



DRAFT

Devon Housing Commission

Innovation Impact and Business
University of Exeter
30/06/2022

Amended 14/9/22
(Comments from Chair of DHTF)

Background

Devon's housing challenges and their solutions are complex, interconnected and vary across the county.

The eleven Devon local authorities in acknowledging the very great and growing challenges established a Devon Housing Task Force. This is a Member-led group that has started to examine the interrelated problems across the various housing markets that make up the wider housing system.

The data collated by the Task Force shows that demand has outstripped supply for many years leading to a cycle of decline in affordability and availability across the whole housing system.

Furthermore, the evidence shows a clear acceleration in the demand/supply pressures during the Pandemic caused by such changes in behaviour as people being able to work from any location and the spike in use of property for short-term letting or second homes. Whilst Devon has always been an attractive holiday destination due to its natural beauty it is the sheer scale of changes alongside an already heavily constrained market that any change in one part of the market will impact on the whole and the market is now in crisis.

The initial data collated by the Task Force shows:

- Housing affordability 20% higher than rest of the UK average
- Average house price above £300,000 is beyond the range of many first time buyers
- A 50% decrease in private rent stock availability between 2019 – 2021 coupled with an estimated 18% increase in private rent levels in 2022
- Local Housing Allowances not keeping pace with price inflation
- Significant increase in housing waiting lists, homelessness and pressure on temporary accommodation
- Inaccuracy or unavailability of official data to understand the stock levels, quality, price, in each form of tenure to understand the true picture of socio-economic impact

To fully understand the problem, Devon local authorities have asked the University of Exeter to collaborate in the development of a "Housing Commission". This document sets out the purpose, outcomes, objectives, proposed approach, budget and timetable to be adopted for further discussion with Exeter University.

As part of the emerging 'County Deal' discussions with government linked to devolution opportunities as identified in the Levelling Up White Paper, the authorities across Devon are collaborating on a range of issues – with housing being one of the key themes of priority and challenge right across the pan-Devon area. The County Deal geography includes the administrative areas of Devon County Council, the eight District Councils, plus the two unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay. The Devon Housing Commission's scope will reflect this geographic area – often referred to as 'geographic Devon' within this proposal.

Purpose

The purpose of the Devon Housing Commission is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the various local housing markets, 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 into the next decade.

Outcome

Through in-depth socio-economic and demographic analysis and community and stakeholder engagement, produce a report with recommendations to influence significant housing and social policy change and practical solutions that will start to address the broken local housing markets across geographic Devon.

Objectives

The objectives of the Devon Housing Commission are as follows:

1. Develop a clear picture of the problems across local housing markets and tenure types across geographic Devon with a wide-range of engagement from communities, experts and partner agencies.
2. Understanding of the future need for housing supply, tenure types and use that will aid the wider outcomes of prosperity, economic growth and social mobility
3. Provide recommendations for social and housing policy changes required to respond to the crisis over the next decade
4. Provide some practical recommendations that help to deliver on an improvement in use, supply and tenure type including improving the quality of the private rented stock in line with carbon plan objectives.

Delivery

It is our intention to deliver a Housing Commission which will be supported by a panel of advisers and will engage significantly with experts and local and regional stakeholders - hearing from councils, developers, charities, health partners, and many others.

The University of Exeter will manage the delivery of the Housing Commission through their Innovation, Impact and Business Division.

Reporting will be to the Commission and to the Devon Housing Task Force, who will 'own' this exciting piece of work.

Appointing Commissioners

A key component is the appointment of a panel "Commissioners". Commissioners bring independence and expertise to the process. In terms of the role of the commissioners, most commissions appoint a panel of high-level commissioners that set the scope for the work, hear evidence, explore the variety of tools to be deployed and oversee the development of recommendations.

The Commission also needs a route for recommendations to be taken forward and in Devon the Commission will make recommendations to the Devon Housing Task Force that will be

working closely with Government, MPs and local partners through frameworks such as the Devon Deal to action the recommendations.

The success of the Commission will be greatly influenced by the Chair and the panel of commissioners that support the work. A high-profile Chair is seen to add weight to the approach and the panel should be drawn from leading thinkers in demographic and socio-economic modelling and a range of interests with an interest in the problems faced by the seemingly broken housing market in Devon.

The recommendation of the Devon Housing Task Force is that the Commission should not just focus on the technical aspects of the local housing markets across Devon but the wider impact on the economy and prosperity. In this way we see strong links with other work of the University such as the Social Mobility; responding to climate change and health.

Supporting the Commission

The Commission will need to be supported by a small team. The team to be led by a Commission Director to be appointed by the University of Exeter. Their role will be to manage and co-ordinate the work of the Commission Team. The Devon Housing Task Force will provide in-kind support from housing, planning, health and social policy specialists and will also provide a partner contact officer who will draw expertise from wider partners as requested by the Commission Director. They will be supported by a full-time administrator.

Communication, engagement and consultation

The Commission Director will work with the Commission team to develop a communication, engagement and consultation plan as it is intended that the Commission will be the public face of the work of the Devon Housing Task Force and the Devon Deal in lobbying for policy change and innovative solutions.

Given the impact on communities across Devon it is important that the Commission seeks views from a wide range of citizens and stakeholders. The approaches could include:

- Online surveys
- Polling of key groups and stakeholders
- Focus groups (number to be agreed)
- Calls for evidence from interest groups and experts – presented to meetings of the Commissioners
- Open Consultation events/Big conversation
- Evidence gathering
- Evidence events around Devon on key themes
- A web presence and blogs to drive engagement online
- New ideas/innovations conference
- Discussions with the voluntary and community sector may also yield additional community based approaches to ensure that this is an inclusive process.

The Devon Housing Task Force would look to provide in-kind resource from its communications, events teams, policy specialists and data analysts to provide support for this work.

Possible Workplan Phases

Phase 1 – Development

- Appoint Commission Co-ordinator
- Appoint Chair
- Agree Outline Plan (in consultation with the Devon Housing Task Force)
- Appoint the Commissioners
- Scoping Phase
- Commissioners will meet to agree the content and process

Phase 2 - Evidence Gathering

- Researching literature and data in the public domain
- Consultation exercise, inviting written evidence from interested parties
- Evidence Gathering Workshops or Panels (2/3) hosted at the University and across Devon. We will seek to gather information which is:
 - rigorously measured
 - nationally comparable
 - nationally consistent
 - applicable to help inform policy interventions

Phase 3 - Expert Witness Sessions

- Will catalyse the discussion around key themes and further shaping of the scope for further consultation
- A panel of expert witnesses will be assembled to present to Commissioners

Phase 4 - Review and Writing Phase

- Reviewing written evidence submitted to the commission
- Commissioners' meeting at the University to reflect on the issues raised in the workshops and consultations, and to deliberate on policy options.
- Commission findings and recommendations finalised at Commissioners' meeting.
- Presented to the Devon Housing Task Force
- Recommendations testing
- Report and Recommendations Launched

Phase 5 – Task Force

- Response to recommendations and implementation plan from the Devon Housing Task Group.

Potential Themes to be Explored

Our initial work will confirm the themes we need to tackle, and these will probably evolve as we speak to our experts and stakeholders. Experience from similar studies suggests these are likely to include:

- Housing supply
- Housing affordability
- Building more homes
- Creating communities where people want to live

- Homes and integrated health and care
- Homes and employment
- Short term letting – holiday lets, student accommodation
- Second homes

Proposed Budget

Staffing

Commission Director	£68,000
Administrative Support	£27,400
Commissioner Budget (time of Commissioners)	£10,000

Commissioning Research

Budget for thematic research experts and surveys	£30,000
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Events and Travel

Room hire, catering, launch event and focus groups etc.	£10,000
Travel of commissioners and staff	£2,000

Total	£147,400
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Proposed Timetable

We propose that the work can be carried out within a 9-month period with an additional three months for the production and agreement of the final report.

Project Management

Regular liaison with DCC	Bi -Weekly
Commissioner and Expert Meetings	TBC
Recruit Commission Director	Pre project phase
Establish Commission	Month 1
Formal launch	Month 2
Evidence gathering	Months 3 - 9
Draft Report with Recommendations	Month 10
Final Report with Recommendations	Month 11
Presentation of Results and Recommendations	Month 12

Contact

The university will ensure a contact person is identified for the work and that they are available for the regular client and Steering Group liaison.

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