



## Devon: An Overview

### Introduction

What does it mean to live in Devon today? What challenges do people in different parts of the county face? What strengths and opportunities are there? How are communities and voluntary sector organisations working together to improve lives and tackle disadvantage? What more can we do?

This report aims to answer some of these questions by looking beyond the stereotypical images of life in Devon: thatched cottages and cream teas; seaside resorts and dramatic coastline; rugged moorland and tight-knit agricultural communities, far from the modern world.

It's true that we live in a beautiful and varied county, with stunning countryside, some of the most liveable urban centres in the country, and a network of characterful market towns with proud and independent histories.

It's also true that those thatched cottages can be hard to insulate, off the mains gas grid, and a long way from a bus route. And that, out of season, those seaside resorts can have few employment opportunities, and little support for young people struggling with homelessness or poor mental health. And that those agricultural communities may have lost their post office, and have fewer opportunities for local people to get together.

There's a tendency for 'uncovered'-style reports to paint a uniformly gloomy picture of 'the dark side of paradise'. This can make for grim and rather repetitive reading, and misses an important element. Devon's communities never fail to impress and uplift us with their determination, ingenuity and - let's be honest - cost-effectiveness, in their work to strengthen community ties, and support vulnerable members. We at Devon Community Foundation are passionate about the potential of thriving, engaged, and inclusive communities to bring people together, and pool strengths and passions for common good.

So this suite of reports looks carefully at some of the issues that are most important for our county, and explains why they matter. We aim not to be exhaustive, but to pick out some of the most significant themes. It gives a statistical overview, explaining how the situation in Devon relates to the national picture, and digs deeper into the detail; Devon is a large

county and the story is rarely the same across the piece. On the other hand, as Devon includes a county council and two unitary authorities, telling a countywide story is often difficult. Devon Community Foundation is in a good position to look at Devon as a whole.

The report also takes a look at some of the inspiring and creative work going on to address these issues. We show some of the ways in which people and organisations work together, what outcomes have been achieved, what outside support is needed, and what next steps might look like. This is far from being the last word: it's just the beginning of a much bigger, and eminently constructive conversation, about how the Foundation and the people we work with can make our resources work hardest for Devon's communities. Please do share your thoughts! [info@devoncf.com](mailto:info@devoncf.com).

### **Structure of the Reports**

This overview document gives a very general sense of the 'shape' of the county – its geography and basic demographics - informing much of what follows. It includes a broadbrush look at the economy, and the particular challenges of rural areas. Then there is a report on Poverty and Deprivation which gives an overview of several aspects of deprivation.

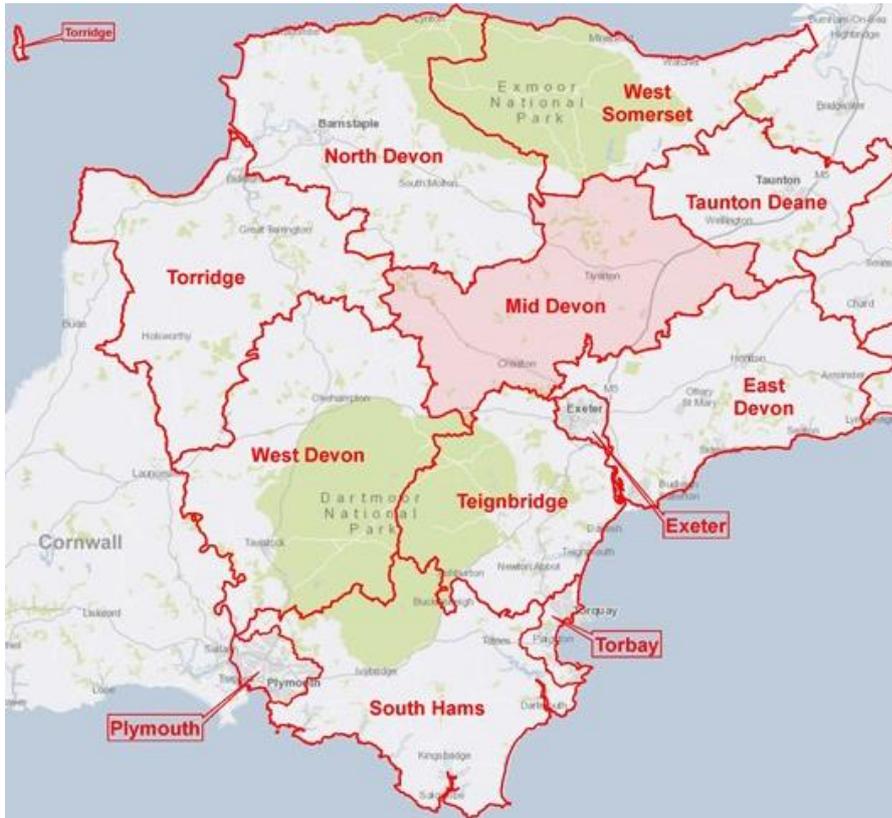
We then present a series of stand-alone thematic reports on issues we feel are most significant currently for people in Devon, including: housing and homelessness, fuel poverty, health and wellbeing, loneliness and social isolation, and food poverty and healthy eating. In writing these, it became increasingly clear that attempting to segment both areas of need and the action taken to address it is an artificial process. Of course, it is important to have a holistic understanding of the challenges people face, just as the most effective approaches to supporting people are also often holistic. So you are encouraged to read all the reports to gain a full picture!

### **Devon: Painting a Picture**

The ceremonial county of Devon is the third-largest in England behind Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, at 6,200 square kilometres. There are 819km of coastline (though it depends whether the tide is in or not), and two national parks – Dartmoor and Exmoor – which, together with five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover 35% of the county. It's well over 100 miles from Start Point in the South Hams to Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast – almost the same distance as from London to Birmingham. Travel times can be substantial: it's a three-hour bus journey from Hartland near Bideford to Exeter.

Administratively, Devon is made up of a county council (comprising seven district councils: East Devon South Hams, Mid Devon, North Devon West Devon, Torridge, and Teignbridge,

along with Exeter city council), plus two unitary authorities, Torbay and Plymouth (map).<sup>1</sup> There are 386 parish and town councils, mostly within Devon County.



Map of local authorities in the County of Devon. Source: Mid Devon District Council

The total population is **1.185 million**, growing by 11% over the last twenty years (see table below).

	Population 1997	Population 2017	% change
West Devon	46,925	55,329	18%
Torridge	54,530	67,821	24%
Mid Devon	66,505	80,623	21%
South Hams	80,020	85,340	7%
North Devon	86,924	95,440	10%
Exeter	109,238	128,916	18%
Teignbridge	117,575	131,437	12%
East Devon	124,294	142,265	14%
Torbay	122,861	135,247	10%
Plymouth	255,028	263,070	3%
<b>Devon</b>	<b>1,063,900</b>	<b>1,185,488</b>	<b>11%</b>

Population change in Devon, 1997-2017. Source: ONS

<sup>1</sup> For clarity, within this report ‘Devon’ refers to the ceremonial county, including both Plymouth and Torbay. ‘Devon County’ refers only to the area of jurisdiction of the County Council.

### *The rural factor*

Although we think of Devon as a rural county, 45% of the population live in three urban centres: Torbay, Exeter and Plymouth, up from around a third twenty years ago. The population is unevenly distributed: there are 32.89 people per hectare in Plymouth, but only 0.47 people per hectare in West Devon. Torridge, West Devon and Mid-Devon all have around half their inhabitants classed as living 'rurally' (that is, in a settlement with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants). Almost 10% of Devon's residents live in hamlets or isolated dwellings, according to the 2011 census, which is three times the average for England.

	<b>% Rural Residents</b>
England	10.5%
All Devon	26%
East Devon	43%
Exeter	0.8%
Mid-Devon	54%
North Devon	43%
Plymouth	0.6%
South Hams	51%
Teignbridge	31%
Torbay	7%
Torridge	58%
West Devon	55%

(from 2011 census)

Devon is unusual in having no medium-sized towns – the main focus for community life outside the urban areas are small market towns of up to 30,000 people, and mostly many fewer, often with a large rural hinterland. Devon County Council divides its area into Devon Market Towns along the lines of these 'natural communities', as one way of organising public health's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This is a useful way of thinking about where people consider to be their 'centre', and where they might travel for services and facilities (see map below).

The 2018 Devon County Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) points out that rural areas in Devon are generally more deprived than rural areas elsewhere in England, whereas Devon's urban areas tend to be less deprived than urban areas in England as a whole. Several rural market towns however are relatively more deprived than their city neighbours. These include:

- Crediton
- Great Torrington
- Holsworthy

- Honiton
- Okehampton
- South Molton
- Tavistock



**Devon Market Towns. Source, Devon County Council**

Rural living can bring a distinct set of challenges. Rates of poverty among rural retired people are comparable with their urban peers. However, transport and heating costs tend to be higher for rural residents, and health and social care needs may not be as easily met. Lower rates of benefits claims are frequently recorded in rural areas. Broadband speeds are notably poorer, which can limit access to information, the ability to access services online, and employment opportunities. The 2018 [State of Rural Services](#) report, published by Rural England, provides more detail.

The JSNA 2018 notes: 'Geographical barriers to services play a significant role in terms of accessibility particularly with more vulnerable and older cohorts, and resultantly they often have poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, and higher emergency and non-elective

admissions.... ‘ An example is in social care, where there is a danger of a mismatch between the location of carers and clients in rural areas.

The reduction in rural transport provision has wide-ranging impacts for equitable access to services. Local authority subsidy of non-metropolitan bus services has reduced nationally by 25% in the last five years, so many more bus services are run on a commercial basis. But the picture varies hugely between local authorities. Between 2010/11 and 2017/18, Devon County doubled its investment in bus services, whereas Plymouth’s bus spending was cut by a third, and in Torbay local authority spending on bus services has been withdrawn completely.

The number of households without a car is around 100,000. Whilst 58,000 of these are in Exeter, Plymouth or Torbay, this leaves 42,000 households in largely rural areas without access to their own transport. Low-income families in rural areas are more likely to own a car than those in urban areas (through lack of an alternative), and can spend up to 25% of their disposable income running a vehicle.

	Change in number of passenger journeys, 2013/14-2016/17	Change in number of non-subsidised bus miles travelled, 2013/14-2016/17
Devon County	-9.4%	-8.2%
Plymouth	-7.5%	-15.1%
Torbay	+0.8%	-4.7%

**Change in bus use. Source: BBC Shared Data Unit, 2018.**

The voluntary sector plays an increasingly important role in service provision in rural areas, stepping in where austerity has deemed provision not to be cost-effective to run libraries, youth clubs, transport schemes and rural shops. It is worth noting that increased centralisation of services in the name of efficiency, coupled with cuts to public transport, greatly inflates the extent to which rural residents are excluded from public provision.

### *Population*

Devon’s population is older than the national average, and is getting older faster. The number of people in Devon aged 85 or over is projected to almost double in the next twenty years, from nearly 40,000 in 2018 to over 76,000 in 2038. Most areas record a net loss of 15-19 year-olds, leaving for jobs and education elsewhere, whereas outside the two cities there are net gains of population in other age groups through internal in-migration. Plymouth is the only local authority with an overall net loss of population in 2017 – all age groups from 20-40 saw a loss. Older residents may therefore be separated from family, either because younger members have left the area, or because they themselves moved away from friends and family to come to Devon.

	% aged 65+ 1997	% aged 65+ 2017	change
West Devon	20%	27%	+7%
Torrige	20%	27%	+7%

Mid Devon	19%	23%	+4%
South Hams	21%	28%	+7%
North Devon	20%	25%	+5%
Exeter	16%	16%	No change
Teignbridge	22%	26%	+4%
East Devon	27%	30%	+3%
Torbay	24%	26%	+2%
Plymouth	16%	18%	+2%
Devon	20%	24%	+4%
England	16%	18%	+2%

**Source: ONS**

The county is 95% white British, with Exeter being the most ethnically diverse area. Plymouth is a dispersal city for refugees, and there has been some limited resettlement of Syrian refugees throughout Devon. There is also a notable eastern European population in some rural areas, often related to the care and agricultural sectors.

#### *Impact of austerity on Devon's cities*

The Centre for Cities' [Cities Outlook 2019](#) suggests that urban areas have been hit hardest by austerity, with cuts to local government funding affecting day-to-day services of an average of 18%, compared to 9% in non-urban areas (Exeter was down 16.8% between 2009/10 and 2017/18, and Plymouth down 12%). Exeter has been able to offset some potential spending challenges through a significant rise in council tax receipts as a result of new housing development (it was the sixth fastest-growing city in the country in 2016-17). Exeter's income from sales, fees and charges has also risen, it has the seventh-highest employment rate nationally, the fifth highest-qualified workforce, and the third lowest rate of job-seekers' allowance. Plymouth by contrast is notable for its low rate of start-up businesses – coming bottom of the list of 62 cities studied, and second from bottom in number of businesses per 10,000 people. Plymouth and Exeter have similar rates of private sector employment, both in the bottom ten, but both cities are in the top ten for having the lowest numbers of unskilled workers (Exeter is top).

The report acknowledges that spending in cities was falling from a far higher starting point, but points out that nationally, need is concentrated in urban area. This does overlook the fact that someone experiencing deprivation in a rural area is less likely to have adequate access to services and support than their urban counterpart. The area of spending to increase over this period, at the expense of things like planning and development, and cultural activities, is social care. Exeter increased its social care spend by 13.8%, and Plymouth by 7.5%, representing a potentially significant shift in emphasis in the role of city councils, away from being pro-active shapers of city space and cultural life, to a primary role as providers of social care (this is true, the National Audit Office says, of all local authorities). The Centre for Cities is heavily critical of this shift.