

Looked after children: trends in numbers, rates & spend

Including the Cordis Bright Looked After Children Stress Test

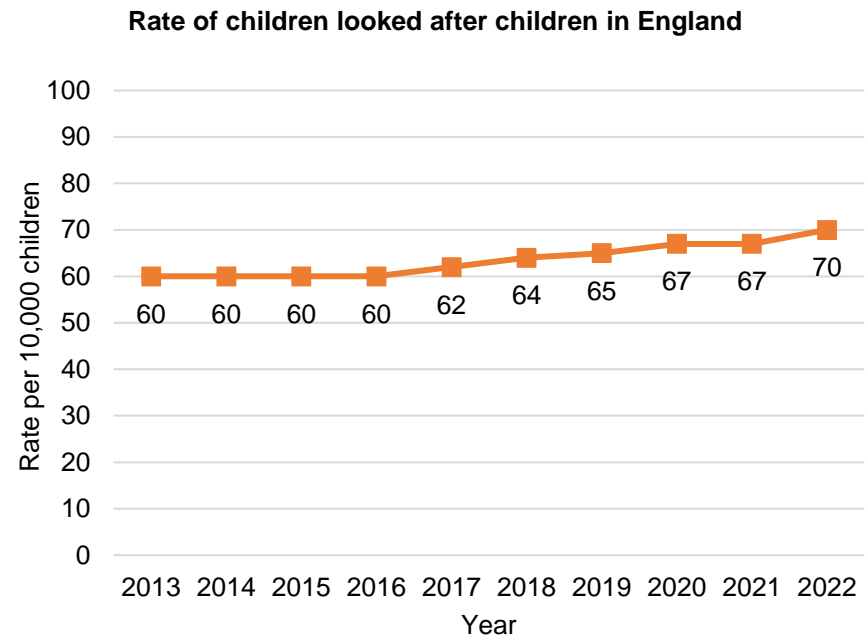
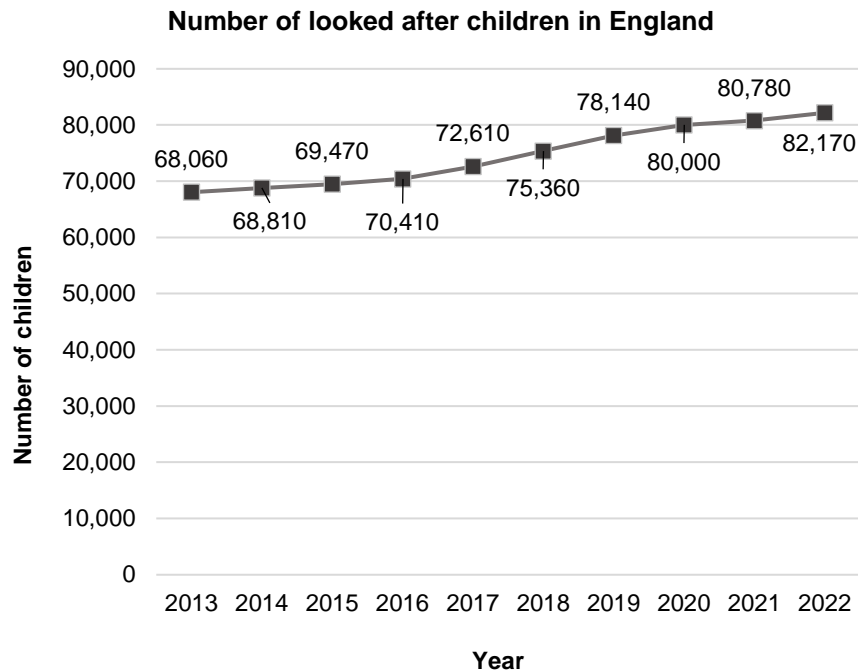
April 2024



Introduction

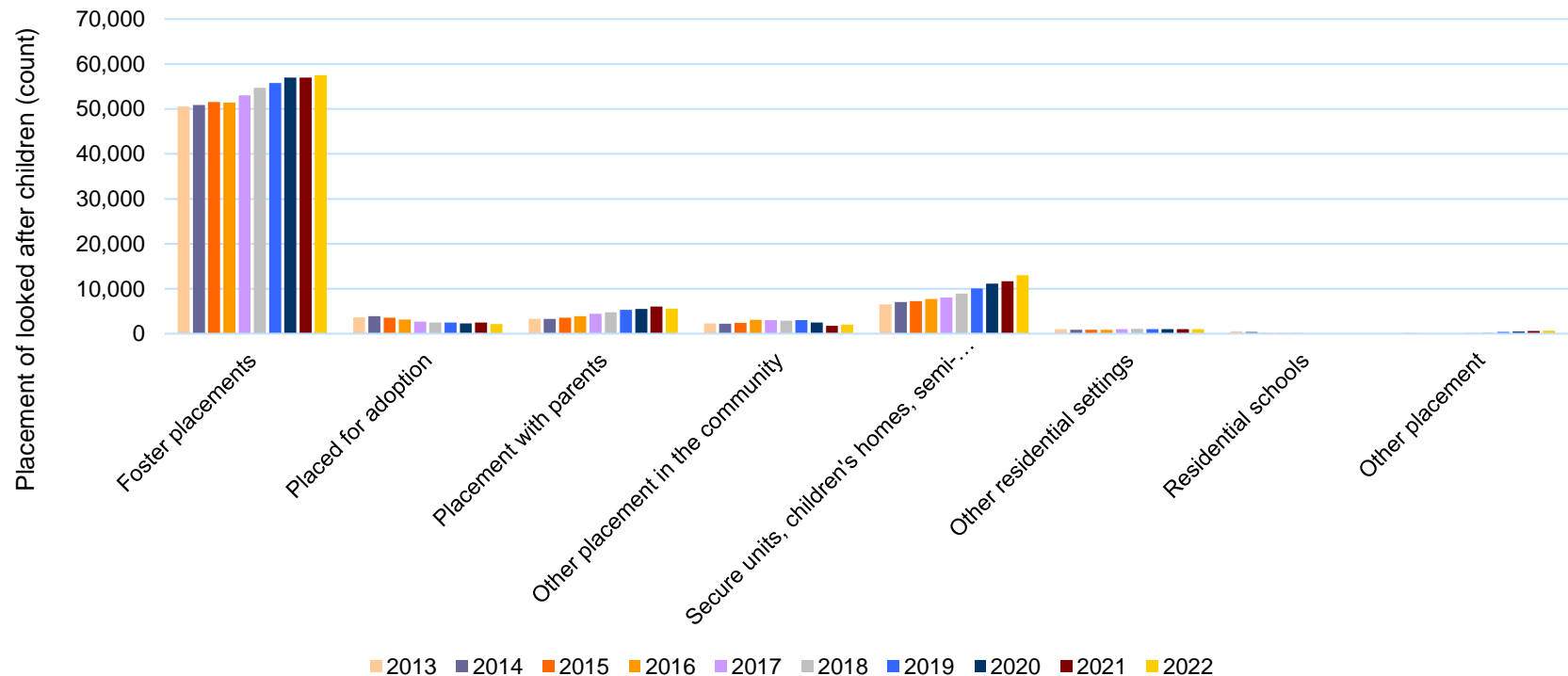
- This document uses publicly available data to examine recent trends in the numbers, rates and spend on looked after children (LAC) in England.
- The first section presents national trends from 2013 to 2022.
- The second section examines trends across local authorities.
- As part of this, it highlights 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.

Number and rate of looked after children



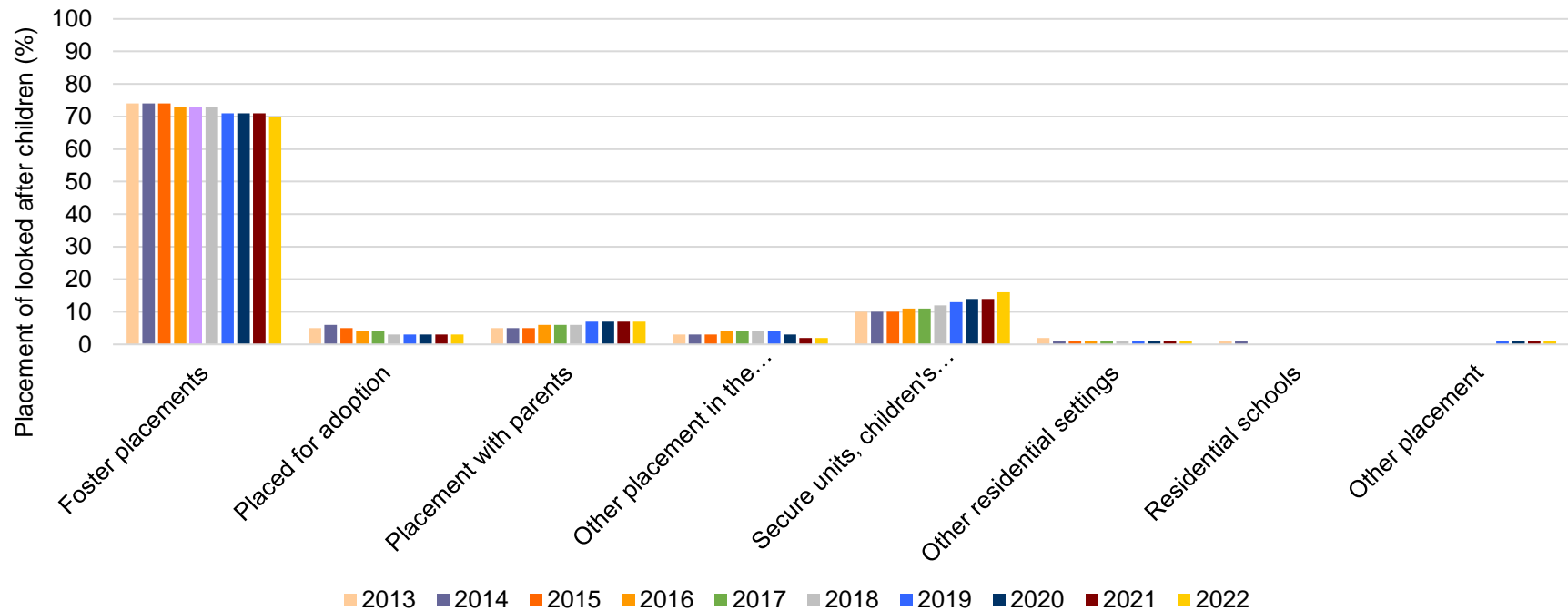
Between 2013 and 2022, the number of LAC at 31 March increased from **68,060** to **82,170**, i.e., **20.7% increase**. The rate of LAC remained **relatively static** (at 60 per 10,000) **until 2016**, after which it increased by **approximately 1.8 children per 10,000 each year**. The increase in numbers, therefore, is driven by something other than overall population growth. Increases are likely to be due to complex and multi-faceted reasons.

Placement of looked after children (#)



The number of LAC placed in foster care has been a year-on-year increase since 2013, with 57,540 LAC placed in 2022. The next largest number of LAC are placed in **secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living**, with 13,010 placed in 2022, and a year-on-year increase since 2013. The number of LAC placed for adoption has fallen consistently between 2014 and 2021 by **42.3%**, with an increase by **10.2%** between 2020 to 2021. In 2022, this number was at 2,140, indicating a slight drop in the number of LAC placed for adoption.

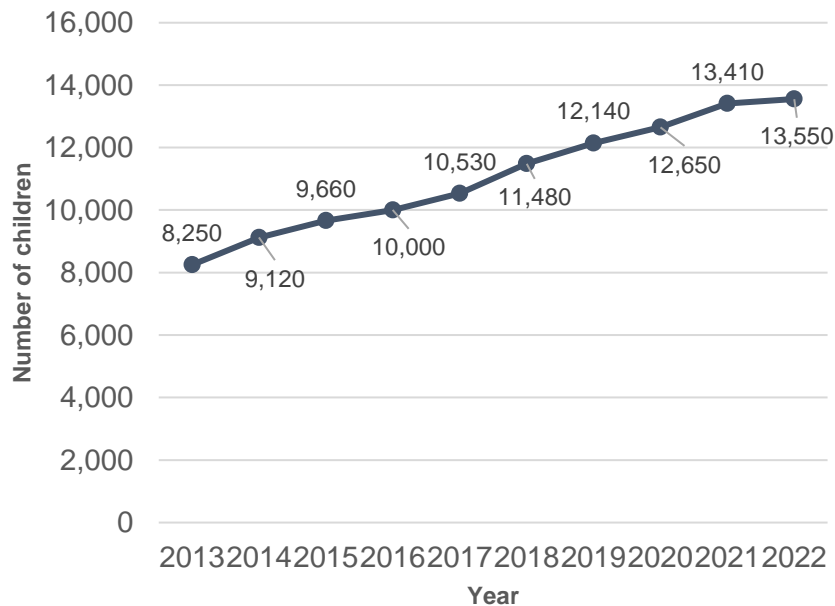
Placement of looked after children (%)



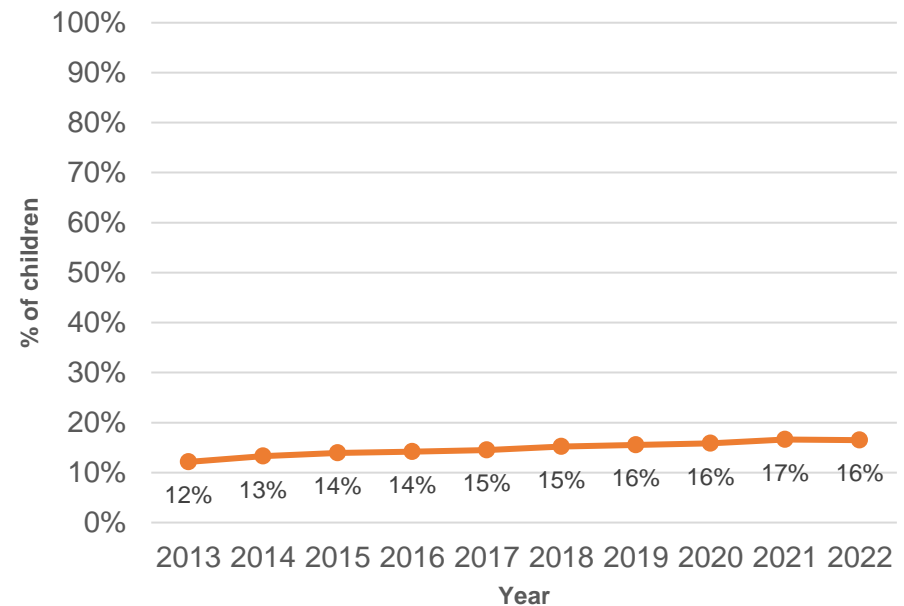
Percentages show a slightly different picture. The proportion of LAC in foster placements has remained relatively static since 2019. In comparison, there has been a relatively steady increase in the **proportion of LAC in secure units, children's homes, and semi-independent living.**

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

Number of LAC placed out of LA boundary and over 20 miles from home at March 31



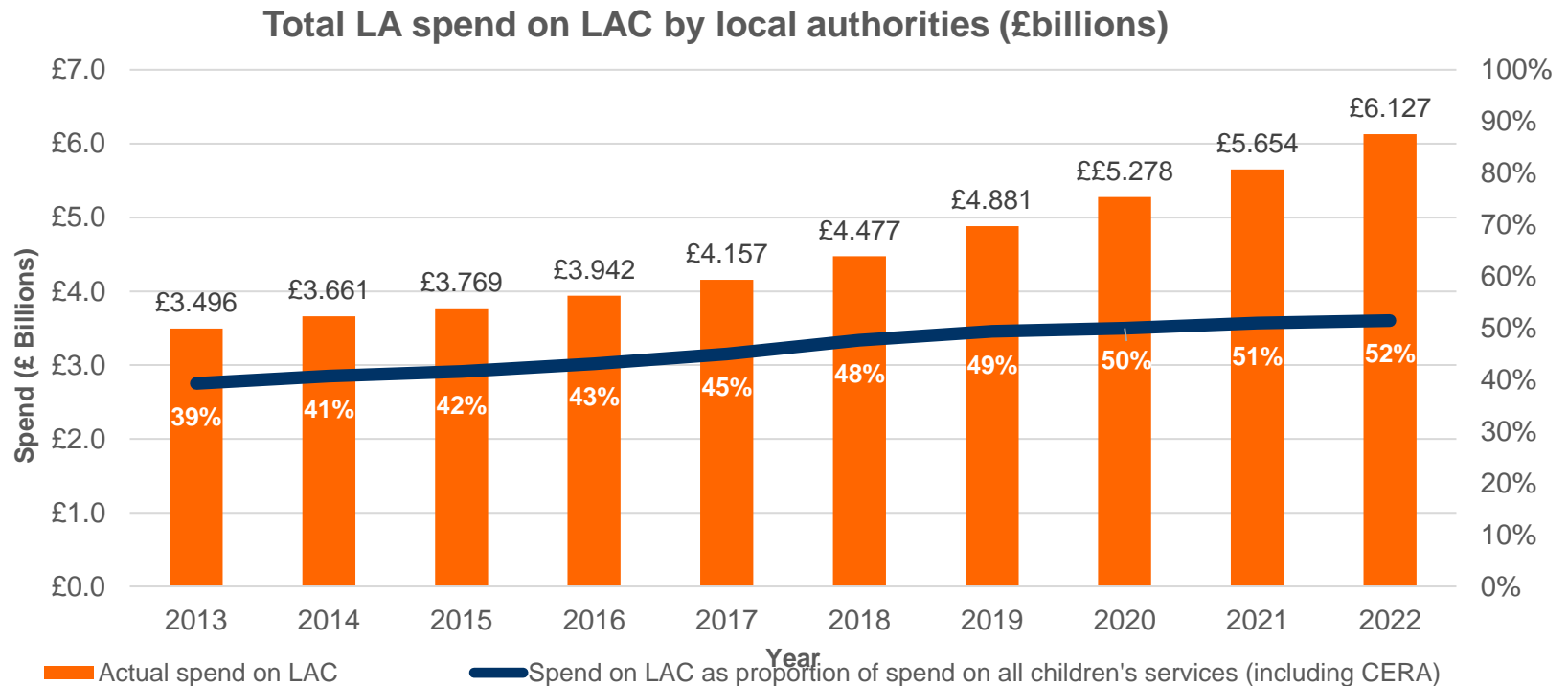
Percentage of LAC placed outside LA boundary and over 20 miles from home at March 31



The number of LAC being placed more than 20 miles away and outside the local authority boundary has increased every year from **8,250 in 2013** to **13,550 in 2022**, an increase of **64.2%**.

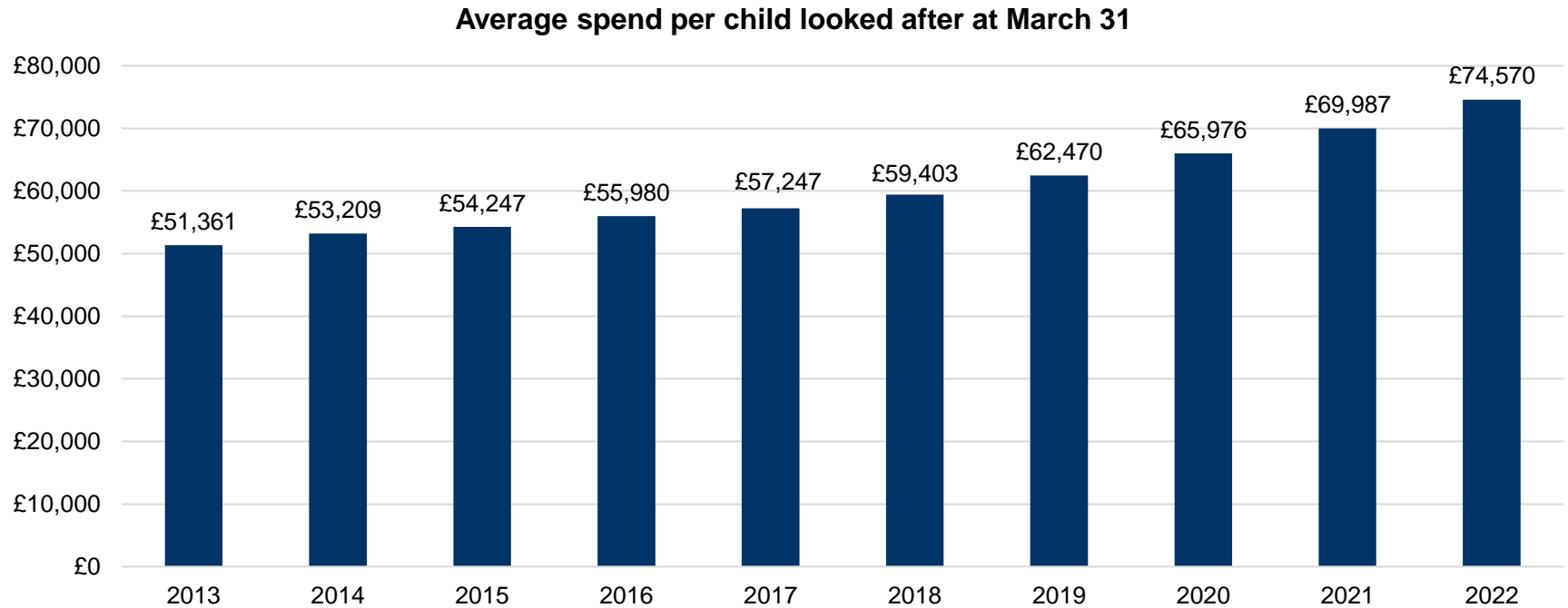
Between 2013 and 2022, the proportion of LAC placed far from home increased from **12% to 16%**. This suggests that local areas were finding it difficult to find capacity locally to cater for these children. The proportion declined for the first time in the period in 2022 from 17% to 16%.

Total spend on looked after children



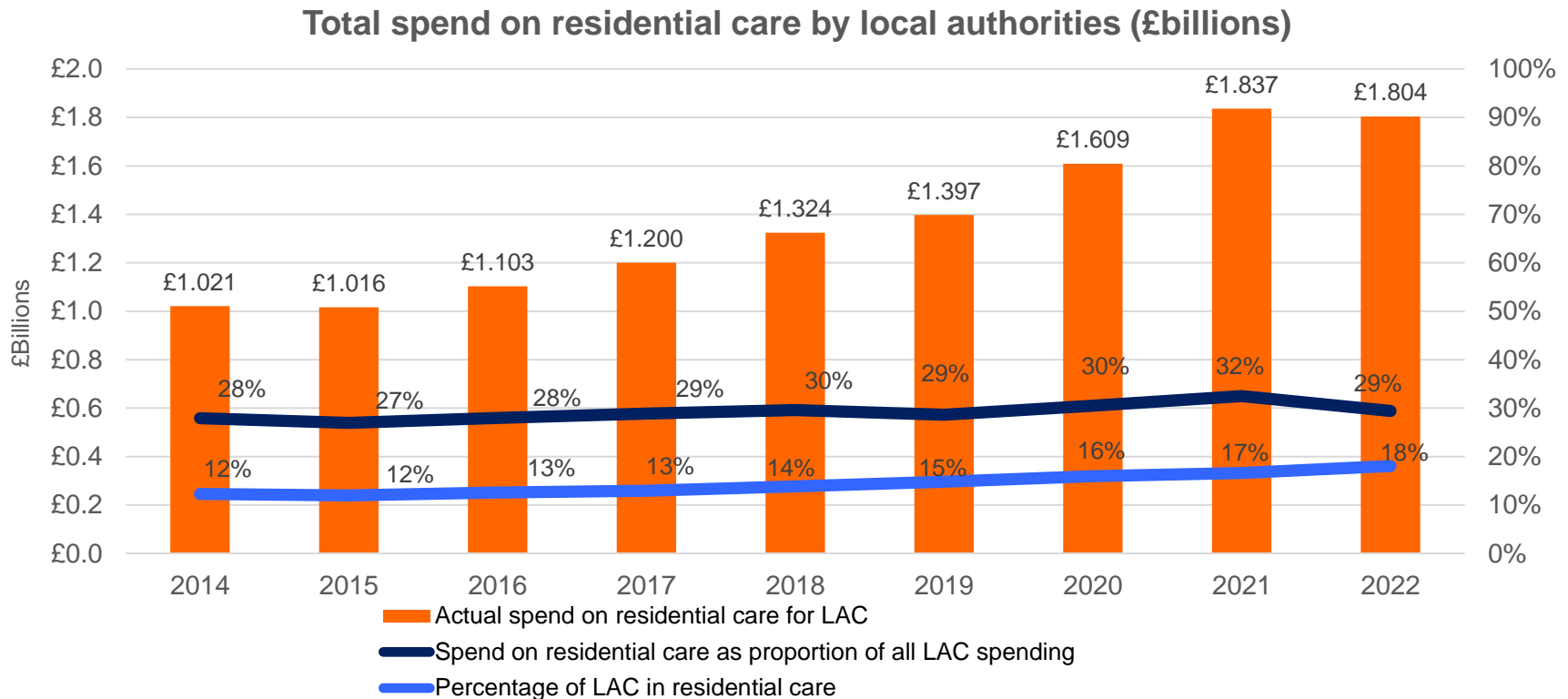
Total spending by local authorities on LAC has increased by **75% since 2013**, from **£3.496bn to £6.127bn in 2022**. Over this period, spending on LAC also absorbed an increasing proportion of total spend on children's services, from **39% in 2013 to 52% in 2022**.

Spend per looked after child per year



The average spend per LAC has also been increasing year-on-year. The average has risen from **£51,361** to **£74,570**, representing a **45.1% increase**.

Spend on residential care for LAC



Between 2015 and 2021 there was a year-on-year increase in spend on residential care, reaching a high of £1.837 billion in 2021. Over this time, an increasing proportion of total LAC spending was being directed at residential care (reaching a high of 32% in 2022). This reflected increasing proportions of children being placed in residential care. However, in 2022, the level of spend fell back to £1.804 billion, reducing the percentage of LAC spending on residential care to 29%. In parallel, however, the total percentage of LAC in residential care continued to increase. In 2022, this stood at 18%. 022, the spend on residential care has marginally decreased.

The Looked After Children Stress Test

Investigating beyond national averages, finding differences between local authorities

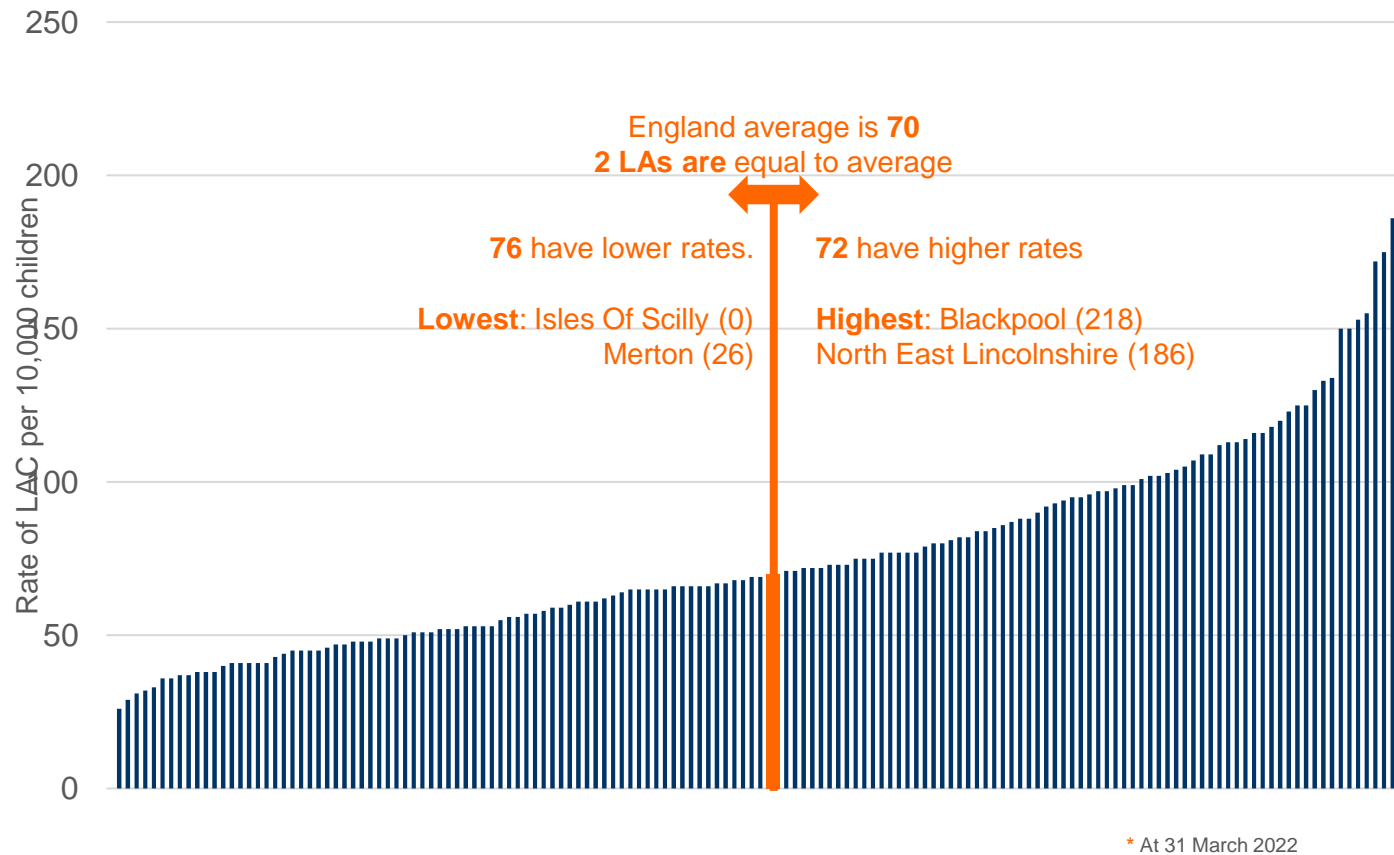
Introduction to the stress test

- 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.

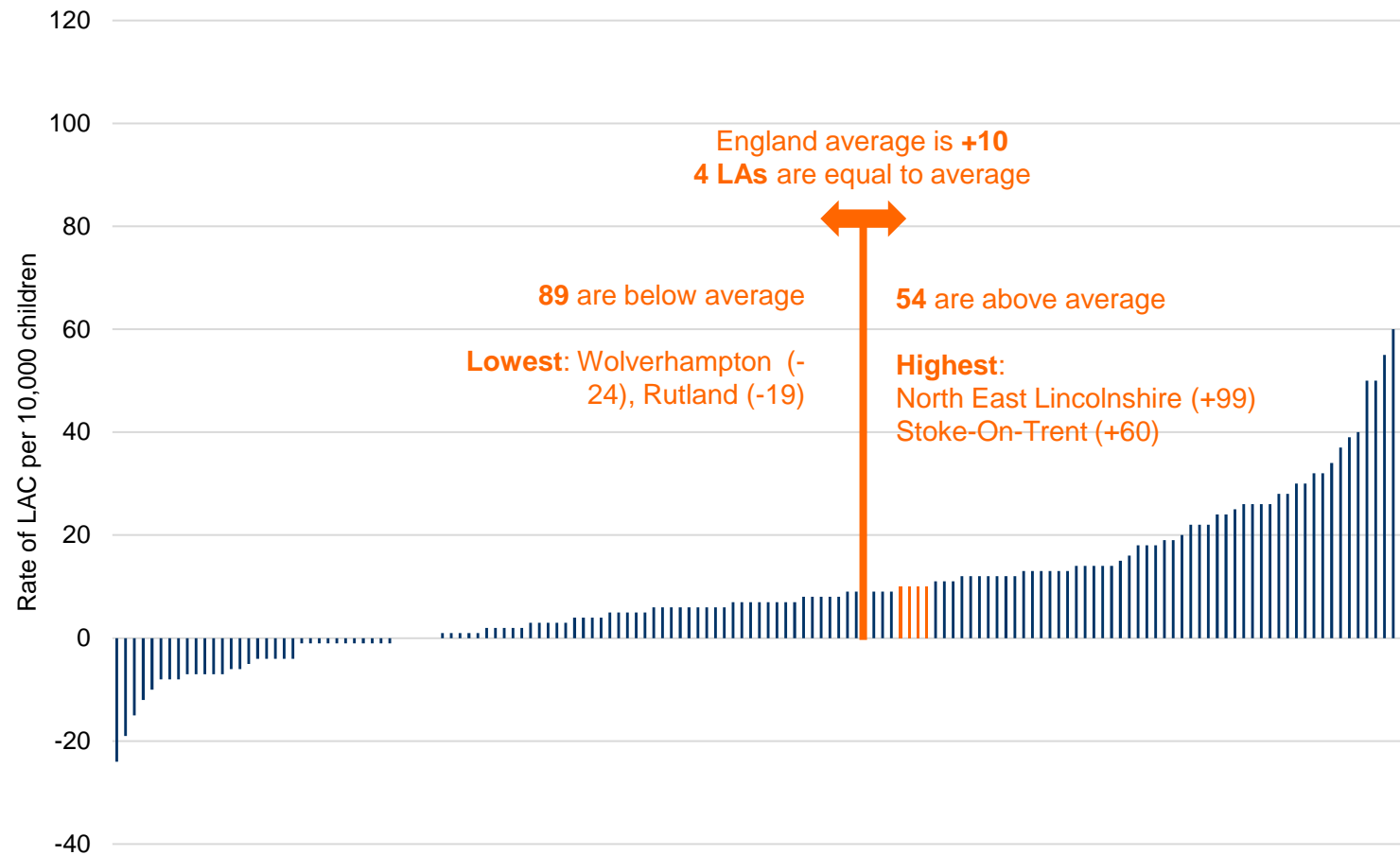
Indicators (2022)	Indicators (2017-2022)
Rate of LAC	Change in rate of LAC
Percentage of LAC in residential care	Change in percentage of LAC in residential care
Percentage of LAC 20 miles or more from home and outside local authority boundary	Change in percentage of LAC placed in residential care
Percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC	Change in percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC
Percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care	Change in percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care

Note: Poole, Bournemouth and Northamptonshire have been excluded from the analysis due to local authority boundary changes.

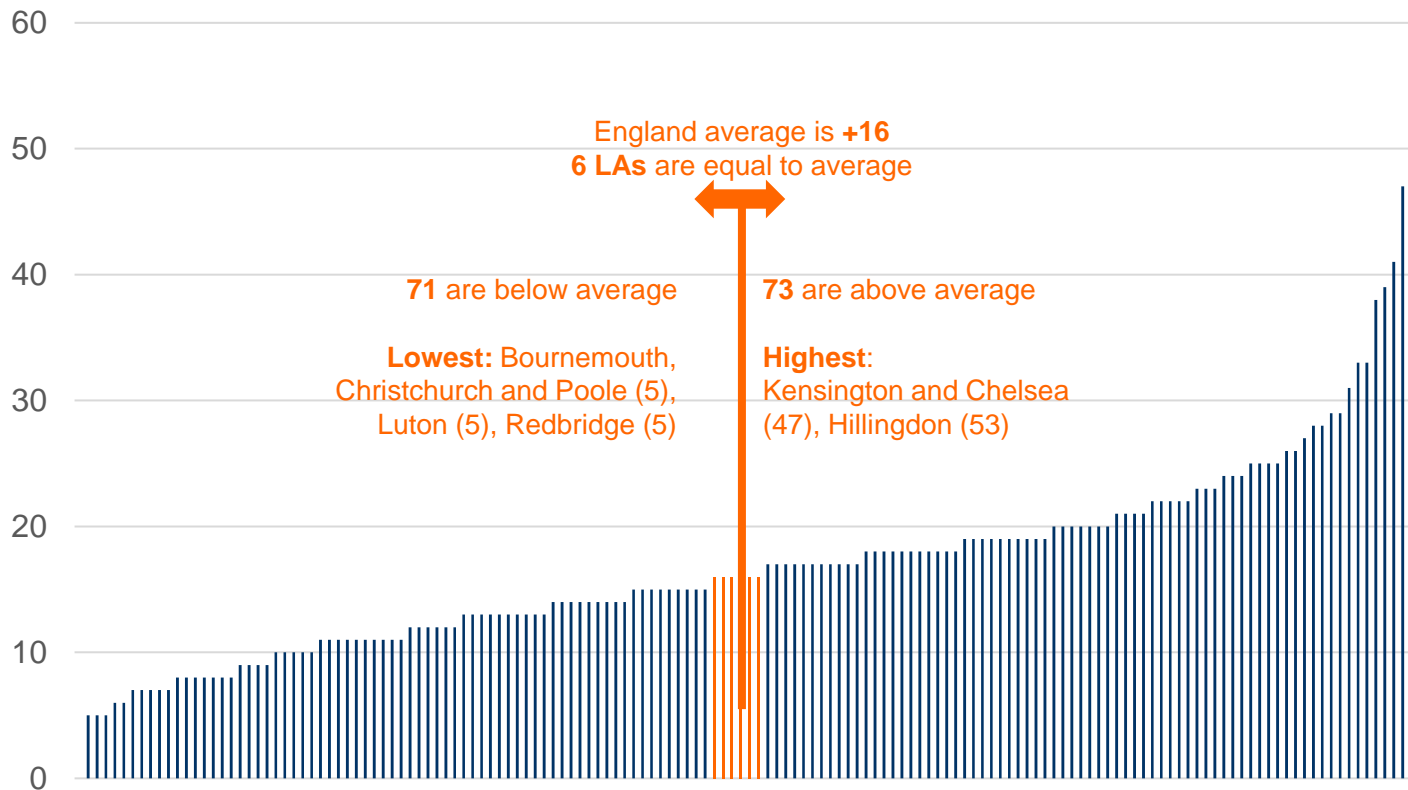
Rate of LAC (2022)*



Change in rate of LAC (2017 – 2022)*

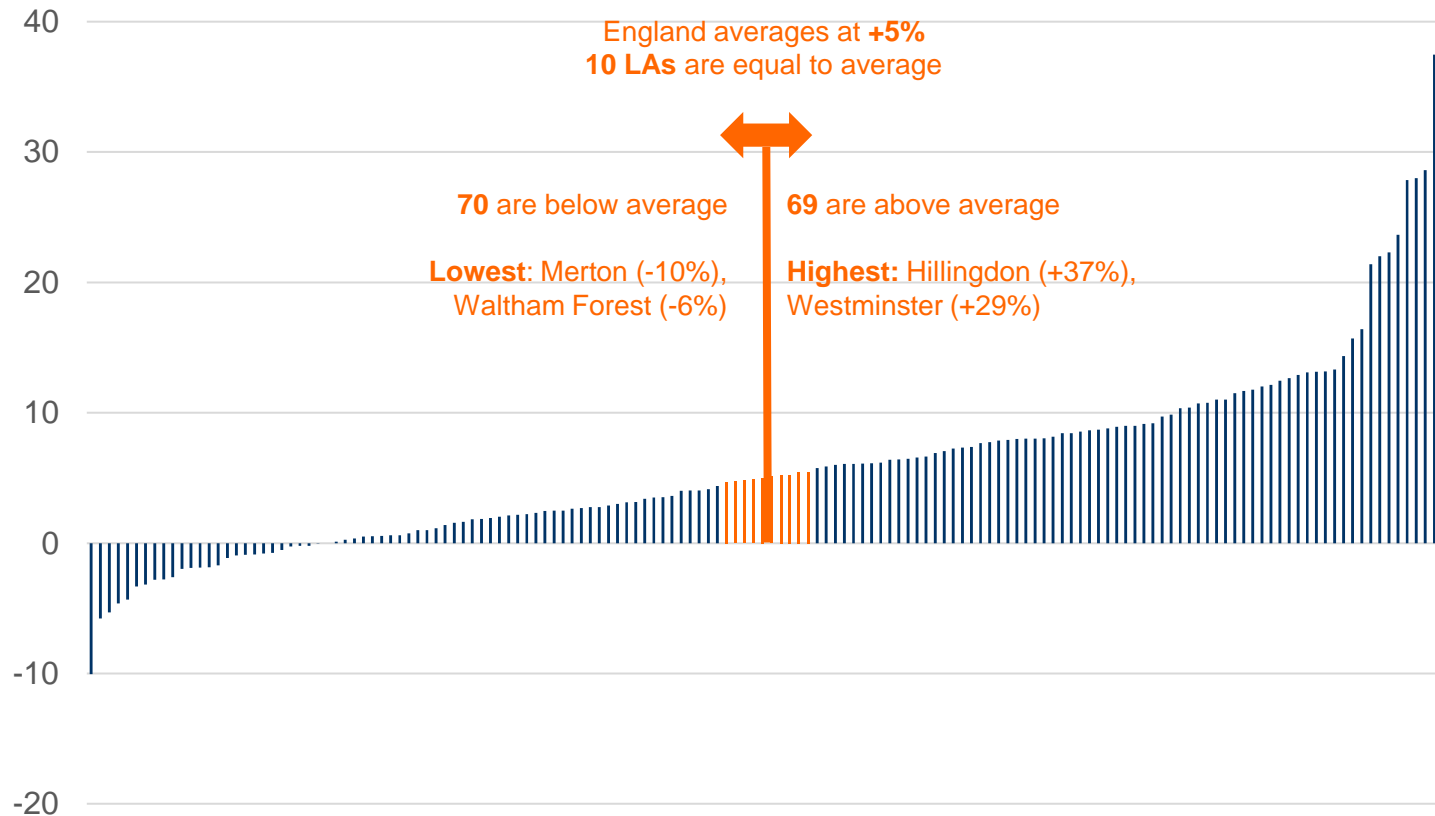


Percentage of LAC in residential care (2022)*



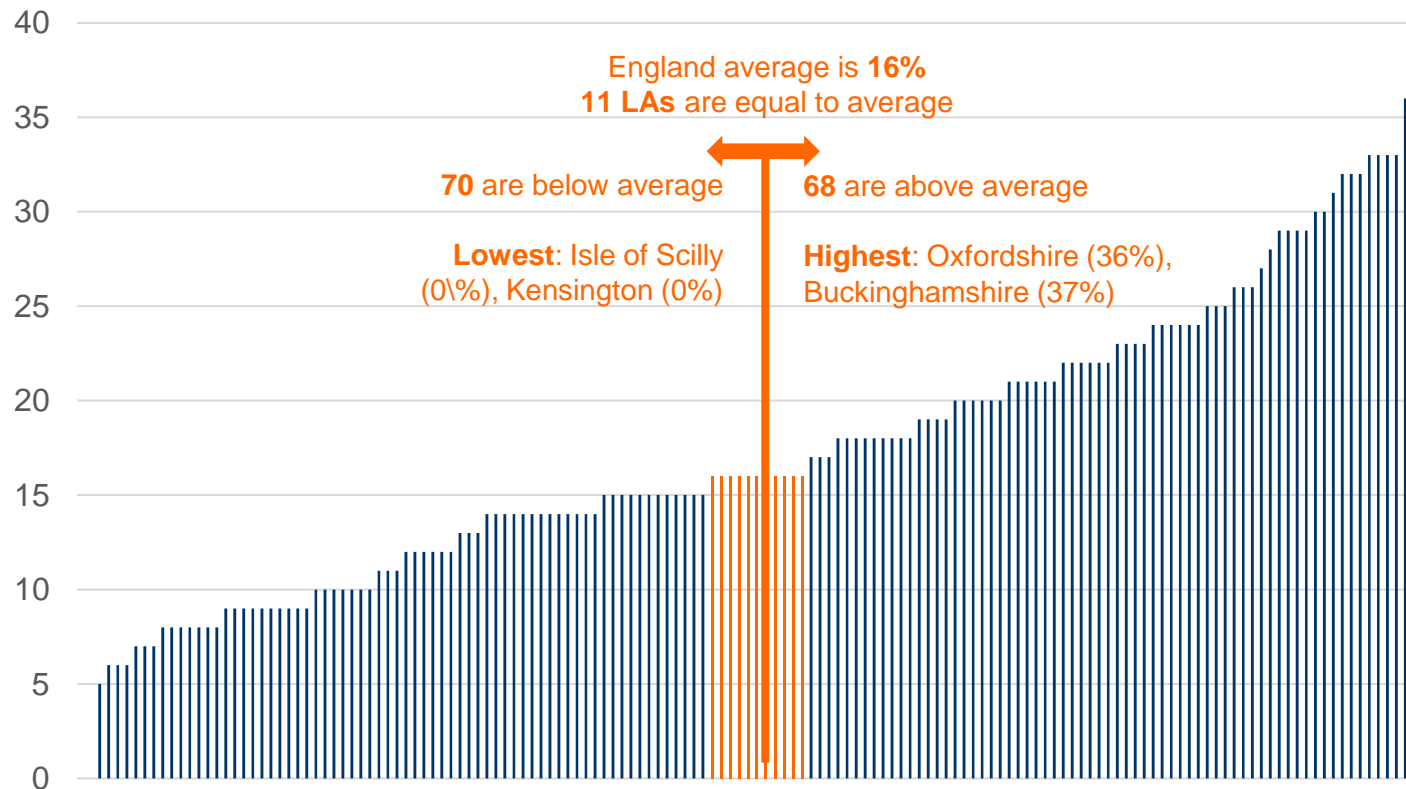
* Based on snapshot on 31 March 2021 of LAC placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living. Other residential care excluded due to lack of data. Data missing from City of London and Isle of Scilly

Change in percentage of LAC in residential care (2017 – 2022)*

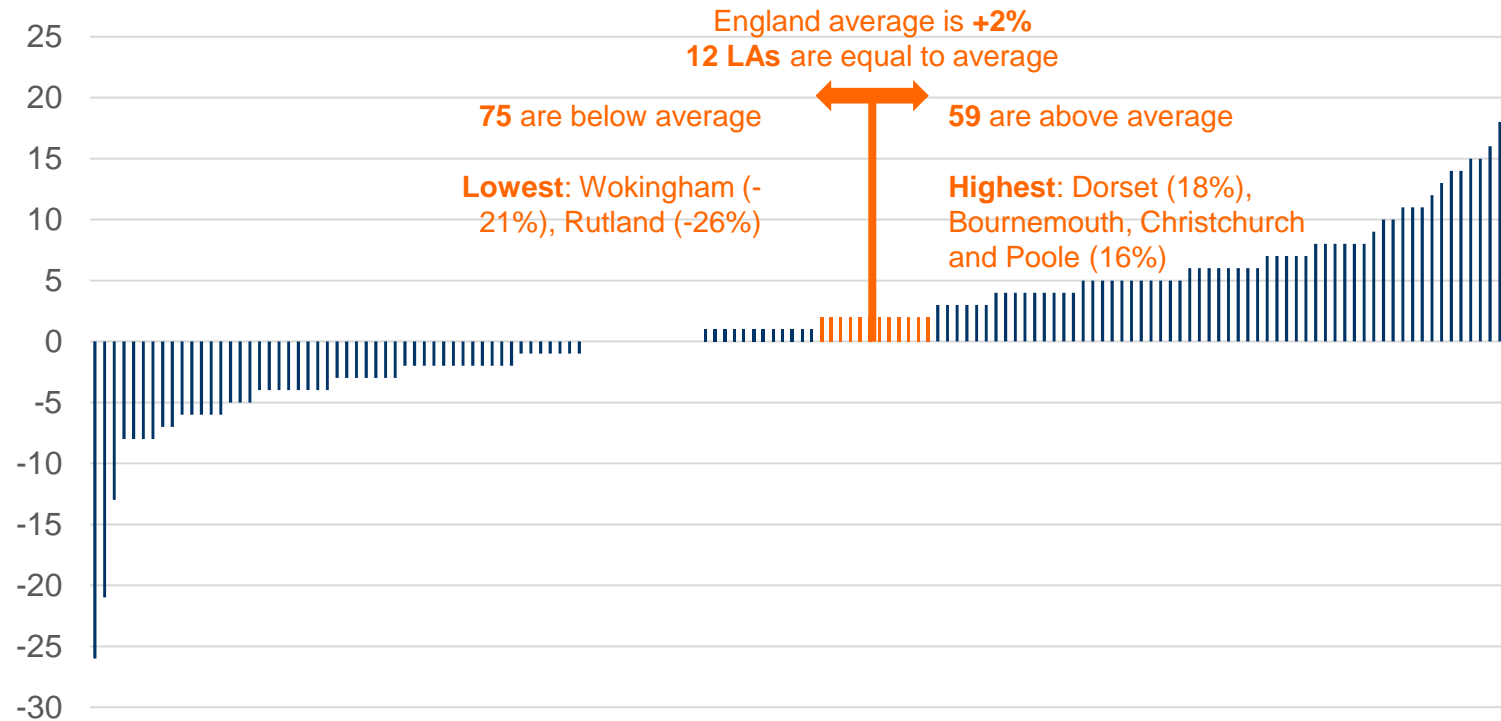


- Based on snapshot on 31 March 2021 of LAC placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation. Other residential placements not included due to missing data. Data missing from Bath and North East Somerset, City Of London, Lincolnshire, Redbridge, Rutland, Sandwell, Swindon, Telford and Wrekin, West Berkshire.

Percentage of LAC placed 20+ miles away & outside of LA boundary (2022)*

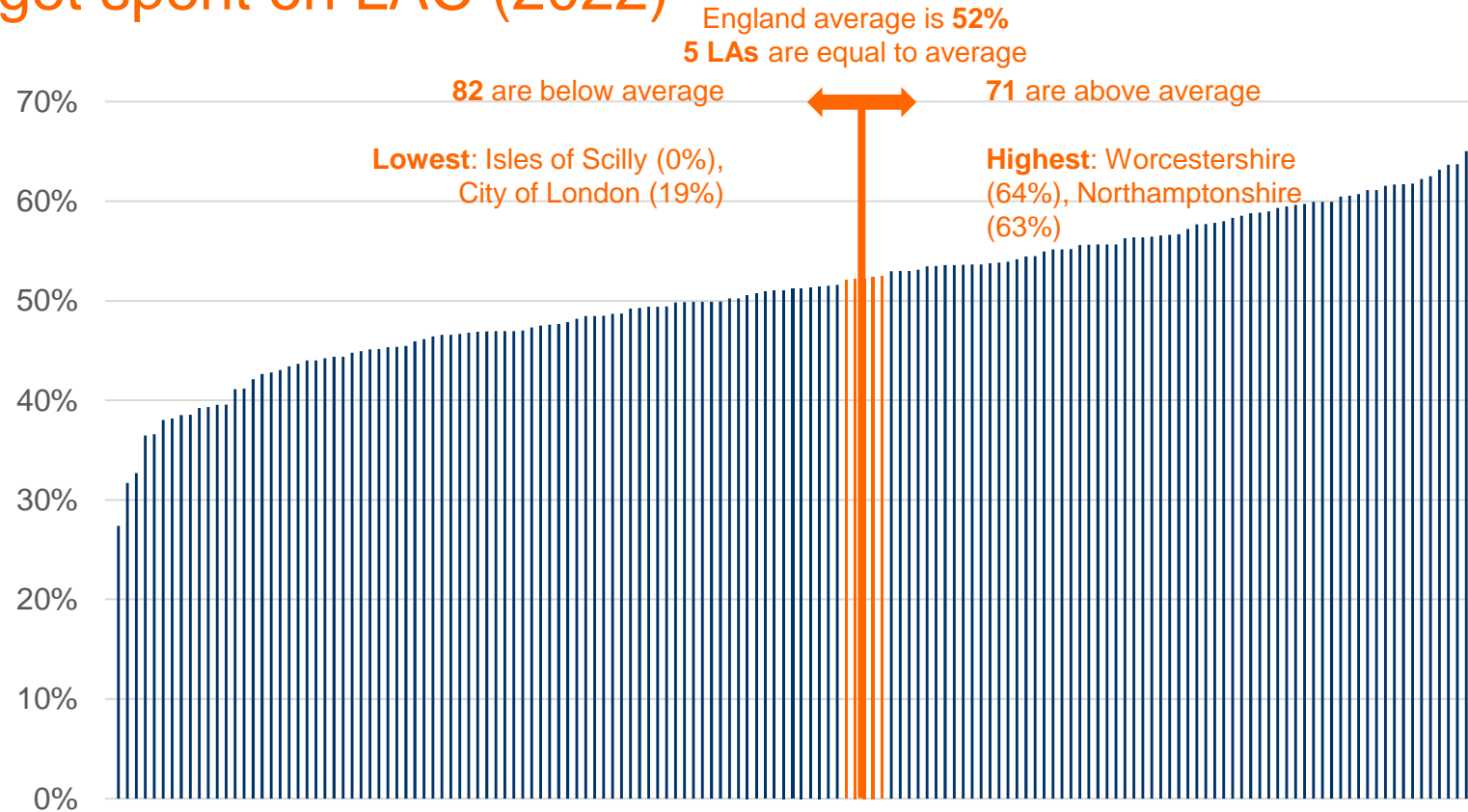


Change in percentage of LAC placed 20+ miles & outside LA boundary (2017-22)*

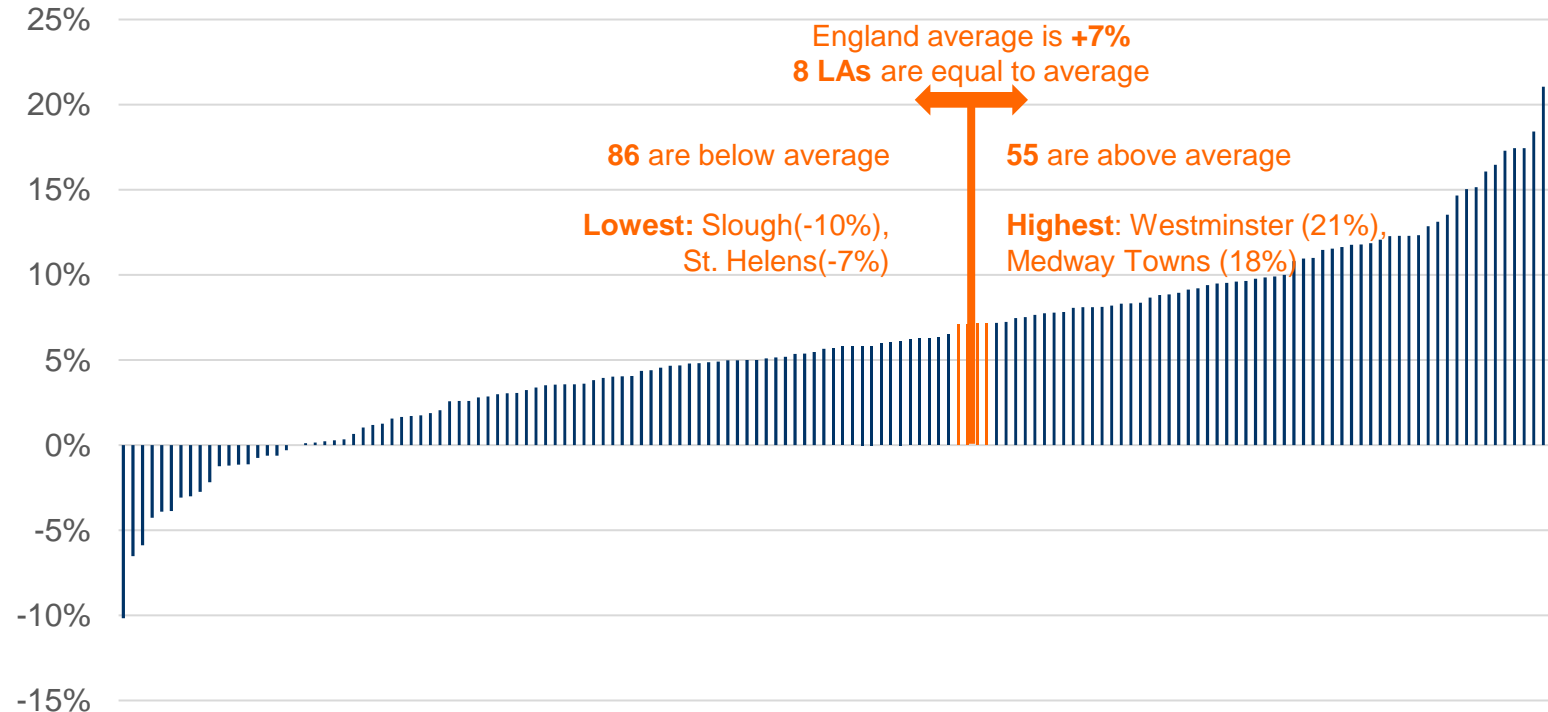


* Based on snapshot at 31 March each year. Data missing from Bath and North East Somerset, City of London and Solihull.

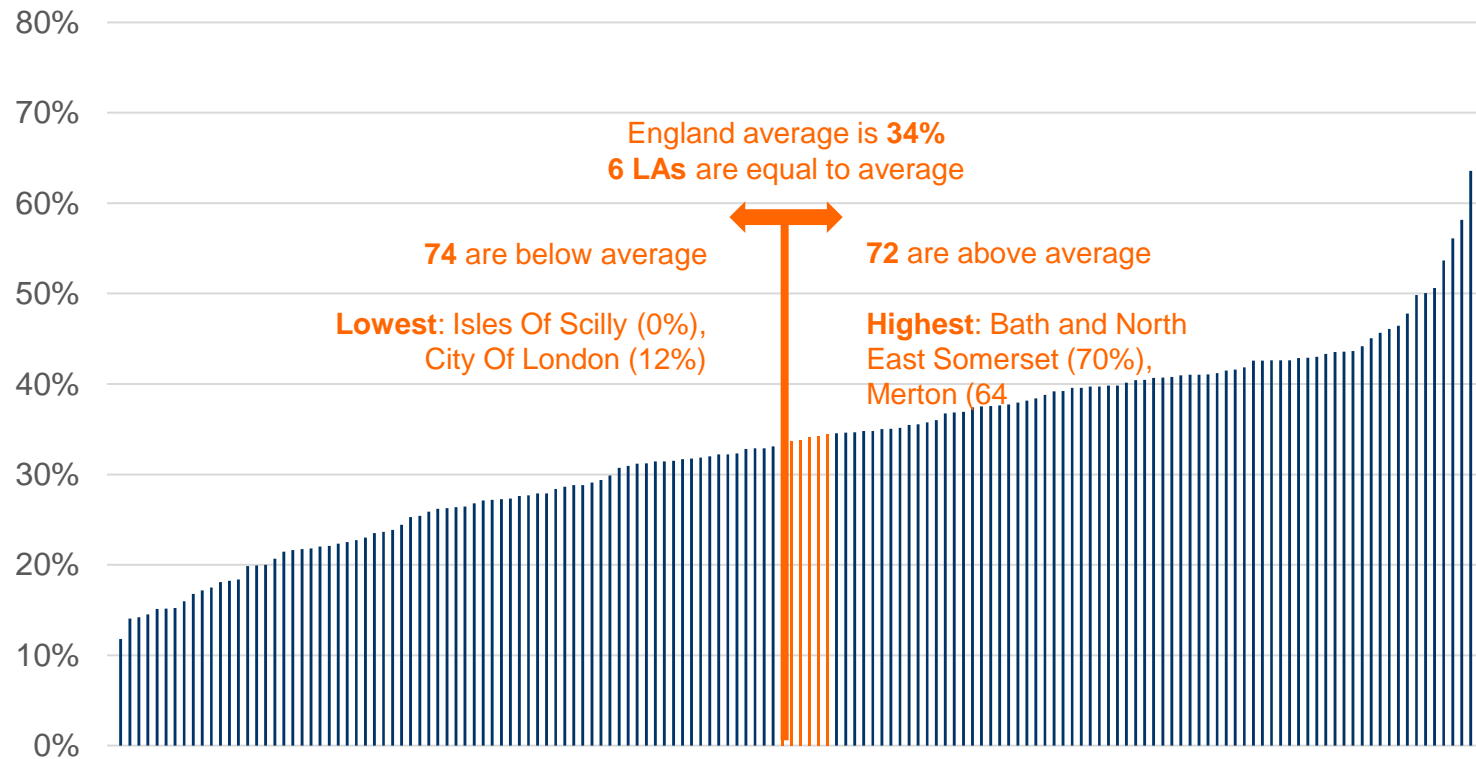
Percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC (2022)



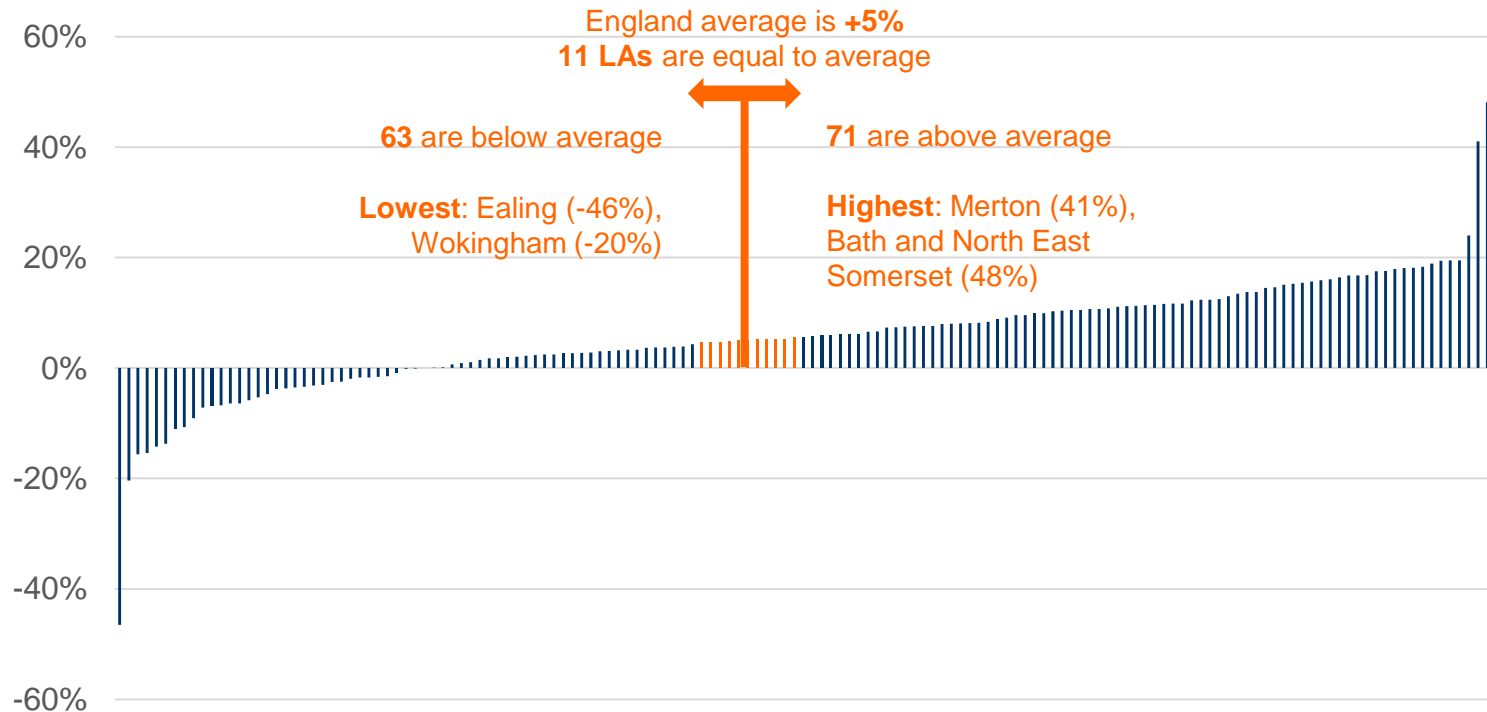
Change in percentage of children's services budget spent on LAC (2017-22)



Percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care (2022)



Change in percentage of LAC budget spent on residential care (2017-2022)



Top 20 'most stressed' local authorities

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

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	Hillingdon	Hillingdon	Buckinghamshire	Dorset
North East Lincolnshire	Stoke-On-Trent	Kensington and Chelsea	Westminster	Oxfordshire	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
Stoke-On-Trent	Shropshire	Hounslow	Rutland	Windsor and Maidenhead	Somerset
Liverpool	Liverpool	Richmond Upon Thames	Hounslow	Swindon	Gloucestershire
Hartlepool	City Of London	Camden	West Berkshire	Derby	Swindon
City Of London	Halton	Westminster	Kensington and Chelsea	Cambridgeshire	Oxfordshire
Middlesbrough	Redcar and Cleveland	Brent	Sutton	Somerset	Sutton
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Bradford	Tower Hamlets	Tower Hamlets	Slough	Medway
Halton	Blackpool	Kingston Upon Thames	Warwickshire	Dorset	West Sussex
Stockton-On-Tees	Stockton-On-Tees	Barnet	Essex	Bracknell Forest	Southampton
Tameside	Derby	West Berkshire	Southwark	Torbay	Derbyshire
Redcar and Cleveland	Gateshead	Rutland	Gloucestershire	Peterborough	Kingston Upon Hull, City of
Gateshead	Solihull	West Sussex	Cheshire West and Chester	Sutton	Bedford
Darlington	Herefordshire, County of	Harrow	Greenwich	Surrey	York
Wirral	Sefton	Ealing	Hammersmith and Fulham	Reading	Plymouth
Torbay	Hartlepool	Wokingham	Newham	Luton	Peterborough
Newcastle Upon Tyne	Isle Of Wight	Windsor and Maidenhead	Swindon	Medway	North East Lincolnshire
Isle Of Wight	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Southwark	South Gloucestershire	Bedford	Kingston Upon Thames
Southampton	Darlington	Essex	Reading	Southampton	Devon
Sefton	Tameside	Oxfordshire	Southend-on-Sea	Richmond Upon Thames	Derby

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 %
Plymouth	Westminster	Bath and North East	Bath and North East
Thurrock	Medway Towns	Somerset	Somerset
Blackpool	Oxfordshire	Merton	Merton
Norfolk	Blackpool	Halton	East Sussex
Somerset	West Berkshire	Middlesbrough	Doncaster
Worcestershire	Worcestershire	Tameside	Tameside
West Northamptonshire	Kensington and Chelsea	Leicester	Herefordshire, County of
	Bath and North East	Shropshire	Hackney
Gateshead	Somerset	Doncaster	Reading
North Northamptonshire	Sefton	East Riding of Yorkshire	Hartlepool
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Sunderland	Wigan	Rutland
Cheshire East	Leicester	Sefton	Cumbria
Shropshire	North Tyneside	Stockton-on-Tees	Southampton
Halton	Plymouth	Worcestershire	Cheshire West and Chester
Liverpool	York	Hartlepool	Northumberland
Tameside	Hammersmith and Fulham	Nottinghamshire	Calderdale
Sunderland	Kingston Upon Thames	Salford	Brent
Staffordshire	Gateshead	Peterborough	Gateshead
North Tyneside	County Durham	West Sussex	Sunderland
Stockton-on-Tees	Hillingdon	Blackpool	Cornwall
Hampshire	Wigan	Darlington	Blackburn with Darwen

Ones to watch in 2022

In 2022, **8 local authorities** were in the top 20 for at least four indicators of stress.


Local Authority	Number of indicators in which LA is in top 20 “most stressed” (2020)
Blackpool	5
Gateshead	5
Tameside	5
Halton	4
Hartlepool	4
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	4
Oxfordshire	4
Sefton	4

Ones to watch in recent years...

2022	2021	2020
Blackpool (5)	Oxfordshire (7)	Oxfordshire (5)
Gateshead (5)	Blackpool (5)	Tameside (4)
Tameside (5)	Sunderland (5)	Middlesbrough (4)
Halton (4)	Tameside (5)	Northamptonshire (4)
Hartlepool (4)	Bath and North East Somerset (4)	Buckinghamshire (4)
Kingston Upon Hull, City of (4)	Bracknell Forest (4)	Dorset (4)
Oxfordshire (4)	Kingston Upon Hull, City of (4)	Redcar and Cleveland (4)
Sefton (4)	Plymouth (4)	Surrey (4)
Southampton (4)		West Berkshire (4)
Stockton-On-Tees (4)		Hartlepool (4)

Three LAs, **Oxfordshire, Hartlepool, and Tameside** have been in the 'most stressed' category for three years in a row.

Key

 On list for past 3 years

Change in level of stress over time – increasing pressures

Local Authority	2022 # of stress indicators	2021 # of stress indicators	Change
Gateshead	5	2	↑
Halton	4	1	↑
Hartlepool	4	3	↑
Sefton	4	2	↑
Southampton	4	3	↑
Stockton-On-Tees	4	3	↑

Five areas were found to have increased number of stress indicators between 2021 and 2022.

Three areas Blackpool (5), Tameside (5), and Kingston Upon Hull, City of (4) remain in the top 10 of the 'Ones to watch' list but maintained the number of stress indicators between 2021 and 2022.

Change in level of stress over time – decreasing pressures

Local Authority	2022 # of stress Indicators	2021 # of stress indicators	Change
Bath and North East Somerset	3	4	↓
Plymouth	3	4	↓
Sunderland	3	5	↓
Bracknell Forest	1	4	↓

Between 2021 and 2022, 4 local authorities fell off the 'most stressed' list.

Local authorities with relatively low pressures

Relatively low pressures					
Barking and Dagenham	Bedford Borough	Bexley	Bolton	Brighton and Hove	Bristol, City of
Bury	Central Bedfordshire	Coventry	Croydon	Dudley	Enfield
Wolverhampton	Hertfordshire	Isles Of Scilly	Islington	Kent	Kirklees
Leeds	Leicestershire	North Lincolnshire	North Yorkshire	Redbridge	Rochdale
Stockport	Suffolk	Trafford	Waltham Forest	Warrington	Wiltshire

30 local authorities were not in the top 20 '**most-stressed**' for any indicators for three years in a row, from 2020 to 2022. This number increased from 24 LAs between 2019 and 2021. These sites could potentially provide some useful evidence on how services are helping to anticipate or reduce demand for more intensive statutory provision.

References I

- Slide 3
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2021-to-2022>
- Slide 4
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2021-to-2022>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2021-to-2022>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2021-to-2022>
- Slide 7
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2021-to-2022-financial-year>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2021-to-2022-financial-year>
- Slide 9
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2021-to-2022>

References II

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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2021-to-2022>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2021-to-2022-financial-year>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2021-to-2022>
- Slide 21
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2021-to-2022>

Appendix

- Appendix A: Local authorities with missing data for percentage of LAC placed 20 miles+ from home and out of LA boundary with missing data for change in percentage of LAC placed 20 miles+ from home and out of LA boundary on 31 March 2020 on 31 March 2020

Local Authorities (n = 17)					
Barnsley	Blackburn with Darwen	Croydon	City of London	Darlington	Gateshead
Halton	Kensington and Chelsea	Knowsley	North Tyneside	Oldham	Sefton
Solihull	South Tyneside	Trafford	Wigan	Winsor and Maidenhead	



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