

Daisy Care Homes

Children's Residential Care Needs Assessment

Supporting Evidence for a C2 Planning Application

Reading / Berkshire

Purpose of this report

This document summarises national and local evidence showing the need for additional children's residential care provision. It is intended to support a C2 planning application for a small, well-managed children's home.

Prepared for Daisy Care Homes

1. Executive Summary

This enhanced needs assessment supports the proposed C2 use as a children’s residential home. It draws on the existing Berkshire needs assessment supplied by the applicant, Department for Education statistics, Brighter Futures for Children and Reading Borough Council evidence, Parliamentary evidence and National Audit Office findings.

The evidence demonstrates a clear and continuing need for suitable local placements. Children are more likely to experience stability when they can remain close to their family, school, health professionals and existing support networks. A local, small-scale residential home can therefore form an important part of social infrastructure within Reading and Berkshire.

Key evidence

England had 83,630 children looked after on 31 March 2024. Department for Education children in need data shows more than 400,000 children in need in 2025. Local Berkshire evidence also identifies population growth, SEND pressure and CAMHS pressure.

2. National Need for Children’s Residential Care

The national picture shows sustained pressure on children’s social care. Department for Education statistics record 83,630 children looked after by local authorities in England at 31 March 2024, remaining above 80,000 following a long-term rise. Children in need data published by the Department for Education records 402,400 children in need in 2025.

The House of Commons Education Committee has previously highlighted substantial growth in children entering and remaining in care. The National Audit Office has also identified market pressures in children’s residential care, including rising demand, limited placements and increased placement costs.

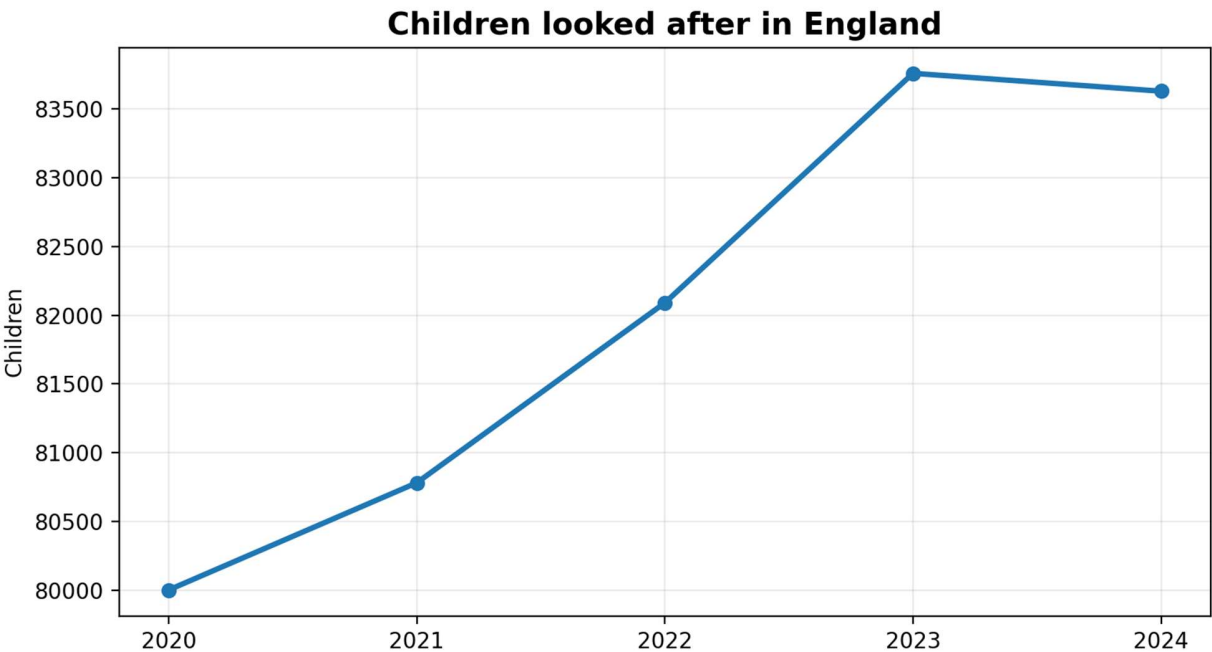


Figure 1: Children looked after in England, 2020-2024. Source: Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoptions, 2024.

3. Children in Need and Wider Social Care Pressure

Children in need include children assessed as requiring help and protection because of risks to their development or health. This wider cohort is important because it shows pressure before children enter care and demonstrates the scale of need within children's services.

Children in need as share of England child population

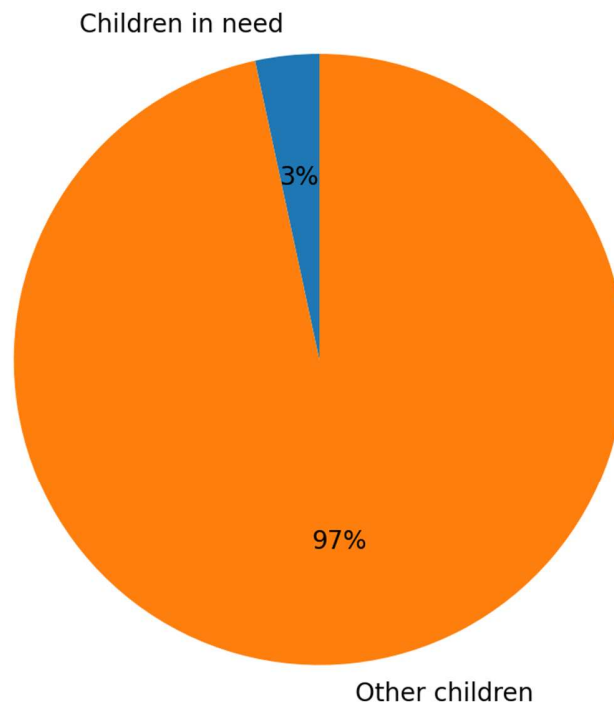


Figure 2: Children in need as a share of the child population. Source: Department for Education, Children in Need 2025; rounded comparative child population base used for visual context.

4. Local Need in Reading and Berkshire

The supplied Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment identifies a combined 0-17 population of 239,011 across West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, Slough and Windsor & Maidenhead. It also identifies projected under-18 population growth of 7.2% by 2030, with particular growth pressure in Slough, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest.

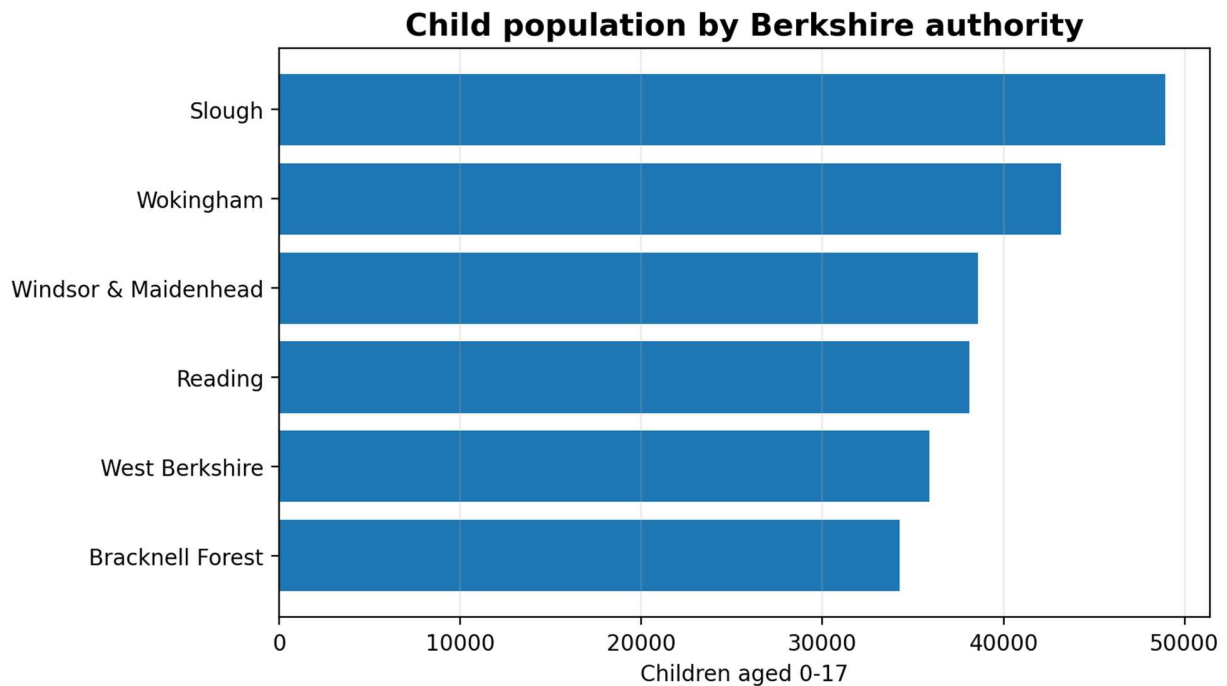


Figure 3: Berkshire child population by local authority. Source: Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment supplied by applicant.

5. Reading Sufficiency Strategy Evidence

The Reading Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2026, prepared by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council, sets out the statutory sufficiency duty under section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The strategy is clear that local authorities must work to secure sufficient accommodation within their area to meet children's needs.

The strategy supports the planning case because it recognises the importance of suitable placements close to children's existing networks. The proposed children's home would add local placement capacity and help reduce reliance on placements further away from Reading.

6. SEND and EHCP Pressure

The supplied needs assessment records a significant rise in Education, Health and Care Plans in West Berkshire, from 971 in 2019 to 1,668 in 2024. This represents a 58% increase and demonstrates wider pressure on children's services and specialist provision across the Berkshire area.

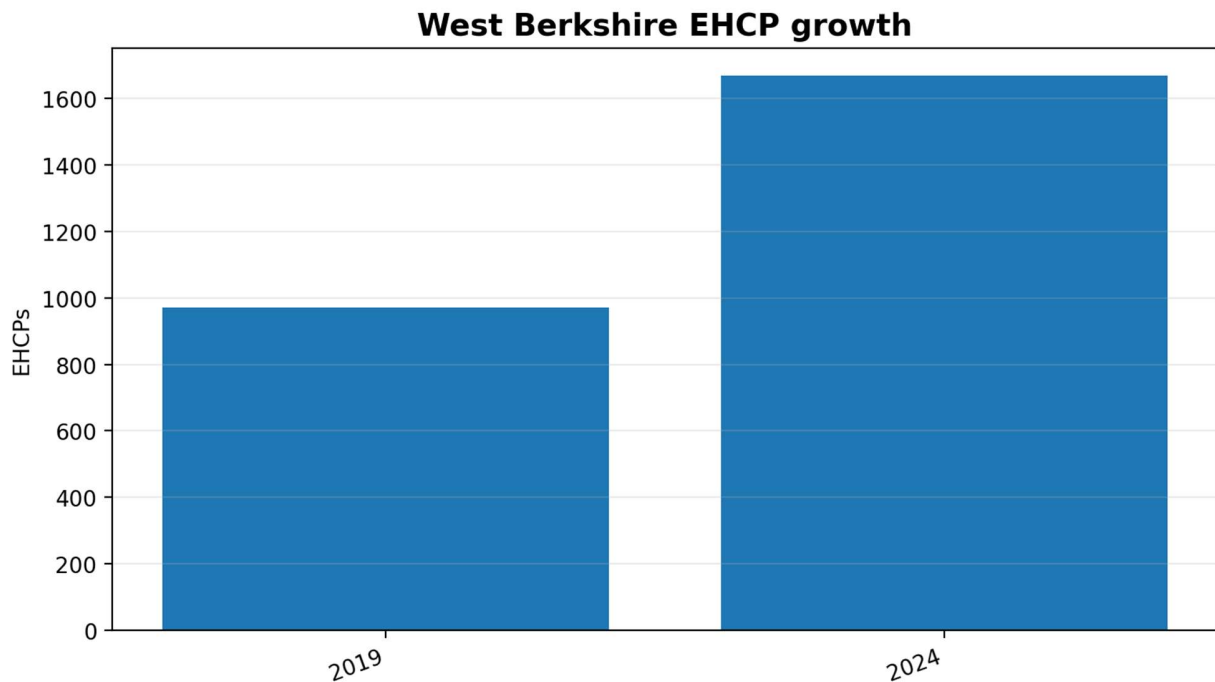


Figure 4: West Berkshire EHCP increase, 2019-2024. Source: Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment supplied by applicant.

7. CAMHS and Complexity of Need

The supplied assessment also identifies pressure on children and adolescent mental health services. Where children have complex emotional, behavioural, SEND or mental health needs, suitable local residential provision becomes especially important because placement instability can worsen outcomes.

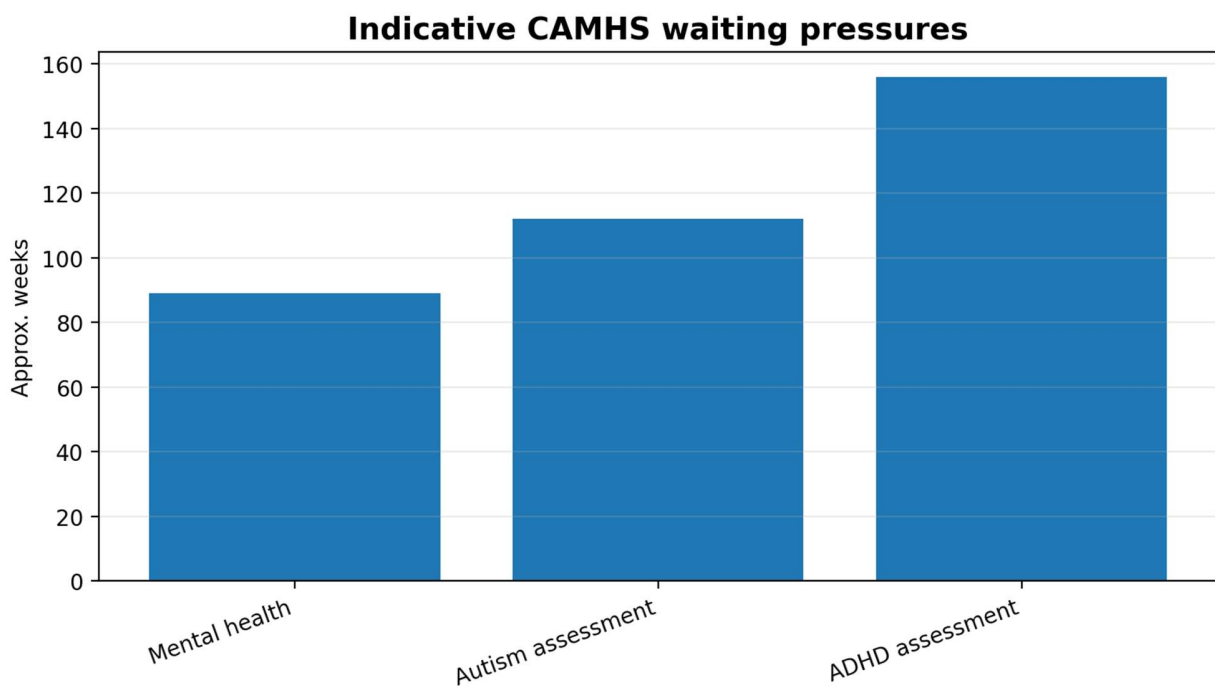


Figure 5: Indicative waiting pressures cited in the supplied assessment. Source: Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment supplied by applicant.

8. Planning Benefits of the Proposed C2 Use

- Provides additional local residential capacity for vulnerable children and young people.
- Helps children remain closer to family, schools, healthcare and established support networks.
- Supports the local authority objective of reducing reliance on out-of-area placements.
- Represents a community and social infrastructure use consistent with identified need.
- Can be managed at a small residential scale with appropriate staffing, supervision and safeguarding arrangements.

9. Summary Table of Evidence

Evidence	Key point	Planning relevance
DfE CLA statistics	83,630 children looked after in England in 2024.	Shows sustained national placement demand.
DfE Children in Need statistics	402,400 children in need in 2025.	Shows wider pressure on children's services.
BFfC / Reading Sufficiency Strategy	Sufficiency duty and need for suitable local provision.	Supports local placement capacity.
Berkshire needs assessment	239,011 children aged 0-17 across Berkshire; projected 7.2% growth.	Shows local population and demand context.
SEND / EHCP data	West Berkshire EHCPs increased from 971 to 1,668.	Shows complexity and specialist support pressure.

10. Conclusion

The evidence supports the provision of additional local residential accommodation for children and young people. The proposed C2 children's home would respond to a clear national and local need, support the statutory sufficiency objectives of Reading Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children, and provide a positive form of social infrastructure.

Subject to appropriate management, staffing, safeguarding and operational controls, the proposal should be viewed as a beneficial use that contributes towards meeting an identified need within Reading and the wider Berkshire area.

References

- Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoptions, 2024.
- Department for Education, Children in Need, 2025.
- Brighter Futures for Children / Reading Borough Council, Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2026.
- National Audit Office, Managing Children's Residential Care, 2025.
- House of Commons Education Committee, Children's Homes and Social Care evidence.
- Berkshire Children's Services Needs Assessment supplied by applicant.

11. Reading Borough Council Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026

Reading Borough Council's official Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026, prepared by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of the Council, provides strong evidence of the need for additional high-quality local children's residential provision. The strategy explains the Council's statutory sufficiency duty under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 and recognises the importance of ensuring enough suitable accommodation is available to meet the needs of children looked after by the authority.

The strategy highlights the benefits of local placements wherever appropriate, enabling children to remain closer to family members, schools, health services and established support networks. It recognises that local provision can improve placement stability, reduce disruption and help achieve better long-term outcomes for children.

The strategy also identifies the challenge of securing suitable placements, particularly for children with complex emotional, behavioural and therapeutic needs. Expanding high-quality local provision is identified as a key objective to reduce reliance on distant placements and improve sufficiency across Reading.

12. How the Proposed Development Supports Reading Borough Council

Reading Borough Council priority	How the proposal supports the priority
Increase local residential capacity	Provides an additional local children's home within Reading.
Reduce out-of-area placements	Offers an opportunity for more children to remain closer to home.
Improve placement stability	Small-scale residential care can provide consistent support and routines.
Keep children near education and services	Children can remain closer to schools, healthcare and professional networks.
Improve outcomes	Stable local placements contribute to better emotional, educational and social outcomes.

13. Additional National Evidence

Department for Education statistics show that more than 80,000 children are looked after by local authorities in England, while over 400,000 children are classified as Children in Need. Over the last decade the looked-after population has increased by more than 20%, placing increasing pressure on local authorities to secure appropriate residential placements. The National Audit Office has reported continuing shortages of suitable placements, contributing to increased costs and greater use of out-of-area accommodation.

14. Overall Planning Assessment

The proposal responds directly to an identified national and local need for additional children's residential accommodation. It supports the strategic aims of Reading Borough Council by increasing local placement capacity, reducing reliance on distant placements and providing high-quality accommodation within the community. The evidence contained within this report demonstrates that the proposed C2 use represents an appropriate form of social infrastructure capable of delivering clear public benefits.