

Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment – 2025

1. Executive Summary

This report presents an evidence-based assessment of the current state of children's care services in Berkshire, focusing on residential care, special educational needs (SEN), and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The findings indicate a significant and growing demand in all three areas, with notable service gaps and capacity challenges.

2. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform stakeholders, including local authorities, healthcare providers, and policymakers, about the pressing needs in children's care services within Berkshire. By analyzing recent data and trends, this report aims to support strategic planning and resource allocation to address these challenges effectively.

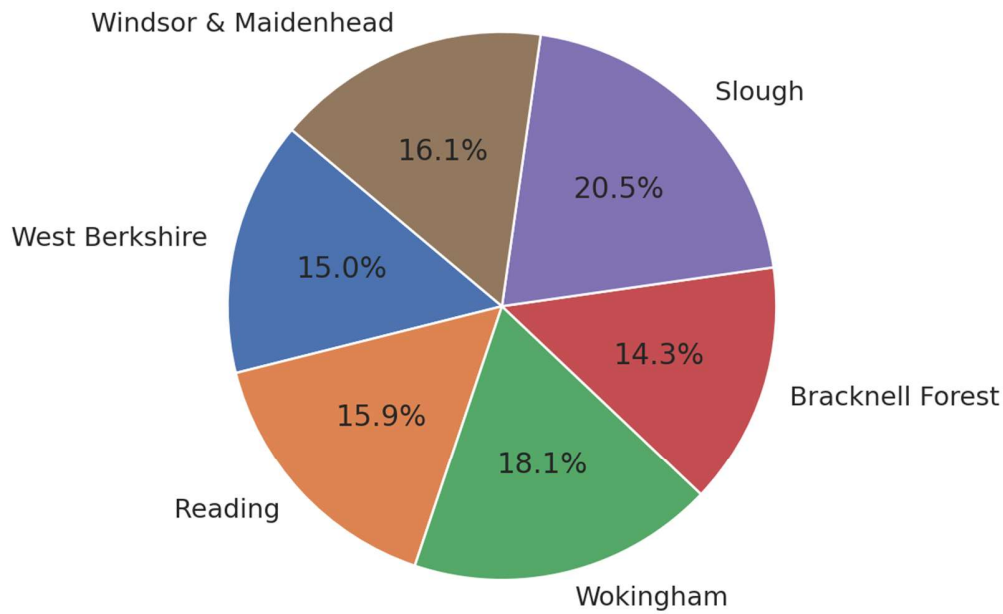
3. Demographic Overview

As of the latest available data, Berkshire has a diverse and growing population of children and young people.

3.1 Total Child Population

- West Berkshire: 35,914
 - Reading: 38,101
 - Wokingham: 43,182
 - Bracknell Forest: 34,279
 - Slough: 48,942
 - Windsor and Maidenhead: 38,593
- Total: 239,011 children aged 0–17

Child Population Distribution in Berkshire (2021 Census)



3.2 Projected Growth

The under-18 population in Berkshire is projected to increase by 7.2% by 2030, particularly in Slough, Wokingham, and Bracknell (ONS Subnational Population Projections 2020).

4. Residential Care Needs

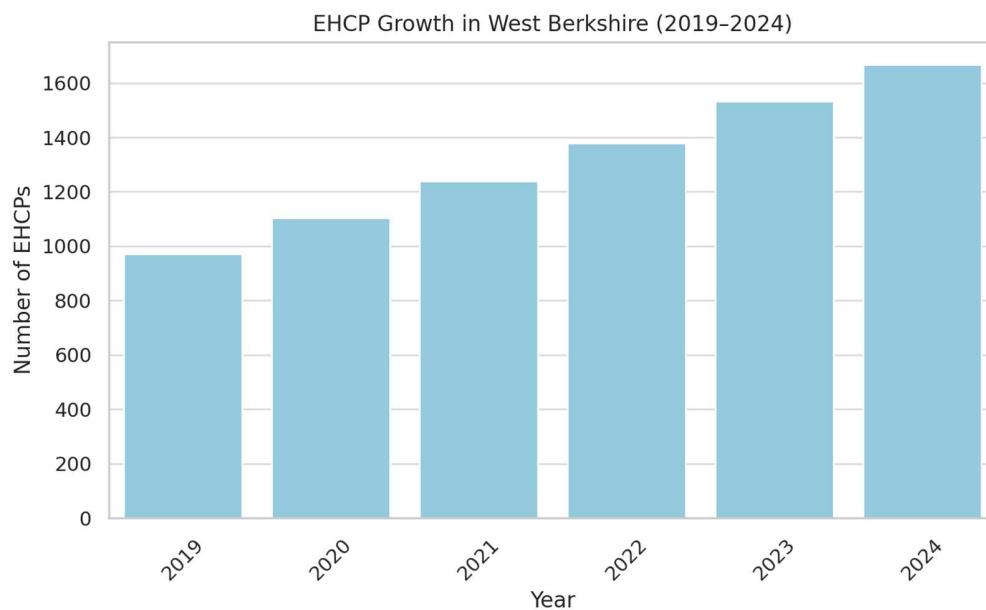
In 2023, there were 83,840 children looked after in England (DfE, 2023). Local authorities in Berkshire face capacity shortfalls in residential care, often resulting in out-of-area placements that compromise stability for vulnerable children and increase placement costs.

Further evidence is provided in the 'Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026' by Brighter Futures for Children (Reading Borough Council). This strategy emphasizes the need for placements close to the child's home, family, and school, and identifies challenges in securing suitable placements—especially for children with complex needs. The strategy outlines plans to expand in-house residential care and improve local placement options to enhance stability and outcomes.

Reference: <https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/BFFC-Children-in-Care-Sufficiency-Strategy-2024-2026.pdf>

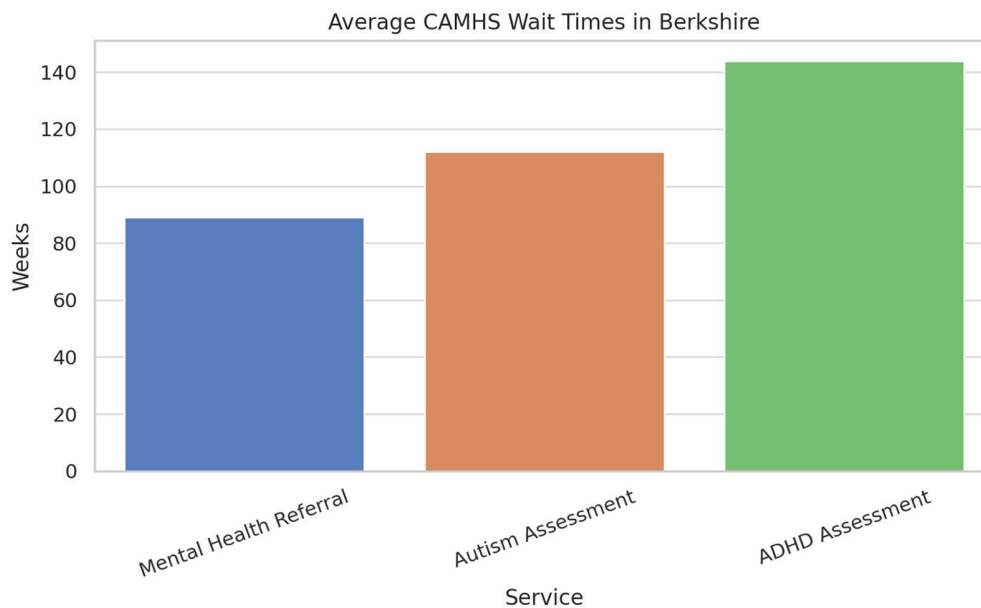
5. Special Educational Needs (SEN)

West Berkshire saw EHCPs rise from 971 in 2019 to 1,668 in 2024—a 58% increase (West Berkshire Council, 2024). Local provisions have not kept pace with demand, leading to long waits and increased independent school placements.



6. Mental Health Services

In 2023, 3,723 children in Berkshire received mental health treatment—63% of referrals, compared to a national average of 32% (Newbury Today, 2024). CAMHS services face extensive wait times: up to 89 weeks for mental health, 25–28 months for autism assessments, and 28–36 months for ADHD (Berkshire Healthcare, 2025).



7. Conclusions and Recommendations

There are clear gaps in residential care availability, SEN provision, and mental health services across Berkshire. Recommendations:

- Expand local residential provision to reduce out-of-area reliance.
- Increase assessment and intervention capacity for SEN.
- Bolster CAMHS resources and early intervention programs.

8. Appendix

Glossary of Terms

CLA – Children Looked After

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

C2 – Residential Institution Use Class

Reference Links

OFSTED Children’s Homes Register:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes>

West Berkshire Council Strategy Documents: <https://westberks.gov.uk>

Berkshire CAMHS Info: <https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk>

Reading CIC Strategy: <https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/BFfC-Children-in-Care-Sufficiency-Strategy-2024-2026.pdf>