

Cornwall's Vital Issues 2025

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‘I am very proud to be able to support this essential research into social and economic conditions in our county. The knowledge that is gained will help to focus the Community Foundation and its donors on the areas of real need throughout Cornwall.’

James Williams CVO Vice Lord-Lieutenant, and former Chair of Cornwall Community Foundation.

Introduction

Cornwall Community Foundation has produced the Vital Issues and Vitals Signs reports since 2017 to offer a comprehensive snapshot of the economy, society, and natural environment across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

By drawing together data from a wide range of sources, the report helps illuminate how the challenges facing this region — such as housing affordability, low wages, and food insecurity — are deeply interconnected and experienced collectively. These overlapping pressures shape people’s daily lives and have profound effects on health and wellbeing.

There is growing recognition that the social determinants of health — employment, education, housing, food access, and financial stability — must be addressed in partnership, across sectors and services. Yet, access to coherent, joined-up local data remains limited.

The Vital Issues report addresses this gap, offering a resource that is not only comprehensive but practical — supporting decision-making and collaboration among those working to improve outcomes for communities across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

This year’s Vital Signs report builds on that foundation. Led by the Cornwall Community Foundation, it aims to inform action by providing an accessible overview of current conditions and emerging trends. We hope it proves valuable to local funders, organisations, policymakers, and residents who are shaping the future of this region.

We were pleased to support this year’s publication through a collaboration involving students and researchers from Rutgers Health and the University of Exeter who contributed research and analysis across a range of themes. Their involvement underscores the value of partnership and the importance of engaging new perspectives in place-based work. Our thanks go to the Cornwall Community Foundation for their leadership and for continuing to centre the voices, needs, and aspirations of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Professor Catherine Leyshon
Centre for Geography and
Environmental Science
University of Exeter,
Penryn Campus

Dr. Rahul Mittal
Assistant Professor
Rutgers Health –School of
Health Professions

Vital Signs

Vital Signs® is a research project designed to identify social and community priorities across a range of themes important to the county's quality of life. This will inform the priorities for our grant-making.

Cornwall's Vital Signs research was previously carried out in 2017 and 2022. Using a combination of published research, surveys, resident community consultations, and stakeholder meetings with the public, private and VCSE (Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise) sectors, this Vital Signs report provides a comprehensive portrait of social trends, key community needs and peoples' perceptions of where they live and work. Vital Signs is supported by UK Community Foundations (UKCF), with research support from the Social Innovation Group at the University of Exeter.

The process requires the production of two publications: a detailed report **Vital Issues**; and a summary report **Vital Signs**.

Core themes

The core themes are the backbone of this report. This follows the approach recommended by UKCF and repeats themes from the 2017 and 2022 Vital Issues reports. Each area of research, the surveys, consultations and meetings have all been aligned to these themes, where possible.

1. Local Economy and Employment
2. Fairness and Strong Communities
3. Healthy Living
4. Housing and Homelessness
5. Safety
6. Education and Learning
7. Arts, Culture and Heritage
8. Environment

Themes cross over and impact one another and therefore should not be interpreted in isolation. In addition, there are two further cross-cutting themes that, whilst not considered separately, impact all eight main themes: transport and rurality.

The long-term impact of COVID-19, and the cost-of-living crisis, also continue to exacerbate the issues facing communities across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Additional note on interpretation and sources

The data herein is based on published research, survey results and community consultations. It aims to be independent, unbiased, free of preconceptions and political affiliation, and includes qualitative and quantitative data throughout. Every effort has been made to ensure that the analysis, interpretation and reporting is evidence-based.

Methodology

Our research for Vital Signs consisted of several work streams:

- We worked with the University of Exeter and reviewed statistical data, reports and consultations from charities, local authorities and national government.
- We supplemented this research with a survey of residents who use the services of or are connected to the community groups, charities and social enterprises that CCF has supported. **371** responses were received.
- We explored the emerging themes in more detail at three community consultations.

Community consultations

CCF chose three area types in which to undertake our community consultations:

1. Rural – Millbrook on the Rame Peninsula
2. Coastal town – Penzance
3. Inland town – Bodmin

The consultations brought together residents and representatives of the community – including businesses, the council, schools, health professionals and those working across some of the groups CCF supports.

We thank The Rame Centre, TRELYA, and KBSK Performing Arts CIC for kindly hosting and facilitating these consultations.

Cornwall – the context

Cornwall lies on a long peninsula with no inland area more than 20 miles from the sea

It has a coastline of over 400 miles (724 kilometres), 158 miles designated as Heritage Coast, and over 300 beaches. Its only land border is with Devon to the east, and it is the furthestmost western county of England.

Headline statistics:

- Cornwall National Landscape covers almost one-third of Cornwall – an area bigger than Dartmoor National Park.
- Nearly **75%** of Cornwall's land area is managed for agricultural use (Cornwall Wildlife Trust).
- Cornwall has: **22** Marine Conservation Zones; **4** Marine Special Areas of Conservation; **3** Marine Special Protected Areas; and **115** County Geology Sites.
- The Cornish Mining World Heritage Site is the largest industrial World Heritage Site in the UK, encompassing 10 distinct areas across Cornwall and West Devon.

Population changes and structure

Cornwall's population was **578,324** in 2023 ([ONS, Cornwall Council](#)). The population is spread over 1,376 sq. miles in total, equivalent to 414 people per sq. mile, compared to 671 people per sq. mile across the UK. However, Cornwall has no major urban centre but is characterised by several small towns of 20,000–27,000 people, and many dispersed rural settlements.

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the average (median) age of Cornwall increased by two years, from 45 to 47 years of age. The area had a higher average (median) age than the South West as a whole in 2021 (44 years) and a higher average (median) age than England (40 years). The number of people aged 65 to 74 years rose by around 16,000 (an increase of 25.9%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 8,400 (8.0% decrease) ([ONS Census 2021](#)).

Between the last two censuses, the population of the Isles of Scilly fell by 4.5%, from just over 2,200 in 2011 to around 2,100 in 2021. This means the Isles of Scilly was the only local authority area in the South West to see its population decline. The regional population increased by 7.8%, while the population of England increased by 6.6% ([ONS Census 2021](#)).

The gender split in Cornwall is 51.5% female, 48.5% male ([ONS, Cornwall Council](#)).

Ethnic diversity is limited in Cornwall: 93.6% of the population is White British (including Cornish), 0.4% White Irish, 0.2% Roma, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, 2.6% Other White, 0.6% Asian, 0.2% Black, 1.2% Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, 1.1% Other ethnic groups ([ONS Census 2021](#)).

Cornish ethnicity

On 24 April 2014 Cornish people were granted minority status under the [European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#). This affords the Cornish the same status as the UK's other Celtic people – the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish.

In the 2021 Census, 117,350 people in England and Wales identified as Cornish, with 88% of them residing in Cornwall. Within Cornwall 42,778 of residents (7.5%) identified their Ethnic Group as solely 'Cornish' which is double the 2001 figures of 21,416.

In recent years the Cornish language has become more widely used in official signage, street signs and in organisations' literature. Cornwall Council and Transport for Cornwall have been particularly active in this regard, the former using bilingual signage on its buses and the latter producing bilingual, or partially bilingual, documents (Institute of Cornish Studies, The State of Cornwall – What we currently know about our Socio-Economic Landscape, July 2022).

Rurality

46% of Cornwall's residents live outside of towns, in settlements of fewer than 3,000 people ([Cornwall Council The Cornwall We Know](#)).

1. Local Economy and Employment

Overview

As of mid-2023, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly had a population of 578,324, with a workforce marked by high levels of part-time work and self-employment.

Key employment sectors include retail, health, construction, hospitality and education. These sectors made up 60% of all employment. Cornwall faces persistent economic challenges including low wages, high housing costs and increasing living expenses. In 2024, the average wage in Cornwall was £37,542 – significantly below the UK average. Over 20% of workers earned below the real Living Wage, with South East Cornwall being most affected.

Employment dropped in 2024, with economic inactivity rising to 22.4%. Self-employment (14.7%) remains above the national average, but earnings are low.

Universal Credit claimants increased by 35% between 2022–2024. Most people commute by car, while public transport use remains low.

Cornwall’s economy is dominated by micro and small enterprises, especially in construction and agriculture. The county has three Enterprise Zones supporting marine, aerospace and space sectors.

The visitor economy contributes £2 billion annually but is under strain due to inflation, reduced consumer spending and a skills shortage. The rise of the gig economy and low-pay, insecure jobs, especially in rural areas with limited transport, adds to employment challenges. In 2025, Cornwall was declared the UK’s first “Living Wage Place.”

1.1 Salary data

In 2024 the average wage in Cornwall was £37,542. The UK average wage was £45,836 (Cornwall Council Economy Monitoring).

Across Cornwall, in 2024, 1 in 5 employees (20.1% of the population) earned less than the real living wage (£12.60 per hour), compared to 15.7% across the United Kingdom. In 2024, part-time employees were almost three times more likely to be low paid than full-time employees. In Cornwall 34.5% of part-time jobs paid below the real living wage, vs 12.8% of full-time jobs (ONS 2025).

Part-time work accounts for over 37.6% of jobs in Cornwall (Nomis Labour Market Profile Cornwall 2025).

Following successful campaigning by Simon Fann, Truro Foodbank Manager, and the Cornwall Poverty Forum, in February 2025 Cornwall has become the first UK county or Duchy to be recognised as a “Living Wage Place” by the Living Wage Foundation.

It means that real living wage employers are committed to fair pay and tackling in-work poverty, with over 15,000 workers now guaranteed the real living wage.

Area in Cornwall	% earning below real living wage
South East Cornwall	33.7%
St Ives and Penzance	25.3%
North Cornwall	20.8%
St Austell and Newquay	20.2%
Truro and Falmouth	18.1%
Camborne and Redruth	12.1%
Cornwall	20.1%

(ONS, Real Living Wage & Living Wage Foundation)

1.2 Employment

267,600 people (ages 16 to 64) were employed in Cornwall in June 2024. Employment in Cornwall has decreased compared with the previous year. Cornwall’s employment rate of 76.1% (ages 16 to 64) was lower than across the South West (78.8%) as a whole in the year ending December 2023 (ONS 2025).

Unemployment (people looking for work) has fallen slightly since a year earlier. Around 7,100 people (ages 16 to 64) in Cornwall were unemployed in June 2024. This is a rate of 2.7%, marginally higher than across the South West (2.5%) as a whole (ONS 2025).

Claimant Count at 3.1% was higher in March 2024 compared with a year earlier. The Claimant Count measures the number of people who are claiming unemployment-related benefits (ONS 2025).

Economic inactivity has increased since the previous year to 22.4% (ages 16 to 64). Around 74,800 people (or 22.4% of the population) aged 16 to 64 years in Cornwall were “economically inactive” in the year ending December 2023. This compares with around 67,900 people (20.7%) in the year ending December 2022. People are classed as “economically inactive” if they are not in employment but don’t meet the criteria for being “unemployed”.

This means they have not been seeking work within the previous four weeks or were unable to start work within the next two weeks. Common reasons include being retired, looking after the home or family, or being temporarily or long-term sick and disabled. At 22.4%, economic inactivity in Cornwall is higher than across the South West (19.1%) and Great Britain (21.2%) (ONS 2025).

1.3 Self-employment

Self-employment accounted for 14.7% of all employed people in Cornwall in Sept 2024. This was higher than the average of 11.8% in Great Britain (Nomis Labour Market Profile Cornwall 2025).

The most recent data for self-employed people is from 2023 for the South West. With the average self-employment income at £22,900 it is lower compared to the UK median at £30,300 (HM Revenue & Customs).

Self-employed workers are not subject to the National Minimum Wage regulations.

1.4 Universal Credit

Since May 2022, there has been a general upward trend of people on Universal Credit. There were 58,963 people on Universal Credit in December 2024 compared to 43,917 in May 2022, showing a rate of increase of just over 34% in two-and-a-half years (Cornwall Council).

This rise looks set to continue as those on lower wages struggle with the higher cost of living. Further to this, there is still movement from other benefits to Universal Credit, as well as the general population increasing (Cornwall Council).

1.5 Travel to work

The Travel to Work report presented the statistics for travelling to work (aged 16 and over and in employment). Almost one-quarter of people (24.7% or 62,832) in Cornwall reported working mainly at, or from, home in 2021. This proportion was lower than in the South West (30.4%) and in England and Wales (31.2%).

Travelling to work as a driver of a car or van remains the most frequently used method in Cornwall (56.1% or 142,649). 9.8% (25,022) travelled to work by foot in Cornwall compared to 7.6% for England and Wales combined. This was more frequently used than cycling to work.

1.9% travelled to work using public transport in Cornwall. In comparison to 3.4% for the South West and 7.9% for England and Wales. Public transport includes bus, minibus, coach, train, underground, metro, light rail and tram travel (Cornwall Council Travel to Work).

1.6 Economy

The population of Cornwall aged 16 and over was 477,425, with 55.8% being economically active and 44.2% being economically inactive (including retired people). Cornwall has a lower share of economically active people compared to the England and Wales average.

60% of people in employment work in wholesale, retail and motors, health and social work, construction, accommodation and food services, and education.

The NHS and other health providers are the top employers in the constituency of Truro and Falmouth, perhaps unsurprisingly as the home of Royal Cornwall Hospital at Treliske. Retail leads employment in three of the six Cornwall constituencies: Camborne and Redruth, North Cornwall, and South East Cornwall. Hospitality is the top employer in two constituencies: St Austell and Newquay (19.1%) and St Ives, which includes Penzance and west Cornwall (23.2%) [\(Cornwall Live 2025\)](#).

Industry	Employees	%
Wholesale, retail and motors	40,379	15.9
Health and social work activities	39,849	15.7
Construction	27,255	10.7
Education	23,128	9.1
Accommodation and food services	21,925	8.6
Manufacturing	16,392	6.4
Public administration and defence	14,028	5.5
Professional, scientific and technical activities	12,864	5.1
Administrative and support services	12,802	5.0
Transport and storage	8,834	3.5
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	7,055	2.8
Information and communication	5,953	2.3
Real estate activities	4,077	1.6

Financial and insurance activities	2,930	1.2
Water, sewage and waste management	2,072	0.8
Mining and quarrying	1,188	0.5
Electricity, gas and air conditioning	1,007	0.4
Other	12,510	4.9

(Nomis 2021 Census Profile Cornwall)

There are **25,275 distinct businesses** in Cornwall and 29,590 local units, or workspaces. Compared to the previous 2023 data, there has been a loss of 75 businesses (-0.3%) and 60 local units (-0.2%).

Cornwall Enterprises	Numbers	%
Micro (0 to 9)	22,385	88.6
Small (10 to 49)	2,500	9.9
Medium (50 to 249)	330	1.3
Large (250+)	60	0.2
Total	25,275	

The largest sector by number of businesses was Construction with 3,965 businesses (15.7%), followed by Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing at 3,840 (15.2%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services at 2,590 (10.2%) [\(Cornwall Council Economy Hub\)](#).

Cornwall has three Enterprise Zones – designated areas established to promote business growth in specialist target sectors. The Cornwall Marine Enterprise Zone is a base for marine business comprising 15 hectares in three primary locations: Hayle Harbour, Falmouth Docks, and Tolvaddon.

The Goonhilly Enterprise Zone is a world-class space asset and has received investment to grow in the commercial space sector and invest in satellite technology. The Aerohub Enterprise Zone at Cornwall Airport, Newquay, provides airport facilities as well as landside development sites [\(Cornwall Council, Enterprise Zones, 2025\)](#).

From 1 April 2024, responsibility for the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CloS) transferred to Cornwall Council, with the CloS LEP Board meeting for the last time in March 2024.

While CloS LEP no longer operates as an organisation, its resources have transitioned to Cornwall Council to continue delivering key services, including the Growth Hub, Careers Hub, sector development, and trade and investment across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly [\(CIOS LEP\)](#).

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Forum is a group led by the private sector. It advises Cornwall Council and the Council of the Isles of Scilly on economic priorities to create local jobs and drive growth.

The Forum focuses on stimulating economic prosperity, year-round tourism, sustainability, global identity, and community cohesion, while also identifying key event opportunities and considering governance for implementation [\(Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Forum\)](#).

There is a united call from our business leaders for greater strategic planning, better connectivity and urgent action on housing and skills. The top three priorities highlighted by Cornwall Chamber of Commerce recent survey are improving transport and connectivity (56%), delivering affordable housing (47%), and supporting SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups (47%). Boosting skills and employability (40%) and driving strategic economic planning and investment (35%) also ranked highly [\(Falmouth Packet\)](#).

1.7 Visitor economy

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are one of the UK’s strongest tourism assets. With miles of coastline and 27% of the region being designated as a National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) over **4 million overnight visits** happen every year, along with 14 million day trips. This success creates a large number of regional jobs and **£2 billion of visitor spend** annually.

Overall, the visitor economy makes up **15% of the Cornish economy** with salaries for different occupations within the sector showing significant variation. Catering, bar and restaurant managers earn the highest salaries. Within the visitor economy, the largest proportion of staff are cleaners, followed by those who work with food, either as kitchen and catering assistants or chefs, and then receptionists, waiting staff and bar staff.

Within Cornwall, the demand is highest for chefs and kitchen/catering assistants. There is an ongoing concern within the sector about the domestic skills shortage, driven by both the immigration changes as a result of Brexit, and the pandemic [\(Cornwall Opportunities\)](#).

Research carried out by Visit Cornwall has shown that the cost to holiday in Cornwall is proving to be an issue. Cornwall remains a strong consideration for people as a UK holiday destination but the return to international travel and the cost of living in the current economic climate has impacted on people committing to their holidays.

People are booking trips with a shorter lead time, with as little as three weeks advance booking for holidays. This is a trend which has occurred since the pandemic and shows no signs of returning to pre-2020 trends.

The current cost of living is likely to impact most visits to the county as people look to cut costs and manage the household budget. 34% are spending less on eating and drinking out and 29% are looking for more ‘free things’ to do. 29% are cutting back on buying gifts/shopping, although this has been declining for a number of years [\(Future Trends in Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Tourism, The South West Research Company & Visit Cornwall 2024\)](#).

1.8 The growth of the ‘gig’ economy

Recent years have seen a rapid increase in new forms of work, which are typically associated with low pay and insecurity. These jobs require workers to be self-employed, often on zero hours contracts.

Most low-paid work is undertaken by those with low qualifications. The ‘low pay/no pay’ cycle traps people in low-paid work, and a lack of qualifications means that low-paid workers suffer frequent periods of unemployment in between periods of work, which in turn impacts their ability to access better jobs.

Barriers to better paid work include care responsibilities, health, rurality, housing costs and poor or expensive public transport which mean that some workers – typically women – have few alternatives if they want flexible work close to home, especially in an area like Cornwall with its dispersed settlement patterns. The Isles of Scilly has even more acute barriers, as workers are often limited to employment opportunities on each island as inter-island transport is expensive.

The rise of home working has helped to alleviate this issue but for those with low qualification levels this is less of an opportunity [\(Low wages in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Red Box Research and Smart Growth Analytics\)](#).

Vital Signs community survey

The employment situation worsened in 2025, with increased difficulty securing stable jobs and a growing mismatch between skills and employer needs:

- 40% of respondents reported difficulties securing or retaining good quality, year-round employment, a significant increase on 2022 results (25%).
- Almost half of the respondents (48%) to our survey feel that they don't receive a fair wage for the work they do.
- 39% reported their current skills did not match employer needs.
- Many people (46%) still feel that Cornwall is not doing well after the pandemic and economic uncertainties (42% in 2022).
- A third of respondents (31%) are struggling to pay all their bills and buy food for their families.

'People can't survive on what they earn.'

'Residents in Cornwall are mainly dependent on tourism, which makes stable, year round employment difficult.'

Vital Signs community consultation

- 'Not only do we get less funding on average, it actually costs more for us to provide the same level of service because we are a vast, more sparsely populated, Duchy. Not only are we getting less, but we are also having to do more with that less'
–Bodmin community consultation.
- 'It's not just a nice buzz word to say we're on the periphery, we really are'
–Bodmin community consultation.
- 'Our foodbank use in St Ives goes up in the winter by about 25%, usually due to the amount of seasonal work'
–Penzance community consultation.
- 'There is employment but it's diminishing as every business starts to struggle, summer wages and winter wages are completely different'
–Millbrook community consultation.
- 'Businesses are finding it difficult to find apprentices. It is a wonderful opportunity if you have the support, but the pay is so little'
–Millbrook community consultation.

2. Fairness and Strong Communities

Overview

Cornwall faces significant socio-economic challenges across multiple dimensions of deprivation, including education, employment, health and housing.

Over half of households experience at least one form of deprivation, with child poverty particularly alarming –one in three children live in poverty, peaking at 42% in some wards. Fuel poverty affects 15.4% of households, with energy-inefficient homes worsening the issue. Rising living costs have driven record reliance on foodbanks, and increased eligibility for free school meals, now at 22.9% of pupils. However, not all eligible children receive them.

Poor public transport and broadband infrastructure exacerbate rural isolation, limiting access to jobs, healthcare and education. A decline in rural post office access further impacts vulnerable residents.

Cornwall's average internet speed lags behind the UK average, with over one-third of residents facing slow connections. Citizens Advice reports 40,000 residents have negative budgets, with housing and energy costs driving financial stress.

Despite these hardships, Cornwall boasts a vibrant voluntary sector with 140,000 volunteers contributing an estimated £490 million to the local economy. Local initiatives like the Winter Wellbeing program and Council financial support provide essential aid, but sustained intervention is needed to address widespread deprivation and inequality.

2.1 Deprivation

Cornwall has high levels of deprivation and has a low-wage, seasonal economy. Wages are around 80 percent of the national average, leading to families and children living in poverty. The rurality of the county means that people have high transport costs, and almost half of the population are not on the mains gas network, compared to 14% nationally. The county also experiences high numbers of excess deaths in the winter months (Local Government Association, Responding to cost of living challenges: Cornwall Council).

The latest census data includes four different 'dimensions' of findings based on different types of deprivation: education, employment, health and housing. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows 53.9% of households in Cornwall were deprived in at least one of these 'dimensions' when the most recent census was carried out. Others may have only been affected by one or two, but the effects of suffering deprivation in any of these dimensions should not be overlooked.

The ONS says a household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education (GCSE level) and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student. In terms of employment, a household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or disabled.

A household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any member of the household has general health that is "bad" or "very bad," or if any member is identified as disabled.

In the housing dimension deprivation is present when the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, shared, or has no central heating (Cornwall Live 2022).

2.2 Child poverty

A child in the UK is classified as living in poverty if they live in a household whose income is 60% below the average median income in a given year. Child poverty after housing costs in Cornwall is deeply concerning, with **one in three children living in poverty**. Child poverty is highest within **North Cornwall** and **Camborne** and Redruth parliamentary constituencies, 36% and 35% respectively. These rates are higher than the UK average (31%) and a significantly higher proportion of children in Cornwall face disadvantages related to child poverty than the rest of the UK (**End Child Poverty 2024**).

21,485 children under 16 are estimated to be living in relative poverty in Cornwall in 2024, up from 20,241 from the year before and the highest since 2013 (**Cornish Times, 2025**). Some areas, such as North Cornwall and Camborne and Redruth, have higher child poverty rates.

Parliamentary constituency	child poverty %
North Cornwall	36.2%
Camborne and Redruth	35.0%
St Ives and Penzance	33.9%
St Austell and Newquay	32.9%
South East Cornwall	32.1%
Truro and Falmouth	28.6%
Cornwall	31.8%

Data collated from the DWP and ONS and presented in Cornwall Live show that, in the Bodmin St Mary's & St Leonard ward, 42% of children are living in poverty. In the Camborne Trelowarren and Penzance East wards, 36% of children were living below the threshold. In Falmouth Penwerris 34% of children were living in poverty, and in Launceston North and North Petherwin the ratio was 33%.

The actual number of children living in poverty in local areas is likely even higher, as the method of calculating the figures is different than at the national level. The national figures look at relative poverty after housing costs, whereas local figures don't take housing into account. The national figures also include children from the age of 0 right up to 19, if they are still at home and not in work. Local figures only include children aged 0 to 15 (**Cornwall Live**).

Cornwall's worst 19 areas for child poverty figures

- Bodmin St Mary's & St Leonard: **42%**
- Camborne Trelowarren: **36%**
- Penzance East: **36%**
- Falmouth Penwerris: **34%**
- Launceston North & North Petherwin: **33%**
- Redruth North: **32%**
- Roche & Bugle: **31%**
- Pool & Tehidy: **31%**
- Penryn: **31%**
- St Ives West & Towednack: **30%**
- Four Lanes, Beacon & Troon: **30%**
- Mousehole, Newlyn & St Buryan: **30%**
- St Austell Central & Gover: **29%**
- Truro Tregolls: **29%**
- Penzance Promenade: **29%**
- St Blazey: **29%**
- St Dennis & St Enoder: **28%**
- Camborne West & Treswithian: **28%**
- St Teath & Tintagel: **28%**
- Camelford & Boscastle: **27%**
- Liskeard Central: **27%**
- Mullion & St Keverne: **26%**
- Land's End: **26%**
- Bude: **25%**
- Newquay Central & Pentire: **25%**
- Gwinear-Gwithian & Hayle East: **25%**

By contrast, just 9% of children in the Falmouth Arwenack and Feock and Kea wards were living in poverty last year, the lowest proportion of any wards in Cornwall (**Cornwall Live**).

2.3 Fuel poverty

Fuel poverty remains a significant concern in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. A household is identified as fuel poor if it has higher-than-typical energy costs and would be left with a disposable income below the poverty line if it spent the required money to meet those costs (also defined as spending more than 10% of its household income on fuel to achieve adequate levels of warmth).

At the time of writing, **fuel poverty affects over 15.4% of all households** (40,355 homes), a 2.8% increase from 2022. On the Isles of Scilly it is 18% (179 homes), a 6.3% increase from 2022 (**Cornwall Council, Winter Wellbeing**). Both figures are above England's average of 13%, however, these statistics do not account for the recent rise in energy and living costs.

Cornwall has about double the number of houses with no central heating, about 1.5% nationally and 3.5% in Cornwall (**Cornwall Council Pathways Report**). Approximately 22.63% of households have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of E, and about 39.56% of households are E and under (**Cornwall Council Pathways Report 7, 2025**). EPC ratings range from A (very energy efficient) to G (not energy efficient). Properties with an EPC rating below band E are considered substandard.

2.4 Winter Wellbeing

In the winter of 2024, Cornwall, like other parts of the UK, experienced a period of high mortality. Cold and damp can cause health problems, reducing people's life expectancy.

Since its inception in 2011/2012, the Winter Wellbeing program has assisted over 40,000 households to stay warm, well and safe during the winter months and prevented 963 hospital admissions. There are over 30 partners who work together to reduce fuel poverty, improve health, and progress people to work (**Cornwall Council, Winter Wellbeing**).

In September 2024 (**Cornwall Councilors**) voted to demand the government should halt its planned changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance as it would impact nearly 120,000 people in Cornwall.

2.5 Foodbanks

The increase in the cost of everyday essentials like energy and food is putting significant pressure on incomes. People who have never had to ask for help before are finding themselves in a position where they need support.

The Trussell Trust reported that between April 2024 and March 2025, food banks in Cornwall distributed over 35,500 emergency food parcels, with more than 12,500 of these parcels provided for children under the age of 16. These figures are very similar to the previous year, but a huge increase on pre-pandemic levels. The top reasons for food bank use are the 'rising cost of essentials' and 'ongoing impact of physical or mental health conditions'. The data doesn't include non-Trussell food banks in Cornwall, so this is just the tip of the iceberg (**Trussel Trust**).

Truro Foodbank reported that mental and physical health is the biggest single issue that their customers are facing. Benefits issues are falling as the single biggest issue thanks to the work by Citizens Advice Cornwall. Low income as a primary issue has fallen from 30% in 2023 to 21% in 2024 to 18% in 2025 thanks to the campaigning for Real Living Wages in Cornwall lead by Simon Fann, Manager of Truro Foodbank.

Camborne based Transformation CPR Foodbank distributed 134,137 food bank meals in 2024, which is 11,178 meals per month. They also delivered 349 Christmas Hampers to families and individuals and approximately 1,000 wrapped presents. Transformation CPR had 673 visits to their Community Hub which offers support for money, health and wellbeing issues.

Their Community Health and Wellbeing Workers engaged with 320 households and are actively working with over 60 individuals.

In Newquay, the Drop In and Share Centre (DISC) experienced a dramatic increase in demand during the pandemic, providing up to 4,000 meals a week at its peak. However, due to funding challenges, DISC Newquay announced its closure at the end of 2024, raising concerns about the availability of support for vulnerable individuals in the community (**Churches Together in Cornwall InfoHub**).

Volunteer Cornwall has 3,600 volunteers throughout Cornwall who can help with food shopping collections, signposting to debt advice, general health and wellbeing support, local activity, and social groups (**Cornwall Council**).

2.6 Free school meals

Nearly one-quarter of children in Cornwall are eligible for free school meals. Department for Education figures show that in January 2024, Cornwall had 16,937 pupils eligible for free school meals, representing 22.9% of all pupils in the area. This was 613 more than in January 2023 and a record number in the past nine years.

Across England, a record number of children were eligible to receive free school meals as of January, but education sector leaders said the numbers were just “the tip of the iceberg”, as some youngsters living in poverty are missing out on them.

Children in state schools in England can receive free meals if a parent or carer is receiving one of several benefits, including Jobseeker’s Allowance, child tax credits or income support. Parents on Universal Credit can also qualify for free school meals if their household income is less than £7,400 a year.

The figures also show that not every child eligible for free school meals received them. In Cornwall, just 75.8% of the eligible pupils were in receipt of free school meals due to a combination of restrictive eligibility criteria and a lack of universal provision ([Cornish Times 2024](#)).

2.7 Car ownership

420,155 vehicles were registered in Cornwall by March 2023. 20,792 classified as low-emission vehicles, meaning 5% of the vehicles in Cornwall are low-emission. Designed to emit less than 75g of carbon dioxide per km, they include battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric and fuel cell electric vehicles ([Cornish Times](#)).

15% of households in Cornwall didn’t own a car or a van in 2021, a much lower figure than the average in England (23.5%). 42.1% of households owned one car or van, 30.4% owned two cars or vans and 12.5% owned three or more cars or vans ([Nomis 2021 Census Area Profile Cornwall](#)).

Given Cornwall’s rurality and relatively poor public transport network, the higher-than-average car ownership indicates the necessity for a vehicle rather than a lack of deprivation.

Rising fuel prices affect some people’s ability to get to and complete their work. The rise in fuel costs has impacted residents’ ability to commute and perform work-related travel, highlighting the need for improved public transportation infrastructure and support mechanisms to mitigate the financial strain on Cornwall’s population.

2.8 Public transport

Public transport in Cornwall, particularly in rural areas, faces challenges including limited services, high costs, and infrequent or non-existent routes, impacting access to essential services and opportunities for residents. While improvements are being made through government initiatives and local efforts, disparities persist.

Cornwall has the tenth longest road network in Great Britain, with 435 km of ‘A’ roads and 4,174 km of minor roads. Cornwall also has 128km of mainline rail that runs through the centre of the Duchy, passing through the main urban areas.

Only 1.1% of Cornwall residents aged 16 to 74 who are in employment use the train to get to work, compared with 10% of people nationally ([Cornwall Council, The Cornwall We Know](#)).

University of Exeter research shows that the skills of talented people living in rural Cornwall are being wasted because of poor public transport and lack of internet access.

The absence of the necessary human networks and infrastructure is stopping people accessing jobs, getting to workplaces and hearing about opportunities ([University of Exeter](#)).

Research carried out on the Isles of Scilly highlighted the seasonality, reliability and cost of transport services as key issues. There were further problems associated with freight deliveries and delays, as well as the additional costs incurred in moving things on and off the islands and having to store items in case of delays.

A number of people also highlighted the shortage of food over the winter when freight services were unable to leave Penzance. Transport caused major difficulties responding to medical emergencies, accessing specialist care and attending important events on the mainland ([Wills, Jane \(2023\) Establishing a Community Research Network in the Isles of Scilly: The community view. University of Exeter, Penryn, Cornwall. ISBN 978-0-902746-94-7](#)).

2.9 Access to a Post Office

Access to rural post offices in Cornwall has further declined in 2024, as the Post Office announced plans to close 115 branches across the UK, including those in Newquay and Liskeard ([Falmouth Packet](#)). In Marazion, residents have been without a post office since April 2023. Despite a petition with nearly 3,000 signatures submitted in April 2024, requesting at least a one-hour weekly mobile service, the Post Office has not reinstated services, citing the proximity of alternative branches in Long Rock and Goldsithney ([Cornwall Live](#)).

Goldsithney Post Office: After 22 years, the sub-postmistress closed the branch in December 2024 due to ongoing issues with the Horizon IT system, which caused significant financial discrepancies and stress ([BBC News Cornwall](#)).

The Lizard Post Office: England’s most southerly post office closed in December 2024 after the long-serving operators retired. Despite efforts to find new tenants, no one has stepped forward, leaving the community without this vital service ([BBC News, Cornwall](#)).

Portreath Post Office: The closure of this branch in June 2024 left residents frustrated, especially given the short notice and lack of consultation. The Post Office cited unsustainable options as the reason for the closure ([BBC News, Cornwall](#)).

Wadebridge Post Office: Plans to relocate this branch fell through in June 2023 due to space constraints at the proposed new site. As a result, the post office closed, forcing residents to seek services in neighboring towns ([Voice Newspapers](#)).

2.10 Broadband

As of December 2024, the average internet speed in Cornwall is 103 Mbps. This is 42% lower than the UK average (158 Mbps). Broadband users in Cornwall typically see speeds in the range of 35 Mbps to 143 Mbps, and the median download speed here is 47 Mbps, 56% lower than the UK median (73 Mbps). The average upload speed in Cornwall is 15 Mbps, which is 26% lower than the UK’s average upload speed (20 Mbps).

Most people’s internet connections in Cornwall are rated adequate, with approximately 23% of its residents seeing speeds ranging from 30 to 60 Mbps. About 11% of Cornwall’s residents have very fast internet connections – getting download speeds over 300 Mbps. Compared to December 2023, this is a percentage increase of around 74%, rising from 2.93% over the previous 12 months.

The number of people suffering from slow or very slow internet connections in Cornwall currently stands at 34% of its population. This represents a percentage drop of about 12% since December 2023, when 38% of people in Cornwall put up with worryingly low speeds: under 10 Mbps (very slow) and up to 30 Mbps (slow) ([Fair Internet Report](#)).

2.11 Financial assistance

In 2023/24 Citizens Advice Cornwall assisted 1,200 people with debt issues, helping them write off a total of £769k in debt and reschedule a further £92k. Their team of skilled money advisers provide advice on strategies to help people manage and clear debt. These include payment plans, full and final settlement, bankruptcy, Debt Relief Orders and write-off requests. They also provide advice on budgeting and specific issues like bailiffs ([Citizens Advice Cornwall](#)).

Citizens Advice Cornwall has found that 40,000 people living in Cornwall have more money going out than coming in every month. The worrying trend of negative budgets—where people’s expenditure on basic bills like energy, housing and food exceeds their income—is a growing problem in the county.

As falling living standards continue to push people’s finances to the brink, the new analysis from Citizens Advice Cornwall found energy and housing are the key costs swallowing up people’s income, pushing many into the red.

This means more and more people in this situation are likely to fall further into a spiral of debt ([Citizens Advice Cornwall](#)).

Cornwall Council provides lots of financial help for those struggling – free school meals, help with food, tips for saving money and more ([Cornwall Council](#)).

Crisis and Care funding, available to adults and families for support with food, energy, utilities, clothing and essential household costs, currently awards up to £1,500 to each eligible applicant ([Cornwall Council](#)).

In 2025, Cornwall Council’s portion of Council Tax will increase by 4.99%. This includes a 2% increase to fund Adult Social Care services. Additionally, a 100% Council Tax premium will be applied to second homes from April 1, 2025 ([Cornwall Council](#)).

2.12 Volunteering and taking part

There are approximately 5,500 voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Cornwall has an estimated 140,000 volunteers.

The contribution of these volunteers to the Cornish economy is estimated to be worth £490 million. Cornwall also has one of the highest volunteering rates in the UK, with over one-third of people regularly volunteering ([Volunteer Cornwall](#)).

Vital Signs community survey

Financial inequalities and public transport limitations remained significant concerns in 2025, with more people feeling disadvantaged and excluded due to rising costs and lack of transport options. However, results show strong localised community support.

- 91% of respondents believe there is a wide income gap between people in Cornwall (a 4% increase from 2022, 87%).
- 57% reported feeling disadvantaged compared to others.
- 71% of respondents said there were not enough means of public transport for commuting and accessing services.
- However, 73% stated that they know their neighbours and feel able to get to know people in their community, with 73% getting involved in local events and activities.

‘Affordable housing and transport in rural areas are out of reach for most low-income families.’

Vital Signs community consultation

- ‘There aren’t many places to go as a young person where you can be yourself without getting judged, without people expecting trouble because you’re a teenager’
– [Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘In many of our cases, that hour a week that they come to our sessions is the only time the children have actually left the house’
– [Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘We’ve become very good at lifting the bar of the Cornish economy, but what we actually haven’t done is raise the floor. The Shared Prosperity Fund hasn’t achieved this either’
– [Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘You’re fighting fires all of the time just to try and support where you can because the systems that are greater than you are not able to’
– [Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘A lot of pensioners, mentally ill people and disabled people who are getting no social interaction, don’t come to the foodbanks because they can’t get out. But there is a level of need there that we are not yet meeting’
– [Penzance community consultation](#)
- ‘Elderly people are so embarrassed that they come to the foodbank in tears. People are paying a really high rate for services as they are not online.’
– [Penzance community consultation](#)
- ‘The people who really need us are the people that are the hardest to get hold of’
– [Penzance community consultation](#)
- ‘A lot of isolation still comes from COVID, especially when talking to older people, they’re scared still of coming out and intermingling just in case they catch something’
– [Penzance community consultation](#)
- ‘You can’t get mobile coverage in the middle of Millbrook. No lifeline connection for an ageing population and nowhere to signpost elderly people’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#)
- ‘The Rame is a peninsula within the peninsula. Bus services are not adequate and it is almost impossible to get to beyond Torpoint. You have to go to Plymouth first to get to Saltash and it takes half a day on the bus’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#)
- ‘We were stranded at Derriford with no public transportation late evening and had to spend £60 on a taxi to get home’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#)
- ‘Small shops charge more so those who are less able to travel have to pay more’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#)

3. Healthy Living

Overview

Cornwall fares as ‘average’ for healthy living indicators with life expectancy figures marginally higher than the UK.

However, there are certainly areas for concern with long waiting lists for mental health assessments, high suicide rates, and more people living with depression since the COVID-19 pandemic. Cornwall has a higher-than-average proportion of people with a long-term health condition or disability. One in five people are affected by disability. Improving health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health, including employment, housing, education and community.

Cardiovascular deaths are rising, though still below the national average. Obesity is a major concern, with 62.7% of adults in Cornwall overweight or obese. Drug use, especially crack cocaine and synthetic substances, is growing, with 2,388 adults in drug treatment and 1,808 for alcohol treatment. Alcohol-related deaths are higher

than national rates. Mental health issues, including depression and suicide, are worsening, with long waits for assessments and care access hindered by staff shortages and rural isolation. Suicide rates are among the highest in the country.

Dementia affects nearly 10,000 older adults, with diagnosis rates just below national figures. Disability affects 2% of the population, with economic inactivity driven by illness.

Though employment is up, jobs are often insecure and poorly paid. One in ten residents provides unpaid care, and social care staff shortages remain high, with 11% of posts vacant. These issues highlight deep-rooted health and social care challenges in the region.

3.1 Diet and exercise

Recent data indicates that nearly **two-thirds of adults in Cornwall are overweight or obese**. Cornwall Council’s Healthier Weight Strategy 2025–35 highlighted that in 2022–23 **62.7% of adults in Cornwall** and 66.7% of adults on the Isles of Scilly were living with overweight or obesity ([Cornwall Council Healthier Wage Strategy](#)).

In 2022–23, **22.4% of Reception aged children** and **32.8% of Year 6 aged children** in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly were living with overweight or obesity.

Cornwall Council’s public health team have published the Healthier Weight Strategy to address the factors which can influence our health in the places that we live, such as the food, the environment, and having local places to be active.

The British Obesity Society said that the increasing cost of living has also increased consumption of processed foods which are seen as “quick, cheap and convenient”.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said obesity costs the NHS around £6.5 billion a year and is the second biggest cause of cancer ([Cornish Times](#)).

3.2 Cardiovascular disease

More people are dying early from heart and circulatory diseases in Cornwall, new figures have revealed. It comes as poorer people across England are increasingly more likely to die early from these conditions. Data from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities shows there were an average of 1,307 deaths linked to cardiovascular disease from 2020–22 in Cornwall. This was an increase from 1,275 between 2017 and 2019 ([Cornish Times](#)).

3.3 Life expectancy

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show a girl born in Cornwall between 2020 and 2022 has a **life expectancy of 83.5 years** – one of the lowest across the region. Meanwhile, boys born in the area has a **life expectancy of 79.6 years** ([ONS Life Expectancy for Local Areas](#)). Across the South West, the average life expectancy was 80.1 years for men and 84 years for women ([Cornish Times](#)).

According to ONS projections, Cornwall’s population is undergoing significant demographic change.

Between 2020 and 2043, the proportion of residents aged 65 and over is expected to increase from 25.1% to 31.5%, while those aged 0–15 will decline from 17.0% to 15.3%.

The working-age group (16–64) will shrink from 57.9% to 53.3%. These figures, based on mid-year estimates and long-term projections ([ONS, 2023](#)), reflect a trend toward an aging population with a relatively smaller workforce, raising critical considerations for future service provision, housing and economic planning in Cornwall.

3.4 Drug and alcohol dependency

The Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Drugs Needs Assessment 2024–25 update reported that an estimated **27,700 people took illicit drugs in Cornwall last year**, with cannabis being the most prevalent at an estimated 22,200 users. Around one-third are class A drug users ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

National research into the prevalence of problem drug use estimate that there are **2,562 adults using opiates and/or crack cocaine in our local population**. There has been an escalation of crack use and associated harms in the last five years, particularly amongst opiate users.

Drug availability and use changed during the pandemic in Cornwall with the emergence of high-strength illicit benzodiazepines, counterfeit drugs, and increased use of cannabis and illicit prescription drugs. Safer Cornwall also saw more drugs bought online.

New synthetic substances are being found in all drugs in Cornwall’s illicit drug market, and this is confirmed in police drug testing. Synthetic drugs present a very high risk of overdose to users. Drugs affected include pharmaceutical drugs that a wider group of people are buying from the illegal market, including young people.

The latest data shows that in Cornwall **2,388 adults were in structured treatment for drug dependency** (any drug) in the 12-month period to September 2024, a 2% increase over the past year and a 4% increase from the March 2022 baseline.

1,808 adults were in structured treatment for alcohol dependency in the 12-month period to September 2024, a 2% decrease on the previous year and a 1% increase from the baseline. Within this figure, the number of people accessing help for non-opiates alongside alcohol has increased, whilst those seeking help for alcohol dependency alone continues to fall (-6%).

In addition, **162 young people under the age of 18 were in treatment** with the young people’s service in the 12-month period to September 2024. This figure has stabilised this year, after a rise of 38% in 2023/24 ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

Of the 3,613 adults in treatment during the year to April 2024, approximately two-thirds are male and one-third female. **62 people died whilst in treatment** in the 12-month period to April 2024, which is 1.7% of people who were in contact with the treatment system in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. This is just above the national average (1.3%) but shows some improvement from the 2% experienced in April 2019.

Alcohol specific deaths have increased and are higher in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly than nationally. There were 17.9 alcohol-related deaths per 100,000 people in comparison with 14.5 per 100,000 nationally. Drug misuse deaths are also higher in Cornwall (6.5 per 100,000 people) than nationally but are lower than alcohol specific deaths.

Some of our most vulnerable people are repeatedly excluded from critical services, such as housing and mental health support, due to high-risk behaviours that present a risk to themselves and others (such as drug use, drinking and violence). This often leaves them on the street, highly vulnerable with escalating needs and behaviours. Safer Cornwall is particularly worried about the exploitation and abuse of young women in this position ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

3.5 Mental health

There is a strong link between financial insecurity and poor mental health. Stress related to housing, employment and poverty continues to impact psychological wellbeing (Insights Dashboard, 2022). The life expectancy of individuals with mental illness remains significantly lower than those without, a gap driven by both physical health conditions and socioeconomic disadvantage.

More people in Cornwall are living with depression since the COVID-19 pandemic. In Cornwall there were 66,261 adults with depression in 2022–23, making up 13.5% of adults in the area registered with a GP. This was a slight increase on the year before, 12.7%, and more than in 2019–20, before the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was 10.9% ([Cornish Times](#)).

Healthwatch Cornwall reported in 2025 that Cornwall's mental health services face systemic issues that are common across the UK, such as long waiting lists, workforce shortages and service fragmentation.

However, rural isolation and underfunding exacerbate these challenges. Addressing these requires targeted investment, integrated care and sustainable workforce strategies for equitable access ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

Individuals seeking neurodivergent assessments face some of the longest delays in the country.

- **Children's ADHD assessments:** 2-year waiting list
- **Children's autism assessments:** 3-year waiting list
- **Adult ADHD assessments:** 6-year waiting list
- **Adult autism assessments:** 11-year waiting list

These waiting times exceed national averages and reflect systemic issues such as funding shortages, high demand and workforce constraints. Despite 30,000 referrals to specialist services, many individuals are denied care due to restrictive eligibility criteria. Geographic isolation, limited crisis services and transportation barriers create disparities in access to mental health care ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

The NHS Confederation reports that only 8% of the mental health budget and less than 1% of the total NHS budget is spent on children and young people's mental health.

This indicates a significant disparity in funding allocation, as 50% of adult mental health problems are present by age 15, and 75% by age 24 ([NHS Confederation](#)).

Cornwall faces a severe shortage of Mental Health Practitioners (MHPs) in GP surgeries, with only 19 currently employed by Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. This is far below the target of 46, and leads to inconsistent access to early mental health support. A shortage of local specialist in-patient facilities forces many patients, especially those with complex conditions, to seek care outside Cornwall, disrupting continuity of care and increasing pressure on families.

A shift in funding from NHS services to voluntary sector organisations raises concerns about sustainability, specialist expertise and the risk of service fragmentation ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

Socioeconomic factors profoundly influence mental health, affecting both immediate wellbeing and long-term outcomes. Financial strain, unemployment and housing instability are key contributors to stress, anxiety and depression, limiting access to essential mental health resources. Those facing financial difficulties often struggle with the emotional toll of not meeting basic needs, leading to a cycle of mental health challenges and social isolation. Worries about maintaining housing or finding stable work can result in chronic stress and further deterioration of mental health ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

According to data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022 saw **deaths by suicide in Cornwall hit their highest point in nine years**, with 86 recorded, up from 73 in 2021. The 86 deaths registered in 2022 were also the highest number recorded since 2001. Over the last three years of available data, the suicide rate in Cornwall stood at 15.6 deaths per 100,000 people which is much higher than the rate for England and Wales at 10.7 ([Cornish Times](#)).

3.6 Dementia

As of February 2025, an estimated **9,919 individuals** aged 65 and over in Cornwall were living with dementia. Of these, 6,129 had received a formal diagnosis, indicating a diagnosis rate of 61.8%.

Nationally, the dementia diagnosis rate for individuals aged 65 and over reached 65.4% in February 2025, marking a three-year high. While Cornwall's rate was slightly below this national average, efforts are ongoing to improve local diagnosis rates ([NHS England Digital](#)).

Given Cornwall's higher-than-average older population, the region is expected to experience a significant increase in dementia cases over the coming decades ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

3.7 Disability and long-term illness

Cornwall has a higher-than-average proportion of people whose day-to-day lives are limited by disability, equating to 120,570 or **21.2% of the population**, much higher than the average in England at 17.3% ([Nomis Census Profile](#)).

37% of households in Cornwall have one or more disabled people ([Disability Cornwall](#)).

The Director of Public Health Annual Report highlighted that in 2024 around 77,500 people of working age in Cornwall were 'economically inactive' with nearly one-third on long-term sick leave, largely due to mental ill health and musculoskeletal conditions. Employment rates for people with life-limiting conditions and for people with disabilities are significantly below the national rates ([Cornwall Council Public Health](#)).

Overall, there are more people in employment and unemployment has decreased. Unemployment and job insecurity are associated with harm to health and rising mortality. It is estimated to be affecting over 35,500 people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly ([Cornwall Council](#)).

3.8 Dental care

Healthwatch Cornwall's Dental Crisis Report revealed that patients often wait over a year for appointments, with more than half unable to secure NHS dental care. Financial barriers further prevent vulnerable individuals from accessing treatment, leading to worsening dental health issues.

The percentage of adults seen by an NHS dentist in Cornwall has steadily declined from 2019–2024. The percentage dropped from 47.3% in 2019–2020 to just 34.5% in 2023–2024 ([Healthwatch Cornwall](#)).

In the NHS Dental Statistics for England for the 2023–24 period, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board (ICB) is ranked **36 out of 42 ICBs** for the percentage of the adult population that has been seen by a dentist over the 24 months leading up to March 2024.

For children, it is ranked 41 out of 42 ICBs (based on the percentage of the child population seen by a dentist within the 12 months leading up to March 2024).

There is a lack of access to both routine and emergency NHS dental care across Cornwall. The cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated cost concerns for dental care. People are paying for private dental care out of desperation even though they can't afford it, with many people getting into debt.

3.9 Carers

In Cornwall **one in ten residents provide unpaid care**. The last census data from the Office for National Statistics (**ONS**) shows 10.1% of the population over five years old (54,552 people) in Cornwall were looking after someone without being paid.

In Cornwall, 28,130 people were providing more than 20 hours of unpaid care a week, including 17,453 people doing so for more than 50 hours a week (**Nomis Census Profile**).

Census data has shown that 115 children in Cornwall between the ages of five and 17 provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care work per week (**Falmouth Packet**).

The vacancy rate in the social care sector in Cornwall is over 11%. For the overall adult social care workforce in Cornwall, there were a total of 19,500 posts, and filled posts stood at 17,500 in 2023. Of these, 10,500 were care worker posts, of which 9,000 were filled. There were 1,200 bank and agency posts, of which 800 were care workers (**Cornwall Council Proud to Care**).

Vital Signs community survey

Healthcare access remained a challenge in 2025, with mental health and transportation to appointments worsening, and waiting times continuing to be a major concern.

- **76%** of respondents reported inequality in healthcare access with **75%** stating they could not see a healthcare professional when needed.
- **68%** reported difficulty seeing a healthcare professional without long waiting times.
- Mental health provisions were of particular concern with **72%** stating that mental health support was not readily available when needed.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of people who find it difficult to arrange transport for attending healthcare appointments, **44%**, compared to 19% in 2022.

‘Health and social care are stretched beyond limits, making access difficult.’

‘I struggle to get the healthcare I need when I need it

Vital Signs community consultation

- | | |
|---|---|
| • ‘You have to plan your whole day around just the travel, to get to somewhere like the hospital’
– Bodmin community consultation . | • ‘Somebody I know waited for 16 hours for an ambulance with a broken hip’
– Penzance community consultation . |
| • ‘Transport in Cornwall has always been an issue. Sometimes getting from Bodmin to Newquay can take two hours on a bus’
– Bodmin community consultation . | • ‘We need change at a grassroots level, learning to grow food, to cook food, to having a balanced diet, to being able to provide for yourselves’
– Millbrook community consultation |
| • ‘There isn’t enough support for rehabilitation. We are concerned about the mental health of men and those coming out of prison, trying to change their life’
– Penzance community consultation . | • ‘What can we do to empower a community to be able to move away from those supply food chain systems which are financially really prohibitive for people and lack any nutrition’
– Millbrook community consultation |
| • ‘We are seeing a lot of men aged 25–35 with late diagnosis of autism without associated learning disabilities’
– Bodmin community consultation | • ‘Millbrook had a full-time surgery before COVID, but it closed during COVID’
– Millbrook community consultation |
| • ‘Dental health and access to a dentist is an issue in Cornwall. With the wait time being something like seven years’
– Penzance community consultation . | • ‘Impoverished communities create poor environments’
– Millbrook community consultation |
| • ‘95% of our illnesses are caused by lifestyle and ultra-processed food. NHS was set up to treat sick people, not to educate them about healthy living’
– Penzance community consultation . | |
| • ‘Somebody I know waited for 16 hours for an ambulance with a broken hip’
– Penzance community consultation . | |

4. Housing and Homelessness

Overview

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly face a significant shortage of homes that are affordable, making it difficult for local residents to find and afford homes, especially those on lower incomes.

Cornwall has high house prices, increasing homelessness rates, and a shortage of social housing, with a doubling of applicants for social housing and a significant rise in families and individuals in temporary accommodation.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already fragile housing situation in Cornwall. There was a significant demand on existing homes that housed local people to be converted into holiday lets and this was particularly high in coastal areas. The lack of security of tenure and planning controls contributed to the issue of properties being used as ‘assets’ for tourism, rather than homes for local residents. Cornwall’s Housing Register hit an all-time high and the Council declared Cornwall as officially in a Housing Crisis in 2022.

Homes for Cornwall, an independent coalition of representatives from the voluntary sector, private businesses, local government and policy makers, is dedicated to speeding up the local response to this crisis, creating more opportunities for more people, more quickly.

To end homelessness in Cornwall, we need solutions that not only provide immediate housing but also tackle the root causes to prevent homelessness in the future.

4.1 Housing stock

There are 284,160 properties in Cornwall. 66.3% of homes are owned by occupants, while the figure for England is 61.3%. The private rental market makes up 19.7% of housing in Cornwall, similar to 20.4% nationally, and social rentals represent 12.8%, in contrast to 17.1% in England (Cornwall Council, 2024).

In the 2023–24 period, Cornwall Council delivered 775 new affordable homes (Cornwall Council Affordable Housing September 2024).

During 2023–24 there were 2,527 net additional homes completed, which represents a circa 0.9% increase in Cornwall’s housing stock (Cornwall Council Housing Analysis 2024-25).

Dwelling counts by type (2024)	Cornwall	South West	England
Bungalows	20%	12%	9%
Flats/maisonettes	14%	20%	24%
Terraced houses	24%	25%	26%
Semi-detached houses	18%	21%	24%
Detached houses	20%	20%	16%

4.2 Average house prices

The average house price in Cornwall was £292,000 in March 2025 compared to £295,654 in England. This was slightly higher than the average of £286,000 in March 2024 (revised), a 2.0% rise. This was a lower rise than in the South West (5.3%) over the same period (ONS 2025).

- Detached properties: £441,000
- Semi-detached properties: £293,000
- Terraced properties: £241,000
- Flats and maisonettes: £161,000

The most affordable postcode district is TR14 8 (eastern Camborne) with the average price of £182,000. The most expensive postcode district is PL27 6 (villages surrounding Wadebridge), with an average of £718,000 (Cornwall Council Housing Analysis 2024-25).

In Cornwall the average home costs 8.8 times average earnings in 2024, compared to 7.5 in England and Wales, (ONS, 2024). While earnings have doubled since 1997, house prices have more than quadrupled.

The University of Exeter research exposed the extent to which the lack and unaffordability of housing has negative implications for the demographic balance of the community, labour supplies and service provision on the Isles of Scilly. These challenges are worsened by the additional costs of living and working in the Isles of Scilly caused mainly by the cost of transportation and associated premium on supplies and specialist labour. The viability of the community is further threatened by sea level rise and the insecurity of freshwater supplies (Wills, Jane (2023) Establishing a Community Research Network in the Isles of Scilly: The community view. University of Exeter, Penryn, Cornwall. ISBN 978-0-902746-94-7).

4.3 Rented housing

The private rental market makes up 19.7% of housing in Cornwall, in contrast to 20.4% nationally (Cornwall Council, 2024).

The average monthly private rent in Cornwall was £957 per month in April 2025. This was an increase from £883 in April 2024, a 8.4% rise (ONS 2025).

In Cornwall, the average rent for flats or maisonettes rose by 8.3%, while for detached properties, it increased by 7.9%. Average rent for one-bed properties rose by 9.3%, while the average for four-bed (or above) properties increased by 7.2%.

Average rents, by number of bedrooms, as of April 2025 in Cornwall were:

- One bedroom: £655
- Two bedrooms: £840
- Three bedrooms: £1,029
- Four or more bedrooms: £1,453

There were 424 rental listings on Rightmove in Cornwall in April 2025.

4.4 Social housing

Social rented properties represent 12.8%, compared to 17.1% in England (Cornwall Council, 2024). The figures in the 2011 census were 12% compared to 18%. So, England has reduced since then, but Cornwall has managed to buck the trend and increase the proportion of social housing.

In August 2024 there were 21,120 households on Cornwall Homechoice, the social and affordable housing register (Cornwall Council Housing Intelligence). This has increased by 131% over the last 5 years. 54% of households on the housing register require one-bedroom accommodation (Cornwall Council Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy).

The Homechoice register prioritises those who need emergency relocation, have urgent and high welfare needs, are waiting for adapted/accessible homes, care leavers, hospital discharge, overcrowding, Category 1 Hazard Disrepair and statutory homelessness (Cornwall Council).

1,987 new social housing lets were offered to tenants in Cornwall in 2022–23. This was down from 2,432 in 2021–22, and the lowest figure of any year over the past decade, with the number of new lets provided having fallen by one-quarter during that time (Voice Newspapers).

There were 916 households in temporary emergency accommodation in March 2025, of which 390 are families with children and 486 are single people (Cornwall Live).

814 affordable homes were developed in 2024 for Social or Affordable Rent or affordable homeownership with the council or a Registered Provider (Cornwall Council Specialist and Supported Housing).

Cornwall Housing manages three gypsy and traveller sites for Cornwall Council, Boscarn Parc (32 pitches), Wheal Jewel (24 pitches) and Fordown Park (10 pitches). 80% of the Gypsies, Roma and Travellers communities live in conventional housing in Cornwall, with 20% living in caravans or other mobile or temporary structures (compared to 1.2% of the general population) (Cornwall Council).

4.5 Decent homes

Cornwall Council's Decent Homes report estimates that 44,340 of Cornwall's owner-occupied properties have category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards. This equates to 24% of owner-occupied properties.

12,497 (20% of all private rented) of private rented have category 1 hazards, and 2,637 (8% of all social rented) of social rented properties have a category 1 hazard. Social stock tends to be more thermally efficient than the private stock (owner-occupied and private rented together) ([Cornwall Council Decent Homes](#)).

Category 1 hazards pose serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety and examples of hazards include excess cold, damp and mould growth, and fall hazards. Within this, private rented properties had the greatest number of cases across all five hazards.

4.6 Second homes

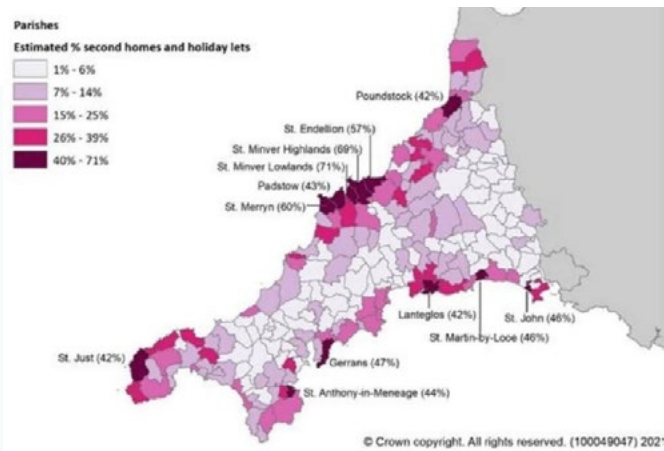
There are **14,123 second homes** in Cornwall as of 2024. That's an increase of nearly 1,000 homes in the space of a year, **up by 7.5%** from 13,140 in 2023. In 2023 the number of second homes in Cornwall had actually fallen from 13,292 in 2022. It means that **one in every 20** dwellings in Cornwall is now classed as a second home.

No other council area in England comes close to Cornwall when it comes to the number of second homes. North Yorkshire has the second highest total with 8,572 followed by Kensington and Chelsea with 7,667 ([Cornwall Live, ONS](#)).

A second home is a property which is not the sole or main residence of any individual for council tax purposes. It is difficult to accurately report numbers of second homes as this may include a 'holiday home', which is let for under 140 days per year (at which point it would be listed under business rates as holiday accommodation.)

Second homes that are occupied more frequently bring some economic benefit to the community, especially through sectors that support tourism such as local shops, restaurants and cafés, services such as gardening, cleaning, construction and repair. Issues associated with an imbalance of second homes include the erosion of community, seasonality, under-occupation of stock and reduced affordability ([Cornwall Council Second Homes report](#)).

Cornwall Council started to charge an additional 100% Council Tax premium on second homes from 1 April 2025.



4.7 Short-term lets

Short-term let numbers fluctuate between 15,000 to over 24,000 in summer. There were approximately 6,080 holiday homes in Cornwall when the census was taken in March 2021.

As of 6 November 2024, there are 13,305 active Airbnb listings. A typical short-term rental listing in Cornwall is booked for 226 nights a year, with a median occupancy rate of 62% and an average daily rate of £121. In 2023, a typical host income (annual revenue) was £26,848 ([Airbtics](#)).

Airbtics reported that short-term rental regulation is lenient in Cornwall. Very few Airbnb listings currently have their license number on their Airbnb listing. This likely means the local government is not strictly enforcing the short-term rental-related regulations ([Airbtics](#)).

4.8 Vacant properties

The number of long-term empty properties in Cornwall is 2,652 ([Cornwall Council Revenues and Assessments, August 2024](#)).

38% of these properties were in West Cornwall, with the Camborne, Pool and Redruth Community Network Area (CNA) containing most empty properties overall. The predominant reasons for properties being empty were due to being under repair (22%), followed by the property being for sale (15%) ([Cornwall Council Empty Homes report](#)).

Bringing empty homes back into habitable use could alleviate challenges presented by the housing crisis. From inception of Cornwall Council's Empty Properties Project in September 2010 to April 2021, 1,446 empty properties have been brought back into use through intervention, including advice and assistance plus enforcement action ([Cornwall Council Empty Homes report](#)).

4.9 Homelessness and rough sleeping

In 2023-24, 2,910 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in Cornwall. Single people accounted for 68% of all households who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. In Cornwall young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness with 18-34-year-olds accounting for 47% of all homeless people.

Family and friends no longer able to accommodate, and end of private rental tenancies are the two main causes of homelessness in Cornwall, accounting for nearly half of the homelessness. Mental health is the most prevalent support need, accounting for 32% of all support needs ([Cornwall Council, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#)).

In January 2025 there were 960 households in temporary and emergency accommodation. Since 2019 there has been a 224% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation, having increased from 253 to 819 over this time period.

There is a very heavy reliance on emergency accommodation which can be unsuitable and very costly. In 2023-24 circa £20m was spent on emergency and temporary accommodation in Cornwall.

The majority (68%) of households currently in temporary accommodation have been there for less than a year, 21% have been there for between one and two years, and over 10% of households have been in temporary accommodation for more than two years ([Cornwall Council, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#)).

The official rough sleeper snapshot identified 53 people sleeping rough on a single night in Cornwall. The 2024 snapshot showed that rough sleeping was up by 20% nationally and 23% in Cornwall ([Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#)).

During the 2024-25 winter St Petrocs' Winter Service supported 538 people, a 27% increase from the previous winter. St Petrocs provided 107 people with emergency accommodation over the winter, of which 97 (or 91%) did not return to rough sleeping ([St Petrocs Winter Services Impact Report 2024-25](#)).

Most of the people St Petrocs supported in their emergency accommodation presented with multiple and complex health issues, often the result of prolonged periods of sleeping rough, trauma or limited access to healthcare. 82% of people had mental health needs, 64% of people had physical health issues and 21% of people had substance use issues.

In 2024 St Petrocs helped 537 people move on from homelessness. They engaged 1,402 people across their services. In 2024, 346 people lived in St Petrocs' 24 supported accommodation units. The five most common causes of homelessness experienced by their clients include relationship breakdown, family or friends cannot support, loss of rented accommodation, mental health and violence. It shows that homelessness is complex, shaped by personal challenges, social factors and broader issues such as lack of affordable housing ([St Petrocs Annual Report March 2025](#)).

Citizen Advice Cornwall (CAC) supported fewer clients in 2024 but provided more in-depth assistance as cases became increasingly complex. Over the past three years, fewer people have approached CAC at risk of homelessness, with more already experiencing homelessness, making intervention more resource-intensive due to limited housing options.

The mental and physical toll on those affected is deeply concerning, prompting a shift toward early intervention efforts. Additionally, 65% of their clients now have long-term health conditions or disabilities, a 48% increase since 2014. This suggests that financial and legal challenges are worsening physical and mental wellbeing, leading to a rise in Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications for those struggling with long-term health conditions or disabilities ([Citizens Advice Cornwall 2025](#)).

Vital Signs
community survey

The housing crisis worsened in 2025, with increasing concern over affordability, unoccupied homes and lack of available housing for low-income households:

- 91% of respondents believe there is insufficient local, affordable housing.
- 93% agreed that there aren't enough houses for people on low income, an increase of 10% since 2022.
- 92% stated that private rental accommodation is unaffordable for most people, a 5% increase since 2022.
- 87% agreed that too many homes stood unoccupied all year.

‘There are not enough affordable houses and private rents far exceed wages.’

‘The right kind of quality housing for the right people is essential to reduce homelessness.’

Vital Signs
community consultation

- ‘We’re facing a lot of families with living conditions that are totally unacceptable. The mould and damp are serious problems’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).

- “There are a lot of homeless people. We have people living in the woods, living in the cemetery, some camp out at the beach’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).

- ‘Rentals you can’t get anywhere, a lot of what does come up for rental is at extortionate prices, it’s out of the range of the vast majority of young working families’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

- ‘Our rent has doubled in the last five years. And if I was to be made homeless tomorrow to find a house to fit my family I’d be looking at £500 more than that easily’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

- ‘We looked at a property to rent on Saturday and within two hours there were five applicants and the property had gone to someone else’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

- ‘Housing is a massive issue here. There are a lot more Airbnbs and not enough properties for rent. The need far outstrips the availability – it is a vicious circle’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

- ‘You have one option for emergency accommodation offered by Cornwall Council, and they may offer you to move to other side of Cornwall. If you turn that down you are at the back of the queue. It hollows out the community’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

5. Safety

Overview

Cornwall is performing relatively well against the rest of the UK. It is perceived as a safe place to live and work, as reflected in our questionnaire results (75% agreed) and this is confirmed by comparatively low crime rates.

While Cornwall is still perceived as safe, safety concerns have increased, with more residents feeling unsafe at night, being affected by anti-social behaviour and perceiving inadequate police presence.

Cornwall’s crime rate is 11% lower than the national average for similar areas, with 33,083 crimes reported in the past year. However, crime increased by 13% compared to 2023, driven by rising shoplifting and persistent issues with violence, domestic abuse and drug-related offences.

Over half of recorded crimes occur in town centres, and two-thirds happens in ten major towns. Safer Cornwall’s Partnership Plan 2025–28 identified the following priorities from their evidence and annual strategic assessment process:

- Problem drug use and drug-related deaths
- Dependent drinking and harms to health
- Domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Exploitation including County Lines
- Anti-social behaviour
- Hate crime
- Serious violence including knife-crime

These are the issues that cause the greatest harm to communities ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, despite strong staffing, faces challenges due to its rural coverage and reliance on on-call firefighters. It was rated as needing improvement in ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

5.1 Crime statistics

Cornwall’s overall recorded crime rate is below average for similar areas nationally, but this is largely driven by very low rates of theft.

In the past year, 33,083 crimes were reported to the police, equating to a rate of 57.5 crimes per 1,000 residents, 11% lower than the average for similar areas nationally. Compared with the same period in 2023, crime numbers increased by 13% ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

Violence, domestic abuse, drug-related crime, and exploitation are key concerns due to the high risk of harm to communities. Over 55% of recorded crime occurs in our town centres.

Sexual offences have risen by 40% in Cornwall over the past four years, with 1,835 reported to police in the year up to September 2024. This equates to more than 30 a week. Each year 10,000 reports of domestic abuse are made, and since 2020 eight women in Cornwall have been killed by men who were either their current or former partner, or a family member. A further six women, who were victims

of domestic abuse, took their own lives, and another five deaths – also linked to domestic abuse – are likely to be determined as suicides pending an inquest.

Of the 22 domestic abuse-related death reviews commissioned in Cornwall since 2020, 19 involve a female victim ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

Reports of domestic abuse and sexual violence continue to increase year-on-year, and it is estimated that one in three women in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will be affected during their lifetime. The true figure is likely to be far higher as many incidents go unreported to police.

The Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Drugs Needs Assessment 2024–25 update reported that an estimated 27,700 people took illicit drugs in Cornwall last year, with cannabis being the most prevalent at an estimated 22,200 users. Around one-third are class A drug users ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

National research into the prevalence of problem drug use estimate that there are 2,562 adults using opiates and/or crack cocaine in our local population. There has been an escalation of crack use and associated harms in the last five years, particularly amongst opiate users.

Drug availability and use changed during the pandemic in Cornwall, with the emergence of high-strength illicit benzodiazepines, counterfeit drugs and increased use of cannabis and illicit prescription drugs. Safer Cornwall also saw more drugs bought online.

Recent data from the Safer Cornwall Partnership indicates a significant rise specifically in shoplifting incidents in Cornwall. In the year leading up to September 2024, Devon and Cornwall Police recorded 2,433 shoplifting offences in Cornwall, marking a **30% increase from the 1,878 reported a year earlier**.

In Devon and Cornwall, 19% of shoplifting offences led to a charge or summons over this period, with no suspect identified in 38% of cases ([Cornish Times](#)).

Two thirds of all recorded crimes happen in 10 of our largest towns (Bodmin, Camborne, Falmouth, Liskeard, Newquay, Penzance, Redruth, Saltash, St Austell and Truro) where only one-third of Cornwall's population lives ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

The Safer Towns programme aims to improve community safety and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour by providing intensive partnership support for the ten towns with the highest levels of crime and disorder, delivering strong local action plans that respond to the needs and voices of the whole community ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

Safer Cornwall's Strategic Assessment 2024–25 reported that since pandemic restrictions ended in 2021, levels of reported crime have increased year on year. Most types of crime are now above pre-pandemic levels, with the highest rises seen in violent crime, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and harassment and knife crime. Theft offences remain comparatively low, despite having risen over recent years. The rate of burglary experienced in Cornwall continues to be one of the lowest in the country.

In the 2024 Have Your Say Survey, residents told Safer Cornwall that their quality of life is affected by rising anti-social behaviour and other issues in their local area. They feel less safe, and fear of crime has increased.

A decline in public confidence is a contributory factor in under-reporting of anti-social behaviour and low-level crimes. Negative perceptions are further amplified through adverse narratives and misinformation on social media.

Positive steps have been made in recognising the impact of trauma and embedding a trauma-informed approach to help break the cycle of abuse in people's lives. Public sector and VCSE partners are working together more effectively to develop creative solutions that better support people that need help ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

5.2 Police response to anti-social behaviour

In Cornwall, there were 7,536 anti-social incidents reported in the period from October 2023 to September 2024. The number of anti-social incidents has increased by 4% compared to the previous year (Safer Cornwall).

The top five areas in Cornwall with the most anti-social incidents offences are Truro South & Central (480), Penzance Quay (334), St Austell Central (265), Camborne East (247), and Camborne West (243) ([Cornwall Live](#)).

5.3 Hate crimes

In the period from October 2023 to September 2024, 487 hate crimes were recorded in Cornwall by Devon and Cornwall Police. Hate crime currently accounts for around 1% of all recorded crime in Cornwall. Over the past three years, recorded hate crime has decreased by 3% (Safer Cornwall).

The number of hate crime offences against religion/belief recorded in Cornwall rose from 39 to 44 last year. Crime against transgender people increased by 54% from 24 to 37 in the 12-month periods ending September 2023 and September 2024.

There has been a fall in reports of hate crime to the police, but Safer Cornwall's Have your Say Survey revealed that hate speech and abuse has increased –particularly racist, homophobic and transphobic behaviours. This is strongly felt in the online space, fuelled by misinformation and targeting by antagonists from outside of Cornwall, and frequently outside the UK.

Most recently, although we did not experience riots in Cornwall, the rise in Right Wing Extremism is a significant issue for the safe placement of refugees and asylum seekers, and for our growing population of international workers and their families ([Safer Cornwall](#)).

5.4 Fire safety

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) employs 700 people. The service is run by Cornwall Council. CFRS operates 31 fire stations with 43 fire engines across Cornwall, staffed by approximately 167 Full-Time Wholtime Firefighters (24 hours) and around 400 On-Call Firefighters. While the ratio of firefighters to population in Cornwall is higher than the national average, the service faces challenges due to the large geographic area it covers and the reliance on on-call personnel, which can impact response times and availability ([Cornwall Council](#)).

As of September 2023, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) assessed Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) as requiring improvement in several key areas, including workforce management and ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. The service maintains a high fire engine availability rate of 87.8%, but response times to primary fires average 12 minutes and 27 seconds, which

Vital Signs community survey

The housing crisis worsened in 2025, with increasing concern over affordability, unoccupied homes and lack of available housing for low-income households:

- 75% of respondents considered Cornwall a safe place to live which marks a decrease from 2022 (83%).
- Only half the respondents (53%) report feeling safe walking alone at night, compared to 63% in 2022.
- 65% felt there were not enough police patrols to respond quickly to crime.
- 36% reported being affected by anti-social behaviour, a significant increase from 24% in 2022

‘There are not enough police, crimes are not being responded to quickly.’

‘I don't feel safe walking alone in certain areas, especially at night.’

is slower than the average for rural services. The report highlighted that CFRS had not made sufficient progress since the previous inspection, with concerns about the service's workforce plan and IT systems that can be slow and inaccurate and are hampering staff productivity ([HMICFRS](#)).

Vital Signs community consultation

- ‘Schools are seeing an increase in antisocial behavior during school holidays, especially in the summer. Everything stops during summer, even football has a break’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘We have massive issues of antisocial behaviour. There's an obvious presence of people who are intoxicated, with that comes disruptive behaviour which can be very intimidating’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘I don't think there is a level of policing that makes me feel safe with the level of antisocial behaviour that I've experienced personally in the last year. I have seen homeless people in the centre being physically attacked for quite a long length of time with no police presence’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘We say we treat everybody equally but we don't, it's such a disappointment that there's that extra layer; that I need to be careful because I look different, that I need to blend in with everyone else and not make too much noise. We want to make sure our streets are safe for people who look different and that don't kind of fit in’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘We looked at a property to rent on Saturday and within two hours there were five applicants and the property had gone to someone else’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘Our level of crimes are very low, we have a few issues with drunk and disorderly behaviour but this is often due to the ferry link with the city’ –
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

6. Education and Learning

Overview

Cornwall continues to face significant educational challenges, particularly for disadvantaged students.

A 2024 report by the South-West Social Mobility Commission reveals that the region has the lowest proportion of disadvantaged students attaining Level 3 qualifications (A-levels, T-levels and equivalents) and the highest school absence rates in England. The report warns that these entrenched challenges, coupled with rising living costs, threaten long-term social mobility in the region.

75,718 pupils are attending **295 schools** in Cornwall in 2024/25. This includes 278 state-funded and 6 independent schools.

Early years development and KS2 performance for children eligible for free school meals (FSM) lag behind national averages in most constituencies. GCSE results varied widely, with the top school achieving 61% grade 5+ in English and maths, while others fell below 30%. Nationally, 45.3% reached this benchmark compared to 19.2% in Cornwall.

Funding for schools in Cornwall is among the lowest in England, with the lowest average teacher salaries. Recruitment challenges persist, particularly in rural areas, driven by low funding and excessive workload.

6.1 Work age population without qualifications

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that in 2023 6.9% of 16-64 year-old in Cornwall had no qualifications, slightly worse than the national average of 6.2% in England ([ONS, No qualifications](#)).

30.6% of people in Cornwall had a level 4 or higher qualification – such as a degree, postgraduate qualification, higher national certificate or diploma. Nationally, 33.8% of people aged 16 years and older stated they had a level 4 qualification or above ([ONS, Education](#)).

In Cornwall, 6.6% of people reported an apprenticeship as their highest level of qualification. This was slightly higher than in England (5.3%) ([ONS, Education](#)).

6.2 Number of schools, colleges, and universities

The Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) partnership offers a diverse range of educational institutions, encompassing both further and higher education, including Falmouth University, the University of Exeter (with the Camborne School of Mines), the University of Plymouth, Cornwall College, and Truro and Penwith College. These institutions operate across multiple campuses, providing a variety of academic and vocational programs ([Cornwall Council](#)).

Cornwall has 51 secondary schools that serve 33,934 students for the school year 2024/25 ([snobe.co.uk](#)).

Cornwall has 238 primary schools that serve 41,784 students for the school year 2024/25. There are a total of 2,405 teachers in Cornwall, and student teacher ratio is 19:1 ([snobe.co.uk](#)).

In 2023/2024, Cornwall supported over 4,000 children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A significant portion of these children have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, with an 18% increase in EHC plans in recent years. There were also in excess of 100 EHC needs assessment requests every month ([Cornwall Council](#)).

6.3 Exam results

Cornwall's GCSE performance in English and maths varied notably across schools in the 2022/23 academic year. St Joseph's School in Launceston led with 61% of pupils achieving grade 5 or above, followed by Penrice Academy in St Austell (54%), Richard Lander School in Truro (53%), and St Ives School (51%). Penair School in Truro and Launceston College each had 50% of students reaching this benchmark ([Cornwall Live](#)).

Conversely, Sir James Smith's School in Camelford and Hayle Academy reported the lowest outcomes, with only 20% of students attaining grade 5 or above, followed by Bodmin College (23%), Looe Community Academy (25%), Pool Academy (27%) and Poltair School at St Austell (28%).

Nationally, 45.3% of students achieved a grade 5 or above in both English and maths in the 2022/23 school year. Disadvantaged students faced greater challenges, with only 25.2% reaching this standard compared to 52.4% of their peers.

In Cornwall 19.2% of students eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved a grade 5 or above in both English and maths compared to 44.5% of those who are not FSM-eligible ([Social Mobility Commission](#)).

The South-West Social Mobility Commission 2024 report highlights persistent educational disadvantages faced by children from low-income backgrounds in Cornwall. More 5-year-olds lack school readiness, while 11-year-olds and 19-year-olds are less likely to meet basic educational milestones at the end of primary school or 16–18 education.

Only 46% of 5-year-olds eligible for free school meals met Early Years Foundation Stage goals in the region, compared to 50% nationally in the 2022/23 school year. Five out of six Parliamentary Constituencies in Cornwall are below the England average when it comes to disadvantaged children meeting expected levels of development ([University of Exeter](#)).

Only Camborne and Redruth (56.5%) outperformed the England average. St Ives has the lowest percentage of FSM-eligible children meeting the expected level of development (37.6%).

For primary school outcomes, Camborne and Redruth (44.8%) and St Ives (44.8%) reach the national average of 44%. All the other Cornish constituencies are performing lower than the national average for disadvantaged children reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) ([University of Exeter](#)).

6.4 Attainment

The overall attainment score for all secondary school pupils in Cornwall was 44.1 points out of 90 points for 'Attainment 8' in 2022/23. The grades measure pupils' performance in eight GCSE-level qualifications. The average score achieved across secondary schools in England was 46.3.

Department for Education figures show disadvantaged children in Cornwall secondary schools received an average score of 33.2, while their peers achieved a much higher score of 47.4. Disadvantaged pupils include pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in any of the spring, autumn or summer terms. The attainment gap in Cornwall was 14.2 points – lower than the average for the country, which is 15.3.

Cornwall pupils whose first language is not English scored an average of 46.8 points. This was higher than native speakers' results, who got 44.1 ([Cornish Times](#)).

Students routinely eligible for free school meals in rural areas regularly experience lower attainment than similar pupils in urban areas. Poverty and social exclusion are common in rural-coastal areas with issues around infrastructure, housing, transport, tech and leisure compounded by socio-economic disadvantage ([Cornwall Research School](#)).

6.5 School absence

The overall absence rate in Cornwall is higher than pre-pandemic levels. Department for Education data shows that schools in Cornwall had a higher rate of persistent absence (missed 10% or more sessions) of 23% in the 2023/24 school year, compared to the England average of 20% ([Department for Education](#)).

Permanent absence, however, is much lower on the Isles of Scilly than the England average, at 12.2%. Missing 10% of school sessions was equivalent to around seven days of absence across the term.

It is concerning that the number of persistent absences double in Cornwall in secondary schools compared to primary schools, with **one in three** secondary school pupils missing out on 10% of their sessions.

The persistent absences rate for primary schools is 15.3%, higher than the national average of 14.6%, and the **secondary school rate of 31.7%** is significantly higher than the national average of 25.6%. ([Department for Education](#)).

Cornwall Council's Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Strategy 2024–34 reported that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people's educational achievements are worse and declining still further, contrary to the national trend. Levels of both temporary and permanent exclusions are high, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children leave school at a much earlier age. Despite the fact that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities generally value education and skills development, particularly for their children, participation in secondary and higher education is low ([Cornwall Council](#)).

Vital Signs community survey

Slight improvements were seen in school performance and skills development in 2025, but higher education opportunities and literacy levels continued to lag behind.

- Only half of respondents (52%) agreed that local schools provided a good level of education (55% in the 2022 survey).
- However, 62% felt they had opportunities to learn new skills and gain qualifications.
- 45% felt that higher education opportunities in Cornwall were insufficient, compared to 33% in 2022.

‘There is a lack of opportunities for young people to learn and progress.’

‘There is limited access to further education and skills training for rural communities.’

6.6 Funding

Cornwall is **142nd out of 149** local authorities for school income per pupil. Cornwall is **151st out of 151** local authorities for average gross salary of teachers.

In Cornwall, funding for education and non-statutory children's social care, including early years and family support services, is relatively low. It is less than £2,000 per child, compared with a median of £2,753 across 150 English local authorities. This equates to over £14,000 less funding over the course of a child's life from 0 to 18 years.

Teacher recruitment is likely to be a particular issue in coastal and isolated schools in the region. The low spend on education and preventative children's social care appears to be driven by both lower-than-average overall funding and higher-than-average spending on adult social care, potentially attributable to the peninsula's ageing population ([University of Exeter, Social Mobility in the South West, Levelling up through education](#)).

Vital Signs community consultation

- ‘We’ve seen a huge increase in children that aren’t able to access education, lots of social isolation. It’s echoed across the county.’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘A lot of children are staying at home to look after the mental health of their parents, that is definitely a post COVID increase, without question.’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘Parents of neurodivergent children are desperate. They are fighting all the time, whether they are sat on a waiting list for an assessment or a waiting list to access tutoring. Parents are exhausted in just finding something small for their children.’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘There are some children where even in year 8 or 9 they have only just had their first time at the beach.’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘We have a high level of young carers, hidden young carers who don’t realise they are until they say something. It’s normalised for them, they don’t know any different.’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).
- ‘64% of children in my school are on Pupil Premium which is huge, easily three times the national average. Whilst 50% have special educational needs’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘64% of children in my school are on Pupil Premium which is huge, easily three times the national average. Whilst 50% have special educational needs’
[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘There is no way into CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) as the waiting list is too long. Children are out of school because there are no provisions for them.’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘Children are not being toilet trained when they are going to school and part of our remit at reception is to toilet train children as they are still in their nappies’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘A neurodivergent diagnosis process is not the simplest. You have to word it correctly which a lot of parents don’t know how to do so they give up, and then they’re caught in that trap. And then that child goes onto secondary school and fails, then they leave school and they fail and then who picks them up? And then they wonder why people are unemployed’
–[Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘The pressure of the classroom and the education system doesn’t work for every child’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

7. Arts, Culture and Heritage

Overview

Arts, culture and heritage are thriving in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, with distinctive Celtic roots and folklore. Cornwall's creative sector is growing particularly in digital media, film, music, performing and visual arts

10,870 people are employed in creative-related occupations (Cornwall Council, Creative Census 2024).

However, whilst Cornwall has many festivals and celebrates its arts, culture and history (including its own language), access and affordability is a barrier for many. 72% of our survey respondents stated that travelling to arts, culture and heritage events is difficult and close to two-thirds of the respondents (64%) cannot afford to attend as many arts, culture and heritage events as they would like.

Addressing barriers to finance, access to markets at local, national and international level, and improving business performance/productivity represent the greatest opportunities to increase the contribution that the creative

industries can make to the economy of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (Cornwall Council, Creative Census 2022).

Cornwall has 13,000 listed buildings, 1,437 scheduled monuments, 517 historic ports and 145 conservation areas. Our Cornish Mining World heritage site covers nearly 20,000 hectares and is made up of 10 distinct areas across Cornwall and West Devon.

Revival of the Cornish language, Kernewek, is part of a broader cultural movement in Cornwall, with Cornish-language films, music and literature being produced. Although it remains a critically endangered language, Kernewek has been recognised internationally for its successful ground-up revival.

Gorsedh Kernow have an annual Holyer an Gof Publishers Awards, with a class dedicated to publications in the Cornish language. Since 2023, Cornish language films are available on BBC iPlayer.

7.1 Museums and cultural attractions

There are over 80 museums in Cornwall and countless other cultural attractions, some of the most famous being Tintagel Castle, St Michael's Mount, the Eden Project, the Minack Theatre, Tate St Ives, and Land's End. They continue to attract vast numbers of visitors.

The Cornwall Museum and Art Gallery, formerly known as the Royal Cornwall Museum, benefited from £1.5 million of Arts Council England funding to improve the windows and roof of the building, and £2.1 million from the Cornwall Council Good Growth Programme to renovate the main gallery and entrance.

Since 2018, the Cornwall Heritage Awards annually celebrates the very best projects, collaborations, initiatives and teams from organisations all over Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Cornwall Heritage Trust owns or manages 11 heritage sites in Cornwall, while the National Trust has over 30 places of interest to visit, from period properties and gardens to exploring the mining history.

There are over 250 festivals in Cornwall, including literature, food, cider, music, oysters, beer, and fish festivals, as well as village feast and celebration days

(including St Piran's Day, Trevithick, Flora Day, Obby Oss, Golowan and Lafrowda). High-profile events include the Port Eliot Festival, Boardmasters and the Leopalooza Festival, making them a critical part of our vibrant cultural scene ([DCMS Festivals Inquiry](#)).

The Cornwall International Male Choral Festival, the world's largest festival of its kind, takes place biennially. In 2024 it featured over 50 international choirs, hosted 50 concerts and attracted 30,000 attendees.

The Hall for Cornwall is the largest performance venue in Cornwall, playing host to more than 300 musicals, operas, musical arts, ballets and other shows throughout the year. Kresen Kernow ('Cornwall Centre') is home to the world's largest collection of documents, books, maps and photographs related to Cornwall's history. Krowji, home to Creative Kernow, is Cornwall's largest creative hub, providing studios, workspaces, meeting rooms, a café and other services for a diverse range of creative businesses.

Falmouth University is also key to the development of Cornwall's creative economy, educating the next generation of creative practitioners with about 7,000 students studying creative and cultural subjects at the Falmouth and Penryn campuses.

7.2 Culture and creativity

Cornwall's Creative Manifesto 2021-25 shines a light on Cornwall's amazing cultural and creative sectors. The Manifesto lays out a ten-point plan aimed at bolstering Cornwall's position as a leading rural creative economy in the UK.

Each action focuses on strengthening the local creative community, promoting Cornish heritage, and building partnerships to support sustainable growth ([Cornwall Council Culture and Creativity](#)).

- 1. Raise awareness:** Launch a campaign to engage the creative community and publicise Cornwall's creative initiatives.
- 2. Celebrate Cornish identity:** Highlight Cornwall's unique history, landscape and language to improve residents' quality of life and attract informed visitors.
- 3. Research and promotion:** Conduct research to solidify Cornwall's reputation as the UK's premier rural creative economy.
- 4. Create collaborative spaces:** Develop physical spaces to facilitate collaboration among creative professionals.
- 5. Build strategic partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships with key cultural and heritage organisations like Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 6. Promote the creative economy:** Ensure all partners recognise the importance of Cornwall's creative sector.
- 7. Advocate to Government:** Engage with government leaders to emphasise the value of the creative economy.
- 8. Secure funding:** Collaborate with stakeholders to identify funding opportunities to support initiatives over the next five years.
- 9. Report progress annually:** Provide yearly updates on achievements, celebrating Cornish heritage and measuring success.
- 10. Collaborate for growth:** Work collectively to develop new opportunities, maximising Cornwall's creative potential.

Through these actions, Cornwall Council aims to support a thriving creative sector that respects local heritage, promotes collaboration and leverages strategic partnerships and funding for long-term impact.

7.3 Creative census 2024

Each year, Cornwall Council carries out its census to find out how many people are working in creative industries. Data from the 2024 survey revealed 10,870 people were employed in creative-related occupations across the county, with 60% of respondents being sole traders or freelancers.

Here is a summary of the key findings from the Creative Census 2024 for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly:

- 1. Geographical clusters:** The top areas for creative businesses are Falmouth, Truro, Penryn, Penzance, Redruth, and Liskeard.
- 2. Workforce and employment:** The region has 10,870 individuals employed in creative occupations, with participation in the census increasing by 43% over 2023.
- 3. Job satisfaction:** High levels of satisfaction are reported, with 80% enjoying creative expression, 64% appreciating diverse roles, and 63% valuing the positive impact of their work. Collaboration and flexible work are also key positive factors.
- 4. Growth barriers:** Major challenges include limited access to finance, customers' limited disposable income, high energy costs and a limited customer base.
- 5. Support resources:** Creative professionals accessed resources from various organisations, with the most utilised supports coming from Cultivator, Arts Council England, Cornwall Council and FEAST.
- 6. Creative sector income:** A significant 83% earn at least half of their income from creative work, with 47% relying solely on this income.
- 7. Workspace demand:** The highest demand for additional workspaces is in Falmouth/Penryn, Truro, Penzance, Redruth, and St Austell.

The census reflects strong engagement in Cornwall's creative sector, with positive experiences for many, yet growth barriers and a need for increased workspace are prominent issues ([Cornwall Council Creative Census](#)).

Vital Signs community survey

Cultural appreciation remained consistent in 2025, but affordability and transport barriers worsened, limiting access to arts and cultural events.

- Half of respondents (55%) agreed that Cornwall has a wide range of cultural and sporting facilities.
- 68% believe Cornwall effectively celebrates its history and culture.
- More people stated finding it difficult to travel to cultural events, 72% compared to 67% in 2022.
- 64% said they could not afford to attend as many cultural events as they would like, a significant increase from 2022 (56%).

‘Our cultural heritage is under threat due to lack of funding.’

‘We need more support for local artists and heritage events to keep traditions alive.’

Vital Signs community consultation

- ‘Where I came from the dream of being a dancer was bizarre, and for my family, as it was just not accessible. For many families the arts today is still not accessible. Many young people haven’t been able to unlock their creative genius’
–[Bodmin community consultation](#).

- ‘There is a wealth of talent on the peninsula, it’s a very creative community and a lot of people have stayed here because of that’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

- ‘When people can access the arts it’s life-changing but at the moment it’s difficult to find ways of encouraging people to access it while they’re still struggling and in crisis’
–[Millbrook community consultation](#).

8. Environment

Overview

Cornwall is one of the top-rated places to live in the UK in terms of the environment around us and access to nature, wildlife and natural resources.

With over 400 miles of coast, Cornwall has one of the most varied and beautiful coastlines in the UK, with over 300 beaches.

In 2024, Earth experienced its first year with global temperatures exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Each of the past 10 years (2015–2024) were among the 10 warmest years on record, with 2024 being the warmest, and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are not immune to climate change. Local ecosystems are highly fragile and have degraded over the last 50 years at a dramatic rate, and that is accelerating due to climate change. A poor surrounding environment affects all life, human and non-human, in multiple ways. Taking positive pro-environmental action is good for us (in terms of mental and physical health) and the ecosystems we rely on.

Air quality in Cornwall is generally good, but some areas don’t meet national standards, leading to the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas. Water pollution remains a concern, with Cornwall recording the highest number of incidents in England. Sewage overflows, exacerbated by heavy rainfall, frequently impact beaches.

Flooding is another challenge due to rising sea levels and storms, with several towns at high risk. Soil erosion, linked to farming practices and climate change, has increased, leading to calls for better land management. Biodiversity is in decline, but conservation efforts, including beaver reintroductions and the Forest for Cornwall project, offer hope.

Cornwall has become one of the leading areas for renewable energy and has wind farms, solar energy sites and the UK’s first geothermal development site. Cornwall is currently generating 40% of its electricity supply from renewables and Cornwall Council has set a target for Cornwall to become carbon neutral by 2030, well ahead of the UK target of 2050. However, waste management remains a challenge, with low recycling rates and increasing fly-tipping incidents. Cornwall has the largest cluster of B Corp-certified businesses outside of London, promoting sustainability and social responsibility.

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF), with organisations in the Climate and Environment Alliance, developed ([The Green Footsteps Guide](#)), a practical toolkit to help VCSE organisations across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly improve their sustainability and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

8.1 Air quality

Air quality in Cornwall is generally very good. However, there are certain ‘hotspots’ where standards fail to meet national air quality objectives. Air Quality Management Areas must be declared in areas where these Government standards are not being met. Cornwall Council prepared an Air Quality Action Plan for these areas to target action to improve air quality. Cornwall Council measures nitrogen dioxide at several locations around the county, and reports on air quality in Cornwall are produced annually.

Air Quality Management Areas have been declared for:

- The Camborne, Pool, and Redruth (CPR) area in 2005
- Bodmin in 2008
- Tideford in 2011
- Gunnislake and St Austell in March 2014
- Truro in July 2015
- Grampound in July 2017
- Launceston in February 2018.

Air Quality Management Areas have been revoked for:

- Camelford revoked in November 2024 (declared in January 2017).

There have been significant improvements in public transport since 2016, including more sustainable vehicles. Part of these improvements included **102** Euro 6 buses which produce **75%** less NO2 emissions than previous models. Euro 6 single deck buses have been introduced on the services through Camelford ([Cornwall Council 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report](#)).

A general decline in NO2 has been recorded in the UK since 2016. Diesel car registrations increased from 2010 to their peak in 2016 but have since fallen by 90%, which could further contribute to the current and future reductions in NO2.

As Cornwall Council aims to become carbon neutral by 2030, the expansion of EV charging infrastructure is a key part of the transition. Cornwall currently has over 408 publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) charging points, with the council aiming to expand this network to meet the growing demand for EV charging infrastructure. Road traffic generates 875,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases per year. This is 93% of Cornish transport emissions.

12.7m passengers travelled on the bus network in Cornwall in 2024, an increase of over 2.7% from 2023 ([BBC News](#)).

8.2 Water quality and sewage

Cornwall has seen more water pollution incidents than any other local authority area in England. The Environment Agency recorded 1,278 incidents in the area over five years, making it the only place to top 1,000 cases ([The Independent](#)).

Sewage dumps are often blamed on heavy rainfall as overflows prevent drains from being overwhelmed. After heavy downpours on Sunday 5 January 2025, some 41 beaches in Cornwall had been issued with sewage pollution alerts by Surfers Against Sewage. While most of those 41 incidents cleared within days, there were still four active pollution incidents six days later even though it hadn't rained for those six days ([Cornwall Live](#)).

8.3 Flooding

As a peninsula surrounded by sea, Cornwall is particularly at risk from coastal flooding, and an increase in storms from climate change could also speed up erosion. Changing weather patterns are bringing more rainfall, which increases the flood risk from rivers. Penzance, Hayle, Perranporth, Falmouth, Truro, Newquay, Par, Lostwithiel, Looe, Bude and Wadebridge are amongst the most affected towns.

The Environment Agency (EA) says that adaptation – becoming resilient to the already inevitable effects of climate change – is just as important as actions to cut greenhouse gases. The EA has said there will be more and worse environmental incidents, such as flooding, water shortages and pollution. Regulation is not ready for climate change and the natural world cannot adapt as fast as the climate is changing ([Cornwall Live](#)).

8.4 Soil erosion

In February 2025 the Environment Agency called on farmers in Cornwall and Devon to take action against soil erosion after pollution incidents almost doubled. The agency said there were 25 incidents of heavy rain washing off farm fields into rivers, roads or homes in January 2025, nearly double the number of incidents reported during the same period in 2024.

It said some previously used methods of preventing erosion no longer work and the window for taking action had become shorter due to climate change. Farmers are being asked to risk assess their land and install measures to prevent run-off reaching property and watercourses. The Environment Agency said soil erosion causes farmers to lose crops, top soil, organic matter and nutrients. It also hits them financially as they must re-cultivate and re-sow fields ([BBC News](#)).

Farmers in Devon and Cornwall are being urged to avoid growing crops that could increase the risk of flooding and pollution. Some 'high risk' crops can cause soil erosion and muddy run-off if they are grown on unsuitable soils and slopes, the Environment Agency said. They include maize, fodder beet, potatoes and other root vegetables ([BBC News](#)).

8.5 Biodiversity

Cornwall Wildlife Trust's State of the Nature in Cornwall report highlighted that nature is largely in decline in Cornwall. 12% of species of principal importance are threatened with local extinction or complete loss in Cornwall and nearly half of terrestrial mammals and three-fifths of butterflies are found in fewer places over the last 30 years.

However, it's not all bad news. The natural return of the Cornish Chough in 2021 was of great significance. Their population is now soaring with over 100 birds. Eurasian Beavers have been reintroduced across several sites in Cornwall and have the potential to reduce flooding and to improve habitats for wildlife. Since their reintroduction in 2017, 10 species of birds were recorded for the first time ever, including water rail, green sandpiper and willow tit.

The Forest for Cornwall project aims to create 8,000 hectares of tree canopy across Cornwall. Forest for Cornwall supports the residents, businesses and communities of Cornwall to plant woodlands, orchards, hedgerows, parks and gardens to help tackle the climate and ecological emergencies by planting the right trees, in the right place, for the right purpose ([Cornwall Wildlife Trust State of the Nature in Cornwall](#)).

8.6 Cornwall national landscape

Cornwall National Landscape is unique, it is the only protected landscape that has 12 separate sections of National Landscapes, totalling almost one-third of Cornwall – an area bigger than Dartmoor National Park. Of the areas, eleven cover stretches of coastline; the twelfth is Bodmin Moor.

Kerdroya, the Cornish Landscape Labyrinth, officially opened to the public in March 2025. It has been constructed from 12 different hedge designs to celebrate the distinct hedging styles from all 12 Cornwall AONB sections.

There are separate AONBs covering the Tamar Valley (which is partly in Cornwall and partly in Devon), and the Isles of Scilly.

8.7 Renewables

Our planet cannot absorb all the carbon we are making and putting into our atmosphere. Reducing these emissions needs businesses and households to change how we produce energy.

We must use more renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and geothermal. We must also change how we use energy, by cutting down on the power we use. Cornwall is increasing its renewable energy production, with about **40% of the county's electricity** now coming from renewable sources ([Cornwall Council](#)).

Cornwall has potential for wind, geothermal, photovoltaic, biomass, and wave power. Energy-saving upgrades have included improving 2,100 homes through Cornwall's Winter Wellbeing Partnership to make them more energy efficient.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership is leading the development of a pipeline of floating wind projects in the Celtic Sea, with a target of 3GW of power by 2030.

Geothermal Engineering Ltd runs the UK's first geothermal power plant at United Downs, near Redruth ([Cornwall Council Environment Report for Cornwall](#)).

8.8 Recycling

The proportion of household waste sent to be recycled in Cornwall is below the average in the South West. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) figures show 263,204 tonnes of waste were collected and disposed of by Cornwall Council in the year to March 2023. Of this, about 89,725 tonnes were sent for reuse, recycling or composting – meaning the area had a recycling rate of 34.1%, below the average for the South West (48.2%) ([Cornish Times](#)).

Cornwall Council started to introduce a new waste collection system in January 2024 with food waste collected every week. "Black bag" rubbish bins and recycling sacks and boxes are now emptied on alternate weeks. The county's recycling rate increased from 34% to 44% in 2024 ([BBC News](#)).

8.9 Fly-tipping

Figures from DEFRA show 3,101 fly-tipping incidents were reported in Cornwall in the year to March 2024 – up from 2,770 the year before. Fly-tipping in Cornwall was most common on highways (75%), and household waste accounted for 49% of the illegally dumped rubbish reports. DEFRA figures also reveal a slight drop in the number of enforcement actions, only 28 notices were issued in Cornwall in 2024 ([Cornish Times](#)).

8.10 B Corp certification

B Corp Certification is awarded by the not-for-profit network, B Lab, to companies that meet the high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability. There are around 5,000 B Corps worldwide, with over 800 in the UK and 31 in Cornwall – the largest cluster of B Corps outside of London. B Corps in Cornwall include Flexi-Hex packaging company, the iconic Rodda’s creamery, Ward Williams Associates construction consultants and Wildanet, pioneering internet provider, the first UK AltNet to become B Corp certified.

Wildanet’s B|23 programme brought together more than 40 Cornish businesses to use the B Impact Assessment to transform their companies and ultimately benefit the local community. More than 10 businesses from the first B|23 cohort have submitted their B Impact Assessment to be reviewed for B Corp Certification ([B Lab UK](#)).

8.11 Adaptation

Much work to support and protect our natural environment focuses on mitigation of carbon and ecological decline, and protection of our natural systems. Although related, adaptation to climate and ecological breakdown is less high profile. Increase in the severity and impact of extreme weather events means adaptation is becoming more urgent if we wish to protect both our natural systems, and community members who are in any way vulnerable.

As noted in the introduction to the Devon and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Adaptation review, critical infrastructure (e.g. transport networks, telecoms and sea defences), community assets (e.g. schools, hospitals and green spaces), homes, the environment, businesses and public services are all sensitive to weather and climate.

Therefore, climate change will directly affect the resilience of communities and the environment, demand for services, economic productivity, and infrastructure maintenance costs. Taking a proactive approach to adapt to climate change will result in many benefits, which could create a fairer, healthier, more resilient and prosperous society now and into the future ([Climate Resilient DCIoS](#)).

The impacts of climate change and associated hazards (e.g. heatwaves, floods and droughts) present direct threats to physical and mental health and indirect threats through impacts on the building blocks of health, i.e. food, housing, employment, transport and green space. There is broad consensus that climate change increases health inequalities.

8.12 Action by communities

Communities across Cornwall are taking multiple types of action, from changing how they travel at home or at work, altering their diet, improving the impact of their house, their green spaces and gardens, or their banking. [Cornwall Climate Action Network](#) offers support to local groups and also runs the Climate Café Listening Circles.

The [Transition Network](#) has active groups across Cornwall and new spaces are being developed, such as the Mid Cornwall Eco Hub. Community activity contributes to action on all issues noted above, from engagement on renewables, action on biodiversity, soil and protection of our natural environment; protection of our water and air quality, and preparedness for flooding ([Cornwall Community Floor Forum](#)).

Vital Signs community survey

Awareness and motivation to address environmental challenges increased in 2025, but action on climate and ecological impact still lag behind what might be required to slow the evidenced decline.

- 85% of respondents believed Cornwall was affected by climate change.
- Only half (55%) felt they have opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint, a significant decrease from 2022 (79%).
- 80% reported access to outdoor spaces like parks and footpaths.
- 50% agreed that recycling efforts in their area were insufficient.

‘We need more efforts to protect our natural environment from overdevelopment.’

‘Climate change and erosion are serious concerns for Cornwall’s coastline.’

Vital Signs community consultation

- ‘People we work with in poverty are dealing with their immediate problems so many see climate change as a faraway problem’
– [Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘There are those who stand up for climate change and know the issues that are going on but because of the deprivation they are in it is an inaccessible endeavour’
– [Penzance community consultation](#).
- ‘We’re not only destroying the environment but we’re not preparing the younger generations for what they need to do to repair it’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘We need to be investing in sustainable futures’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘It is now cheaper to drive every day than use public transport. I am very aware of my emissions but I need to get to work’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#).
- ‘We have it all on our doorstep, in terms of accessing green spaces and nature but often people who need to access it the most can’t because of the barriers that they’re facing’
– [Millbrook community consultation](#).



office@cornwallfoundation.com | cornwallcommunityfoundation.com
1st Floor Aspect House, 17 Callywith Gate, Bodmin, Cornwall PL31 2RQ

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