

Annual
Review of
Public
Health:
the year in
headlines
2024-2025



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Front cover image: Thelma Hulbert Gallery art session with Honiton Memory Café © EDDC

Annual Review of Public Health: the year in headlines 2024-2025

“Improving health and wellbeing for residents and communities across East Devon”

1. Introduction and background

Public health is widely regarded as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society. We use the term ‘public health’ to cover the physical, mental *and* social wellbeing of everyone in our district.

Each year we look back on our work and review how we met the targets and aspirations of our Public Health Strategy. Our evidence-based [Public Health Strategy 2024-27](#) identified three overarching aims: to support healthy people, leading healthy lives, in healthy places. To achieve our strategic aims and meet our priority activities we:

- Promote wellbeing and self-care.
- Encourage healthier behaviour so fewer people become ill.
- Tackle environmental and social conditions to promote good health.

As we reflect on our work over the past year, how can local leaders ensure that health is a better understood element of decision-taking, remembering that these activities also align closely with our golden threads of poverty, economy and climate emergency?

2. Highlights - our public health actions in headlines 2024-2025

This brief Review of activities supporting health and wellbeing covers the period 2024-25. It is not a comprehensive list; it is intended to provide a flavour of work, illustrated in particular through press releases of our actions.

The Review celebrates our efforts and shows how we care for equalities, fairness and levelling up. We work with partners across the East Devon district, with particular focus on areas in most need, including deprived and isolated rural communities. We focus on local activities which we are most able to support or influence. This Review reflects briefly upon each of our twelve priorities, and shows how many of them are interlinked:

1. Cost of living crisis.
2. Mental health.
3. Unpaid carers.
4. Loneliness and social isolation.
5. Dementia.
6. Homelessness, housing and indoor environment factors.
7. Smoking.
8. Alcohol and other drug use.
9. Diet and nutrition.
10. Physical activity.
11. Pandemic preparedness.
12. Health effects of climate and adverse weather events.

2.1 Cost of living crisis

Poverty is deepening and the implications are far-reaching. East Devon is a prosperous area for many, however we have identified pockets of poverty, using measures which takes into account data on wages, pensions, benefits and other income. Our Benefits team are seeing increased levels of debt with many households taking on debt to make ends meet, combined with increased food bank usage. Our commitment has included:

June 2024: [Strategy for tackling health inequalities in East Devon launched](#)

March 2025: [East Devon District Council funding helps to reduce poverty and social isolation in Exmouth - East Devon District Council News](#) [see image below]

March 2025: [Council Leader to champion anti-poverty work in local government reorganisation discussions - East Devon District Council News.](#)



Inside the community café © Open Door Exmouth

2.2 Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. It exists on a spectrum and can change for a number of reasons. Mental health in the UK is getting worse: sickness absence due to mental illness is soaring, rates of mental health difficulties are increasing, and already overstretched services are struggling to meet rising demands. Local councils are one of the most important influencers of people's mental health - with responsibility for housing, green spaces, services and more, we can use this influence to help support better mental health for everyone:

[10 July 2024 - Strategy for economic growth approved in East Devon - East Devon](#)

[24 September 2024 - Positive results of council-funded mental health support for Axminster school communities - East Devon](#) [see images below]

[22 January 2025 - Unveiling of new sculpture marks the opening of Tithebarn Local Centre - East Devon](#)

[20 February 2025 - East Devon District Council Countryside Team Supports Young People Through Exeter Chiefs Engage Programme - East Devon.](#)



Axminster project - Heads UP working with children at St Mary's; © Heads UP



Axminster project - Feedback from Axminster - testimony from parent / volunteer, © Parental Minds

2.3 Unpaid carers

An unpaid carer is someone who provides unpaid support to a partner, child, relative or friend who needs help with daily tasks or health issues. This includes adult and young carers, many of whom don't see themselves as carers – and can therefore miss any available support.

Thelma Hulbert Gallery [THG] welcomes a group of Honiton Carers once a month who come every Friday morning to paint – occasionally with direction from an artist, but mostly guiding and supporting each other.

THG also host two group of Young Carers at the gallery – they had a busy creative day making cyanotype photographs and note/sketchbooks, willow birdfeeders and lanterns.

LED Community Leisure were approached by Honiton Carers group to train their volunteers to become Wellbeing Walk leaders and to start a new “Walk and Chat” Group for carers and the people they care for. LED trained volunteers, and guided them on managing a group effectively, accommodating different abilities and fitness levels, and handling essential admin such as risk assessments, walk reces, and accident/incident reporting. 23 people attend their first walk.



Walk & Chat group © Honiton Carers Group

2.4 Loneliness and social isolation

Anyone, anywhere, can be lonely or socially isolated. Both affect mortality similarly to well-established risk factors such as obesity, lack of physical activity, smoking, other forms of substance abuse and poor access to health care. Given the difficulties of identifying lonely people and the stigma attached to doing so, in Devon we are moving towards the more encompassing general concept of ‘social health’. Helping to build community networks is a means to mitigate the problems of loneliness and isolation. For example there are opportunities for volunteers to help at our nature reserves, getting exercise at the same time as gaining benefits such as learning new skills, confidence, and building social

networks. Our officers work with many third sector groups and other agencies to support such initiatives, and directly with many volunteers:

June 2024: [ACED Culture and Heritage Volunteer of the Year announced](#)

[15 October 2024 - East Devon District Council's Countryside Team Tackles Loneliness Through Partnership with Age UK Devon - East Devon](#)

[1 October 2024 - Seaton Wetlands Welcomes 12 New Volunteers to Discovery Hut Team - East Devon](#)

[12 December 2024 - East Devon District Council Countryside Team Celebrate a Year of Wildlife and Community Success - East Devon](#)

[New volunteer Group Launched to Support East Devon's Countryside.](#)

LED Community Leisure partnered with Parkinson's UK to hold a Parkinson's drop-in networking session at The Hangar for those affected. This is a new support group for the local community. 32 attendees came.



Parkinson's drop-in at The Hangar © LED

2.5 Dementia

Up to 1.7 million people could be living with dementia in England and Wales by 2040. Although the progression of dementia cannot be reversed, it can be slowed with early detection and appropriate support and intervention. The earlier in life that healthy changes are made, the greater the likelihood of delaying the onset of dementia, disability and frailty. Various initiatives are already operating across the district, particularly by third sector organisations, including memory cafes and dementia friendly communities. We must also support partners on future dementia-prevention initiatives aiming to tackle those

modifiable risk factors ranging from social isolation to alcohol misuse, to help reduce the risk of young-onset dementia.

THG regularly visit the Honiton Memory Café - bringing an artist in to work with them as part of their session last summer, with South West Academy artist Phil Creek.

LED Community Leisure still support Honiton Memory Café, who take their group on monthly ambles. LED helped Honiton Memory café start their walking group nine years ago; initially six people attended, now there are regularly 25 participants.



February's amble at Ferne Animal Sanctuary © LED

2.6 Homelessness, housing and indoor environment factors

The condition of our home inevitable has an enormous impact on our physical health and our mental wellbeing. Housing across Devon is expensive, making it a particular challenge for lower income households. Councils have a legal duty to house families and people who are vulnerable, but the acute shortage of affordable homes means they are having to rely on temporary accommodation for long periods. The number of people living in temporary accommodation in England has hit a 25-year high, and refugees can be at particular risk of homelessness. Some of our headline activities include:

[26 April 2024 - The first expansion of Cranbrook gets a green light - East Devon](#)

May 2024: [Free workshops will improve East Devon tenants' confidence with using technology](#)

June 2024: [Cranbrook's second expansion area gets the go ahead](#)

[17 July 2024 - Council invests in housing service's future to ensure residents are safe and secure - East Devon](#)

[9 September 2024 - Prestigious recognition for pest control service - East Devon](#)

[4 September 2024 - East Devon District Council supports Gas Safety Week 2024 - East Devon](#)

[24 October 2024 - East Devon District Council supports first Damp & Mould Action and Awareness Week - East Devon](#)

[7 November 2024 - Cranbrook to receive funding for new 'Cranbox' scheme in Devon Devo Deal - East Devon](#)

[22 January 2025 - East Devon District Council supports Clean Air Night - East Devon.](#)

2.7 Smoking

While smoking rates have been declining, it remains the single biggest cause of preventable illness, disability and death in the UK. Cutting smoking is one of the most effective and evidence-based interventions that we can take. Smoking is more common in more deprived areas, further exacerbating the impact of the cost of living crisis.

EDDC is represented on the [Smokefree Devon Alliance](#) and the Public Health Officer has also shared many health messages and set up numerous introductions for staff from [Devon's Stop For Life](#) service across the district.



Screenshot of Stoptober tweet/X by EDDC Public Health Project Officer

2.8 Alcohol and other drug use

Behavioural risk factors such as smoking, alcohol, poor diet and lack of physical activity are the leading influences of ill health and premature mortality both nationally and locally in Devon. Alcohol is also a drug and more people consume alcohol than any other drug; we recognise that the harms caused by alcohol are as important and valid as other drugs.

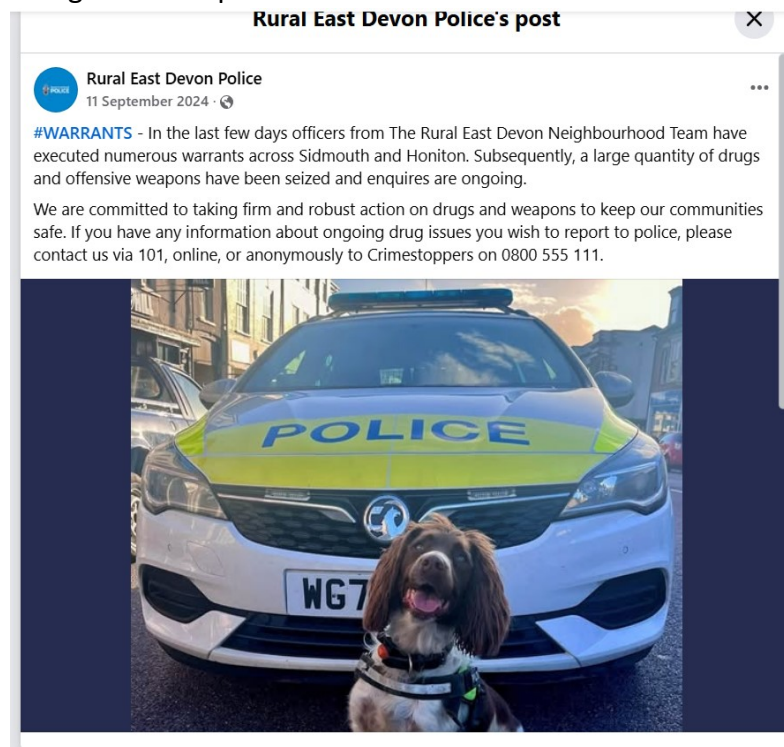
We work across the district to support campaigns by national and regional agencies and local efforts by the police, County Council colleagues and third sector groups to raise awareness, educate and inform about safe alcohol and other drug use.

Our Licensing team's [Statement of licensing policy 2021-2026 - East Devon](#)

Our Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety team took part in Op Sweep alongside British Transport Police:

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/democraticservices/documents/s152282/Op%20SWEEP%20results.pdf>

The ASB team issued seven Community protection warnings for Cannabis use, and they share intelligence with police in Rural East Devon:



Screenshot of Facebook post by Rural East Devon Police

2.9 Diet and nutrition

EDDC is a member of the [Devon Food Partnership](#) – whose work led to [Devon's Good Food Strategy 2023-28](#). Food is crucial to our health, but it is also a driver of ill health, health inequalities, and damage to the environment. We have worked with many partners, such as the charity Project Food; our local initiatives have included:

[30 April 2024 - Exmouth's Inaugural Gate to Plate Festival Celebrated as a Triumph - East Devon](#)

[19 July 2024 - Green partnership helps to grow food for local communities in need - East Devon](#)

[13 December 2024 - Cranbrook celebrates landmark milestone with the opening of Morrisons supermarket - East Devon](#)

[29 January 2025 - "I learned to cook a meal from scratch for the first time" – council project helps to address food insecurity in East Devon - East Devon.](#) [image below]



Local mother Annette and son Arlo enjoy a hands-on cooking session © Project Food

2.10 Physical activity

WHO estimate that insufficient physical activity is now the fourth most frequent cause of death in the world. We know that exercise is good for our physical health and our mental wellbeing. But exercising or getting active can seem quite daunting for anyone who hasn't taken any exercise for while or finds it too difficult to fit into a busy life. We are lucky that our district has such special green spaces and beautiful coastlines: we are committed to ensuring that this outstanding environment contributes to the health and wellbeing of our residents. Our natural open spaces provide valuable opportunities for us to achieve many of our public health priorities, increasing levels of physical activity while at the same time improving mental wellbeing and reducing social isolation. We offer many opportunities for exercise on our land – through play areas, outdoor gyms and skateparks:

[11 October 2024 - Planning permission sought for new 'Clyst Meadows' in East Devon - East Devon](#)

[25 October 2024 - New floodlights for Exmouth skatepark hailed a success! - East Devon](#)

[20 December 2024 - Green light for Clyst Meadows! - East Devon](#)

[8 January 2025 - Work starting on Dinan Way extension - East Devon](#) [active travel].

[LED Community Leisure](#) delivers leisure, health and community services, operating public sports and leisure facilities across East Devon, often working in partnership with schools and other sporting organisations. They organise and run community-based activities in schools and in/on East Devon's countryside and beaches, many by volunteers such as the Walking for Health programme. They offer a style of social prescribing 'exercise on prescription' health referral schemes, e.g. gym use and swimming, in many cases for individuals with long-term health conditions.

LED Community Leisure continued to deliver physical activity and wellbeing sessions with schools including Exeter Road Primary, Littleham Primary, Cranbrook Primary and Secondary Education Campus. LED also worked with Exmouth Community College, Honiton Community College and the Kings School on a shorter basis supporting predominantly Years 8 and 9. Linking closely with the pastoral teams to provide pupil premium/children struggling with anxiety, showing them the relationships that physical activity can have to their mental health. A new session was also delivered to Littleham Primary for a SEND Gymnastics sessions.



Exmouth Community College Session © LED

2.11 Pandemic preparedness

If and when there is another pandemic, being prepared nationally and locally is the best way to ensure the right response. Preparing for another pandemic requires collaboration and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. East Devon District Council is in a much stronger position of preparedness, with tried and tested ways of working with staff from the County Council and other districts. We established a network of local voluntary and third sector groups. We created better links with NHS and other agencies, and are continuing these links through One Devon's Integrated Care System. We are partners in the [Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum](#); who assess local risk to our communities and manage our [Community Risk Register](#).

We help to distribute reliable, safe health messages from trusted sources: [Where to get health information online - East Devon](#)

One of the immediate and ongoing actions we can take, is to help combat mis-information, for instance around vaccinations:



Screenshot of tweet by EDDC Public Health Project Officer

2.12 Health effects of climate and adverse weather events

Climate change matters for health; it is the context in which we will need to protect our physical and mental health from a wide range of climate-sensitive hazards. Climate will affect a wide range of health outcomes and determinants of health. Local authorities have a

critical role and certain opportunities. Flooding has various significant negative impacts including upon mental health - increased risk means that people and properties, as well as health and social care facilities, transport lines and schools are at greater risk of flooding. Impacts of sea-level rise and flooding will be greatest in coastal towns, low-lying areas, and in or near floodplains. We can prevent some of the challenges and impacts and should also focus on co-benefits such as nature-based solutions.

May2024: [Managing flood & coastal erosion risk across the South West](#)

May 2024: [Construction of the final stage of Feniton's Flood Alleviation Scheme expected to begin mid-summer 2024](#)

[17 October 2024 - First spade in the ground marks the final phase of Feniton's Flood Alleviation scheme - East Devon](#)

[22 November 2024 - Advice ahead of Storm Bert this weekend - East Devon](#)

[22 January 2025 - East Devon District Council announces dedicated support for local community action groups - East Devon](#)

[29 January 2025 - Second Tiny Forest Planted in Exmouth's Brixington Park - East Devon.](#)

Some additional headline examples

While not listed as one of our twelve public health priorities, we have also contributed to the health and wellbeing of our communities in many other ways, for example:

[12 July 2024 - High visibility patrols launched in Exmouth to combat antisocial behaviour and serious violence - East Devon](#)

[17 July 2024 - Staff and volunteers thanked as East Devon District Council celebrates Four Green Flag Awards! - East Devon](#)

[4 December 2024 - East Devon District Council cracks down on fly-tipping on Exmouth seafront - East Devon](#)

[19 December 2024 - Public support leads to an update of East Devon dog control Public Spaces Protection Order \(PSPO\) - East Devon](#)

[5 February 2025 - East Devon District Council Countryside Team Forms Partnership with able2achieve - East Devon.](#)

3. Summary

Most people want to be in better health. Although people are living longer, many are often in poorer health. We believe we have an overarching responsibility to consider health and wellbeing in all our council activities. Everything we do aims to ensure that East Devon is a place where people want to live, work, visit and enjoy life, while focusing on where there is greatest need.

Throughout 2024-25 teams from across the council worked together and with partners to support the health and wellbeing of our residents. This Review celebrates our efforts towards meeting our three health and wellbeing aims: to support healthy people, leading healthy lives, in healthy places.

I hope that this Review helps managers and councillors to ensure that health is a better understood and important element of decision-taking. Going forward we should keep health uppermost in mind. Health and wellbeing, poverty, the economy and the climate emergency are linked and together form golden threads running through our service delivery, supporting the twelve priorities outlined in our [Public Health Strategy 2024/27](#).

Author: Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer, 09.04.25



Landscaping at Blackdown House, Honiton © EDDC