

## Evidence of the shortage in West Sussex

- **Increased demand:** As of March 2025, there were 974 children in the care of West Sussex County Council, a 38% increase since March 2018.
- **Out-of-county placements:** Due to the shortage of suitable local places, West Sussex children are often placed in homes a significant distance away, sometimes hundreds of miles from their communities. For example, in 2018/19, some children with complex needs were placed as far away as Lincolnshire and Scotland.
- **Use of crisis placements:** The lack of long-term provision means the council increasingly relies on costly, short-term crisis placements, which are often in remote locations.
- **Issues with placement quality:** The insufficient supply means the council sometimes has to secure placements that do not adequately meet the complex needs of the children.

## Contributing factors

- **Market control:** The residential children's home market is dominated by private equity firms and overseas investors. These providers have been slow to increase capacity, citing challenges like high property prices in the South East and workforce recruitment.
- **Decreased foster care:** A shortage of local foster carers contributes to the increased demand for residential care.
- **Complex needs:** Many children with the most complex needs require specialist care that is not available within the county.
- **Financial pressures:** The high cost of sourcing placements, especially from the private market and for complex needs, adds financial risk to the council.

## West Sussex County Council's response

West Sussex County Council is actively addressing the shortage with new strategies and initiatives:

- **Children's Homes Collaborative:** In March 2025, the council was recognized for this initiative, which aims to create 30 new local residential placements over two years. This project is a direct alternative to using unregistered provisions and out-of-county homes.

- **Commissioning new providers:** As of late 2024, the council began working with new residential providers to create additional small homes (2–3 bedrooms) within or near West Sussex. This model seeks to attract new entrants to the sector by offering support for recruitment, workforce development, and regulatory advice.
- **Early intervention:** The council's "Early Help Strategy" focuses on providing support to families earlier to prevent more children from entering the care system.
- **Collaboration with partners:** The council is involved in a South East Regional Care Cooperative to increase placement options through collaboration.