Looked after children: trends in numbers, rates & spend

Including the Cordis Bright Looked After Children Stress Test

2020

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Introduction

- This document uses publicly available data to examine recent trends in the numbers, rates and spend on **looked after children (LAC)** in England.
- The first section presents national trends from **2012 to 2019**.
- The second section examines **trends across local authorities**.
- As part of this, it highlights those **local authorities** that we think, from the data, **may be experiencing the most pressures in catering for LAC**.
- We also highlight local authorities that may be **sites of effective practice**.

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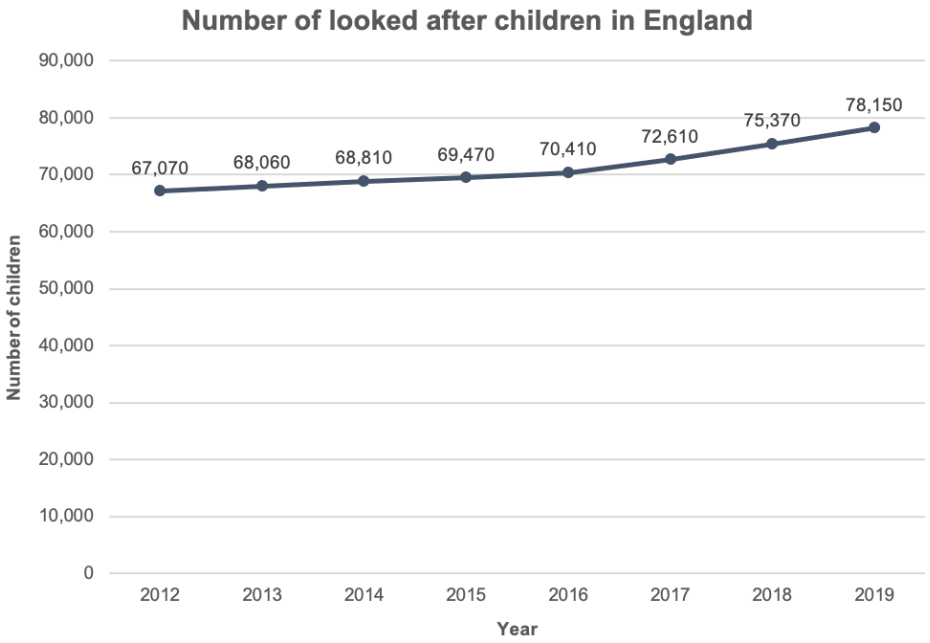
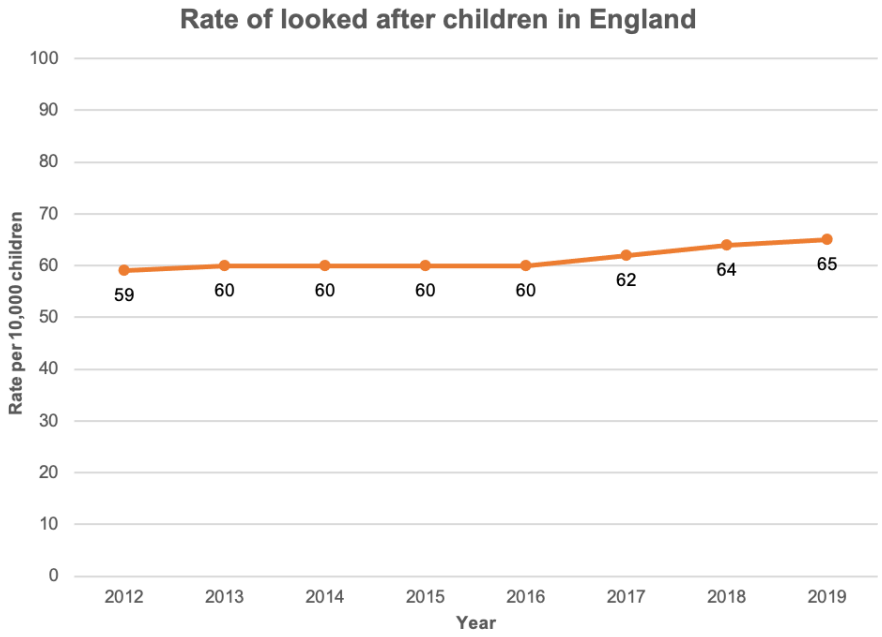
Number and rate of looked after children





Between 2012 and 2019, the number of LAC at 31 March increased from **67,070** to **78,150**, i.e. **16.5% increase**. The rate of LAC remained **relatively static** (at 60 per 10,000) **until 2016**, after which it increased by **approximately 1.6 children per 10,000 each year**. The increase in numbers, therefore, is driven by something other than overall population growth. Increases are likely to be due to complex and multi-faceted reasons.

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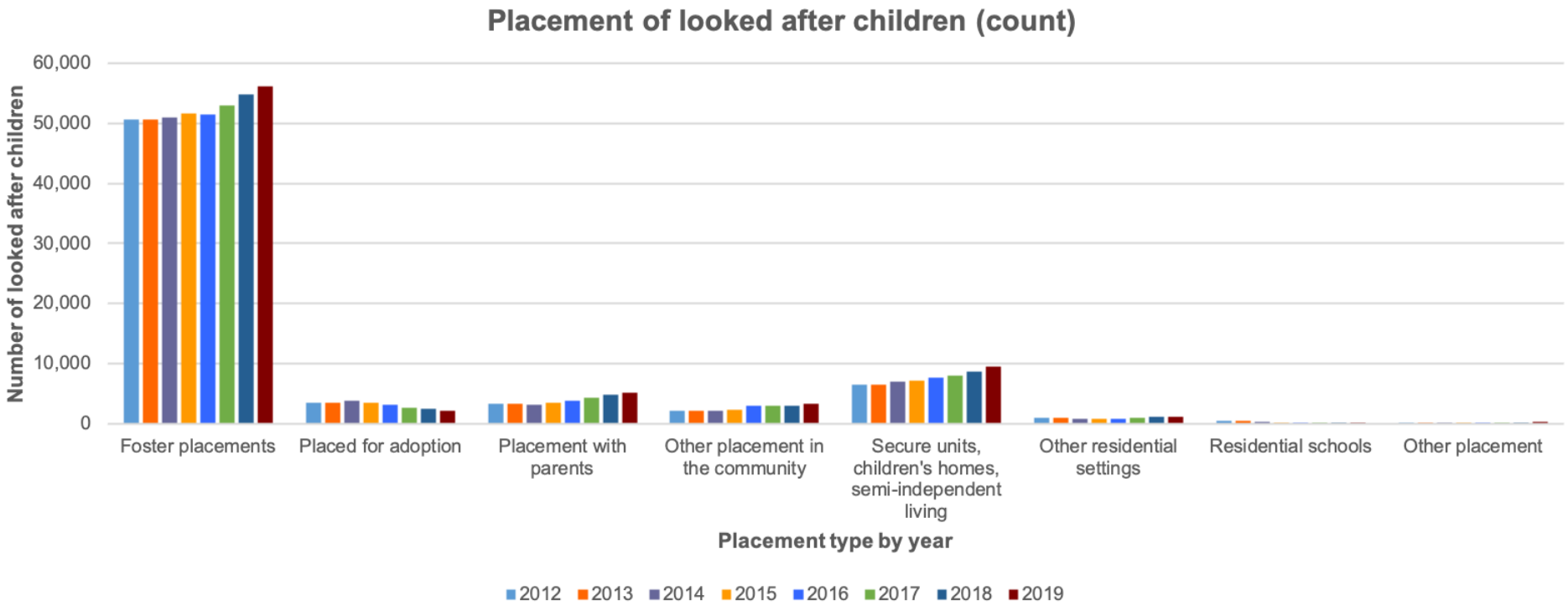
Placement of looked after children (#)



On average, approximately **52,600 LAC are placed in foster care** and these numbers have increased year-on-year. The next largest number of LAC are placed in **'secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living**'. Since 2014, the number of children placed for adoption has fallen consistently, whilst placements with parents have risen.

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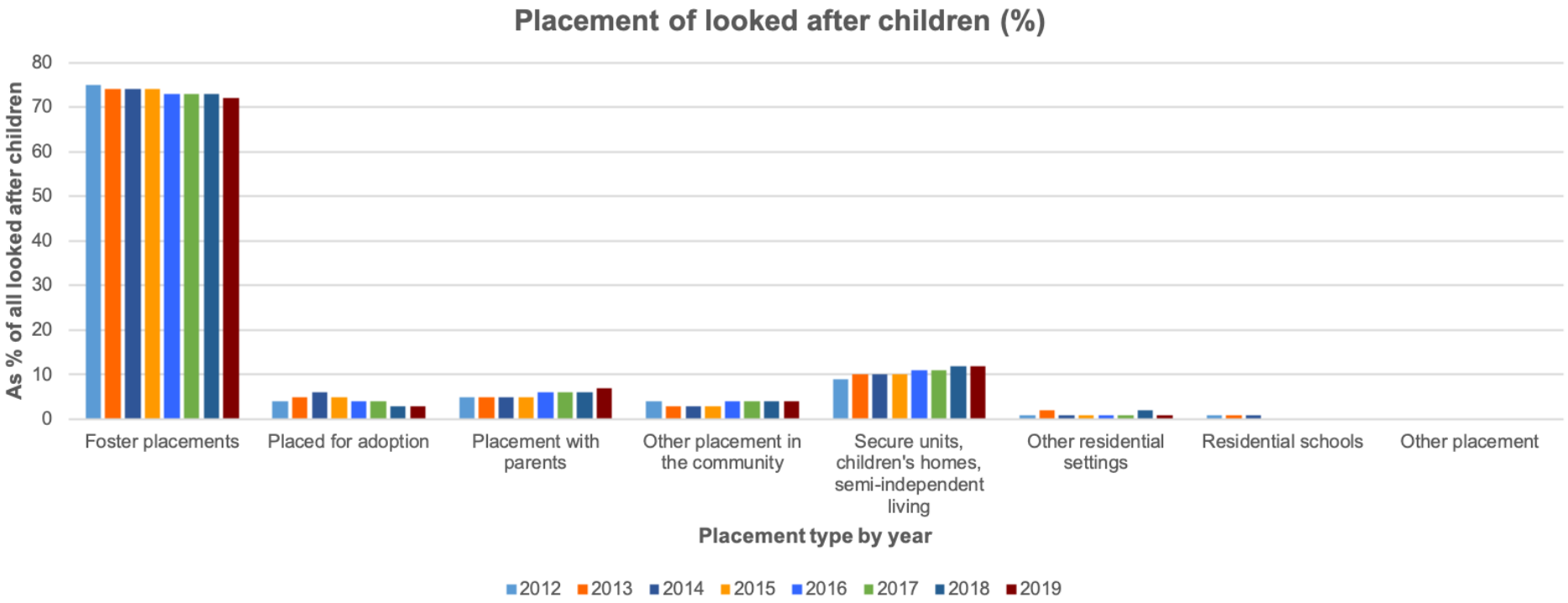
Placement of looked after children (%)



Since 2013, there has been a **2% decrease** in the **proportion of LAC in foster placements and in placements for adoption**. In comparison, there has been a **2% increase** in the **proportion of LAC in secure units, children's homes, and semi-independent living and in placements with parents**. This suggests that the growth in numbers of LAC over this period is not catered for by an even distribution of placement types.

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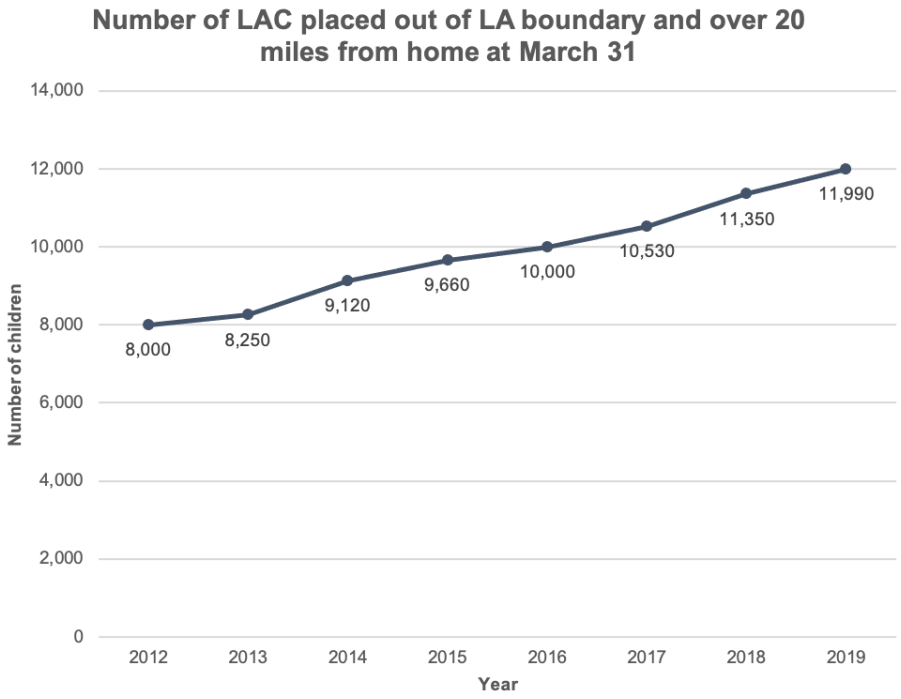
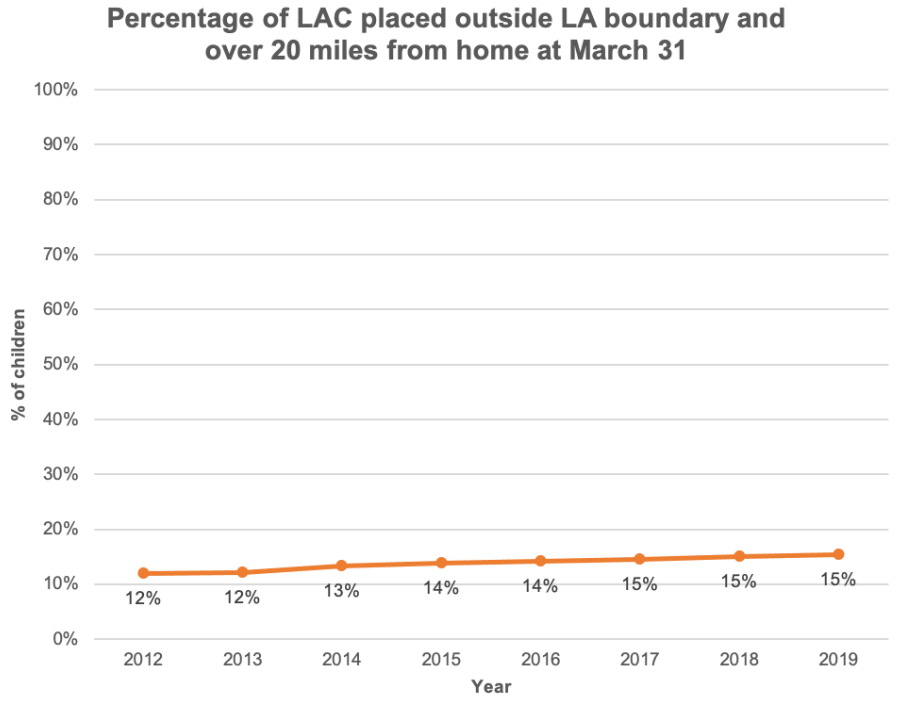
Placement of LAC 20+ miles away & outside of local authority boundary





The number of LAC being placed more than 20 miles away and outside the local authority boundary has increased from **8,000 in 2012** to **11,990 in 2019**, **an increase of 49.8%**.

Between 2013 and 2019, the proportion of LAC placed far from home increased from **12%** to **15%.** This suggests that local areas were finding it difficult to find capacity locally to cater for these children. However, since 2017, **the proportion has remained static at 15%,** suggesting that local authorities have stabilised provision locally.

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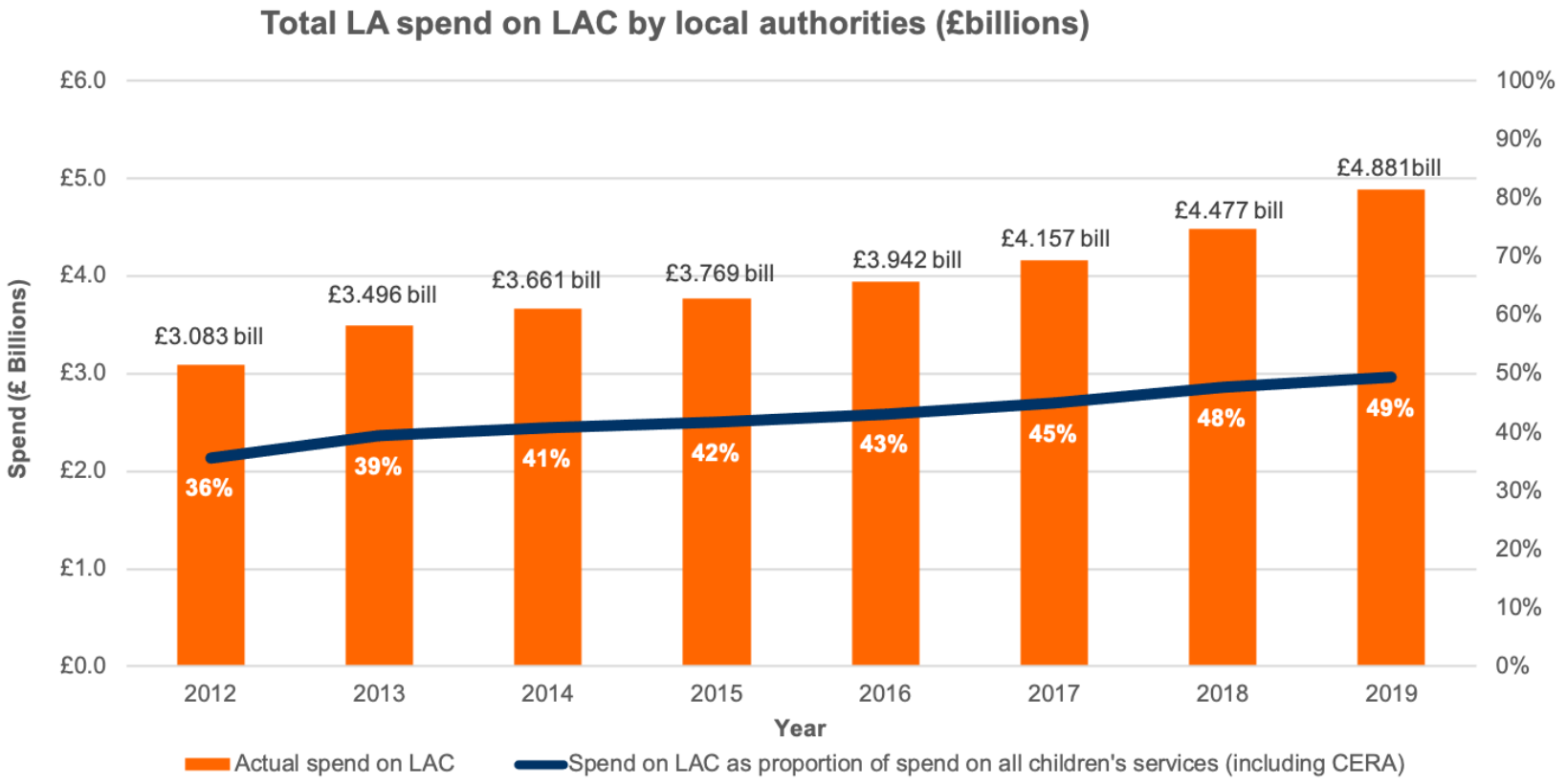
Total spend on looked after children



Total spending by local authorities on LAC has increased by **58% since 2012**, from **£3.083bn to £4.881bn in 2019**. This is above the predicted increase of **38.6%** based on rise in numbers of **LAC (16.5%)** and **CPI inflation (19%)**, so represents a real terms spending increase. Over this period, spending on LAC also absorbed an increasing proportion of total spend on children's services, from **36% in 2012 to 49% in 2019**.

CERA = Capital Expenditure from Revenue Account

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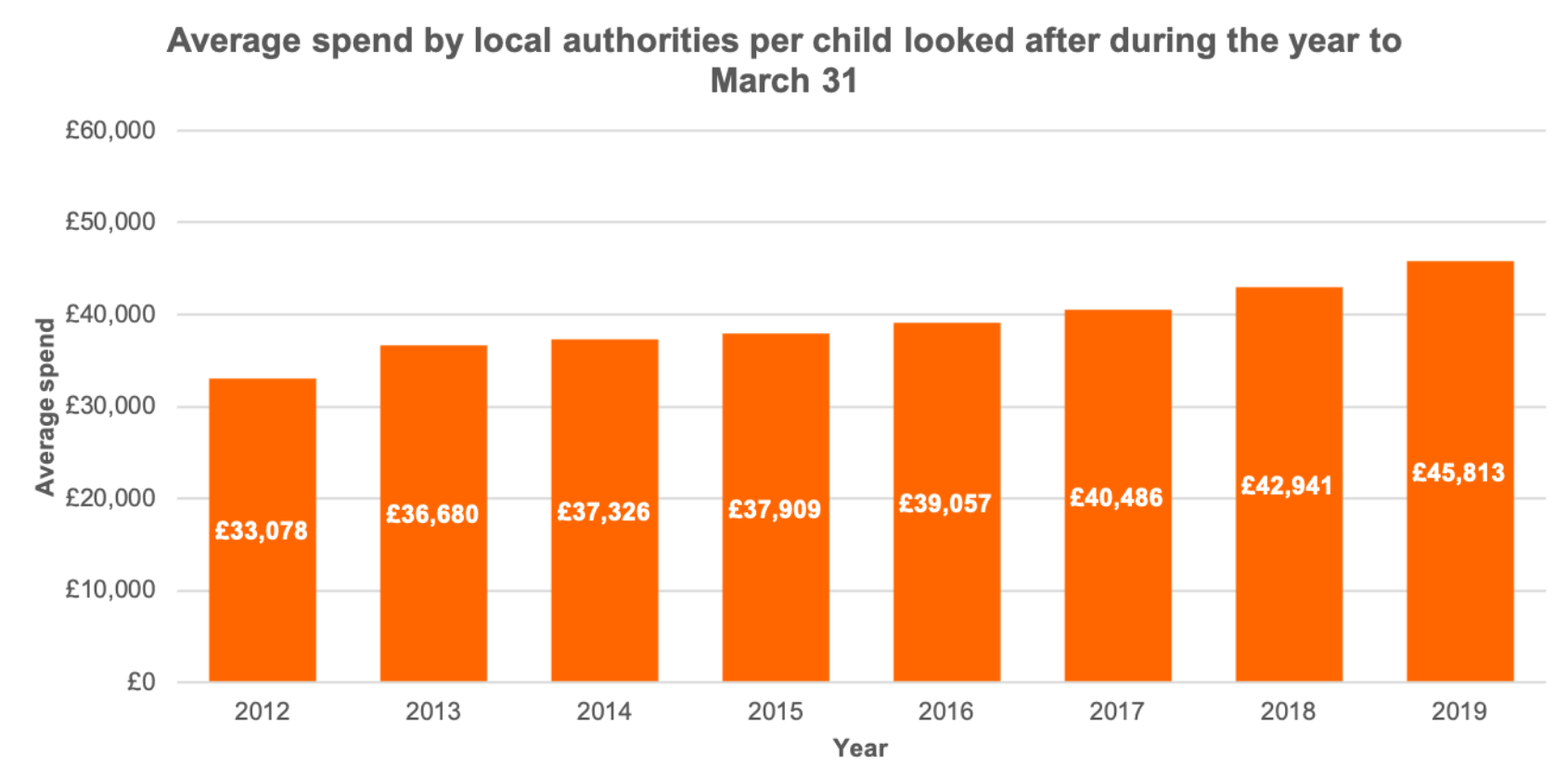
Spend per looked after child per year



The average spend per LAC has also been increasing year-on-year. The average has risen from **£33,078 to £45,813, representing a 38.4% increas**e. Given that CPI inflation over the same period was **19%**, the average spend surpasses the expected average spend of **£39,362** in 2019 by approximately **£6,500.** This suggests that average spend per LAC has increased in real terms.

Averages are based on total number of children looked after over the course of the year.

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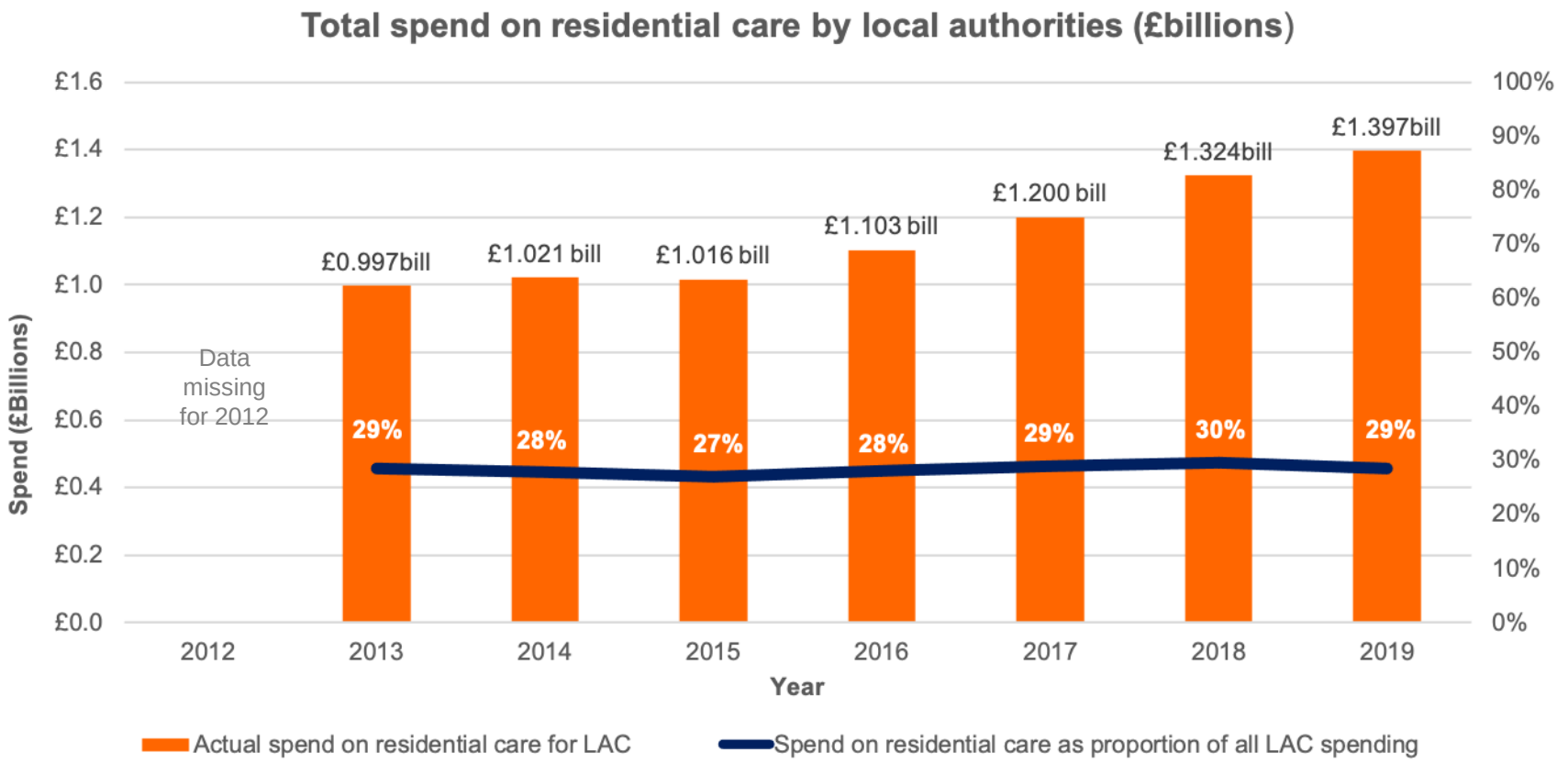
Spend on residential care for LAC



Total spend on residential care has increased from **£0.997bn in 2012 to £1.397bn in 2019**, representing an **increase of 40%.** This is below the predicted increase of **51%** based on **the rise in numbers of children in residential care (27%) and CPI inflation (19%)** over this period, so represents a real terms decrease in local authority spending on residential care.

Total LAC in residential care calculated using figures for 'other placement in the community', 'secure units, children's homes, semi-independent living', other residential settings', residential schools', other placement'.

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The Looked After Children Stress Test

Investigating beyond national averages, finding differences between local authorities

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Introduction to the stress test

- The national averages disguise substantial differences **between local authorities in numbers, rates and spend on LAC**.
- This section examines these differences and highlights those **local authorities (LAs)** that the data suggests **might be experiencing the most challenges in catering for looked after children**.
- The **indicators** included in the analysis are shown below.

Indicators (2019)
Rate of LAC
Percentage of LAC in residential care
Percentage of LAC 20 miles or more from home and outside local authority boundary
Percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC
Percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care

Indicators (2014-2019)
Change in rate of LAC
Change in percentage of LAC in residential care
Change in percentage of LAC placed in residential care
Change in percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC
Change in percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care

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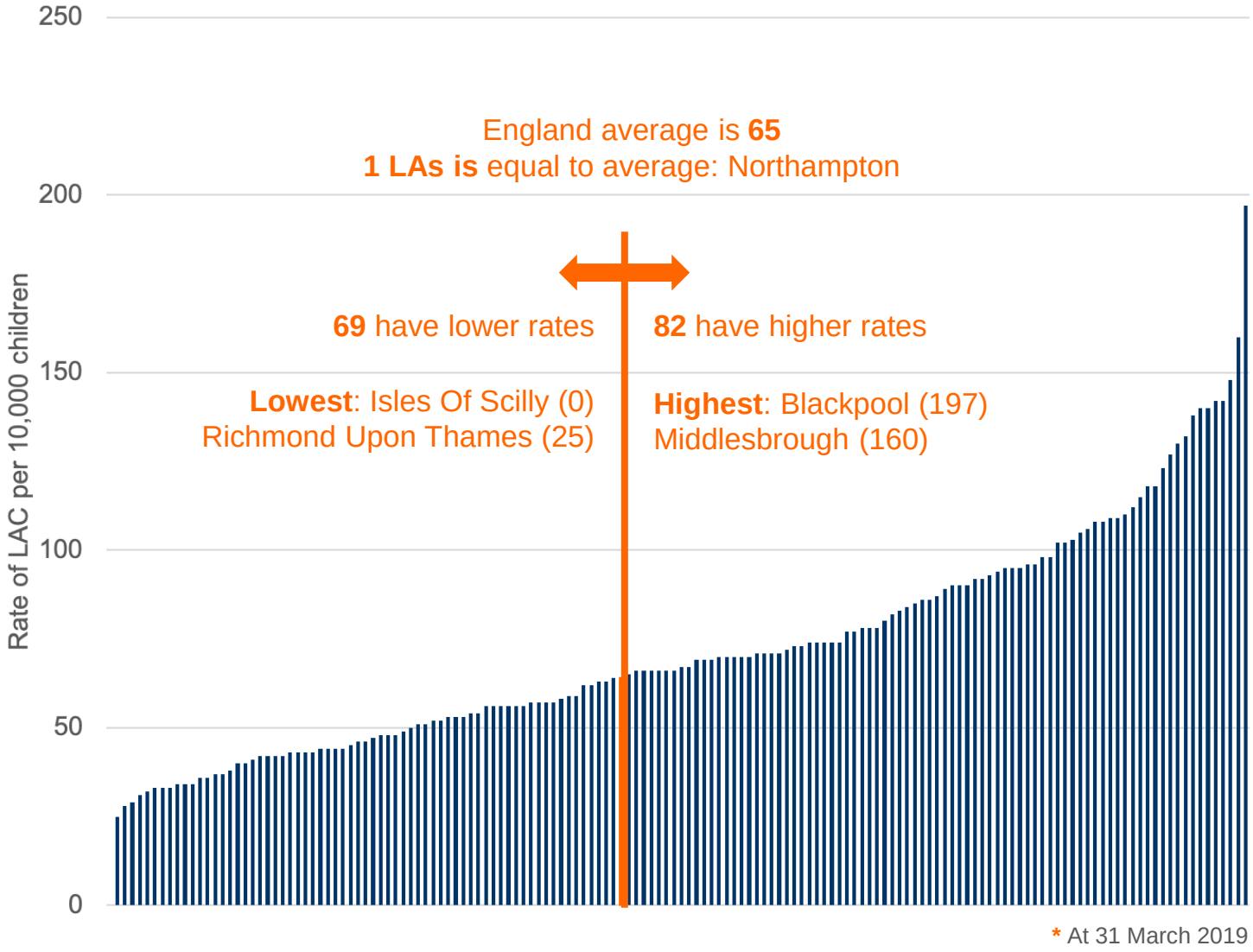
Rate of LAC (2019)*



* At 31 March 2019

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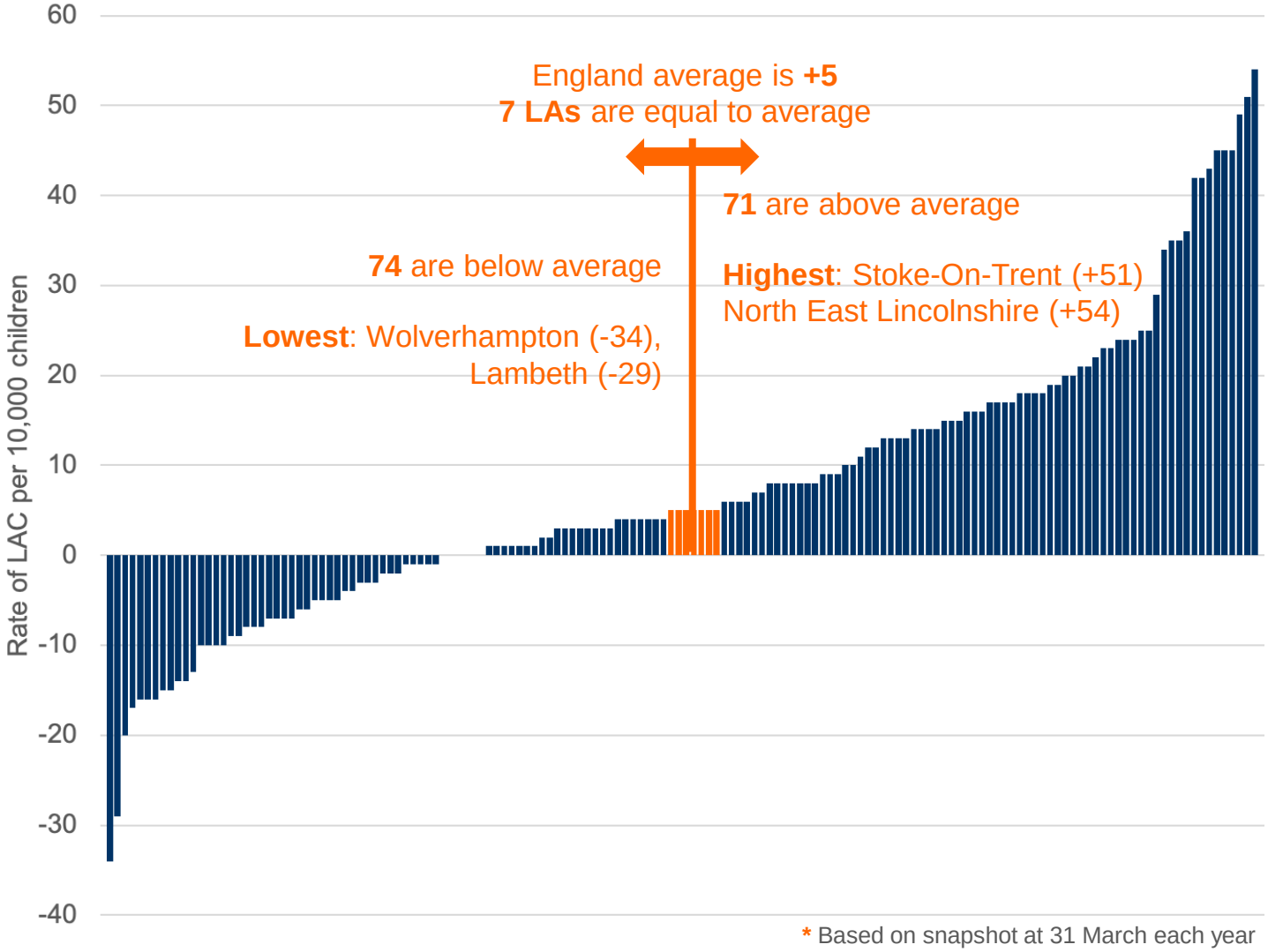
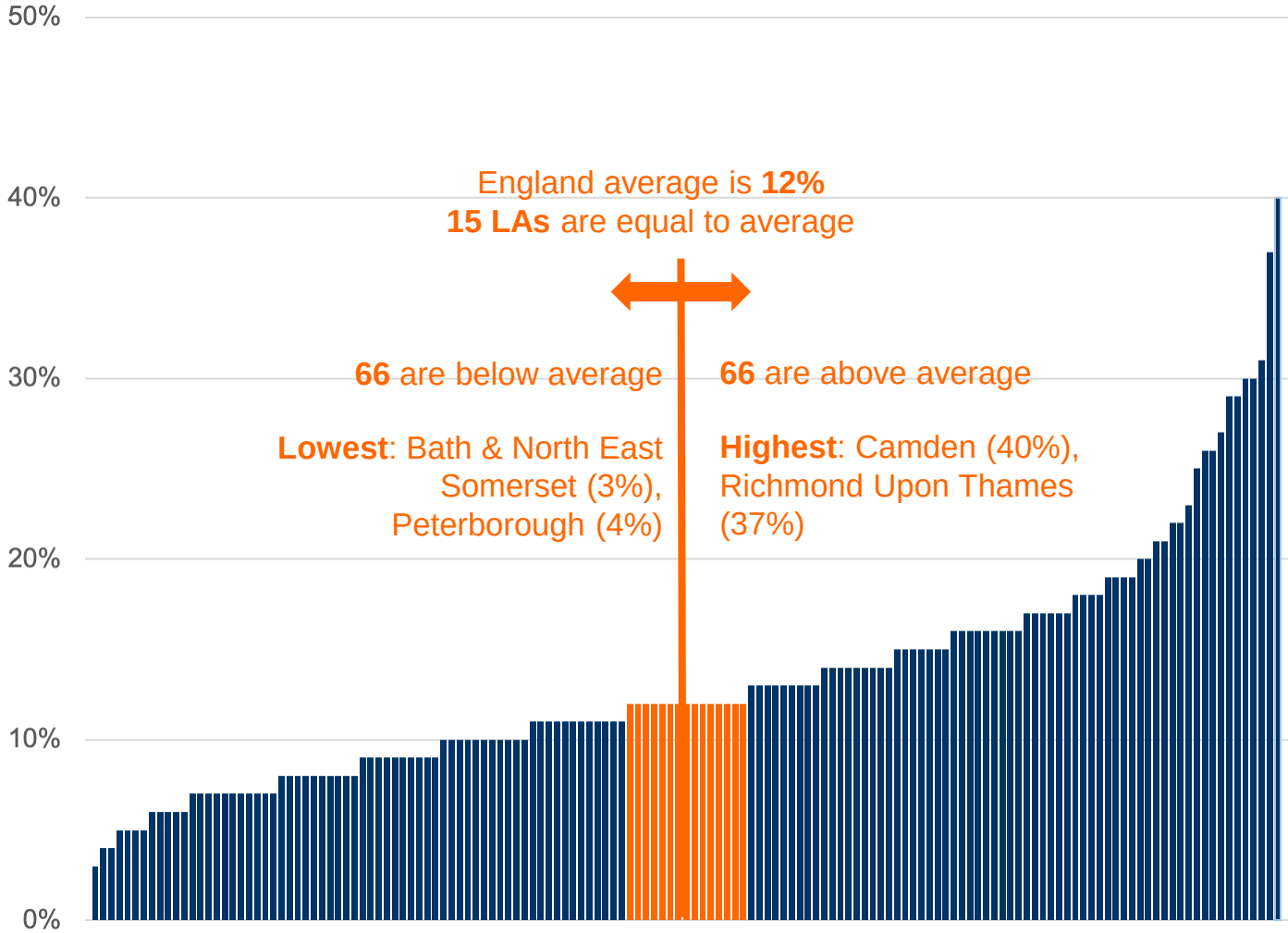
Change in rate of LAC (2014 – 2019)*



* Based on snapshot at 31 March each year

Percentage of LAC in residential care (2019)*



* Based on snapshot on 31 March 2019 of LAC placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation. Other residential placements not included due to missing data. Data missing from Isles of Scilly, Hammersmith & Fulham, Rutland, Sandwell, and Swindon missing for reasons of confidentiality.

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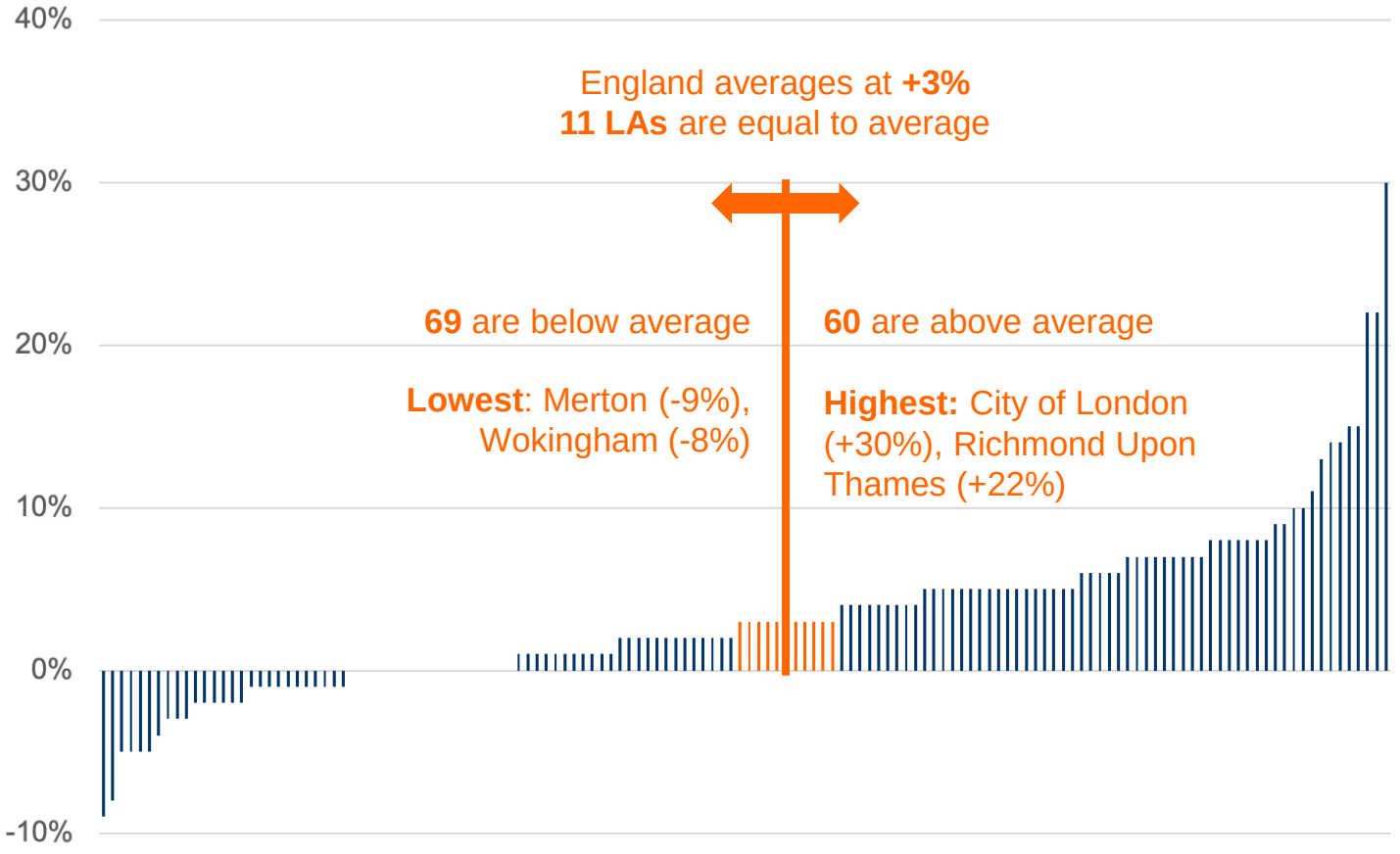
Change in percentage of LAC in residential care (2014 – 2019)*



* Based on snapshot on 31 March 2019 of LAC placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation. Other residential placements not included due to missing data. Data missing from Barking and Dagenham, Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Hammersmith & Fulham, Isles of Scilly, Kingston Upon Thames, Poole, Reading, Rutland, Sandwell, South Gloucestershire and Swindon for reasons of confidentiality.

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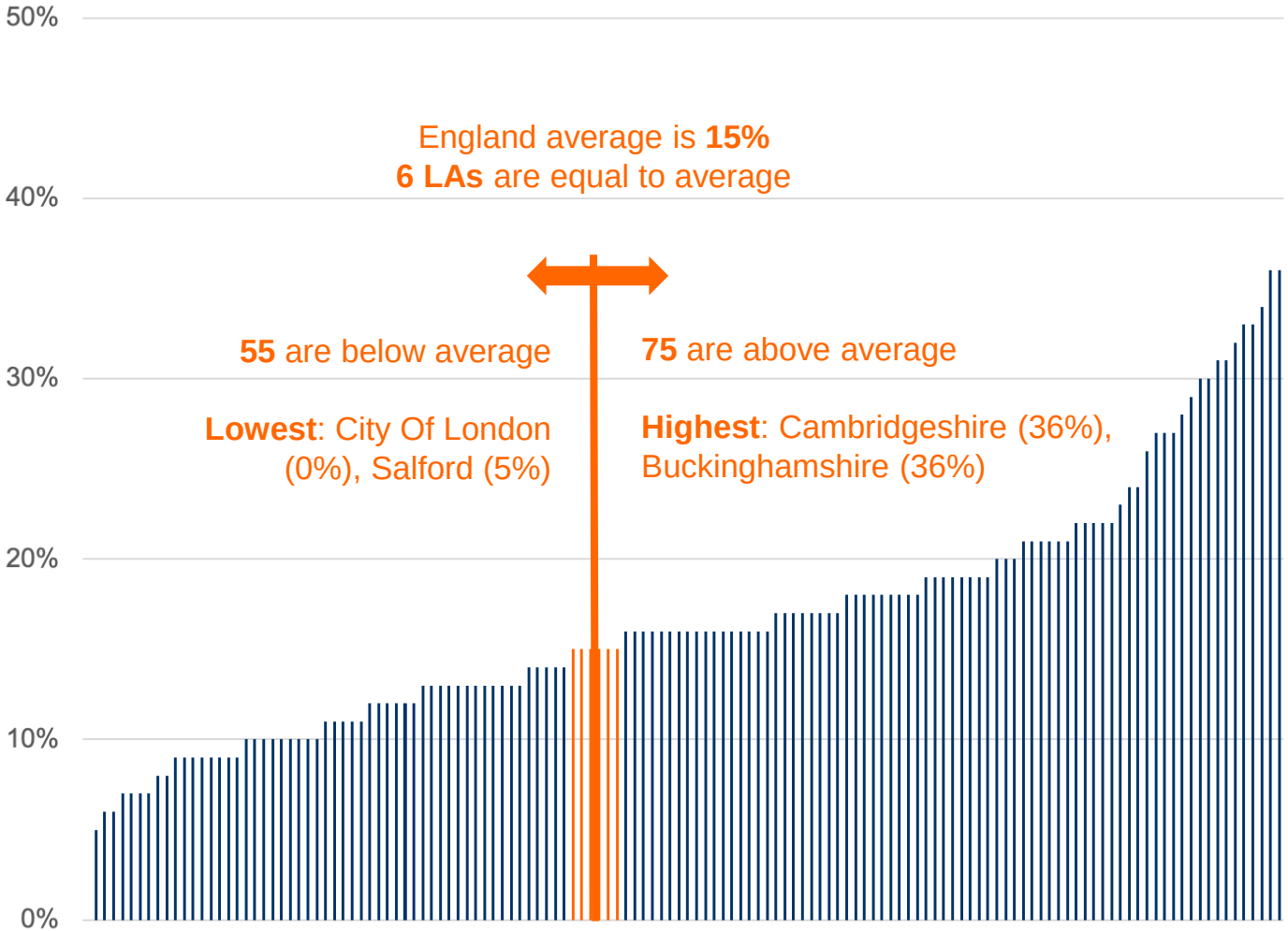
Percentage of LAC placed 20+ miles away & outside of LA boundary (2019)*



* Based on snapshot at 31 March 2019. Data missing for 16 local authorities for reasons of confidentiality (see Appendix A for full list).

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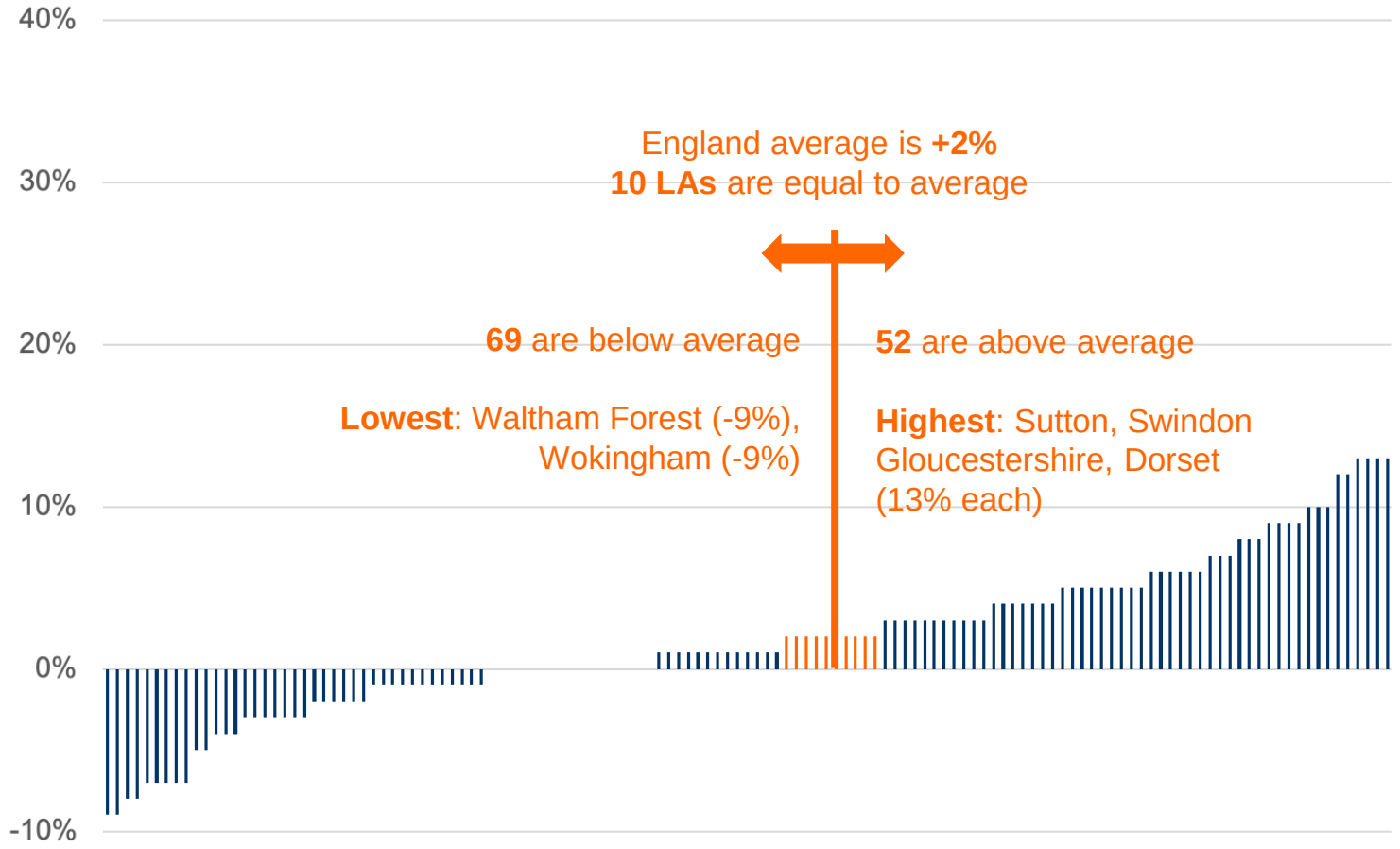
Change in percentage of LAC placed 20+ miles & outside LA boundary (2014-19)*



* Based on snapshot at 31 March each year. Data missing from 21 local authorities for reasons of confidentiality, listed in Appendix B.

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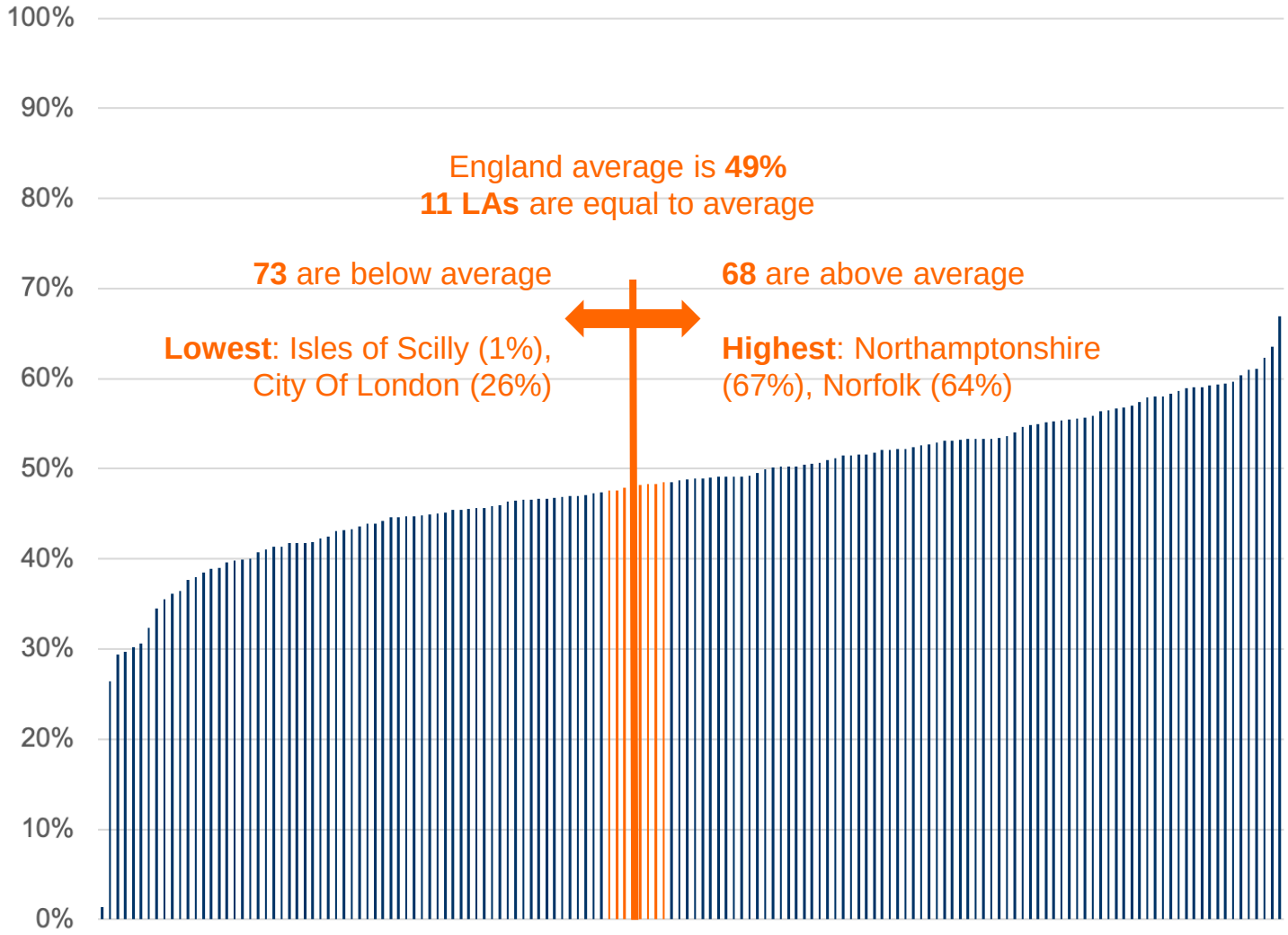
Percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC (2019)



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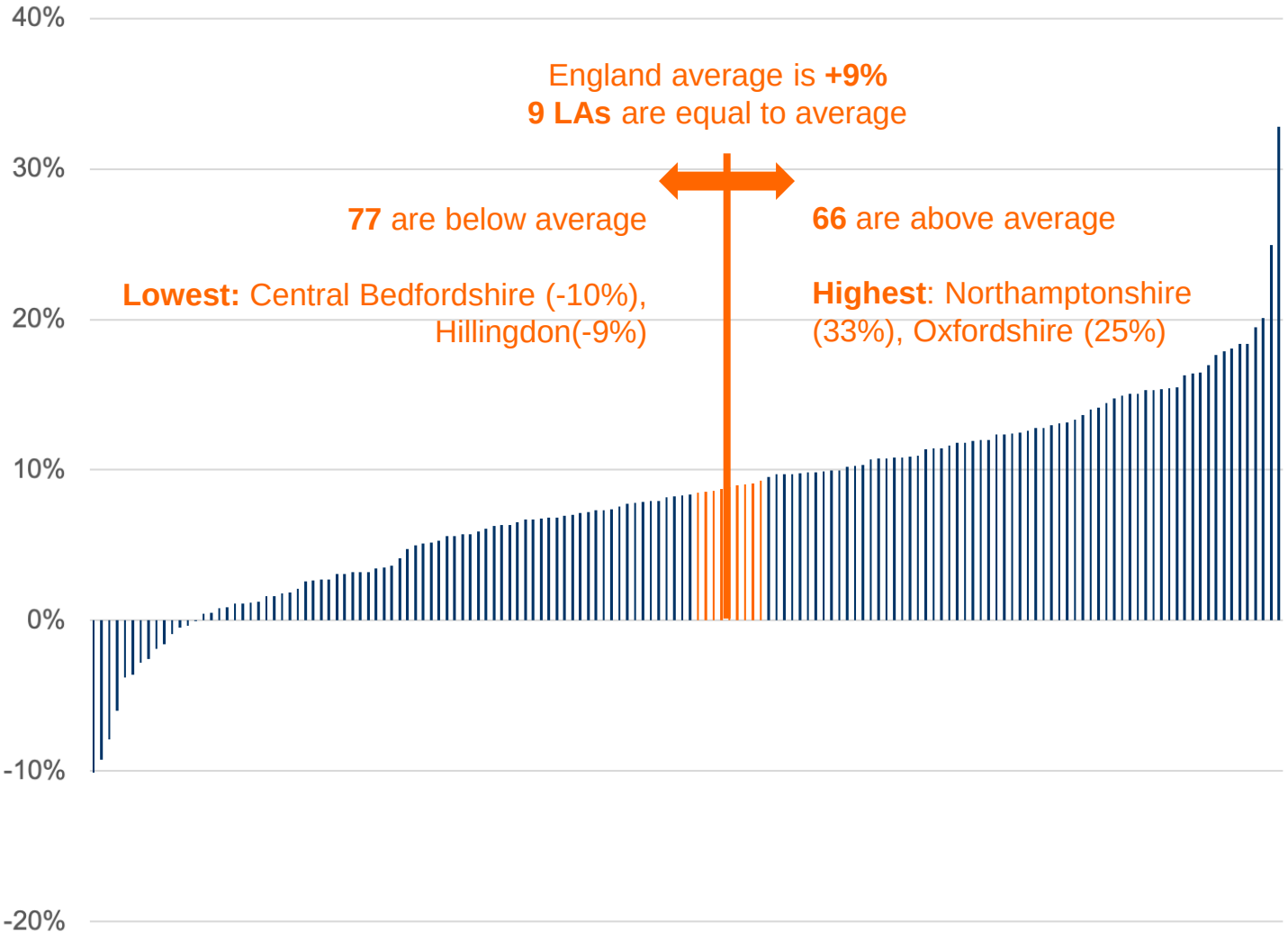
Change in percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC (2014-19)



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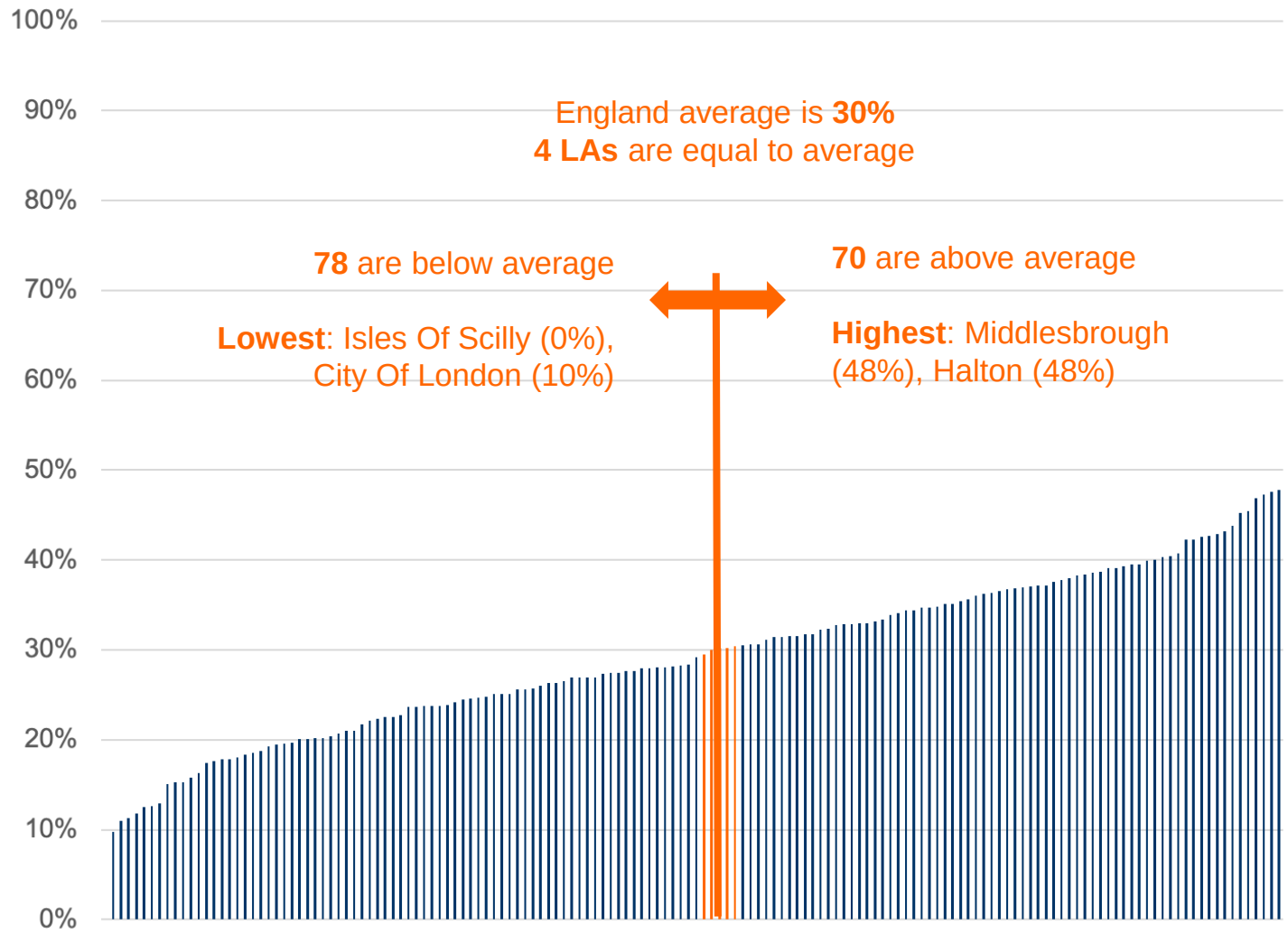
Percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care (2019)



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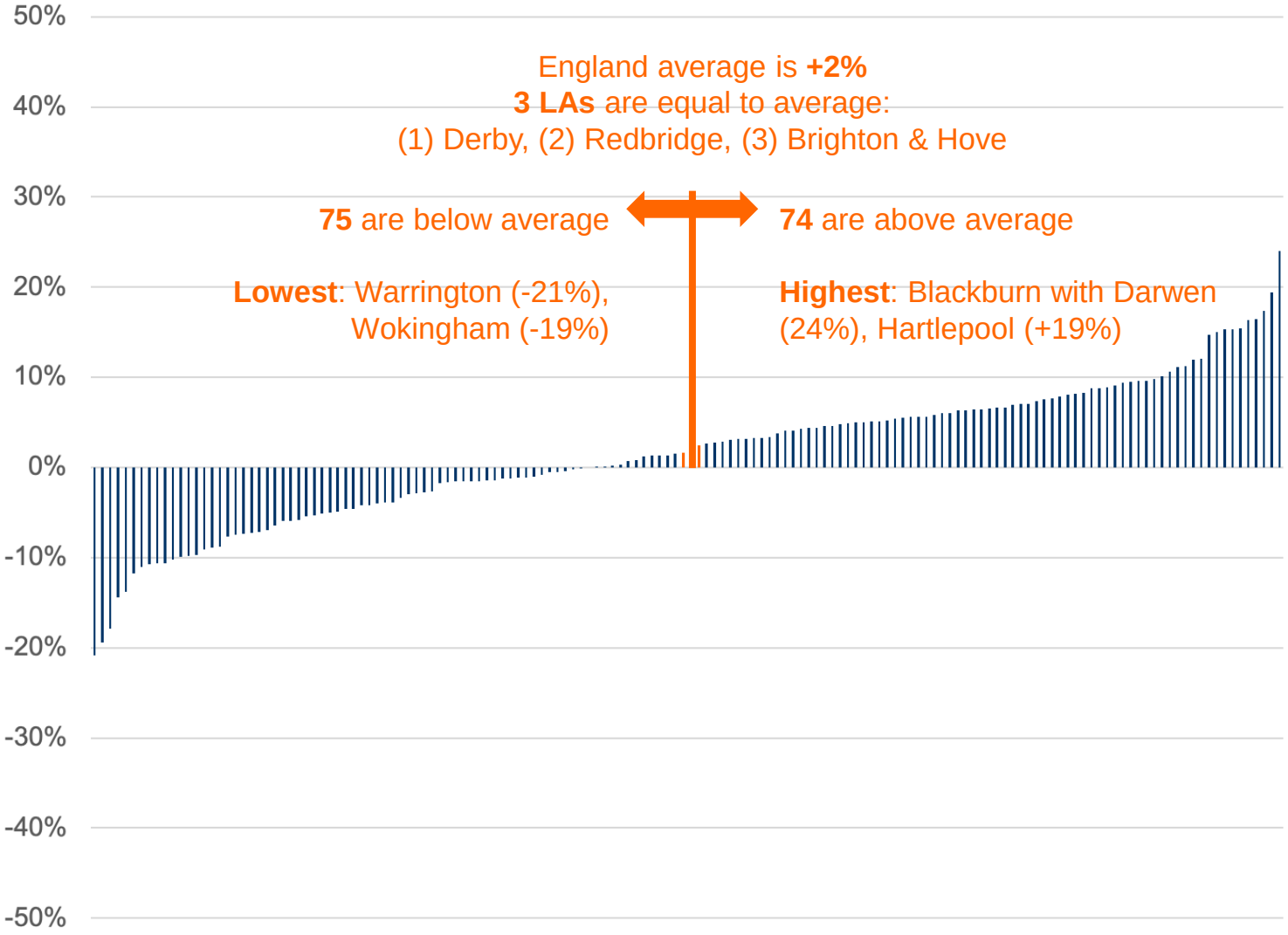
Change in percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care (2014 - 2019)



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Top 20 ‘most stressed’ local authorities

- The tables overleaf show the **c.20 ‘most stressed’ local authorities** for each indicator in the stress-test.

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c.20 most “stressed” local authorities

Rate of LAC		Residential care		20 miles out of LA	
Rate	**Change in rate**	**%**	**Change in %**	**%**	**Change in %**
Blackpool	North East Lincolnshire	Camden	City Of London	Buckinghamshire	Dorset
Middlesbrough	Stoke-On-Trent	Richmond Upon Thames	Camden	Cambridgeshire	Gloucestershire
Stoke-On-Trent	Middlesbrough	Kensington and Chelsea	Richmond Upon Thames	Surrey	Sutton
Hartlepool	Blackpool	City Of London	West Berkshire	Rutland	Swindon
Torbay	Redcar and Cleveland	Hounslow	Westminster	Torbay	Luton
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Tameside	Barnet	Brent	Luton	Surrey
Liverpool	City Of London	Brent	Kensington and Chelsea	Oxfordshire	Cumbria
City Of London	Hartlepool	Harrow	Lambeth	Sutton	Derby
Tameside	Rotherham	Havering	Harrow	Derby	North Somerset
North East Lincolnshire	Portsmouth	Kingston Upon Thames	Greenwich	North Somerset	Leicestershire
St Helens	Darlington	Westminster	Hounslow	Cumbria	South Gloucestershire
Wirral	Sandwell	West Sussex	Havering	Peterborough	Southampton
Darlington	Warrington	Waltham Forest	Kent	Bracknell Forest	Windsor and
Newcastle Upon Tyne	Liverpool	West Berkshire	Bromley	Greenwich	Maidenhead
Stockton-On-Tees	Herefordshire	Buckinghamshire	Cumbria	Swindon	Bracknell Forest
Rotherham	Stockton-On-Tees	Nottingham	Derby	Windsor and Maidenhead	Oxfordshire
Portsmouth	Isle Of Wight	Hackney	Hackney	Dorset	Stoke-On-Trent
Sandwell	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Lambeth	Manchester	West Berkshire	Blackpool
Sunderland	Wirral	Cambridgeshire	Southend-on-Sea	Wiltshire	Devon
Redcar and Cleveland	Durham	Greenwich	Waltham Forest	Cheshire East	Rutland
Rochdale	Sefton	Haringey		Ealing	Barking and Dagenham
Manchester		Southend-on-Sea		East Riding of Yorkshire	Buckinghamshire
Blackburn with Darwen				Islington	Derbyshire
Salford				Somerset	Hillingdon
South Tyneside					Torbay
Wolverhampton					Wiltshire

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c.20 most “stressed” local authorities

% of children’s services budget spent on LAC		% of LAC budget spent on residential care	
%	**Change in %**	**%**	**Change in %**
Northamptonshire	Northamptonshire	Halton	Blackburn with Darwen
Norfolk	Oxfordshire	Middlesbrough	Hartlepool
Thurrock	City Of London	Shropshire	Doncaster
Shropshire	Luton	Worcestershire	Lewisham
Swindon	Shropshire	Darlington	Reading
St Helens	Westminster	Tameside	Tameside
Herefordshire	Dorset	Salford	Southampton
Hampshire	St Helens	Wakefield	Oxfordshire
Darlington	Lancashire	Sunderland	Liverpool
Portsmouth	Stockport	East Riding of Yorkshire	Sunderland
Nottingham	Cumbria	Oxfordshire	Barking and Dagenham
Sunderland	Herefordshire	Leicester	St Helens
Tameside	Portsmouth	St Helens	Redcar and Cleveland
Staffordshire	Wakefield	Telford and Wrekin	Northumberland
Lancashire	Sutton	Knowsley	Northamptonshire
Stockton-On-Tees	Sunderland	Sefton	Surrey
Liverpool	Plymouth	Cumbria	Darlington
Somerset	Barking and Dagenham	Blackpool	Sandwell
Cheshire East	Hampshire	Northamptonshire	Luton
Middlesbrough	Bath and North East Somerset	Stockton-On-Tees	North Lincolnshire
Worcestershire	Leicester		Hackney
Haringey	Durham		Bolton
Reading			Warwickshire
			West Sussex
			Lancashire

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Ones to watch in 2019

Local Authority	Number of indicators in which LA is in top 20 "most stressed" (2019)
City of London	5
Cumbria	5
Darlington	5
Oxfordshire	5
St. Helens	5
Tameside	5
Blackpool	4
Luton	4
Middlesbrough	4
Northamptonshire	4
Portsmouth	4
Stockton-on-Tees	4
Sunderland	4

In 2019, **13 local authorities** were in the top 20 for at least four indicators of stress. Six local authorities were in the top 20 for five indicators, including **Tameside** and **Oxfordshire** which topped the list last year. Seven other local authorities were in the top 20 for five indicators.

There is some evidence for decreased pressure over time. For instance, the number of LAs in the top 20 for at least four indicators of stress has declined from **15 in 2018 to 13 in 2019**. Furthermore, the number of LAs experiencing no indicators of stress has increased **from 47 in 2018 to 50 in 2019.**

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Ones to watch in recent years…

2019	2018
City of London (5)	Tameside (7)
Cumbria (5)	Oxfordshire (6)
Darlington (5)	Liverpool (5)
Oxfordshire (5)	Northamptonshire (5)
St. Helens (5)	St Helens (5)
Tameside (5)	Darlington (5)
Blackpool (4)	Windsor and Maidenhead (4)
Luton (4)	Bracknell Forest (4)
Middlesbrough (4)	Surrey (4)
Northamptonshire (4)	Buckinghamshire (4)
Portsmouth (4)	Derbyshire (4)
Stockton-on-Tees (4)	Cumbria (4)
Sunderland (4)	Middlesbrough (4)
	Sutton (4)
	Bury(4)

Three LAs, including **St Helens**, **Tameside and Middlesbrough** have been in the 'most stressed' category for three years in a row. Five others have been in the 'most stressed' category for two years in a row.

This implies that **9 LAs** experienced a rapid increase in stress between 2017 and 2019.

Key

On list for past 2 years

On list for past 3 years

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Change in level of stress over time – increasing pressures

Local Authority	2019 # of stress indicators	2018 # of stress indicators	Change
City of London	5	1	↑
Cumbria	5	4	↑
Darlington	5	5	→
Oxfordshire	5	6	↓
St. Helens	5	5	→
Tameside	5	7	↓
Blackpool	4	2	↑
Luton	4	2	↑
Middlesbrough	4	4	→
Northamptonshire	4	5	↓
Portsmouth	4	2	↑
Stockton-on-Tees	4	3	↑
Sunderland	4	2	↑

7 of the 13 'most stressed' local authorities experienced increases in stress between 2018 and 2019, often across multiple indicators. However, there were also improvements across at least three local authorities, where they fell of the 'most stressed' list for at least one indicator.

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Change in level of stress over time – decreasing pressures

Local Authority	2019 # of stress indicators	2018 # of stress indicators	Change
Liverpool	3	5	↓
Bracknell Forest	2	4	↓
Buckinghamshire	3	4	↓
Bury	0	4	↓
Derbyshire	1	4	↓
Surrey	3	4	↓
Sutton	3	4	↓
Windsor & Maidenhead	2	4	↓

Between 2018 and 2019**, 8 local authorities fell off the 'most stressed' list**. Of particular note are **Bury** and **Derbyshire** who both **fell by four and three indicators between 2018 and 2019, respectively**.

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Local authorities with relatively low pressures

Relatively low pressures		
Barnsley	**Dudley**	Newham
Bedford Borough	Enfield	North Yorkshire
Bexley	Essex	Nottinghamshire
Bradford	Gateshead	Sheffield
Brighton & Hove	Hertfordshire	Solihull
Bristol	**Hammersmith & Fulham**	Suffolk
Calderdale	Isles of Scilly	Trafford
Cheshire West & Chester	Kirklees	**Walsall**
Cornwall	Leeds	Wigan
Croydon	**Merton**	York
	Milton Keynes	

Key
Not in top 20 in 2017 or 2018

21 local authorities were not in the top **20 'most-stressed'** for any indicators for three years in a row, from 2017 to 2019. An additional **11 local authorities** (**Barnsley, Bexley, Bristol, Cheshire West & Chester, Cornwall, Dudley, Hammersmith & Fulham, Merton, Milton Keynes & Walsall**) were not in the **top 20 'most stressed'** for any indicators for two years in a row, from 2018 to 2019. These sites could potentially provide some useful evidence on how services are helping to anticipate or reduce demand for more intensive statutory provision.

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References I

Slide 3
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 4
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 5
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 6
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 7
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year
Inflation calculator: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator

Slide 8
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year
Inflation calculator: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator

Slide 9
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2018-to-2019#section-251-outturn-data
Inflation calculator: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator

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References II

Slides 12
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slides 13
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 14
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

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https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 16
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 17
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019

Slide 18
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year

Slide 19
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year

Slide 20
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2018-to-2019#section-251-outturn-data

Slide 21
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2018-to-2019#section-251-outturn-data

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Appendix

Appendix A: Local authorities with missing data for percentage of LAC placed 20 miles+ from home and out of LA boundary on 31 March 2019.

Local Authorities (n = 16)			
Blackburn with Darwen	Halton	Middlesbrough	Sefton
Croydon	Isles of Scilly	North Tyneside	Slough
Darlington	Kensington & Chelsea	Oldham	Stockton-on-Tees
Gateshead	Knowsley	Reading	Telford & Wrekin

Appendix B: Local authorities with missing data for change in percentage of LAC placed 20 miles+ from home and out of LA boundary on 31 March 2019.

Local Authorities (n = 21)						
Bath & North East Somerset	Darlington	Hartlepool	Knowsley	Oldham	Slough	Telford & Wrekin
Blackburn with Darwen	Gateshead	Isle of Scilly	Middlesbrough	Reading	Stockton-on-Tees	Trafford
Croydon	Halton	Kensington & Chelsea	North Tyneside	Sefton	Tameside	Wigan

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