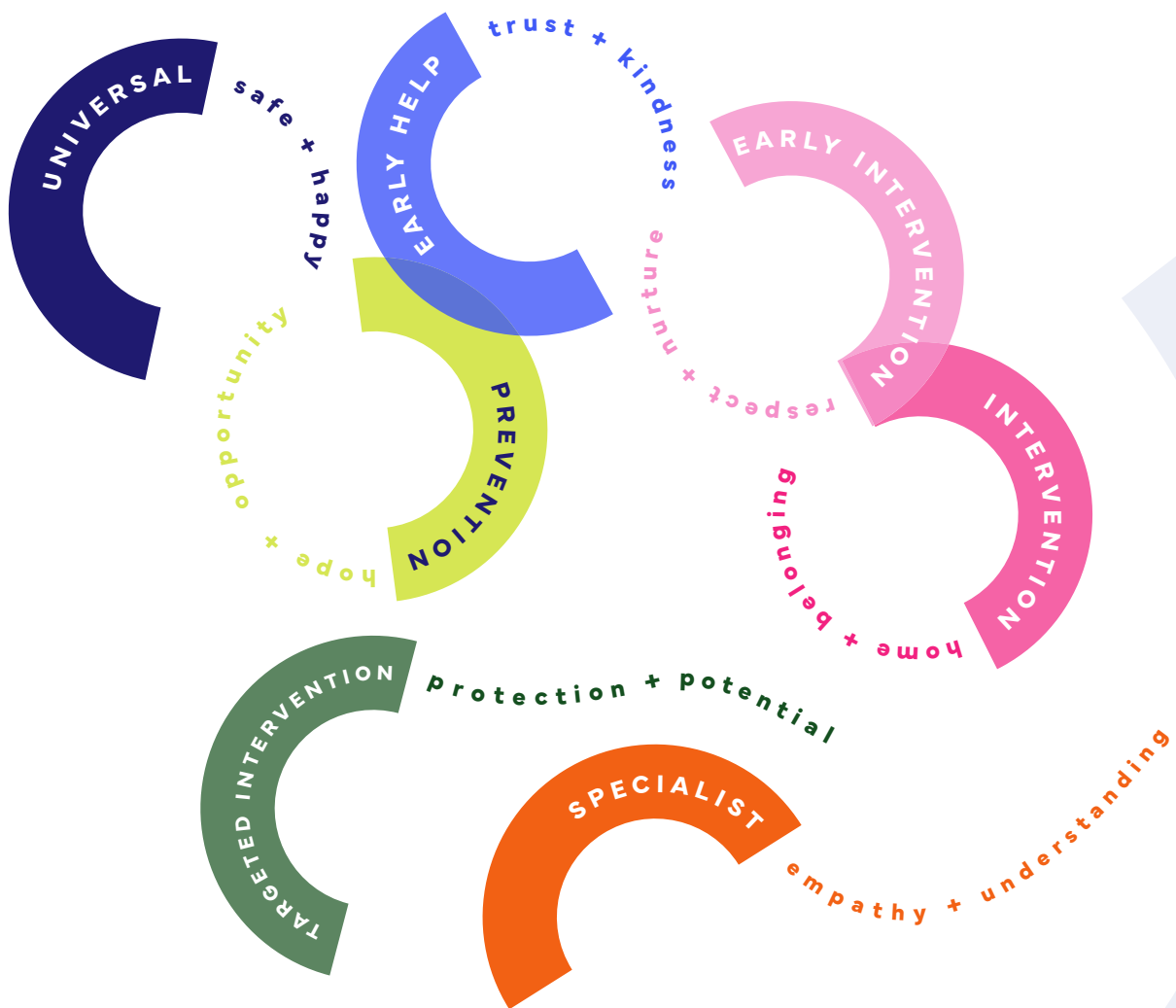


# SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT 2026

## BUILDING POSITIVE FUTURES

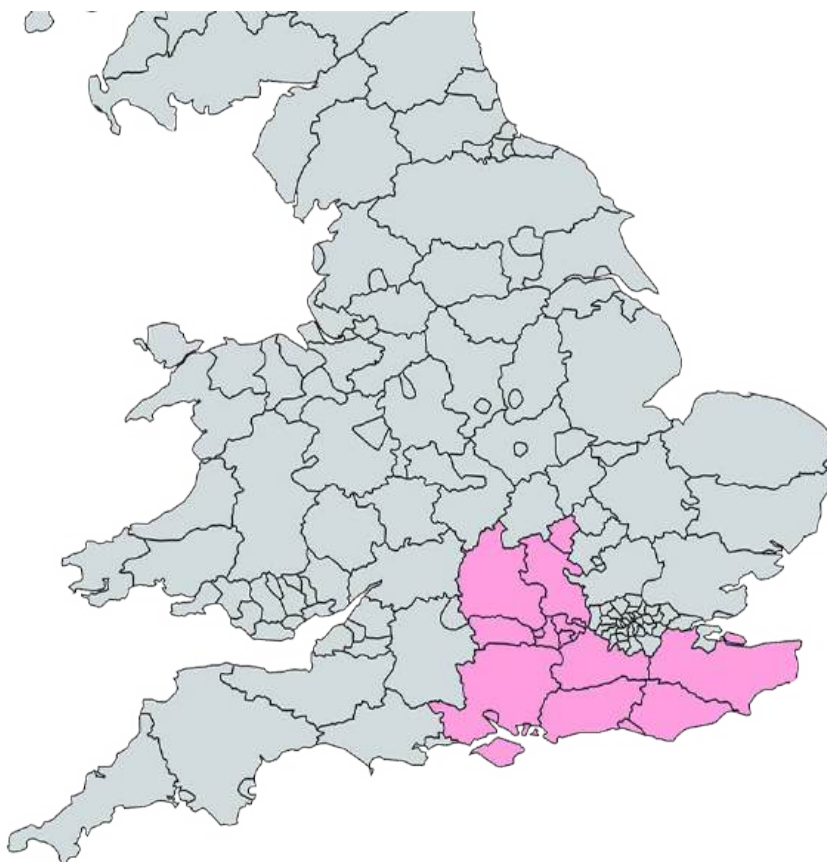


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## THE 19 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- » Bracknell Forest
- » Brighton and Hove
- » Bucks County
- » East Sussex
- » Hampshire
- » Isle of Wight
- » Kent
- » Medway
- » Milton Keynes City
- » Oxfordshire County
- » Portsmouth
- » Reading Borough
- » Slough
- » Southampton
- » Surrey
- » West Berks
- » West Sussex
- » Windsor & Maidenhead
- » Wokingham



## INTRODUCTION

This is the first regional Sufficiency Statement produced by Home and Future, the South East Regional Care Cooperative. It marks the beginning of a shared approach to understanding what children in our region need, where the pressures lie, and how we can work together to ensure every child has the right home and the right support.

Going forward, we will provide **regular updates and quarterly deep dives**, developed in close collaboration with our **Commissioning Board and wider partners**. These will help us track change, respond to emerging pressures, and maintain a transparent view of the regional picture.

The next update is planned for **April 2026** and will include a focused deep dive on **market position, costs and transparency**.

To build this first version, we've used a mixture of national data and the regional information we currently hold. All 19 local authorities in the South East are in the process of completing their Data Sharing Agreements with Home and Future. So far, 11 have fully completed this, meaning they can already upload their information into our new Data App. This statement gives an early glimpse of what the Data Platform will be able to provide — both for the region as a whole and for individual local authorities.

Once all 19 local authorities are connected, the Data Platform will allow everyone to see

interactive information about sufficiency, needs, homes for children and young people and trends. Until then, we will continue producing quarterly sufficiency statements so that everyone has a clear and shared picture of what's happening.

If your local authority hasn't yet completed the data-sharing steps, please do make this a priority. It will support your own planning and will improve the accuracy and value of the regional work we're building together.

Home and Future was created as one of the first two pilot Regional Care Cooperatives following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh MacAlister. We began as a partnership hosted by West Sussex County Council, and earlier this year the SE RCC Board agreed that we should transition to an independent, not-for-profit organisation. This gives us greater flexibility and focus in supporting local authorities and strengthening the system for children across the South East.

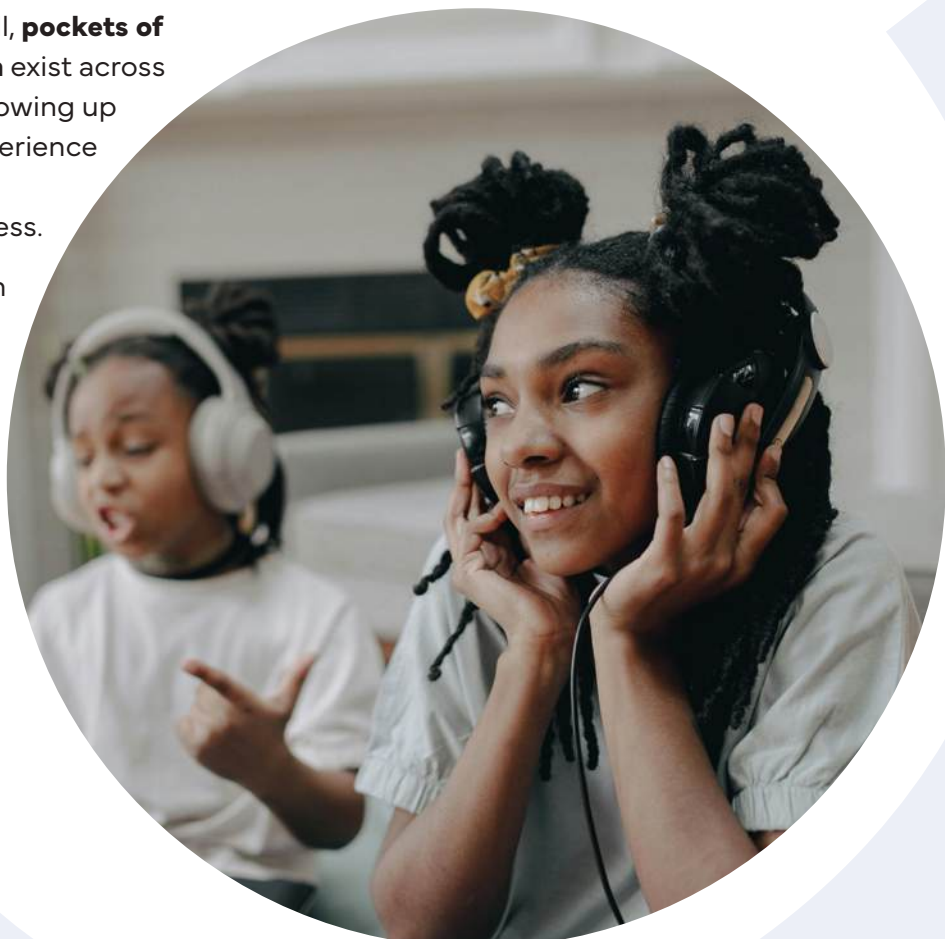
### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH EAST

Before we turn to children in care specifically, it's important to understand the wider picture of children and young people living in the South East. Their needs, family circumstances and community environments all influence the pressures on children's services and the types of homes children require.

- » There are approximately **2,023,900 children aged 0–17** living in the South East region.
- » The number of children and young people in the region has grown over the last decade, and continues to rise in many areas.
- » We're seeing changes in age profiles, with more older children and teenagers needing support — which is putting additional pressure on the availability of suitable homes.
- » Although the South East is often viewed as more affluent overall, **pockets of significant deprivation** exist across the region. Children growing up in these areas may experience higher levels of need, instability, or family stress.
- » The number of children in care across the South East has been increasing year on year. This includes adolescents with more complex needs, leading to greater demand for specialist multi agency support and homes.

- » Wider factors — such as cost-of-living pressures, housing shortages and the movement of families within and into the region — all contribute to the broader demand on children's services.

This overview sets the context for the more detailed, focused sections that follow. The rest of the Sufficiency Statement looks specifically at **children in care**, the homes they live in, and what our emerging data tells us about supply, demand and future planning.



## CHILDREN IN CARE IN THE SOUTH EAST

Understanding the number of children in care – and how this is changing over time – is at the heart of our sufficiency planning. The chart below shows the rate of children looked after at 31 March each year, comparing the South East with the national picture. What we see is a steady upward trend over the last seven years, both locally and nationally.

For the South East, the rate has risen from **51 per 10,000 children in 2017–18** to **56 per 10,000 in 2023–24**. Although our region remains consistently below the England average, the direction of travel is clear: **more children are entering and remaining in care**, and the system is carrying a higher level of demand than it did even a few years ago.

This growth mirrors what local authorities are experiencing on the ground — rising complexity of needs, more adolescents coming into care, and increased pressure on the availability of the right homes. The gap between the South East and England also tells

an important story: while demand is rising here, it is rising even faster nationally, and this creates additional competition for homes, particularly for children with higher or more specialist needs.

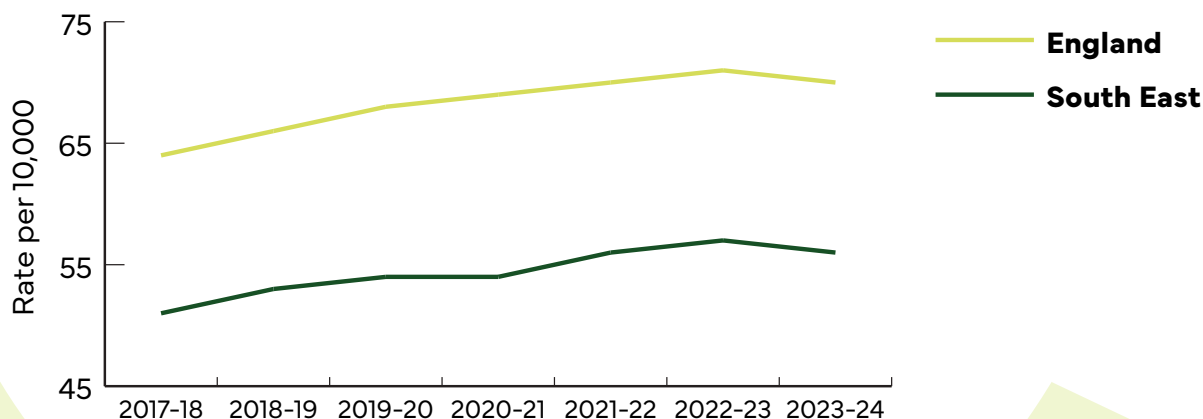
### VARIATION ACROSS SOUTH EAST SUB-REGIONS

Although the overall South East rate of children looked after remains below the national average, the chart clearly shows that the pattern within the region is far from consistent. Each sub-region has its own trajectory, level of demand and pressures on local placement markets.

#### South West (Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton & Isle of Wight)

The South West sub-region continues to have the **highest rates of children looked after in the South East**, and the contrast with other areas is striking.

Rate of children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 children



Rates rose from the **mid-80s per 10,000** in 2017–18 to around the **mid-90s** in the most recent year. This is significantly above the England average and almost double the rate of the lowest-scoring South East sub-regions.

These persistently high rates reflect sustained pressure on local systems — often linked to factors such as higher levels of deprivation, larger cohorts of older children entering care, and more complex needs. As a result, local authorities here face intense demand for both residential and specialist placements.

### **Kent & Medway**

Kent & Medway shows a **steady upward trend** over the period. Rates increase from the high-50s to the mid-60s per 10,000.

This growth reflects a rising number of children entering care locally, including a substantial impact from **unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**, given Kent's position as a major entry point into the UK. As one of the largest sub-regions, Kent & Medway's trend significantly shapes the overall South East picture.

### **Sussexes (East West and Brighton and Hove ) & Surrey**

The Sussexes & Surrey grouping sits **in the middle range** of the South East. Rates have gradually increased over time, peaking around 2022–23 before levelling slightly in 2023–24.

This pattern suggests **stable but sustained demand**, rather than sharp fluctuations. Local authorities within this sub-region report rising complexity of need, increasing pressure on residential homes and specialist placements.

### **Berkshires (all Six)**

The Berkshires consistently show one of the **lowest rates** in the region, generally between the **mid-40s and low-50s per 10,000**.

Although there is some year-on-year variation, the overall trend remains well below both the South East and England averages.

While lower rates do not necessarily mean lower complexity, they do indicate a **smaller volume of children entering care**, leading to different sufficiency pressures — typically focused on maintaining the right mix of provision rather than managing high overall demand.

### **North (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes)**

The North sub-region has similarly low rates — typically in the **mid-40s to mid-50s per 10,000**, making it one of the lowest alongside the Berkshires.

Fluctuations over the period are modest. This reflects **stable but comparatively lower overall demand**, which shapes a different set of sufficiency challenges: finding highly specialised placements rather than large volumes of general provision.

## WHY THESE DIFFERENCES MATTER

Together, these patterns highlight a crucial point for sufficiency planning:

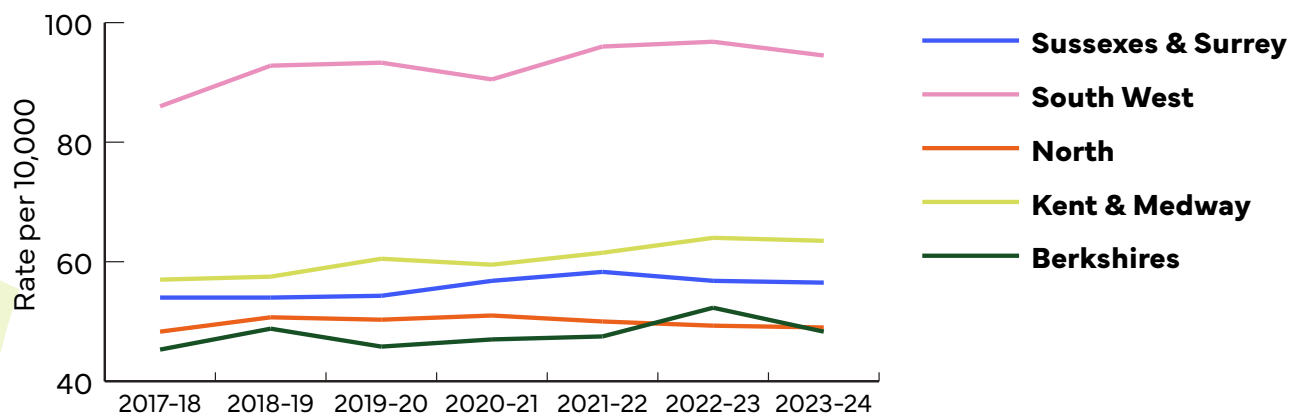
### There is no single “South East” experience.

- » The **South West** sub-region faces some of the **highest pressures** in the country.
- » **Kent & Medway** is experiencing significant **upward demand**, driven partly by UASC.

- » **Sussexes & Surrey** shows **steady and increasingly complex** need.
- » **Berkshires** and the **North** have **lower overall volumes**, but still require specialist and flexible local provision.

Recognising these distinct sub-regional trends is essential in shaping future commissioning strategies — both within local areas and through collective regional planning.

## Rate of children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 children



## NEW ENTRANTS INTO CARE

Another important part of understanding sufficiency is looking at how many children start to be looked after each year. This gives us a sense of the “front door” pressure on the care system — how many children are entering care for the first time or returning after a period at home.

The chart shows a noticeable change in the pattern of new entrants in the South East over the last seven years.

Between 2017–18 and 2020–21, the rate of children starting to be looked after in the South East was steady and relatively low, fluctuating narrowly between 22.5 and 23 per 10,000 children. During this period, the South East sat well below the England average, which ranged between 24 and 27 per 10,000.

From 2021–22 onwards, however, the picture shifts. The South East starts to see a marked and sustained rise — climbing to 26 per 10,000 in 2021–22, 28 per 10,000 in 2022–23, and then rising sharply to 32 per 10,000 in 2023–24. This most recent figure not only represents the region’s highest level in the period but also exceeds the England average for the first time.

This change is significant. A higher rate of new entrants suggests that more children are reaching the threshold for care, and that needs in some communities are intensifying. Local authorities across the region have reported increases in complexity,

more adolescents presenting with risk and vulnerability, and the continuing impact of deprivation, family stress, and wider social pressures. These factors are very likely contributing to the upward trend.

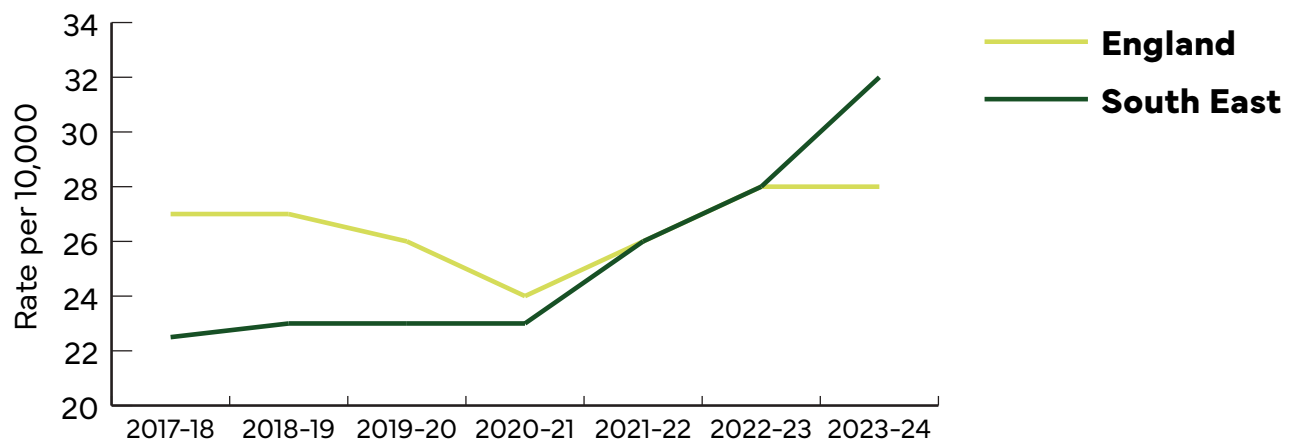
### What this means

The rise in new entrants is one of the clearest signals that sufficiency pressures will continue to grow. More children coming into care means:

- » **Greater demand for a wider range of homes**, especially for older children and those with more complex needs
- » **Increased pressure on both fostering and residential markets**
- » **Heightened competition for specialist homes**, both within the region and nationally
- » A need for **stronger early help and edge-of-care support**, to stabilise families and reduce preventable entries
- » More pressure on local authorities already experiencing rising numbers of children who remain in care for longer

This data also acts as an early warning: if the rate of new entrants continues to rise, the South East will need to expand and diversify its homes to meet both current and future demand.

## Rate of children who started to be looked after during the year per 10,000 children



### NEW ENTRANTS INTO CARE – LOCAL VARIATION ACROSS THE SOUTH EAST

The pattern of **new entrants into care** varies significantly across the South East, and this variation is important for understanding where sufficiency pressures are likely to grow most quickly. New entrants are one of the clearest indicators of immediate and future demand, showing where more children are reaching the threshold for care and where local systems may be under strain.

#### Kent & Medway – Steep and sustained growth

Kent & Medway shows the **most dramatic rise** in new entrants over the seven-year

period. After remaining fairly stable in the mid-20s earlier in the timeline, the rate has risen sharply since 2021–22, climbing to above **50 per 10,000** by 2023–24. This acceleration reflects a combination of rising need, growing complexity, and the well-recognised pressures associated with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This trend signals significant and ongoing demand for foster care, supported accommodation and specialist residential homes.

#### Sussexes & Surrey – Mid-level and relatively steady

Sussexes & Surrey sit in the mid-range, with rates generally in the low-20s. The pattern shows a small rise up to 2021–22 followed by

a slight decline. Although the overall numbers are lower compared with Kent & Medway, local authorities here continue to report increasing complexity, particularly among older children and those with multiple vulnerabilities. As a result, the pressure is less about volume and more about securing the right types of homes, especially for children who need therapeutic or specialist support.

### **Berkshires – Low volume with occasional peaks**

The Berkshires consistently show lower rates of new entrants, typically in the low-20s per 10,000, though there are occasional peaks — for example the noticeable rise in 2022–23. This is common in areas with smaller populations, where a modest change in the number of children entering care can create a visible fluctuation in the rate. Here, sufficiency challenges tend to focus on specialist capacity, local home availability, and ensuring children can stay close to home, rather than managing high overall demand.

### **Why these differences matter for sufficiency**

The variation across these sub-regions highlights the need for flexible and targeted planning. Kent & Medway will require increased capacity and a wider range of homes to meet rapidly growing demand. Sussexes & Surrey will need to prioritise homes that can support children with more complex lives, even if overall volumes remain stable. The Berkshires need to retain strong local options despite smaller numbers, ensuring children do not have to move far from their communities.

Understanding these differences allows regional coordination through Home and Future to be proportionate, responsive and tailored, ensuring each part of the South East has the support and capacity it needs.



# GENDER OF CHILDREN IN CARE IN THE SOUTH EAST

## OVERVIEW

When looking at the gender profile of children in care in the South East, the data shows a clear and consistent pattern over the past six years:

Boys are looked after at a higher rate than girls, and male rates have increased more noticeably in recent years. This aligns with national trends and reflects some of the specific pressures experienced within the region.

## MALE CHILDREN IN CARE

The rate of boys in care shows a steady upward trend across the six-year period.

- » In 2018–19, boys were looked after at around 50 per 10,000 children.
- » The rate stayed relatively stable for several years before rising more sharply.
- » By 2023–24, boys were being looked after at close to 60 per 10,000, the highest point in the series.

A key factor influencing this rise is the number of unaccompanied children (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children – UASC) in the South East.

Unaccompanied children are predominantly male, and their higher representation in some local authorities contributes to the overall upward male trend, particularly in areas such as Kent & Medway.

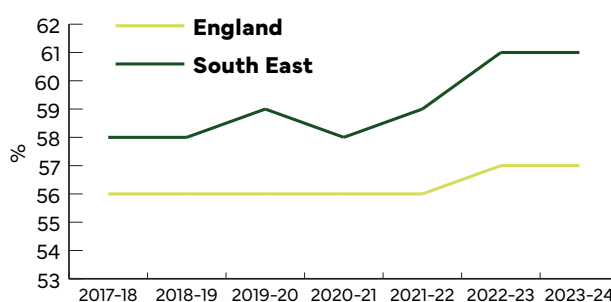
## FEMALE CHILDREN IN CARE

The rate of girls looked after in the South East is lower and more stable than the male rate.

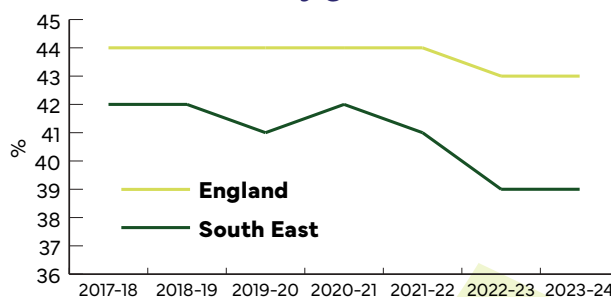
- » From 2018–19 to 2022–23, the girls' rate remained close to 43–44 per 10,000 children.
- » In 2023–24, there was a slight decline to just above 40 per 10,000.
- » Overall, the pattern for girls is one of stability, rather than the clear upward trend seen for boys.

Although fewer girls enter care, the complexity of their needs is often significant — with vulnerabilities linked to mental health, exploitation and trauma.

### CLA at 31 March by gender: % Male



### CLA at 31 March by gender: % Female



## AGE DEMOGRAPHICS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Understanding the age profile of children in care is essential for sufficiency planning. Different age groups require different types of homes, support, workforce skills and commissioning approaches. The data below highlights the changing age distribution of children looked after in the South East compared with England over the past seven years.

Across the period, the South East shows a stable picture for younger children, but a clear and sustained rise in older adolescents. This shift has major implications for home capacity, workforce skills, supported accommodation, fostering recruitment and specialist residential demand.



### UNDER 1S

The proportion of children under one year old entering care in the South East remains very small and stable at 4–5%, mirroring the national picture. Both the South East and England show no significant change across the period.

- » South East: 4–5% every year
- » England: decreased from 5% to 4% nationally
- » Year-on-year change: South East same (0%), England down (-20%)

Infants represent a very small proportion of overall demand and contribute only minimally to sufficiency pressures.

### AGES 1–5

The percentage of children aged 1–5 in care in the South East has shown a slight downward shift over time, from 11% to 10%, reversing a small rise seen in earlier years.

- » South East: 11% to 10%
- » England: stable at 13%
- » Year-on-year change: South East down (-9%), England same (0%)

The South East continues to have a lower proportion of early-years children in care compared with England. This may reflect stronger diversion, kinship arrangements, or different demographic pressures.

## AGES 5–9

The proportion of 5–9-year-olds in care remains highly stable in both the South East and England.

- » South East: consistently 16–18%, now 16%
- » England: consistently 18–19%, stable at 18%
- » Year-on-year change: no change (0%) regionally or nationally

This stability suggests demand for primary-age homes remains predictable, though these children often require long-term fostering solutions.

## AGES 10–15

Children aged 10–15 represent the largest single age group of children in care, both regionally and nationally. This pattern has been stable for several years.

- » South East: consistently 39–40%
- » England: consistently 38–39%
- » Year-on-year change: no change (0%)

This group is often associated with increasing complexity, particularly around emotional wellbeing, school disruption and early adolescence risks. Their needs strongly shape fostering, residential and edge-of-care demand.

## AGES 16+

The most significant change appears in the 16+ age group, where the South East shows a clear and sustained upward trend.

- » South East: 26% to 32% over seven years
- » England: 23% to 27%
- » Year-on-year change: South East up (+7%), England up (+4%)

Older adolescents now make up almost one-third of all children in care in the South East — a higher proportion than the national average. This rise is linked to:

- » Increases in teenage entries to care
- » Growth in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- » Rising complexity and contextual safeguarding risks
- » Longer stays in care prior to adulthood
- » Growing reliance on supported accommodation for 16–17-year-olds

This shift has profound sufficiency implications for the region, particularly around adolescent fostering, specialist residential pathways, therapeutic provision and the workforce.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY IN THE SOUTH EAST

### 1. Demand is increasingly shaped by adolescents

Older children, especially 16–17-year-olds, are driving growth in the care population. This requires:

- » more adolescent-skilled foster carers
- » specialist therapeutic fostering
- » robust residential provision
- » supported accommodation that can manage risk effectively

### 2. Early years and primary-age demand is stable

Homes for 0–9-year-olds remain important but are not driving sufficiency pressures.

### 3. Stable but complex 10–15 demand

This group presents consistent volume but increasing complexity, requiring strong multi-agency support.

### 4. Adolescent need must be at the centre of regional planning

Given the scale of change, sufficiency planning must prioritise:

- » adolescent residential development
- » step-up/step-across pathways
- » supported accommodation quality and regulation
- » workforce capability in trauma-informed and contextual safeguarding practice

## SUMMARY

The age profile of children in care in the South East is shifting towards older adolescents. While younger age groups remain stable, the rapid growth in 16+ demand places significant pressure on fostering, supported accommodation, residential care and the workforce. This trend reinforces the need for a region-wide, adolescent-focused sufficiency strategy that can respond to increasing complexity and ensure the right homes are available for young people as they move towards adulthood.

## UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC) IN THE SOUTH EAST

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) make up a significant and growing part of the care population in the South East. The chart shows a steady rise in UASC rates across the region over the last six years, with a noticeably sharper increase in the most recent two years.

### TREND OVERVIEW

- » In 2018–19, the rate of UASC in the South East was already higher than many other regions, sitting just below 14 per 10,000 children.
- » Rates remained broadly stable for several years before starting to increase.
- » From 2021–22 onwards, the rise becomes more pronounced.
- » By 2023–24, the UASC rate is just under 20 per 10,000 children, the highest point in the dataset.
- » Throughout the period, the South East sits well above the England average, which rises more gradually from around 8 per 10,000 in 2018–19 to around 12 per 10,000 in 2023–24.

### WHY THE SOUTH EAST IS HIGHER

Several factors shape this pattern:

- » The region's coastal geography and transport routes mean the South East receives a higher volume of spontaneous arrivals.
- » Kent, in particular, has carried a long-standing responsibility for large numbers of UASC, impacting the broader regional rate.
- » The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has helped distribute young people more evenly across the country, but the South East continues to receive higher numbers than many other regions.
- » UASC are overwhelmingly male teenagers, which directly contributes to the rising male LAC rate across the region.





# HOME + BELONGING

## WHERE OUR CHILDREN LIVE

### HOME WITH PARENTS

Homes with parents are an important part of the care landscape in the South East, allowing children to remain with their birth families while still being supported under a care order. This type of arrangement is often used to stabilise family relationships, support reunification and maintain strong emotional bonds.

The chart shows that the rate of children placed with parents in the South East has been remarkably stable over the six-year period, with very little movement year to year.

### TREND OVERVIEW

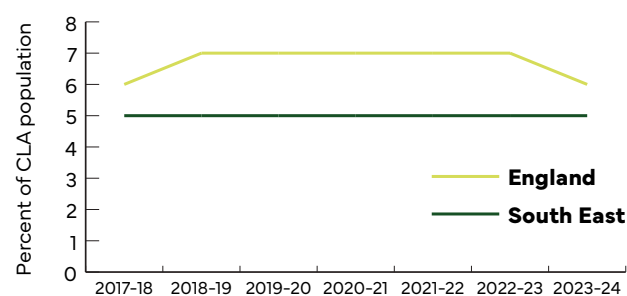
- » The South East sits consistently around 18–20 per 10,000 children, with only slight fluctuations.
- » The England average remains even more stable, sitting at around 15 per 10,000 throughout the entire period.
- » Although the South East is slightly higher than the national average, both lines show a broadly flat pattern.
- » The small dip in the South East in 2023–24 brings the regional rate closer to the England figure, though it still sits a little above it.

### WHAT THIS SUGGESTS

This stable picture reflects several regional characteristics:

- » The South East continues to use homes with parents at a steady and predictable rate, suggesting consistent practice approaches across local authorities.
- » Decisions to place children with parents are likely being made in line with court processes, reunification planning, and family support availability rather than large shifts in need.
- » The slightly higher regional rate may reflect:
  - a stronger emphasis on family-led solutions
  - access to local family support services
  - local authority commitment to keeping children close to home wherever safe and appropriate

### CLA at 31 March by placement: % Placement with parents



# CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

Children placed for adoption represent a very small but important part of the overall cohort of children in care in the South East. Adoption offers a permanent and stable route out of care for children who cannot safely return to their birth families, and the rate at which children are placed for adoption can be influenced by court decisions, family circumstances, and the age profile of children entering care.

The chart shows that the rate of children placed for adoption in the South East has remained low and relatively stable, with small fluctuations over the six-year period.

## TREND OVERVIEW

- » The South East (light green line) sits consistently around 4–5 per 10,000 children, showing very little variation.
- » The England average (dark green line) follows a similar pattern, remaining around 4 per 10,000 throughout.
- » Both the regional and national rates show minor dips and rises, but no sustained upward or downward trend.
- » In 2023–24, both the South East and England dip to around the same level, reflecting the lowest point in the series.

## What this suggests

This low and stable pattern is typical and reflects several key factors:

- » Adoption now accounts for a smaller proportion of exits from care compared to a decade ago, nationally and regionally.
- » Local authorities continue to prioritise family reunification, kinship care and long-term fostering where appropriate, rather than adoption.
- » The age profile of children entering care — with increasing numbers of older children and adolescents — naturally reduces the number of children eligible or suitable for adoption.
- » Court timelines and family court capacity also influence adoption numbers year to year.



## FOSTER HOMES

Foster care remains the main type of home for children in care in both the South East and across England. However, the chart shows a steady and noticeable decline in the proportion of children living in foster homes over the past six years.

Although foster care is still the most common home environment for children in care, it now accounts for a smaller share of the overall population than it did previously — a trend with important implications for sufficiency planning.

### TREND OVERVIEW

#### South East

- » In 2017–18, 74% of children in care in the South East were in foster homes.
- » This proportion has fallen every year, reaching 65% by 2023–24.
- » This represents a 9 percentage-point drop over the period — a significant shift.

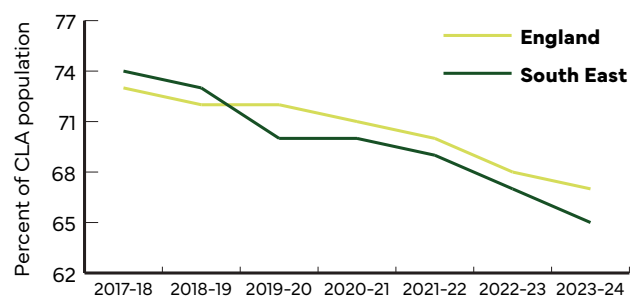
#### England

- » Nationally, the picture is similar but the decline is less steep.
- » England's rate falls from 73% in 2017–18 to 67% in 2023–24 — a 6 percentage-point drop.

### Regional comparison

- » The South East begins slightly above the national average but drops below England from 2019–20 onward.
- » By 2023–24, the South East has the lowest share of foster homes across the period shown (65%), compared to 67% nationally.

### CLA at 31 March by placement: % Foster placements



### What this suggests

Several factors likely contribute to this decline:

#### 1. Increasing complexity of children entering care

More children — especially older adolescents — are entering care with complex needs that foster carers may find challenging to support without specialist training or wraparound services.

## 2. A shrinking foster carer workforce

Local authorities across the South East report:

- » difficulties recruiting new foster carers
- » high retention challenges
- » increasing numbers of carers leaving or reducing their capacity

## 3. Alongside the overall reduction in fostering capacity, emerging work with regional partners indicates that a proportion of existing foster carer vacancies remain unused, even when there is clear demand.

These “avoidable vacancies” often occur when potential matches are not being identified or secured, despite carers having availability. Early findings suggest a range of factors may contribute — including assessment of needs, matching confidence, and variations in local authority and IFA processes. Further collaborative work with independent fostering agencies will be essential to understand these barriers more fully and to develop shared approaches that help ensure every available family-based option is utilised effectively.

## 4. Greater reliance on residential and supported accommodation

As fewer foster homes are available, children (particularly teenagers) are more likely to be placed in:

- » children’s homes
- » semi-independent/supported accommodation
- » specialist therapeutic settings

## 5. Impact of UASC on foster home demand

The South East receives higher numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who are predominantly older teenage boys. This group traditionally requires:

- » supported accommodation
- » specialist foster care
- » larger households or families with experience supporting adolescents.

This affects foster care availability for other children.



## NATIONAL ROLLOUT OF FOSTERING HUBS

In response to the national shortage of foster carers and the increasing complexity of children's needs, the government has begun rolling out **Fostering Hubs** across the country. These hubs are designed to:

- » bring together recruitment, assessment and support functions under one integrated model
- » create specialist foster care pathways (e.g., for adolescents, step-across from residential care, therapeutic foster care)
- » improve retention by offering enhanced wraparound support, training and access to multi-disciplinary teams

- » reduce competition between agencies by coordinating local and regional recruitment
- » provide a clearer, more consistent offer to carers

The hubs are part of a wider reform programme aimed at strengthening the foster care workforce and increasing stability for children.



CLARITY +  
LEADERSHIP

## SOUTH EAST REGIONAL FOSTERING HUB – OVERVIEW

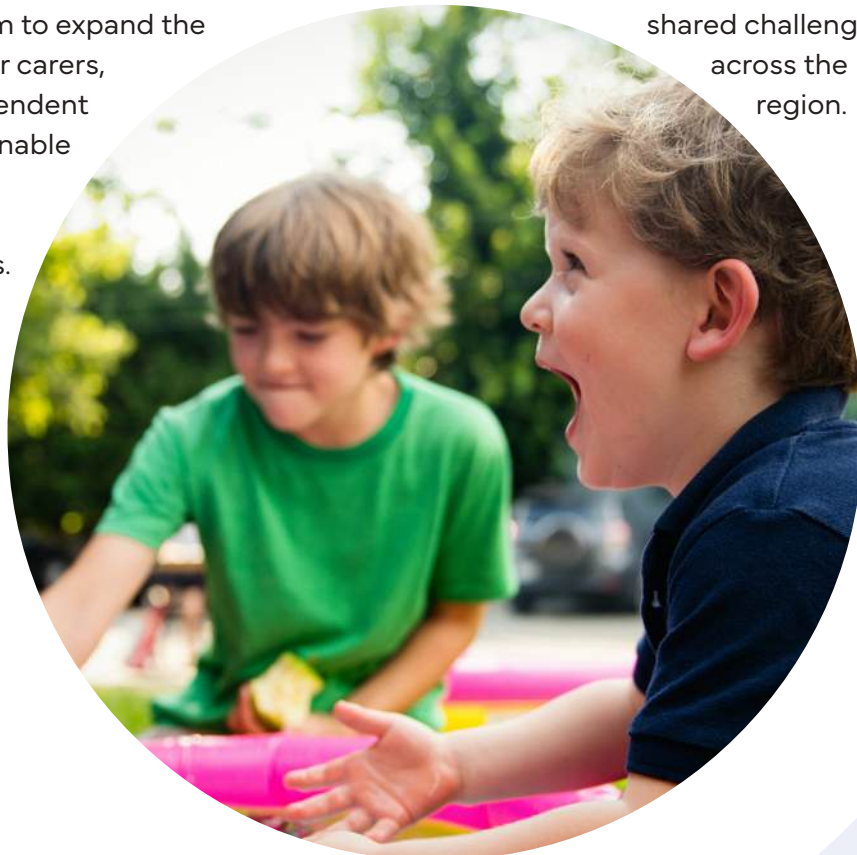
The South East Regional fostering hubs, known as **Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE)**, launched in July 2024 as part of the Department for Education’s national programme of fostering-recruitment hubs. It is the **largest of the nine regional hubs** established across England and brings together **17 local authorities** across the South East to transform the way foster carers are recruited, trained and supported.

The hub serves a region with **over 11,000 children in care** and fewer than **3,000 local authority foster carer households**, reflecting a significant and long-standing shortfall in family-based homes. By joining forces, South East authorities aim to expand the pool of high-quality foster carers, reduce reliance on independent fostering agencies, and enable more children to remain closer to their families, schools and communities.

LAFSE provides a **single, centralised enquiry and application pathway**, regional marketing campaigns, and a consistent package of training and support for prospective and approved carers. The regional model reduces competition between

councils, strengthens retention, and creates specialist fostering pathways for adolescents, sibling groups, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children requiring therapeutic care.

This collaborative approach is designed to rebuild fostering capacity across the region, strengthen stability for children, and ensure that more young people can experience safe, stable and nurturing homes within their local area. The South East Regional fostering hubs are therefore a key component of the wider sufficiency strategy, supporting local authorities to meet rising demand and respond collectively to shared challenges across the region.



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY

Foster care remains the preferred home option for most children — but the decline in availability means more children are entering non-family-based provision.

### 1. The decline in foster homes is a core regional risk

The falling proportion of foster homes means the region must act decisively to rebuild capacity.

### 2. The regional fostering hubs provide an opportunity

If implemented at scale, the hub could:

- » increase recruitment
- » improve retention
- » strengthen specialist capacity
- » reduce pressure on residential homes

### 3. Collaboration is key

A regional approach helps all 19 local authorities benefit from shared investment and a consistent offer.

### 4. Future sufficiency depends on increasing and diversifying foster care

Especially for:

- » adolescents
- » UASC
- » complex needs
- » sibling groups



EXPERTISE + PASSION

# RESIDENTIAL HOMES

Residential care plays a vital role in meeting the needs of children who require higher levels of support, structure or therapeutic intervention than can be provided in foster care or family settings. The chart shows a **steady increase** in the proportion of children in the South East living in residential homes over the past six years.

While residential homes care for a much smaller proportion of children than foster homes, the rising trend signals growing complexity in the needs of children entering or remaining in care.

## TREND OVERVIEW

### South East

- » In **2017–18**, around **7.5%** of children in care in the South East were placed in residential homes.
- » This proportion has **risen consistently each year**, reaching around **11%** by **2023–24**.
- » This represents a **3.5 percentage-point increase**, showing sustained upward pressure on residential provision.

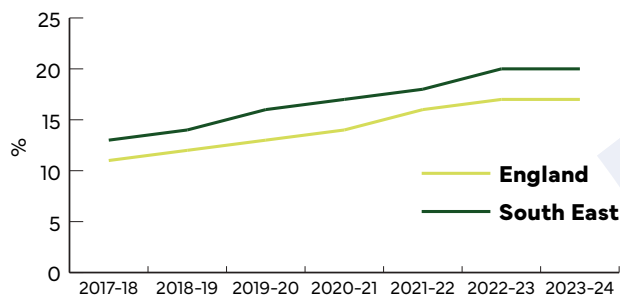
### England

- » The national trend mirrors this pattern, rising from **6%** to around **9.5%** over the same period.
- » The increase is steady but **slightly less steep** than in the South East.

## Regional comparison

- » At every point in the timeline, the South East has a **higher proportion** of children in residential care than the England average.
- » The gap widens slightly in recent years, with the South East holding a **clear lead** in residential use.

## CLA at 31 March by placement: % Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation



## What this suggests

Several important themes emerge:

### 1. Rising complexity of children's needs

Children entering care increasingly present with:

- » high levels of trauma
  - » mental health needs
  - » risk-taking behaviour
  - » exploitation concerns
  - » disabilities or special educational needs
- This contributes to greater demand for residential care.

## **2. Pressure on foster care capacity**

As foster homes become harder to secure — particularly for older children and those with multiple needs — residential homes are increasingly being used to meet demand.

## **3. Growth in 16–17-year-old homes**

Older adolescents are the age group **least likely** to be matched into fostering, and the South East sees a high proportion of teenagers entering care. Many require:

- » structured residential settings
- » step-across arrangements
- » specialist therapeutic provision

## **4. Limited regional supply**

Despite the South East being a major provider and purchaser of residential homes, supply does not keep pace with demand.

This leads to:

- » rising costs for residential homes
- » increased use of out-of-region homes
- » challenges in matching children close to home

## **What this means for sufficiency**

### **1. Strategic expansion of residential capacity is needed**

The rising demand — especially for older children and complex needs — means the South East will require:

- » more local residential homes
- » homes closer to children's communities
- » specialist and therapeutic provision
- » step-across services linked to fostering and family homes

### **2. A diverse mix of provision**

Homes offering:

- » therapeutic support
- » trauma-informed care
- » disability/SEND provision
- » crisis or short-term intervention are essential to meet the range of needs.

### **3. Workforce development is critical**

Residential care depends on a skilled workforce capable of supporting high levels of complexity.

Training, retention and career pathways will be central to sustaining quality.

### **4. Stronger links with fostering developments**

As fostering hubs expand, opportunities increase for:

- » step-across residential – fostering pathways
- » joint planning of support for adolescents
- » better alignment between residential and fostering offers across the region

## 16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORTED LODGINGS

Supported accommodation for 16–17-year-olds has become an increasingly significant part of the care landscape nationally and within the South East. Following the 2023 regulatory changes, all supported accommodation providers for 16–17-year-olds are now required to register with Ofsted. This shift, combined with rising numbers of older adolescents entering or remaining in care, has brought both opportunities and new pressures for local authorities.

This section summarises the national picture, highlights the South East position, and outlines what these trends mean for sufficiency planning across the region.

### NATIONAL TRENDS

#### Growth in 16–17-Year-Olds in Supported Accommodation

National data shows a steady increase in the number of 16–17-year-olds living in supported accommodation:

- » Around 7,000 16–17-year-olds in England now live in supported accommodation (2024).
- » This represents approximately 26–27% of all looked-after 16–17-year-olds.
- » The most common types of provision include:
  - Shared or semi-shared houses

- Dispersed flats
- Bespoke solo accommodation
- Specialist UASC-focused services

This shift reflects the wider national trend of more older teenagers entering care or remaining in care longer, combined with falling availability of fostering placements for adolescents.

#### Profile of Young People

Nationally, young people living in supported accommodation tend to be:

- » **Older adolescents** (16–17, with some turning 18 yrs)
- » **UASC**, who account for a significant proportion of semi-independent accommodation
- » Young people with risk-taking behaviour, contextual safeguarding concerns, or exploitation vulnerabilities
- » Young people with emerging mental health needs
- » Young people stepping down from residential care and needing semi-independent living

Supported accommodation is designed to offer increasing autonomy and preparation for adulthood — but the level of need now entering the system often exceeds what many providers have traditionally supported.

## Regulation and Market Adjustment

The introduction of Ofsted registration has led to:

- » Consolidation in parts of the market
- » Some providers exiting or reducing their footprint
- » Increased costs as providers adjust staffing and compliance
- » Improved consistency in quality expectations
- » Short-term capacity pressures during transition

These shifts disproportionately affect regions with high numbers of older adolescents.

## THE SOUTH EAST PICTURE

The South East region has one of the highest proportions of 16–17-year-olds in supported accommodation in England. This reflects:

- » High numbers of UASC
- » Rising complexity in older adolescents entering care
- » Limited adolescent-focused fostering capacity
- » A strong but mixed-quality independent provider market
- » Variations in local authority use of supported lodgings and step-across provision

## Key Regional Features

- 1. Higher reliance on supported accommodation than national average**  
Many South East authorities place more than one-third of their looked-after 16–17-year-olds in supported accommodation — above the national average of ~27%.
- 2. Concentration of providers in lower-cost or coastal locations**  
Areas such as Kent/Medway, Portsmouth, Southampton and parts of Sussex have the highest density of providers, largely driven by:
  - » UASC arrivals
  - » Lower accommodation costs compared with inland counties
  - » Existing private provider infrastructure
- 3. Significant variation between local authorities**  
Some councils rely heavily on supported accommodation (often due to UASC numbers), while others use it more sparingly and prioritise fostering or step-across residential provision.
- 4. Quality and workforce concerns mirror the national picture**  
Providers report challenges in:
  - » Recruiting experienced staff
  - » Meeting regulatory requirements

- » Supporting young people with high complexity
- » Managing risk where needs escalate

#### 5. **Limited availability of supported lodgings**

Supported lodgings — often a preferable and more family-based option — remain in short supply across most of the South East.

Where they do exist, demand far exceeds supply, particularly for:

- » Young people aged 16–17 with low–medium support needs
- » Young parents
- » UASC
- » Young people stepping down from children’s homes

### **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY IN THE SOUTH EAST**

The data shows that supported accommodation will continue to play a critical role in the region’s sufficiency landscape, particularly for older adolescents. However, several risks and opportunities need addressing:

#### **Key Challenges**

- » High demand is placing significant pressure on the market
- » Variability in provider quality and staffing
- » Rising costs as regulation embeds

- » Over-reliance on private providers, especially in coastal regions
- » Insufficient supported lodgings to offer a family-based alternative
- » Escalating risk profiles among older teenagers
- » Limited step-across options from residential care

#### **Opportunities for Regional Collaboration**

Home and Future provides the mechanism for the South East to reshape this market more strategically through:

#### **1. Regional mapping of supported accommodation providers**

Interactive Data will allow all 19 authorities to understand:

- » Capacity
- » Locations
- » Quality
- » Vacancy timelines

#### **2. Joint commissioning of higher-quality and specialist provision**

Particularly where:

- » Therapeutic support is needed
- » UASC numbers are high
- » Complex risk profiles require skilled staff

### **3. Regional expansion of supported lodgings**

A coordinated recruitment and support model could significantly increase capacity and provide better outcomes than standard semi-independent options.

### **4. Creating clear step-up/step-across pathways**

Ensuring young people can move:

- » From residential to semi-independent
- » From semi-independent to fostering or supported lodgings
- » Into adulthood with stable support

### **5. Improved workforce standards**

Training, qualifications and stable staffing models will be essential to meet the increasing complexity of 16+ care.

## **SUMMARY**

Supported accommodation and supported lodgings are essential components of the South East's care landscape, particularly given the region's high numbers of older adolescents and UASC. While the regulatory changes bring greater consistency to the sector, they also magnify existing pressures around capacity, quality, and workforce.

Regional collaboration through Home and Future offers a pathway to stabilise the market, improve quality, increase supported lodgings and specialist provision, and ensure that young people receive the right support as they approach adulthood.

**LOVING  
LOCAL +**

# DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY ORDERS (DOL) FOR CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH EAST

Deprivation of Liberty (DoL) orders have become an increasingly used mechanism to keep children safe when no suitable regulated placement is available. These orders authorise restrictions on a child's liberty – such as constant supervision, restrictions on movement, or placement in secure or highly controlled environments – and must be approved by the High Court under the inherent jurisdiction.

Nationally, the use of DoL orders has risen sharply over the last five years. Research from the **Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2023–24)** shows:

- » A **462% increase** in the number of children subject to a DoL order since 2017.
- » Over 1,300 children were subject to DoL applications in 2023 alone.
- » The majority of children placed under DoL orders are **girls aged 14–17**, often with significant histories of trauma, mental health needs, exploitation or self-harm.
- » Most DoL placements are **not regulated children's homes** – instead they are ad hoc, bespoke, high-cost setups, often staffed by agency workers and without the safeguards of regulated provision.

## THE PICTURE IN THE SOUTH EAST

Local authorities across the South East report growing reliance on DoL orders due to:

- » **Acute shortage** of secure welfare provision nationally.
- » **Limited local therapeutic and specialist adolescent provision.**
- » **Home breakdowns** linked to growing adolescent complexity and mental health needs.
- » Increasing numbers of young people presenting with **acute risk of harm**, including criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, self-harm, or missing episodes.

Although precise regional figures are still being consolidated through the Home and Future Data App, early intelligence from social care leaders indicates:

- » DoL usage in the South East has **increased year on year**, with the largest rises in coastal areas and authorities with high levels of contextual safeguarding need.
- » Many DoL arrangements are delivered by bespoke private providers, often at very high cost, with limited opportunities for children to step down into regulated provision. Workforce pressures mean some DoL arrangements rely heavily on agency staffing, which can undermine stability and consistency.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SUFFICIENCY

The rise in DoL orders signals some of the most severe sufficiency challenges in the region:

### 1. Lack of specialist local provision

Children who require high-level supervision, therapeutic intervention or secure environments often have no suitable regulated home to move to.

### 2. High cost / low stability arrangements

Bespoke DoL packages can cost several thousand pounds per week, yet often struggle to maintain consistent staffing.

### 3. Home breakdowns and drift

Many children remain in DoL arrangements far longer than intended due to absence of suitable step-across placements.

### 4. Legal and workforce pressures

Increased DoL activity requires significant senior management, legal and social work time.

## REGIONAL PRIORITIES

To reduce reliance on DoL orders, the South East will need to:

- » **Increase local specialist and therapeutic residential capacity**, including crisis units, step-across children's homes and trauma-informed adolescent provision.
- » **Develop regional crisis and emergency response models**, reducing the need for High Court applications.
- » **Strengthen mental health partnership arrangements** to ensure CAMHS and ICBs are integrated into responses for children at acute risk.
- » **Establish multi-agency regional oversight** of DoL use, improving data quality, trend analysis and planning.
- » Work with providers to develop **safe, regulated alternatives** to bespoke unregulated DoL arrangements.

DoL orders should remain **exceptional**, time-limited measures – but they are currently being used because provision gaps leave local authorities with no viable alternatives. Addressing these gaps must be a core part of regional sufficiency planning.

# UNREGULATED AND UNREGISTERED HOMES

## CONTEXT

Prior to 2023, many older adolescents were placed in “unregulated” semi-independent or supported accommodation. In 2023, new national regulations came into force requiring all providers housing 16–17-year-olds to **register with Ofsted**. As a result:

- » The term “unregulated home” is now largely obsolete for looked-after children aged 16–17, because all accommodation must be registered as “supported accommodation”.
- » The key remaining issue for children of any age is **unregistered homes** – illegal homes that are providing care without being registered as a children’s home.

Despite strengthened legislation, unregistered homes remain a significant concern.

## NATIONAL PICTURE

National research shows the continued use of unregistered homes as a symptom of severe sufficiency shortage:

- » Ofsted’s national data (2024) indicates **hundreds of enforcement actions** relating to unregistered children’s homes each year.
- » Unregistered homes are typically used for children with **complex and high-risk needs**, often at point of crisis or following multiple home breakdowns.
- » Providers often operate under short-term, high-cost bespoke packages, with limited oversight and inconsistent staffing.

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory links the rise in unregistered homes to the same pressures driving DoL orders: **insufficient regulated adolescent provision** and **rising complexity** in the 14–17 age group.

IDENTITY+ INDEPENDENCE

## THE SOUTH EAST PICTURE

The South East has a higher proportion of adolescents in care than the national average, and one of the highest rates of UASC. This contributes directly to the region's vulnerability to unregistered home usage, particularly where:

- » No regulated residential vacancy can meet a child's risk profile
- » Foster home break down
- » No suitable supported accommodation exists for a young person's level of need
- » A DoL order authorises a bespoke package that does not meet registration thresholds

Local authority feedback across the region indicates:

- » Some children are placed in **short-notice bespoke arrangements** pending availability of a regulated home.
- » Unregistered provision is **most common for 14–17-year-olds** with exploitation risk, violence, self-harm, or acute mental health needs.
- » High property and workforce costs in the South East make it harder to open new registered homes, increasing reliance on ad hoc arrangements.

## LEGAL AND SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

Unregistered homes are **unlawful**, unless used only for the short "grace period" while a provider actively seeks registration. Risks include:

- » Lower oversight and weaker safeguarding arrangements
- » Inconsistent staffing and use of agency-only rotas
- » Lack of therapeutic structure
- » Delays in children moving to stable, regulated provision

The withdrawal of unregulated provision for under-16s (2021) and new registration requirements for 16–17s (2023) have reduced options for emergency arrangements, increasing reliance on **unregistered bespoke homes**, especially during crises.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SUFFICIENCY

Unregistered homes are the strongest indicator that local capacity cannot meet children's needs. Reducing their use requires:

### 1. Rapid expansion of regulated adolescent provision

More small-group homes, therapeutic provision, and high-support residential homes.

### 2. Crisis and emergency residential capacity

Allowing children to be placed safely and legally while long-term options are identified.

### 3. Regional provider development

Joint commissioning and planning through Home and Future to shape new provision across all 19 authorities.

### 4. Strengthening supported accommodation

High-quality, well-staffed supported accommodation reduces pressure for bespoke unregistered arrangements.

### 5. Clear regional pathways

Including specialist step-up/step-across options to minimise crisis escalation.

## SUMMARY

Unregistered homes and DoL arrangements are symptoms of:

- » Rising adolescent complexity
- » Workforce shortages
- » Insufficient therapeutic and crisis residential provision
- » High demand for 16+ accommodation
- » Lack of local options for children with the highest levels of need

Strengthening regulated, high-quality local provision will be critical to reducing reliance on unregistered and DoL arrangements, improving safety, stability and outcomes for children in the South East.



# WORKFORCE: STABILITY, CAPACITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A skilled, stable and confident children’s residential workforce is central to sufficiency, quality and home stability across the South East. Workforce capacity directly affects the availability of homes, the ability to provide therapeutic support, and the long-term sustainability of local and regional provision.

The South East faces a number of distinct workforce pressures, including high turnover in some sub-regions, recruitment challenges, and limited access to consistent training and progression pathways. To address these issues, the South East Residential Workforce Academy is being developed as a region-wide infrastructure to strengthen recruitment, develop shared standards, and support professional career routes across all 19 local authorities and partner providers.

## WORKFORCE PROFILE (2024–25)

### Workforce Size

Based on national workforce estimates and regional weighting, the children’s homes workforce in the South East is estimated at over 4,600 staff. This includes residential care workers, senior support workers, registered managers and specialist roles.

### Retention and Turnover

- » National turnover stands at 29%, broadly reflected across South East homes.

- » 47% of homes nationally reported no care staff vacancies (up from 38%).
- » Despite this, 62% of homes report recruitment difficulties, likely mirrored in the South East.

### Key Barriers to Recruitment

National census data identifies:

- » Lack of experience – 74%
- » Lack of skills – 66%
- » Low applicant motivation – 57%
- » Visa-related challenges – 13%

These barriers have direct implications for sufficiency as homes cannot operate at full registered capacity without appropriate staffing.

### Training & CPD

- » 53% of managers nationally cite challenges in delivering CPD.
- » Staff value mentoring, coaching and reflective practice, but availability is inconsistent.
- » Many staff resist progression to manager roles due to workload and lack of structured development pathways.

*Source: Department for Education (2025), Children’s Homes Workforce Census (Verian & NCB).*

## **SOUTH EAST WORKFORCE FEEDBACK**

Qualitative research undertaken by The Staff College highlights several workforce themes across the South East:

### **Feeling undervalued**

Staff reported frequently feeling undervalued, despite the emotional intensity and complexity of their roles.

### **Emotional Pressure & Burnout**

Workers described high emotional pressure, inconsistent support and insufficient preparation — all contributing to burnout and early turnover.

### **Variable Training Quality**

Staff highlighted major inconsistencies in:

- » training quality
- » access to reflective practice
- » leadership development
- » induction quality for new staff

Consistently, workers called for more coaching, mentoring, and communities of practice.

### **Unclear Progression Pathways**

Many staff expressed interest in progression but reported limited structured pathways across the region.

These insights directly inform the design of the South East Residential Workforce Academy, which aims to build a stable, skilled, and supported workforce across the region.



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY

A strong and stable workforce is central to delivering the homes and support children need. Workforce challenges directly impact:

- » the number of homes available
- » the ability to maintain regulatory compliance
- » home stability
- » quality of care and outcomes

To strengthen sufficiency, the region will require a coordinated workforce strategy focused on:

### 1. Reducing Vacancy and Turnover

Through values-led recruitment, improved induction, and targeted retention support.

### 2. Building a Skilled Workforce

Establish region-wide training, practice standards and accredited pathways.

### 3. Embedding a Shared Philosophy of Care

Enhance consistency, wellbeing and continuity across all homes.

### 4. Aligning Workforce Development With Sufficiency Planning

Ensure workforce growth follows real-time demand and complexity trends.

## SUMMARY

The workforce is at the heart of sufficiency. Strengthening recruitment, training, leadership and retention is essential to delivering local residential capacity and ensuring children receive high-quality, relationship-based care. The South East Residential Workforce Academy represents a major opportunity to develop a stable and skilled workforce for the future.

RESPECT + NURTURE

# HOME LOCALITY

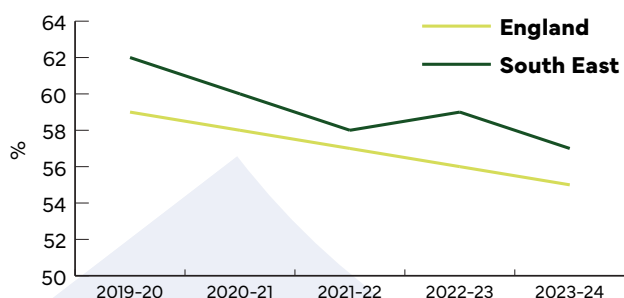
Ensuring children can live close to home is a core principle of good sufficiency planning. When children remain near their families, schools, and communities, they are more likely to experience continuity, stability and a stronger sense of identity. However, the growing complexity of children’s needs, pressures on foster care capacity, and uneven residential provision across the South East mean that more children are now living outside their home local authority — and, increasingly, at greater distances from home.

This chapter brings together three key measures:

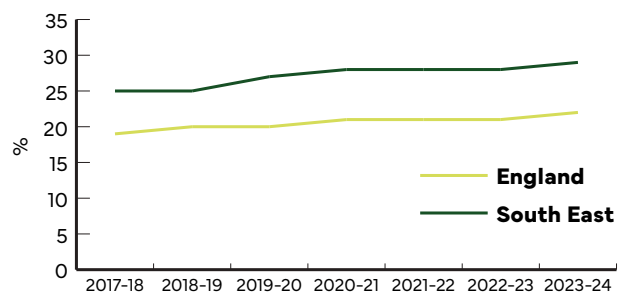
1. **Children placed within their local authority**
2. **Children placed outside their local authority but within 20 miles**
3. **Children placed more than 20 miles from home**

Collectively, these trends offer a clear picture of how sufficiency challenges are shaping the lived experience of children in care in the South East.

## CLA at 31 March by placement location: % Placed within the local authority boundary



## CLA at 31 March by placement location: % Placed over 20 miles from the child’s home



## 1. CHILDREN PLACED WITHIN THEIR LOCAL AUTHORITY

The proportion of children placed *within their home local authority* has remained broadly stable over the last six years, sitting at around **54–55%** for most of the period. This mirrors the England average, which has also remained steady.

While this stability might appear positive, it masks significant underlying pressures. Local authorities report increasing difficulty securing local homes, particularly for older children and those with more complex needs. Many achieve stability in this indicator only by making greater use of neighbouring authorities when local capacity is not available.

An anomaly in 2018–19 shows a recorded drop to zero; this is understood to be a recording issue rather than a real change in practice.

## 2. CHILDREN PLACED OUTSIDE THEIR LOCAL AUTHORITY BUT WITHIN 20 MILES

The percentage of children placed **out of LA but close to home** is gradually increasing in both the South East and England. This suggests that when a home is not available within a child's home authority, local authorities are making conscious efforts to keep children close to their communities by placing them in neighbouring areas.

These homes often work well for children:

- » travel to school remains manageable
- » family time can continue regularly
- » children retain links to their familiar area
- » disruption to services is minimised

However, the rise also reflects the reality that many local authorities no longer have enough in-boundary homes to meet all needs — especially in foster care and specialist provision.

## 3. CHILDREN PLACED MORE THAN 20 MILES FROM HOME

The chart shows a consistent upward trend in the proportion of children placed **more than 20 miles from home**, rising from around 18% to 22–23% in the South East over the period. The England average has also increased, though at a slightly lower rate.

Children who live more than 20 miles away are most often:

- » older teenagers
- » children with complex trauma or exploitation risks
- » those requiring specialist or therapeutic residential care
- » children whose needs cannot be met safely within their home area

While some distance homes are necessary and can be appropriate for a child's safety or therapeutic recovery, the steady increase indicates that a growing number of children are living far from home because local capacity cannot meet their needs.

## WHAT THE COMBINED TRENDS TELL US

### A. Local capacity is stretched, even if in-LA rates look stable

The stability of the "within LA" figure does not reflect an abundance of local homes. Instead, it indicates that authorities are working harder to maintain local homes while relying more heavily on neighbouring areas when local options run out.

### B. Neighbouring LAs are functioning as an extension of the local market

The rise in children living out of LA but within 20 miles suggests that cross-boundary

activity is increasing. Families in the South East often live close to county borders, so these arrangements can still maintain good continuity — but they also highlight wider systemic pressures.

### **C. The steady rise in long-distance homes is the strongest indicator of sufficiency challenges**

When the local system cannot absorb complex, specialist or adolescent demand, children are increasingly placed further from home. This carries risks for:

- » education continuity
- » family and sibling relationships
- » access to services
- » home stability
- » identity and belonging

### **D. Specialist provision is unevenly distributed**

Children needing therapeutic residential care, SEND provision, or specialist support often have no choice but to live far from home. This is a regional and national pattern.

### **E. Market conditions strongly shape where children live**

Residential homes in lower-cost or rural locations, combined with the region's high property prices, mean many children are placed at distance even when regional demand is high.

## **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY PLANNING**

### **1. Increasing local foster care, especially for adolescents**

Shortages in mainstream and specialist foster carers directly drive up out-of-LA and long-distance homes.

### **2. Creating more local residential capacity**

Particularly:

- » therapeutic homes
- » small-group homes
- » specialist SEND/complex needs provision
- » step-across to fostering homes

### **3. Using regional planning to reduce unnecessary distance**

Home and Future's Data App will allow all 19 LAs to:

- » track demand and movement in real time
- » identify hot spots where children are routinely placed far from home
- » jointly commission new provision
- » influence the provider market more effectively

#### 4. Reducing avoidable long-distance homes

While some children will always need homes outside their area, the regional goal should be to reduce the number of children who travel far *because no local option exists*.

#### 5. Protecting relationships and continuity

Local homes support:

- » school stability
- » family time
- » friendships
- » community belonging
- » better longer-term outcomes

These are central to sufficiency and should guide the development of new provision.

#### SUMMARY

The combined indicators of homes locality show that the South East, like England as a whole, faces increasing pressure on local homes capacity. More children are being placed beyond their home area, and a rising number are living more than 20 miles from home.

Strengthening local sufficiency — across fostering, residential care, supported accommodation and specialist provision — is essential to keep children closer to their communities, improve outcomes, and reduce reliance on distant homes.

Home and Future provides a unique opportunity for the region to plan together, build sustainable local capacity, and ensure that children in the South East can live in the right place, at the right time, and as close to home as possible.



# STABILITY OF HOMES

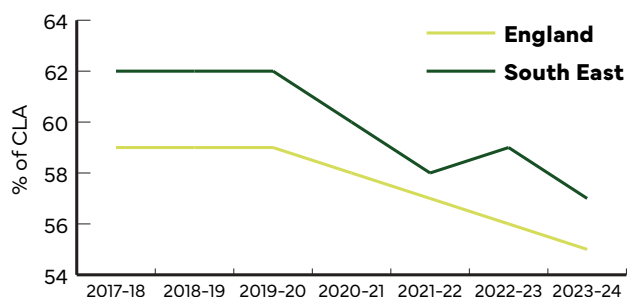
**Stability in where children live** is one of the strongest indicators of care quality, emotional security and long-term outcomes. Frequent moves can disrupt education, relationships, identity and a child’s sense of safety. National guidance and inspection frameworks emphasise that children should experience as few moves as possible — particularly unplanned ones.

The chart below shows the percentage of children in care who experienced **three or more home moves within a 12-month period**, comparing the South East with the England average.

## OVERVIEW OF TRENDS

The data shows that both the South East and England have seen a gradual increase in the proportion of children experiencing three or more moves. While the South East performs slightly better than the national picture, the gap has narrowed over time, and stability remains a key area of concern for sufficiency planning.

### CLA at 31 March by placement: % Placed inside the Local Authority boundary



## KEY PATTERNS

### 1. Rising instability across both England and the South East

Children experiencing three or more home moves have increased gradually, suggesting that the system is under growing pressure. This aligns with wider national challenges — increased complexity of children’s needs, reduced fostering capacity, and uneven availability of local residential provision.

### 2. South East performs marginally better — but the difference is shrinking

Historically, the South East has reported slightly lower instability rates than England overall. However, recent data shows that the region is tracking closer to the national average, indicating increasing challenges in maintaining stable homes.

### 3. Adolescents drive much of the instability pattern

Local authority intelligence across the region highlights that teenagers — particularly those aged 14–17 — are the group most likely to experience multiple home moves. This reflects:

- » rising levels of risk (exploitation, mental health, missing episodes)
- » difficulties finding carers confident in supporting complex adolescents
- » limited availability of therapeutic placements

- » insufficient step-across options from residential care

This pattern reinforces the need for specialist fostering, adolescent residential pathways, and trauma-informed support.

## **WHY HOME STABILITY IS DECLINING**

Across the region, several pressures appear to be contributing to rising instability:

### **1. Shortage of foster carers**

Especially those able to support:

- » adolescents
- » children with complex needs
- » sibling groups
- » young people stepping down from residential care

The reduction in in-house fostering capacity and high IFA competition also contributes to **churn in where children live.**

### **2. Increased complexity of need**

Behaviours linked to trauma, exploitation risk, mental health difficulties and contextual safeguarding challenges make it harder to sustain homes.

### **3. Early breakdown in unsupported semi-independent provision**

Some young people placed in 16+ supported accommodation without sufficient wraparound support experience early moves as providers struggle to manage escalating need.

### **4. Limited regional availability of specialist and therapeutic homes**

When the right type of provision is not available locally, children are placed wherever a vacancy exists — increasing the likelihood of mismatch and subsequent moves.

## **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY**

Improving home stability must be a central objective in the South East sufficiency strategy. To achieve this, the region will need to focus on:

### **1. Increasing specialist and therapeutic fostering capacity**

Carers with the skills, support and confidence to care for adolescents and children with complex needs are essential to reducing home moves.

## **2. Strengthening regional residential pathways**

Better step-up and step-across options between residential and fostering can prevent unnecessary movement.

## **3. Early intervention and wraparound support**

Intensive support — especially for adolescents — helps stabilise homes before they reach crisis. Models may include:

- » multi-disciplinary teams
- » therapeutic support
- » consistent mentoring
- » crisis intervention services

## **4. Predictive use of regional data**

Real-time insights from the Home and Future Data App will allow the region to:

- » identify where instability is rising
- » link stability data with provider types
- » understand patterns by age, need and locality
- » plan targeted interventions

## **5. Workforce stability**

Home stability is directly linked to staff consistency in residential and supported accommodation. High turnover undermines continuity and can increase home breakdowns.

## LOCAL VARIATION IN HOME LOCALITY ACROSS THE SOUTH EAST

The proportion of children placed **within their home local authority boundary** varies significantly across the South East. These differences reflect a mix of local provision, provider presence, population pressures, geography, and the availability of specialist homes.

The chart demonstrates clear and consistent variation across the four sub-regions over the last seven years

### OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The overall picture shows stable but distinct patterns across sub-regions. Some areas consistently maintain higher levels of local homes placements, while others rely more heavily on placements outside their boundary due to demand pressures, geographical constraints, or limited local capacity.

### Kent & Medway – Highest proportion of in-boundary placements

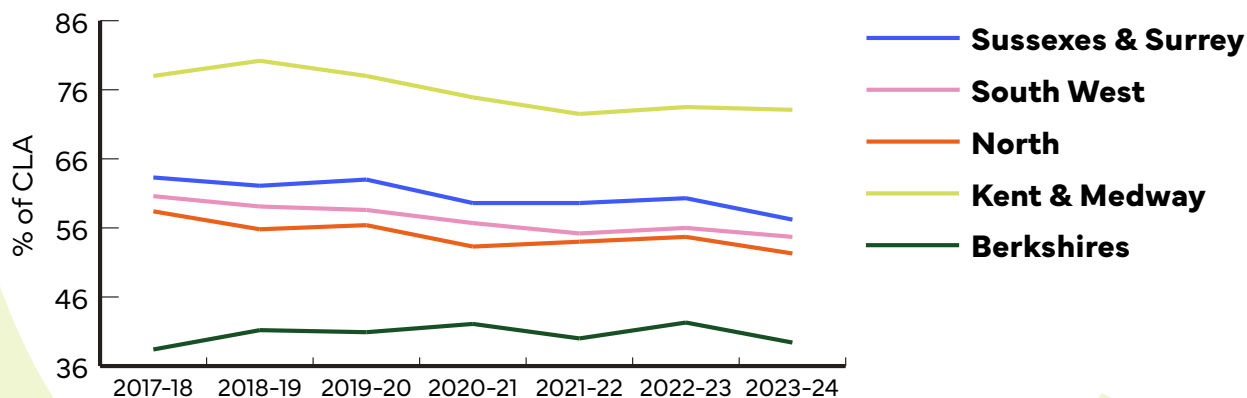
Kent & Medway consistently maintains the highest proportion of children placed inside their LA boundary, with rates typically in the mid-70s across the period.

This strong performance is influenced by:

- » A large and diverse local placement market
- » Extensive in-boundary residential and supported accommodation
- » Long-standing investment in local foster care
- » A broad geographical area with sufficient land and capacity for provision

Although there is a slight downward trend across the years, Kent & Medway continues to sit well above the other groups.

**CLA at 31 March by placement: % Placed inside the Local Authority boundary**



### **Sussexes & Surrey – Mid-range and stable**

Sussexes & Surrey sits consistently in the mid-50s across the seven-year period, making it the most stable mid-range performer in the region.

This reflects:

- » Strong fostering capacity in several authorities
- » Pressures on residential capacity, particularly for specialist homes
- » High and growing adolescent demand in parts of Sussex
- » Additional pressure from UASC arrivals, especially in coastal areas

Their stability suggests a balanced but stretched local market, with regular use of out-of-area placements due to specialist shortages rather than overall capacity failure.

### **South West – Lower but stable proportions**

The South West sub-region (Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Southampton) shows **lower rates of in-boundary placements**, hovering in the **low-50s** across the period.

This pattern reflects:

- » Limited residential capacity, with many providers operating on a small scale
- » High house prices, which make expansion and new provision difficult

- » Higher levels of adolescent need and complexity
- » Coastal geography, restricting options for new homes
- » Ongoing reliance on neighbouring areas for specialist placements

Despite these challenges, the trend shows stability rather than decline.

### **North (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes) – Lower-mid range**

The North sub-region sits in the **high-40s to low-50s**, slightly below the South West but above the Berkshires.

Key contributing factors include:

- » Large rural areas, making it harder to secure in-boundary placements close to home
- » Concentrated pockets of provision rather than broad distribution
- » Limited specialist residential homes locally
- » Growing complexity among adolescents, often requiring out-of-area placements

The pattern remains relatively consistent across the seven-year period.

### **Berkshires – Lowest in-boundary placement rates**

Berkshire authorities consistently record the **lowest proportion** of in-state placements, generally around the **mid-30s to low-40s**.

This reflects:

- » Very small and densely populated local authority areas
- » Limited availability of residential provision within boundaries
- » Few specialist homes operating locally
- » Strong reliance on neighbouring areas with larger markets

This pattern has been stable over time and reflects structural, rather than short-term, constraints.

### **SUMMARY: DISTINCT SUB-REGIONAL PATTERNS**

The five sub-regions show clear and long-standing differences in how often children are placed within their home area:

**Kent & Medway** – strongest in-boundary sufficiency

**Sussexes & Surrey** – stable mid-range

**South West** – lower due to structural and market capacity constraints

**North** – lower-mid, shaped by geography and limited specialist provision

**Berkshires** – lowest due to small size, dense geography, and limited local provision

These differences highlight the need for localised sufficiency planning and tailored strategies across the South East — there is no single model that can meet the needs of every area.

### **WHAT THESE DIFFERENCES MEAN FOR REGIONAL SUFFICIENCY**

Home placement stability across the South East reflects rising complexity, increasing adolescent demand, and significant variation in local capacity. Although the region performs slightly better than the England average, the gap has narrowed, and instability is rising for many children — particularly teenagers.

The data shows a clear link between placement instability and the sufficiency challenges highlighted in the previous section on local variation:

#### **1. Increasing adolescent demand is driving instability**

Older children (especially 14–17) now make up the largest group in care. The South East has also seen one of the strongest national increases in 16–17-year-olds.

This shifting age profile places heavy pressure on adolescent fostering, therapeutic residential homes, and supported accommodation — all of which directly affects placement stability.

#### **2. Shortages in local provision increase movement**

As shown in the chart, several sub-regions — particularly the South West, North, and Berkshires — have lower proportions of in-boundary placements.

Where local fostering or residential options are unavailable, children with higher or specialist needs are placed wherever capacity

exists. This increases the likelihood of mismatched placements and multiple moves.

### **3. Specialist residential capacity is uneven and limited**

Residential care continues to be the placement type least likely to be delivered inside the region. Only 71% of residential placements are in-region, compared with 83% for fostering.

This geographical mismatch means that many children with complex needs are placed out of area, contributing directly to instability.

### **4. Early breakdowns in 16+ supported accommodation**

The South East has one of the highest proportions of young people living in supported accommodation.

Despite regulation improving standards, many settings still struggle to meet the needs of adolescents with significant emotional or behavioural needs — leading to early breakdowns and further moves.

### **5. Workforce instability affects continuity**

High turnover within residential and supported accommodation services disrupts relationships and care routines.

This lack of continuity is a known contributor to placement breakdown, and the new South East Workforce Academy aims to address this pressure.

### **6. Cross-regional movement increases disruption**

Nineteen per cent of South East children are placed outside the region — one of the highest proportions nationally.

Long-distance placements reduce social work oversight, disrupt education, and increase instability risk.

### **UPDATED SUMMARY**

Placement stability in the South East is increasingly shaped by demographic change, market pressures, workforce challenges, and uneven local capacity — particularly for adolescents.

As more older children enter care, reliance on private residential provision grows, and significant numbers are placed outside their local or regional area, instability is likely to increase without targeted intervention.

Improving stability will require:

- » Strengthening fostering and residential capacity
- » Better step-up/step-down / step-across pathways
- » A more consistent and supported workforce
- » A more balanced and resilient regional market that keeps children closer to home

This approach will help reduce unnecessary moves and improve long-term outcomes for children across the South East.

## CROSS-REGIONAL HOMES

The South East Regional Care Co-operative, working with Data to Insight (D2I) and the Department for Education (DfE), has analysed national data on cross-regional homes of children in care. While DfE routinely publishes statistics showing homes outside a child's responsible local authority boundary, these new analyses illustrate movement **between regions**, offering a clearer understanding of how far children are placed away from their home areas at a national scale.

These data, provided through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, show that regional capacity, geography, and the distribution of specialist provision strongly influence whether children can remain within their home region.

### NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Across England, **86%** of children in care are placed within their home region. However, there is significant variation:

- » **London** places the highest proportion outside its region (**23%**).
- » The **South East** is next at **19–20%**, followed by the **East of England (17%)** and the **South West (16%)**.
- » Regions in the north retain the highest proportions of children locally, with the **North West at 94%** and the **North East at 91%**.

These patterns reflect differences in residential capacity, the availability of specialist homes, and demand pressures such as adolescent need and UASC arrivals.

### SOUTH EAST – A HIGH-MOVEMENT REGION

The South East places **81% (2023)** and **80% (2024)** of its looked-after children within the region, meaning around 1 in 5 children live in homes outside the South East.

This makes the South East one of the highest-exporting regions nationally.

However, the South East is also one of the highest-importing regions.

### Outbound and Inbound Activity (2024)

- » Children placed by the South East outside the region: 2,190
- » Children placed in the South East by other regions: 1,970
- » Net movement: +220 children placed out-of-region

In practice, this means that although the South East sends more children elsewhere than it receives, it nevertheless acts as a regional hub for homes from London, the South West and the East of England.

## WHO THE SOUTH EAST EXCHANGES PLACEMENTS WITH?

Most cross-regional placements involving the South East occur with **three neighbouring regions**:

Direction	No. of children
From South East to London, South West, East of England	1,530
From London, South West, East of England to South East	1,660

These exchanges represent the majority of all cross-regional movement affecting the South East.

This pattern reflects:

- » Proximity and travel networks
- » High population density
- » Concentration of private providers in bordering regions
- » UASC arrivals and transfer arrangements
- » Specialist provision located across regional borders

## VARIATION BY HOME TYPE

Cross-regional movement is not evenly distributed across home types.

**Residential homes drive far more extra-regional movement than fostering.**

### Fostering vs Residential – % of Placements Retained in Region

Region	Fostering In-Region	Residential In-Region
North West	95%	91%
South East	<b>83%</b>	<b>71%</b>
South West	89%	63%
England	88%	77%

### Key Insight:

**Residential care is far more likely to require out-of-region provision**, especially for adolescents and children with complex needs.

In the South East, only **71%** of residential homes remain in-region — significantly lower than fostering.

This supports the emerging sufficiency picture:

- » local residential capacity does not currently meet demand, particularly for specialist adolescent provision.

## UASC AND CROSS-REGIONAL MOVEMENT

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) show different patterns due to:

- » Local dispersal arrangements
- » Port-of-entry geography
- » Inter-authority transfer processes

London, for example, places far more UASC outside the region than it hosts — except in relation to the South East, from which it receives a large proportion.

The South East has the **highest number of UASC placed outside its region of any English region (480)**.

This has important implications for both sufficiency and the design of regional UASC pathways.

## STABILITY OVER TIME

Regional proportions of in-region versus extra-regional homes were **largely unchanged between 2023 and 2024**.

This suggests that:

- » The pattern represents structural conditions in the market
- » Significant change is unlikely without deliberate regional action
- » Pressures on adolescent and residential capacity remain consistent

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SUFFICIENCY IN THE SOUTH EAST

### 1. Adolescent Residential Capacity Is the Key Driver

The low percentage of in-region residential homes (71%) indicates a mismatch between demand and supply, especially for:

- » high-needs adolescents
- » complex safeguarding risks
- » mental health and trauma-related behaviours

### 2. The South East is both an exporter and importer of children

This creates:

- » long-distance social work and IRO oversight
- » increased education disruption
- » reduced access to local family, community and cultural ties
- » cost escalation for homes outside the region

### 3. Strengthening regional provision is essential

Particularly:

- » therapeutic and specialist residential homes
- » adolescent step-up/step-across pathways
- » supported accommodation for 16–17-year-olds
- » emergency and crisis provision

### 4. Fostering remains more stable but pressured

With 83% of fostering homes staying in-region, sufficiency efforts must focus on:

- » specialist fostering
- » adolescent fostering
- » fostering-for-residential-stepdown
- » growing the supported lodgings market

LOVE +  
SUPPORT

### 5. A coordinated regional strategy is required

Given the scale of cross-regional flows, no individual authority can fully address the issue alone.

Home and Future provides the infrastructure for:

- » analysing provider distribution
- » joint commissioning
- » market development
- » shared standards and workforce development
- » targeted residential growth

### SUMMARY

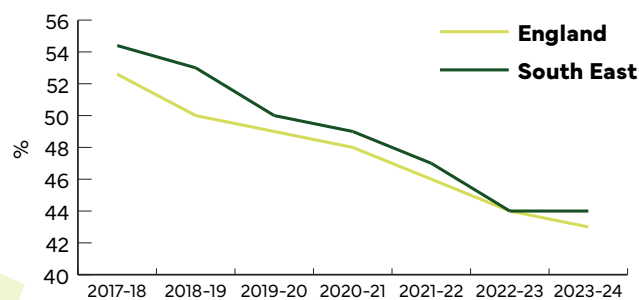
Cross-regional homes data shows that the South East has one of the **highest proportions of children placed outside its region**, largely driven by limited local residential capacity and high adolescent need. At the same time, the region also hosts large numbers of children from neighbouring regions, creating a complex pattern of movement.

Improving sufficiency in the South East will require coordinated regional action to expand local residential and specialist capacity, strengthen fostering, and reduce reliance on cross-regional solutions — ensuring more children can live close to their communities, schools and support networks.

# LOCAL AUTHORITY AND PRIVATE PROVISION

Understanding who provides homes — whether local authorities or private organisations — is a critical part of sufficiency analysis. Provider type affects cost, availability, flexibility, stability, and the ability of local authorities to shape the market around children’s needs. The two charts below show clear trends in the South East: **a declining reliance on local authority-run provision** and an **increasing share of homes made with private providers**, although the last year shows the start of a shift.

## CLA at 31 March by placement provider: % own provision (by the Local Authority)



## 1. LOCAL AUTHORITY PROVISION

The first chart shows a sustained and consistent decline in the proportion of children placed in local authority-run provision across both the South East and England.

### South East Trend

- » In 2017–18, around 19% of homes were provided by LAs.

- » This falls year on year, reaching around 6–7% by 2023–24.
- » The decline is steep and continuous, reflecting national restructures, changing workforce capacity, and reductions in LA-run residential homes.

### England Trend

- » England follows a similar pattern, reducing from around 17% to 5–6% over the same period.
- » The South East remains slightly above the national average throughout, but the trend direction is identical.

### What this means

The diminishing share of LA-run provision reflects:

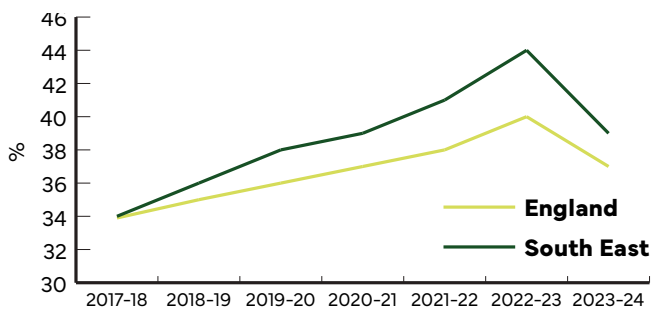
- » historical closures of LA residential homes
- » rising running costs and staffing challenges
- » a shift towards commissioning rather than direct delivery
- » increasing complexity of need, requiring specialist provision often delivered by the independent sector
- » foster carer attrition reducing LA-owned fostering capacity

This trend means that local authorities increasingly depend on external markets to meet core sufficiency duties.

## 2. PRIVATE PROVISION

The second chart shows the proportion of children living in homes delivered by **private providers**, including independent fostering agencies (IFAs), private residential children's homes, and private supported accommodation.

### CLA at 31 March by placement provider: % private provision



#### South East Trend

- » In 2017–18, private provision sat at around 34%.
- » This increased steadily, reaching 44% in 2022–23 — the highest point in the series.
- » In 2023–24, the percentage drops slightly to around 39%, but remains significantly higher than in earlier years.

#### England Trend

- » England also rises steadily from 34% to 40%, before a small drop in 2023–24.
- » The South East follows the same pattern but peaks **above** the national average.

### What this means

Private providers now make up a large proportion of the homes market. This reflects:

- » continued growth of the private residential and fostering sector
- » higher local demand than LA capacity can meet
- » the concentration of specialist provision (e.g. therapeutic homes) in the private market
- » strong regional dependence on private sector supported accommodation
- » challenges in LA recruitment and retention for fostering

The slight dip in the most recent year may indicate:

- » stabilisation in private foster care
- » increased opening of LA block-contract or semi-independent arrangements
- » new provision from voluntary sector entrants

However, the broader trend remains clear: the system relies heavily on private provision.

## WHAT THESE COMBINED TRENDS TELL US

### A. Increasing reliance on external market provision

As LA-run fostering and residential homes decrease, more homes are met by private providers.

This increases:

- » costs,
- » competition between LAs for vacancies,
- » and vulnerability to market instability.

### B. Private providers now play a central role in sufficiency

For many types of provision — particularly residential care — the private sector is the dominant supplier.

This reality must be acknowledged in regional planning and commissioning strategies.

### C. LA provision is no longer matching the level of need

The reduction in LA-operated homes and foster homes means:

- » fewer guaranteed local beds
- » reduced flexibility in matching children to the right home
- » lower control over the quality and stability of children's living arrangements

- » increased travel and distance when privately run homes are located far from children's home areas

### D. Market imbalance impacts placement cost and choice

Cost pressures arise when:

- » demand exceeds supply,
- » and most provision is delivered by private operators.  
The South East — with high property and workforce costs — is particularly exposed to pricing pressures.

### E. Regional collaboration becomes essential

With LAs individually operating fewer homes, the ability to shape the market must increasingly come from **regional influence**.

Home and Future is positioned to:

- » negotiate collectively
- » plan new provision strategically
- » expand not-for-profit and voluntary sector options
- » reduce reliance on high-cost private homes
- » design specialist services informed by real-time data from all 19 authorities

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FUTURE SUFFICIENCY

### 1. Rebalancing the market

The region will need a mix of:

- » new LA-run or LA-commissioned residential homes
- » specialist not-for-profit provision
- » strengthened local fostering hubs
- » better integration of IFA fostering with regional needs

### 2. Expansion of not-for-profit options

Increased voluntary or LA-owned provision helps:

- » moderate costs
- » improve local control
- » align services with local needs
- » reduce long-distance homes

### 3. Better visibility and planning through Home and Future

The new regional data infrastructure will:

- » track homes by provider type in real time
- » highlight gaps and cost pressures
- » support collaborative commissioning
- » allow the region to negotiate from a stronger position in the market

### 4. A more intentional approach to provider partnerships

The region will need to build:

- » sustainable relationships with high-quality private providers
- » joint quality assurance
- » shared training and workforce development
- » strategic market-shaping plans

## SUMMARY

Local authority homes provision has steadily declined across the South East, while private provision has increased significantly and now accounts for a large share of the regional market. These trends reflect national patterns but have particular implications in a region with high demand, high complexity, and uneven distribution of local residential capacity.

Rebalancing the market — through strengthened LA fostering, development of local residential services, expansion of not-for-profit provision, and strategic regional partnerships — will be critical to delivering the sufficiency children in the South East deserve.

## PROVIDER AND MARKET SHAPING SUMMARY

The patterns across provider type and home locality clearly show that the South East is increasingly reliant on a private homes market that was not designed to operate strategically at regional scale. As local authority-run residential homes and in-house foster care have reduced over time, private providers have filled the gap — particularly in specialist residential and supported accommodation.

While private provision forms an essential part of the overall system, this increasing reliance brings challenges. Homes are often located outside a child's home area because provision is concentrated in regions where operating costs are lower. This contributes to rising long-distance homes and reduces local choice for children and young people. It also means local authorities have limited influence over price, availability, or the development of new provision.

The South East needs a more intentional approach to shaping the homes market. This includes strengthening local fostering, expanding local residential capacity, and building a broader not-for-profit offer that reduces dependence on high-cost, geographically distant provision. Equally important is building constructive, long-term relationships with high-quality private providers so they can play a part in meeting the region's needs in a stable and predictable way.

Home and Future provides a unique opportunity for the region to plan collectively. Through shared intelligence, joint commissioning and market engagement, and interactive data from all 19 local authorities, the region will be able to identify gaps, understand demand more accurately, and shape a more balanced and sustainable homes market.

This will enable better value, better stability, and better outcomes for children.



# SUFFICIENCY PRIORITIES FOR THE SOUTH EAST

The data across this sufficiency statement highlights a number of clear and pressing priorities for the South East region. These priorities reflect shared challenges across all 19 local authorities, as well as opportunities created through Home and Future's regional model, the Data App, and the growth of collaborative commissioning.

These priorities should guide local and regional planning, commissioning, and market engagement over the next 12–24 months.

## 1. STRENGTHEN LOCAL FOSTERING CAPACITY

The South East has experienced a significant decline in the proportion of children placed in foster care — and the shortage is particularly acute for:

- » adolescents
- » children with complex needs
- » sibling groups
- » unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

### Priority actions:

- » Recruit and retain more local foster carers
- » Expand specialist and therapeutic fostering
- » Build adolescent-focused fostering capacity

- » Use the South East Fostering Hub to coordinate recruitment and reduce competition
- » Improve support offers, respite, and training to stabilise the workforce

## 2. INCREASE LOCAL RESIDENTIAL PROVISION

Demand for residential care continues to rise, and the South East places a higher proportion of children in residential homes than England overall. Lack of sufficient local provision contributes directly to:

- » increased cost of homes
- » reliance on private providers
- » out-of-area and long-distance homes

### Priority actions:

- » Develop more residential homes across the region
- » Diversify the types of residential support (therapeutic, small homes, SEND-focused, step-across)
- » Improve geographic spread to reduce long-distance homes
- » Shape new provision based on interactive Data from the Data App

### **3. REDUCE AVOIDABLE OUT-OF-AREA AND LONG-DISTANCE HOMES**

The number of children placed outside their local authority and more than 20 miles from home continues to increase. While for some children distance is appropriate, many homes reflect gaps in local capacity.

#### **Priority actions:**

- » Build more local placements (foster and residential)
- » Reduce reliance on distant private provision
- » Improve stability in school and family contact by keeping children closer to home
- » Create regional strategies for adolescents and complex needs to avoid distant homes

### **4. EXPAND NOT-FOR-PROFIT AND LOCAL AUTHORITY-LED PROVISION**

Local authority provision has declined significantly, while private provision has grown. The region needs a better balance of provider types to:

- » reduce costs
- » increase stability
- » improve influence over quality and practice
- » support long-term strategic planning

#### **Priority actions:**

- » Grow not-for-profit provision
- » Re-establish or expand LA-run residential and fostering options
- » Use joint commissioning to shape new provision in areas of need
- » Partner with voluntary sector providers to fill specialist gaps

### **5. DEVELOP SPECIALIST AND THERAPEUTIC CAPACITY**

Many children placed far from home require:

- » trauma-informed support
- » therapeutic residential homes
- » SEND-specific provision
- » support for complex adolescent behaviours

These types of provision are often limited or unevenly distributed.

#### **Priority actions:**

- » Commission specialist fostering and residential provision locally
- » Pilot joint regional therapeutic models
- » Improve cross-agency planning (health, education, CAMHS) to underpin provision
- » Support step-up / step-across pathways between residential and fostering

## 6. STRENGTHEN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGH-QUALITY PRIVATE PROVIDERS

Given the scale of private provision in the region, the goal is not to replace private providers but to work with them more intentionally and strategically.

### Priority actions:

- » Establish long-term partnerships with high-quality providers
- » Use aggregated regional needs to shape new services
- » Develop frameworks or block arrangements that stabilise cost and availability
- » Improve joint quality assurance and workforce standards

## 7. LEVERAGE HOME AND FUTURE'S REGIONAL DATA AND COMMISSIONING INFRASTRUCTURE

The full value of regional sufficiency will only be realised when all 19 LAs participate fully in the Home and Future Data App and commissioning processes. Eleven LAs have completed agreements so far, and this momentum needs to continue.

### Priority actions:

- » Complete all data sharing agreements
- » Upload accurate monthly data of where children live
- » Use real-time dashboards to forecast demand and identify gaps
- » Coordinate regional commissioning to influence the market
- » Share intelligence to prevent duplication and strengthen negotiation power

## NEXT STEPS

This first regional Sufficiency Statement marks the starting point of a shared and long-term approach to understanding demand, shaping provision and strengthening the system for children across the South East. Over the coming months, Home and Future will work closely with local authorities and our wider partners to move from insight into action.

Our next steps will include:

### **Agreeing a shared regional approach to the priorities identified in this report**

We will coordinate discussions with Directors of Children's Services, the Commissioning Board and operational leads to ensure we have collective agreement on which areas should be progressed first, and how regional work can add the greatest value.

### **Developing a regional delivery plan**

Using the priorities set out in this statement, we will co-design a practical plan that sets out the actions, responsibilities and timelines for strengthening sufficiency across the South East.

### **Deepening our understanding through quarterly updates and thematic deep dives**

As more local authorities connect to the Data App, we will continue to publish regular quarterly updates. These will track changes in demand, capacity and market conditions, and will include focused deep dives on key themes. The next update, due in April 2026, will examine market position, costs and transparency.

### **Strengthening collaboration with providers and partners**

We will use these insights to engage collectively with the provider market, NHS partners, voluntary organisations and the wider workforce so that future development is aligned with real need and supports children to stay closer to home.

### **Building the foundations for future regional commissioning**

The insights from this first statement will inform the design of regional commissioning approaches, helping us create a more balanced, sustainable and better-coordinated homes and support offer for children and young people.

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This statement is only the beginning. By continuing to work together, sharing intelligence and acting collectively, we can build a stronger, more resilient regional system — one that ensures every child in the South East has the right place to live, the right support, and the best possible chance to thrive.

## SOUTH EAST SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY — CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS CHART

Priority Area	What the Data Shows	Regional Actions Needed	Owner / Lead	Timeframe
<b>1. Rebuild Fostering Capacity</b>	Declining fostering share; acute adolescent shortage; UASC pressures; rising 10–17 cohort.	Launch SE Fostering Hub- Recruit adolescent, therapeutic & sibling-group carers- Improve support, respite & retention- Reduce IFA dependency	Home & Future + LAs	12–24 months
<b>2. Expand Local Residential Provision</b>	SE above national use; only 71% of residential homes kept in-region; high long-distance use.	Develop new children’s homes- Expand therapeutic, SEND and step-across homes - Broaden geographical distribution	LAs + Home & Future	12–36 months
<b>3. Strengthen 16+ Supported Accommodation &amp; Supported Lodgings</b>	SE has one of the highest proportions in England; rising complexity; mixed quality; supported lodgings shortages.	Map and quality-assure regional provision- Recruit supported lodgings hosts- Commission specialist and step-across models- Improve workforce standards	Home & Future + LAs	12–24 months
<b>4. Reduce Long-Distance &amp; Cross-Regional Homes</b>	19% of SE children placed outside region; rising 20+ mile homes; residential gaps driving movement.	Expand local adolescent and specialist provision- Joint commissioning for specialist needs- Strengthen education and family continuity planning	LAs + Home & Future	Ongoing
<b>5. Rebalance the Provider Market</b>	Decline in LA provision; growth of private providers; high cost and reduced control.	Grow LA-led and not-for-profit provision- Develop strategic provider partnerships- Introduce regional frameworks & block arrangements	Home & Future + LAs	12–36 months

Priority Area	What the Data Shows	Regional Actions Needed	Owner / Lead	Timeframe
<b>6. Build a Stable &amp; Skilled Workforce</b>	High turnover; recruitment challenges; inconsistent CPD; workforce impacts stability.	Launch SE Workforce Academy - Create shared CPD and mentoring- Establish leadership pathways - Develop shared workforce standards	Home & Future	12–24 months
<b>7. Improve Data Quality &amp; Real-Time Insight</b>	Partial participation in Data App; rising adolescent demand; inconsistent local intelligence.	Complete Data Sharing Agreements - Ensure quarterly data uploads - Use dashboards to forecast demand & shape commissioning	All LAs + Home & Future	Immediate – 12 months
<b>8. Develop Specialist Adolescent Pathways</b>	Adolescents drive instability and long-distance homes; growing complexity in 14–17 group.	Commission therapeutic adolescent fostering & residential - Build regional emergency/crisis options- Develop step-up/step-across pathways	LAs + Health + Home & Future	12–36 months
<b>9. Strengthen UASC Pathways &amp; Provision</b>	SE has highest number of UASC placed outside region; high 16+ demand.	Expand UASC-specific supported accommodation - Grow supported lodgings - Develop regional health/ education pathway	LAs + Home & Future	Ongoing
<b>10. Improve Cross-Agency Integration (Health, SEND, CAMHS, ICBs)</b>	Health and SEND pressures impact home availability & stability; SE working to align CANS.	Joint commissioning with ICBs - Align CANS tool with regional sufficiency planning - Build multi-disciplinary wraparound support	Home & Future + Health	12–24 months

Priority Area	What the Data Shows	Regional Actions Needed	Owner / Lead	Timeframe
<b>11. Address Imbalance in Cross-Regional Provision Flows</b>	SE both exports (2190) and imports (1970) children; residential capacity a core driver.	Develop local residential capacity - Negotiate regional provider distribution - Reduce unnecessary cross-regional moves	Home & Future + LAs	12-36 months
<b>12. Reduce Reliance on DoL Orders and Unregistered / Unlawful Homes</b>	Sharp increase in DoL orders nationally and regionally; rise in bespoke high-cost arrangements; limited crisis and specialist adolescent provision; unregistered homes used when no regulated alternative exists; shortages in therapeutic and secure options.	Develop regional crisis and emergency regulated provision for high-risk adolescents- Expand local therapeutic and step-across residential capacity to reduce DoL and bespoke packages- Establish regional oversight panel to track DoL and unregistered homes to use- Strengthen joint working with ICBs/CAMHS for acute risk, mental health and self-harm presentations- Implement rapid regional commissioning protocols to prevent unlawful homes - Build pathways to transition children from DoL/ unregistered arrangements into regulated homes quickly	Home & Future + LAs + Health	Immediate - 24 months

HOME  
+  
FUTURE

NOVEMBER 2025