, it was arranged for the November 2024 Homes PDG to receive a broader presentation on the commission report. This was provided by Matt Dodd of Exeter University (Head of the Commission). The University presentation is attached in Annex A. The PDG subsequently recommended that the Devon Housing Commission report and recommendations be taken into account in the review of the MDDC Housing Strategy due in 2025. This recommendation is therefore carried forward below.

### **Recommendation:**

- 1. That Cabinet agree that the recommendations of the Devon Housing Commission Report (July 2024) are taken into account in an update of the MDDC Housing Strategy due in 2025.**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Devon Housing Commission ('the Commission') was established by the Devon Housing Taskforce and undertook its work between May 2023 and July 2024
- 1.2 The Commission covered the administrative regions of Devon County Council and Torbay Council plus the eight Devon district councils. It therefore did not include Plymouth.
- 1.3 The participating Local Authorities and the University of Exeter funded the Commission which was also hosted by the University.
- 1.4 The work of the Commission was broad ranging:
  - Held 6 sessions with Commissioners across Devon in rural urban and coastal communities
  - Site visits including large developments, small rural Community Land Trusts, Local Authority funded affordable housing and extra care schemes
  - Held a seminar for major landowners in Devon
  - Online Call for Evidence with 509 responses from individuals and organisations
  - Worked with government agencies to gather and analyse data
  - Received evidence from across the housing and local authority sector
  - Built a cross-Devon picture of the housing situation for the first time
- 1.4 As a result of its work, the Commission developed a number of headline findings and a set of recommendations for national and local bodies which are summarised below. These are explored in more detail within the Annex A presentation.
- 1.5 The Commission report can be viewed in full at <2024EI047-Devon-Housing-Commission-Final-Report-v8.pdf>

## **2**    **Headline findings**

2.1    As set out within the presentation, the headline findings of the Commission are:

- Devon population is older than England and is getting older faster
- Devon has an increasing population which is due to internal migration
- People leave when they are young and arrive when they are in late middle age
- Devon's homes are some of the most under-occupied in the country
- They are also some of the poorest quality – twice as many non-decent homes as a proportion than England
- There are fewer affordable homes in Devon than England - 1/2 the proportion in some areas
- Second homes are growing at the same rate as new build homes
- Affordable housing in rural areas has fallen over recent years
- The delivery of new homes in Devon is growing, but the proportion of these that are affordable homes is falling
- The number of bids per home on Devon Home Choice has doubled since 2019/20

2.2    The Commission report recommendations are divided between Government, Local Authorities and Other Bodies.

### **Government**

- Homes England - work closely with Devon and develop rural and coastal housing strategies
- Local Authority Housing Fund - renewed and increased flexibility on temporary accommodation
- Supporting the Renter Reform Bill
- Funding for Rural Housing Enablers
- Support for being more robust on planning
- Infrastructure
- Holiday lets and short-term lets – introduces planning class and supports LAs to limit
- Decent Homes

### **Local Authorities**

- Ensuring Housing Enabling is at the heart of Local Authorities
- Act on holiday lets/second homes
- Ensuring the right type of homes are built –using the local plan process
- Encouraging Rural Exception Sites and Community Land Trusts (CLTs)
- Temporary accommodation – acquisition and remodelling

### **Other Bodies**

- Homes England - work closely with Devon and develop rural and coastal housing strategies
- Housing Associations - communicate on disposals strategies
- Regulator of Social Housing - develop a charter on disposals

- ICB/Public Health - formalise data gathering and sharing on housing and health - make sure health and housing are in each other's strategies
- Promote and encourage construction skills and retrofit/green skills
- Landowners and housing authorities working together

### **3 Current position and next steps**

- 3.1 As outlined at the September Homes PDG, MDDC are well placed through its current Housing Strategy (2021-25) and the new Corporate Plan in aligning our housing policy and initiatives with a number of the Commission recommendations.
- 3.2 Particular examples of this alignment include; the current Local Plan and Rural Exception Sites Policy DM6 which encourages the delivery of affordable and low-cost housing in rural areas, joint work with the Chawleigh and Thorverton CLTs, in-house dedicated Housing Enabling Officer, increased delivery of social housing at type and location of need through the 5-year/500 unit HRA development programme and our ongoing acquisition of temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 Furthermore, MDDC have recently participated alongside District colleagues, University of Exeter and Homes England in a kick-off meeting to develop a shared, Devon and Torbay Strategic Housing Pipeline. This work strongly aligns with our forward review of the housing land supply position including the HRA development programme.
- 3.4 The Strategic Housing Pipeline work is currently at site collation stage with the Council having submitted a range of potential sites that are either within our control as HRA or General Fund land, are in private ownership and 'stuck' for some reason, and; where we know there is CLT/self-build or other interest and a possible barrier to delivery. Next steps are to meet with the Head of the Commission and Homes England to understand our key sites and take this forward into the overall county-level pipeline.
- 3.5 Notwithstanding current uncertainty around the Devon devolution deal and the work of a combined authority, this pipeline should align with the development of a Devon-wide Housing Strategy which informs our local strategic policy approach. Naturally, this will bring together and take into account the Commission report findings.

### **4 Recommendations**

- 4.1 In the context of the above, the following recommendation is made:
1. That Cabinet agree that the recommendations of the Devon Housing Commission Report (July 2024) are taken into account in an update of the MDDC Housing Strategy due in 2025.

## **Financial Implications**

None directly arising from the report. Clearly the forward scoping and delivery of new affordable housing alongside the introduction of a Devon-wide and MDDC Housing Strategy in the near future may have significant financial implications which will need to be understood at the appropriate stage.

## **Legal Implications**

None directly arising from the report. The Commission report has no formal, legal status however the report was launched in the Houses of Parliament.

## **Risk Assessment**

The work to develop a new MDDC and Devon-wide Housing Strategy with a focus on the key recommendations of the Commission represents further opportunity to address and mitigate the current housing crisis within our locality. In turn, as this moves forward this work will be reflected in Corporate Risk 12 – Housing Crisis.

## **Impact on Climate Change**

None directly arising from the report.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Not applicable.

## **Relationship to Corporate Plan**

Homes are a priority for the Council within the current Corporate Plan and this includes delivering new affordable and social homes annually, improving and maintaining the existing stock to the highest standards.

## **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer

**Date:** 21 January 2025

**Statutory Officer:** Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 21 January 2025

**Chief Officer:** Richard Marsh

Agreed by or on behalf of the Corporate Director

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Cabinet member notified:** Yes

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Simon Newcombe, Head of Housing and Health

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**Background papers:**

Current MDDC Housing Strategy 2021-25

<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/mid-devon-housing/help-and-support/procedures-policies-and-strategies/housing-strategy/>