

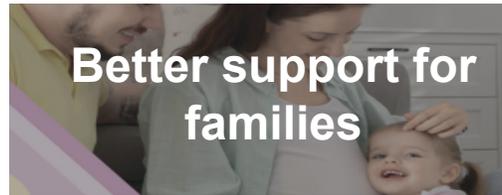
East Sussex Best Start Strategy

Overview March 2026



Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life: strategy overview

In July 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) published its plan to improve family services and early years education. This will support the ambition for 75% of children aged 5 achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.



- Additional £500m investment to deliver **Best Start Family Hubs** in every local authority by 2028
- A national **digital service** to bring together the trusted advice and guidance parents need in one place
- **Improved services** for child and maternal health
- **Child outcome targets** for every local authority (LA)



- Continue the **working parent entitlement expansion** to 30hrs free education from 9 months
- **More places in settings**, inc. in school-based nurseries
- **Increased funding to promote inclusion** of children with SEND
- Create a **stronger system** by supporting high-quality providers grow, consider new powers for LAs to shape markets, and more frequent, Ofsted inspections



- **Incentives for early years (EY) teachers** in disadvantaged communities - an ambition for one in every setting
- **Raising the status of EY educators**, through a workforce register and career pathways
- **Raising skill levels** through training and resources, centres of expertise and stronger links between schools and settings
- Universal and targeted support for schools to **improve teaching in reception year**.

East Sussex: Good Level of Development (GLD)

East Sussex Target

- The proportion of children in East Sussex County Council achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 78%; and
- Disadvantaged children have benefitted *at least equally* from this improvement; that is, that the proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 59.2%.

Personal, social and emotional development

- 1. Self-regulation**
 - understand feelings and begin to regulate behaviour
 - focus, respond and follow instructions
 - work towards simple goals with patience
- 2. Managing self**
 - show confidence and independence
 - understand and follow rules
 - manage personal needs, like hygiene and dressing
- 3. Building relationships**
 - form positive attachments
 - play cooperatively and take turns
 - show sensitivity to the needs of others

Communication and language

- 4. Listening, attention and understanding**
 - listen attentively, responding with comments or questions
 - take part in conversations with teachers and peers
- 5. Speaking**
 - participate in discussions using new vocabulary
 - explain thinking and express ideas and feelings using full sentences

Physical development

- 6. Gross motor skills**
 - move confidently and safely
 - show strength, balance and coordination in a range of physical activities
- 7. Fine motor skills**
 - hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing
 - use other tools such as scissors and cutlery
 - begin to show accuracy when drawing

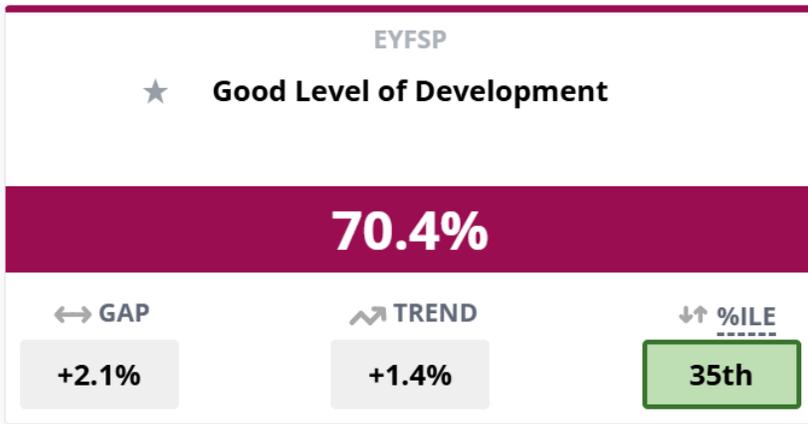
Literacy

- 8. Comprehension**
 - understand and retell stories using own words and new vocabulary
 - anticipate events and use new vocabulary in discussions
- 9. Word reading**
 - say sounds for letters and digraphs
 - read simple words and sentences aloud, including sound blending
- 10. Writing**
 - write recognisable letters and spell words
 - write simple phrases and sentences

Mathematics

- 11. Number**
 - understand numbers up to 10
 - recognise quantities up to 5 without counting
 - automatically recall number bonds up to 5 and some to 10
- 12. Numerical patterns**
 - count beyond 20
 - compare quantities up to 10
 - explore number patterns up to 10 such as odds, evens and doubles

12 development goals for children
 Children’s development is assessed at the end of reception by their teacher through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile assessment. To meet a ‘Good Level of Development’ (GLD) children must meet 12 development goals:



Vision

This strategy sets out a clear ambition for children and families. Together we will ensure that:

- Parents are supported to have good health in pregnancy and into parenthood
- Babies and parent/carers have good early relationships
- Mental health and wellbeing challenges in parents/carers are identified early and supported
- Babies and children have good health outcomes
- Every child enters education with confidence, belonging, and an equitable start.
- We meet the national ambition that 75% of children achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five by 2028.



Principles

- To create a joined-up, inclusive, and high-quality early years system that supports families from conception to school entry.
- To use high-quality data and shared intelligence to understand need, track progress and drive accountability across the whole system.
- To commit to a reduction in inequalities across all outcomes, as well as an overall improvement.
- To centre evidence-based practice and to continue to be responsive to developing policies and practices (e.g. the anticipated revised Healthy Child Programme guidance).



Strategy Overview

01

Better support for families



02

More accessible early education and childcare



03

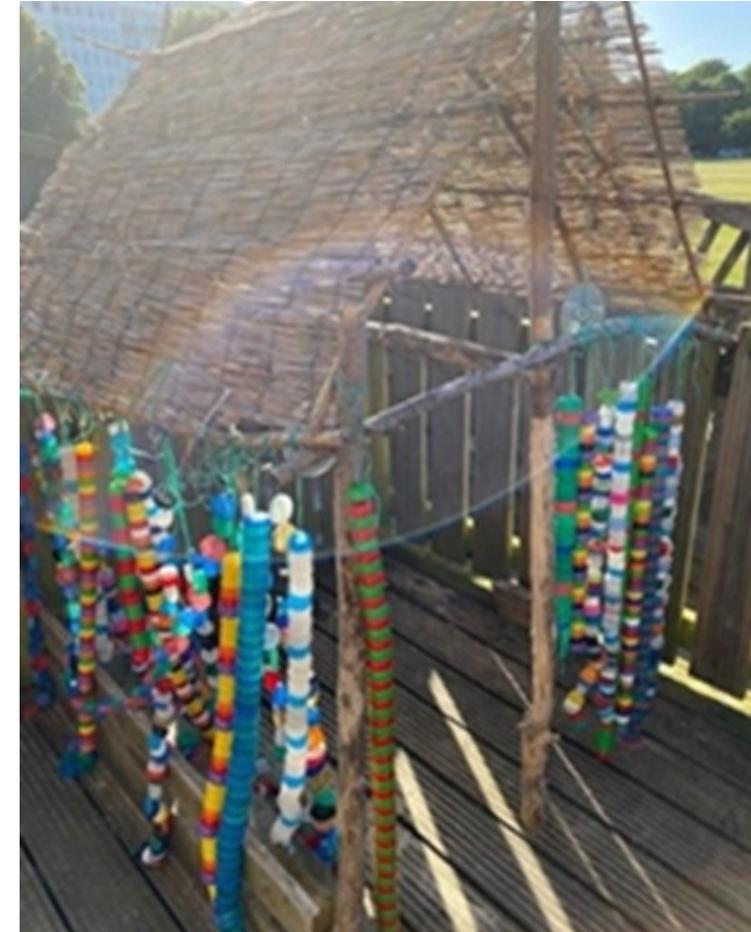
Improving quality in early years including reception



1. Better support for Families

We plan to:

- 1.1 Deliver Best Start Family Hubs across East Sussex
- 1.2 Deliver integrated services including health, education, parenting, and enhanced SEND support
- 1.3 Ensure hubs are accessible, inclusive, working together with parents and carers on co-designing and reviewing service provision through parent panels
- 1.4 Maintain delivery of health services within Family Hubs (e.g. health visitors, infant feeding, mental health)
- 1.5 Promote early identification and support for developmental needs
- 1.6 Improve vaccination uptake and access to mandated reviews
- 1.7 Deliver healthy eating and oral health programmes
- 1.8 Deliver digital resources in line with national digital programme for parents/carers



2. More accessible early education and childcare

We plan to:

2.1 Increase availability of early years places

2.2 Promote uptake of funded childcare entitlements

2.3 Support wraparound childcare and flexible provision for working families

2.4 Ensure sufficient places for eligible two-year-olds where the family is in receipt of additional support

2.5 Track vulnerable children and those who are not in childcare to ensure every effort is made to enable them to access provision

2.6 Support the Early Years sector to create an inclusive environment for all children

2.7 Create Early Years Centres of Excellence that unite education, health, and community expertise to improve child development and support smooth transitions into school.



3. Improving quality in early years including reception

We plan to:

- 3.1 Work with the sector to ensure every nursery setting has a qualified early years teacher with a specific focus initially on our most disadvantaged communities
- 3.2 Support and grow a skilled early years workforce
- 3.3 Deliver training & resources for early years educators
- 3.4 Strengthen partnerships between settings, schools, and health services
- 3.5 Improve teaching in the reception year through a universal offer to all our schools.
- 3.6 Expand our Early Years moderation offer to improve pupil outcomes



Delivery Mechanisms

- Local Best Start Partnership Board
- Three Operational Subgroups
- Community Partnerships and Family Voice
- Data and Impact Framework
- Workforce Strategy
- Funding and Resources
- Digital Infrastructure



Local Best Start Governance Board



Terms of Reference

- Set a bold vision for improving child development and health outcomes with local delivery partners across all sectors
- Maximise opportunities for partnership working across the early years, including creating strong networks and building on existing community assets
- Share and use data to understand local need and disparity that informs the targeting of interventions and resources effectively and efficiently
- Highlight areas of best practice in East Sussex and beyond, and to develop and scale innovative practice
- Share insights from families and collaborate on engagement to improve services
- Identify opportunities for prevention at scale, with a focus on reducing inequalities

Operational Sub-Groups

01

Better support for families

- Leads: Celia Lamden and Julie Powell

02

More accessible early education and childcare

- Leads: Allison Martin and Jane Spice

03

Improving quality in early years including reception

- Leads: Nicola Blake and Rowena Dumbrell

- Each sub-group will include representatives from across Children's Services teams.

Family Hub Funding

Strand	%	2026-27 Allocation	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	23%	£523,700	£428,200	£439,700
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	5%	£104,700	£106,800	£108,900
Parenting support	18%	£364,400	£369,000	£385,200
Home learning environment support	14%	£276,500	£279,900	£292,200
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	26%	£534,600	£534,600	£534,600
Infant feeding support	13%	£261,400	£261,400	£261,400
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£26,700	£26,700	£26,700
Total		£2,092,000	£2,006,600	£2,048,700

Universal RISE Bid

- 1. Strengthening EYFS quality in coastal communities** by seconding experienced EYFS teachers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) into family hubs to improve early identification, inclusive practice, and transitions for disadvantaged children.
- 2. Embedding cross-sector collaboration** between early years settings, family hubs, and mainstream schools to create shared expertise, aligned pedagogy, and consistent support pathways.
- 3. Targeted transition and family engagement work** to support disadvantaged three-year-olds not accessing childcare, including transition programmes, resource packs, and parental workshops.
- 4. Measuring impact through GLD outcomes, early identification rates, school-readiness indicators, and qualitative feedback**, supported by baseline 2024–25 data and a final evaluation by March 2026.

Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

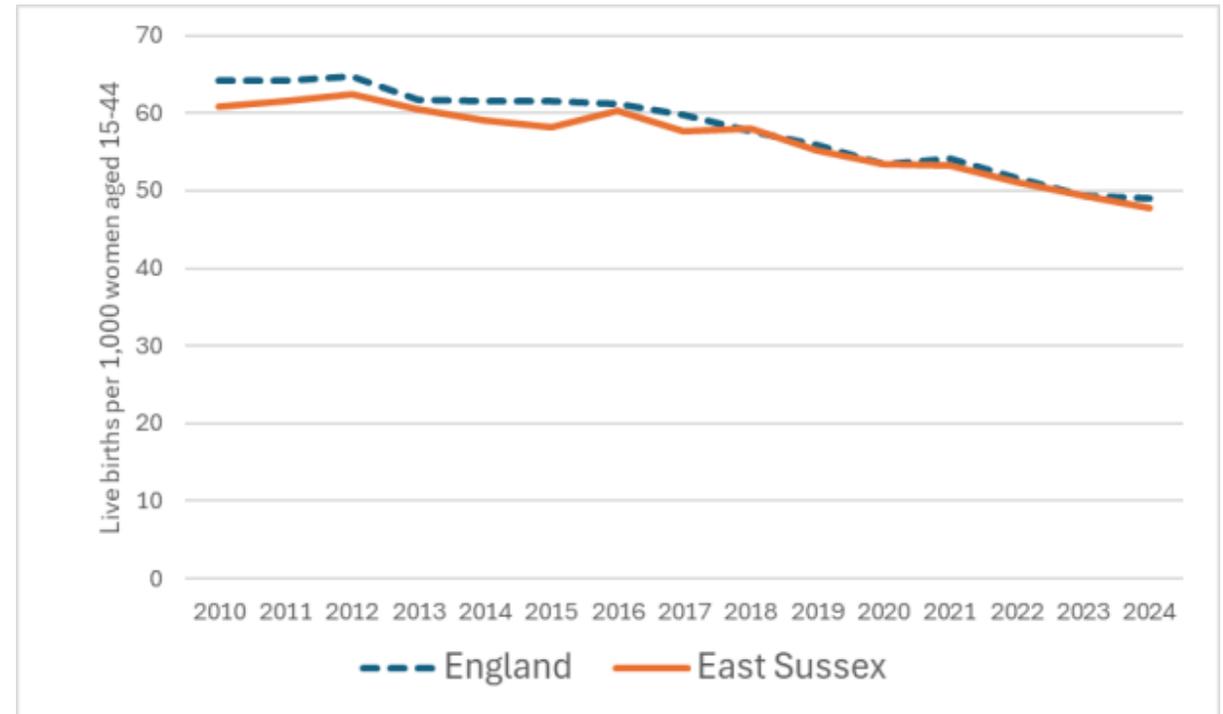
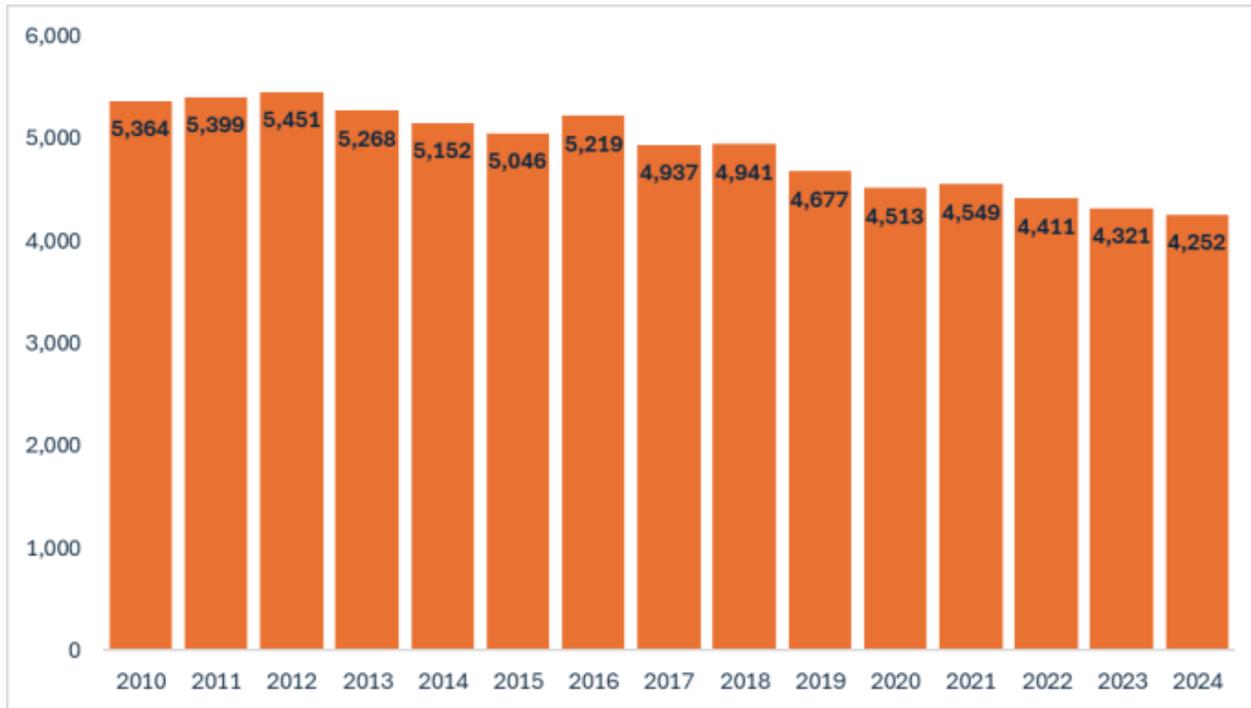
- Summary of some key data for East Sussex



Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

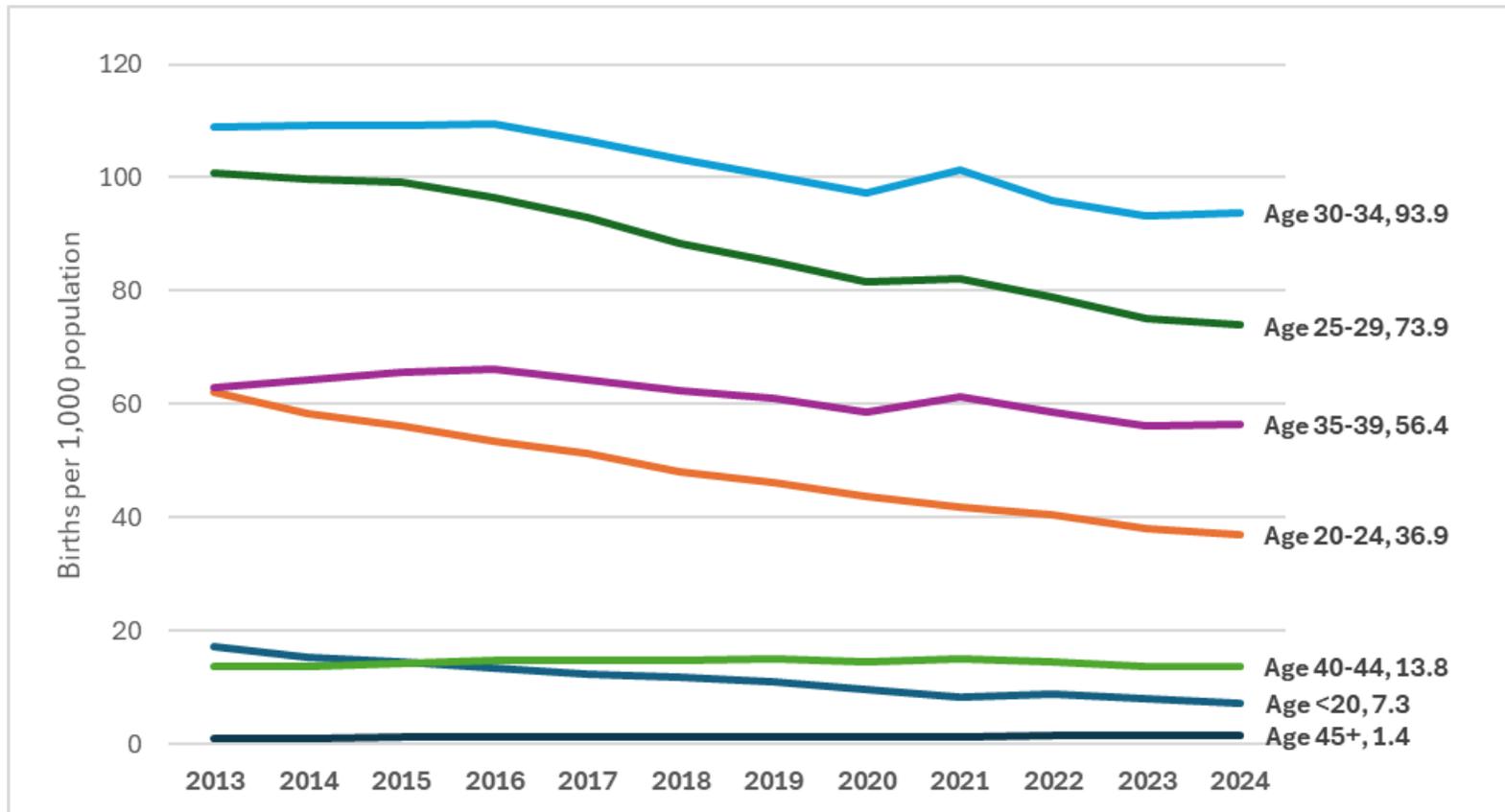
Number of live births in the county continues to reduce

Rates are reducing in line with England



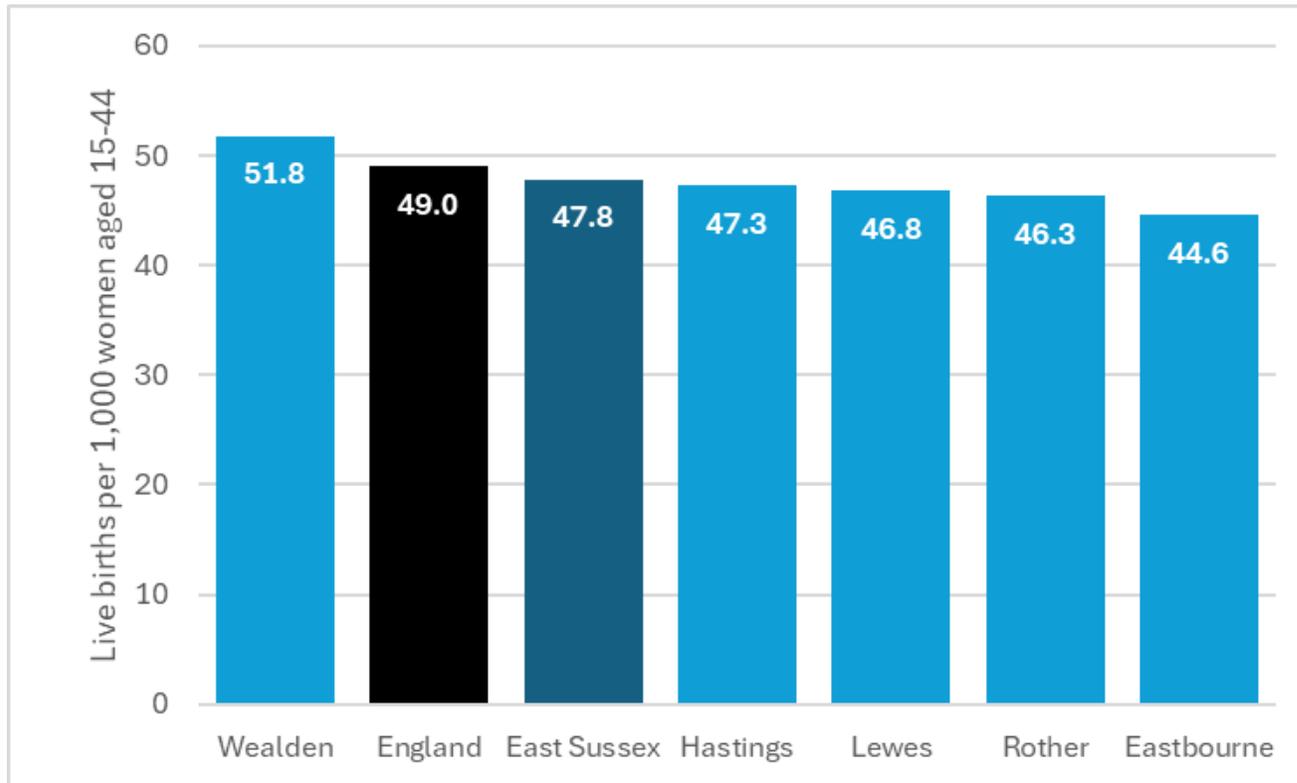
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Age-specific birth rates in East Sussex show biggest reductions for those in their 20s at the time of pregnancy



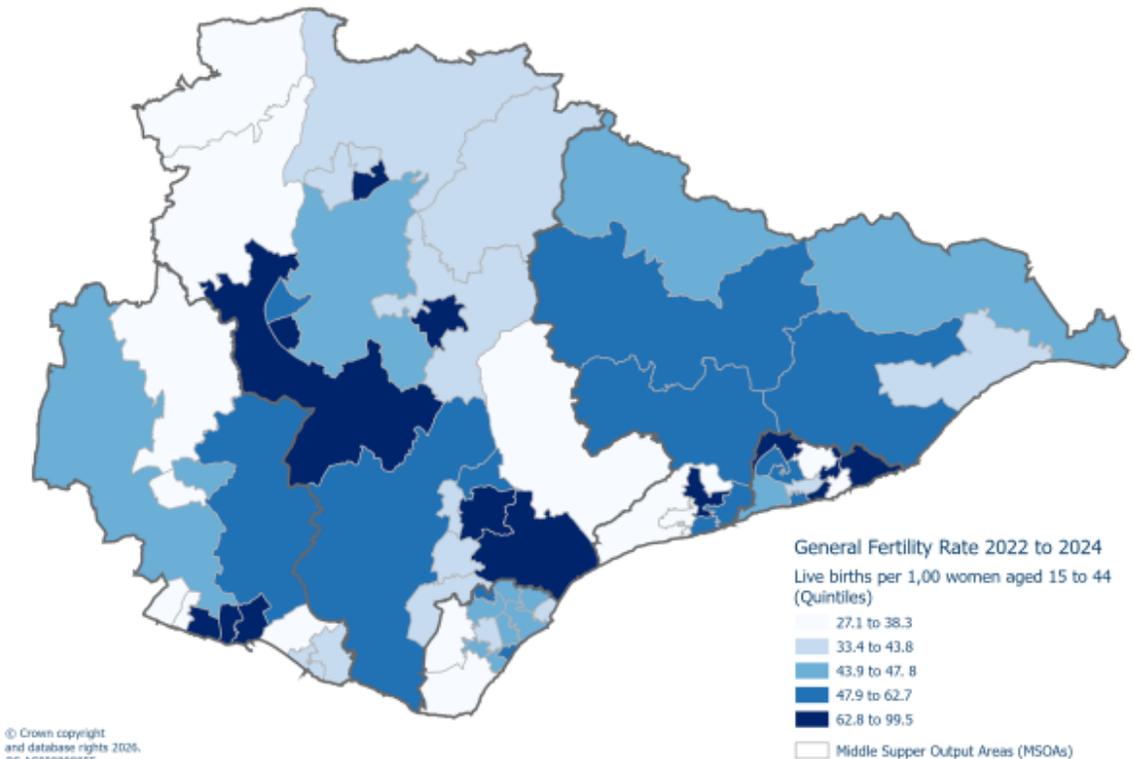
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Rates in 2024 by district/borough



Source: ONS

Rates in 2022-2024 by smaller area



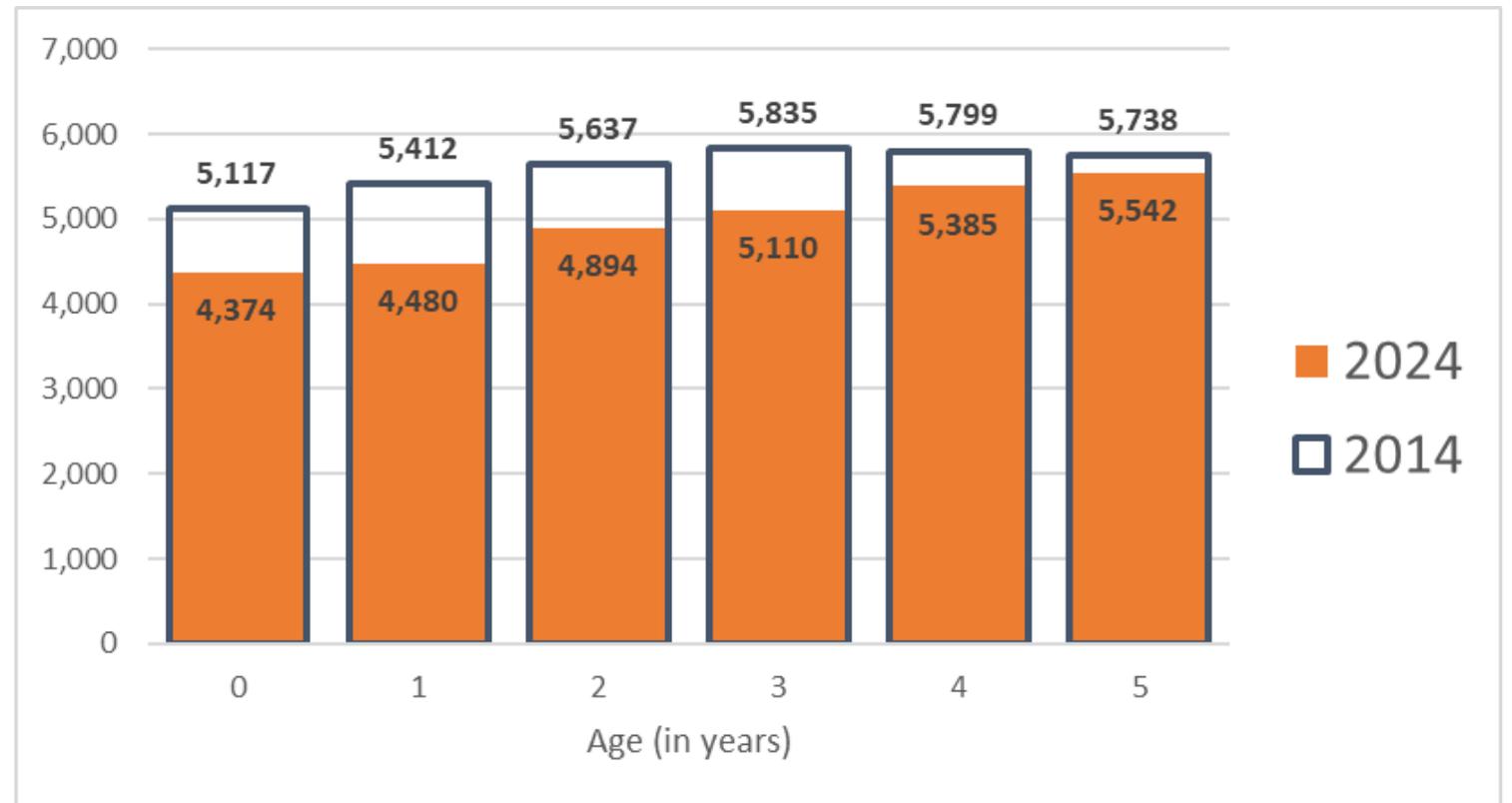
Source: East Sussex Public Health Intelligence Team

[Further detail in JSNA report: Birth rates in East Sussex between 2001 and 2021](#)

Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

East Sussex residents aged 0-5 years, comparing 2014 to 2024

- Reduction of 11% in the last 10 years from 33,538 in 2014 to 29,785 in 2024

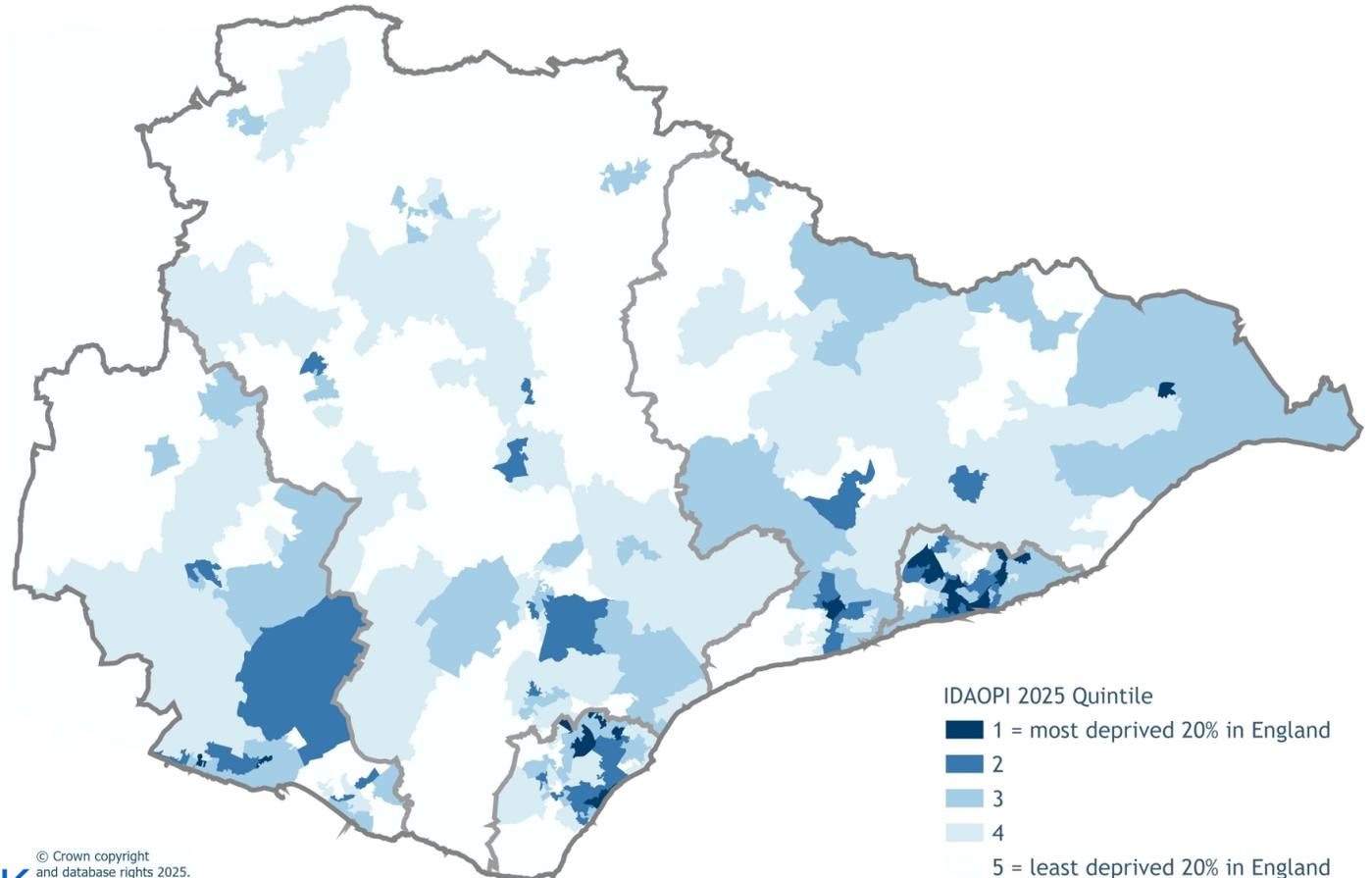


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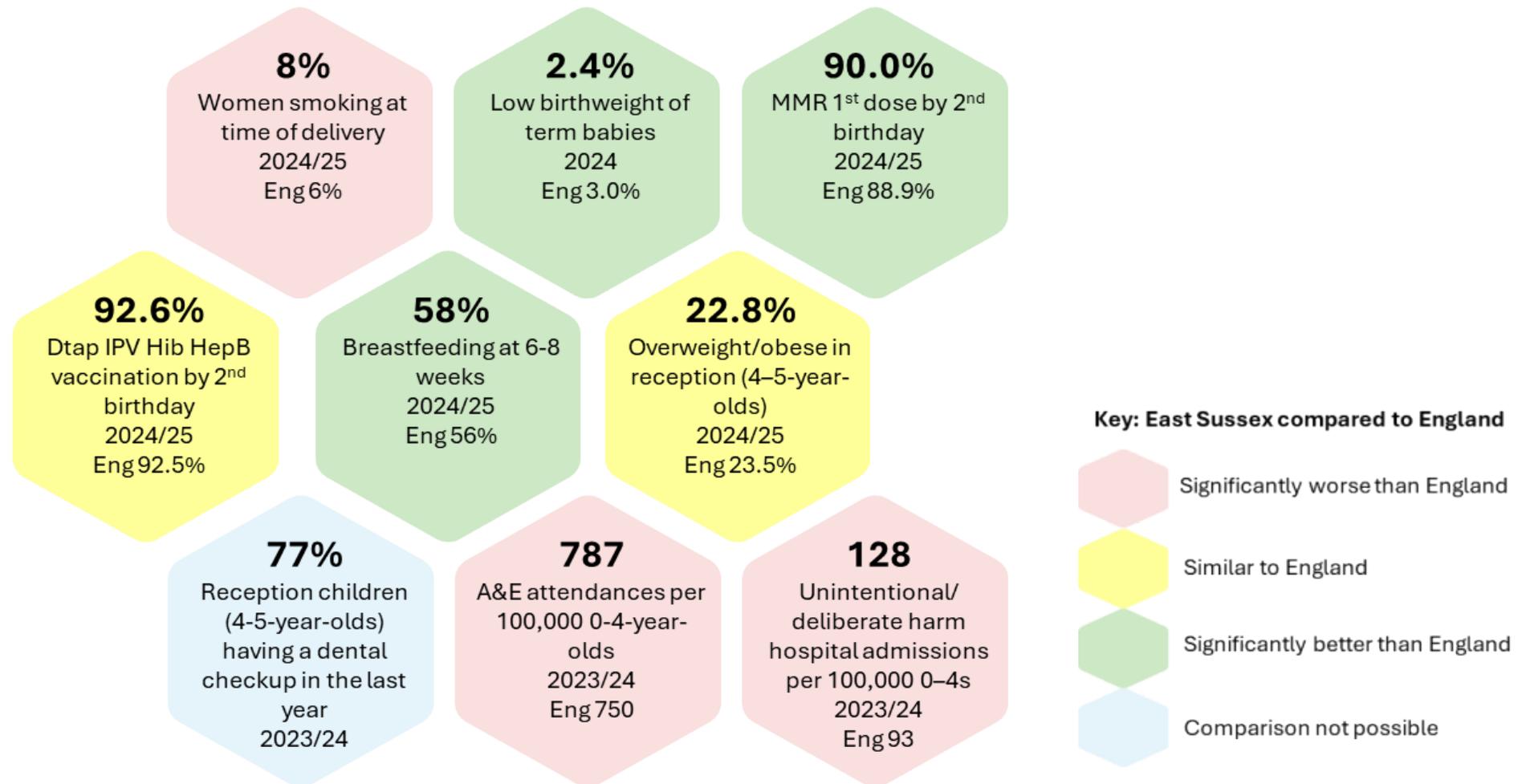
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) 2025 by LSOA in East Sussex

Measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families

Area	Average Score	Rank (out of 296 Local Authorities)	No. of LSOAs amongst worst 20% in England	% of all LSOAs
Eastbourne	42%	68	14	23%
Hastings	50%	26	23	43%
Lewes	33%	140	4	6%
Rother	36%	118	8	14%
Wealden	26%	216	3	3%
East Sussex total			52	16%

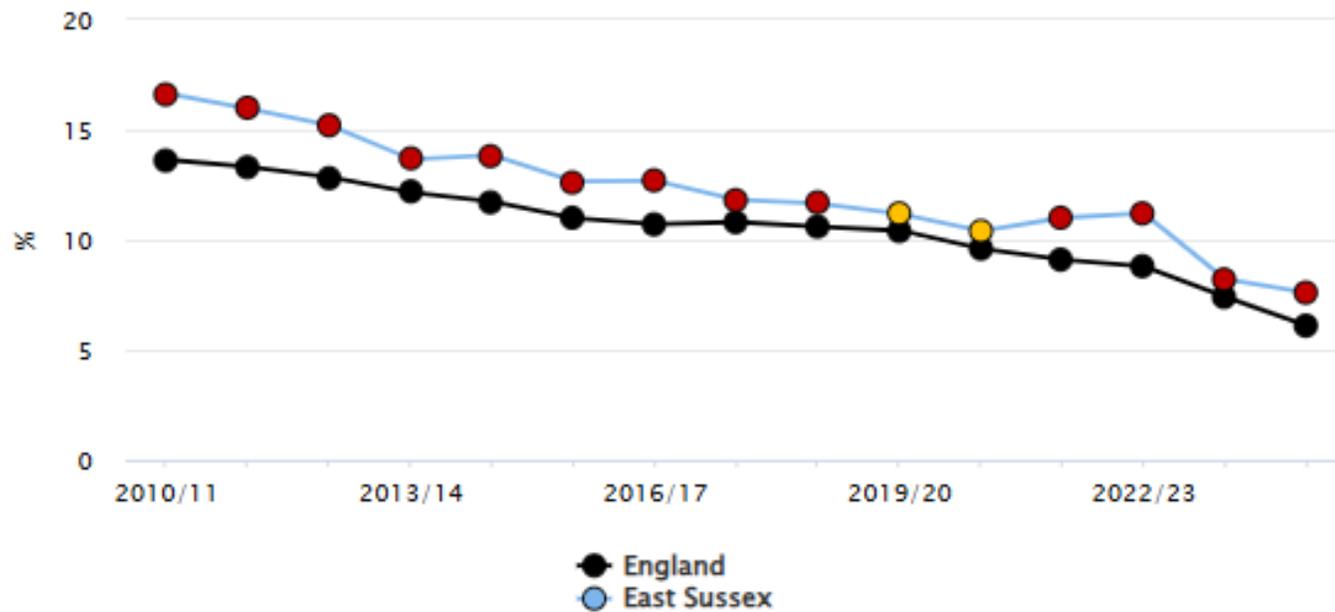


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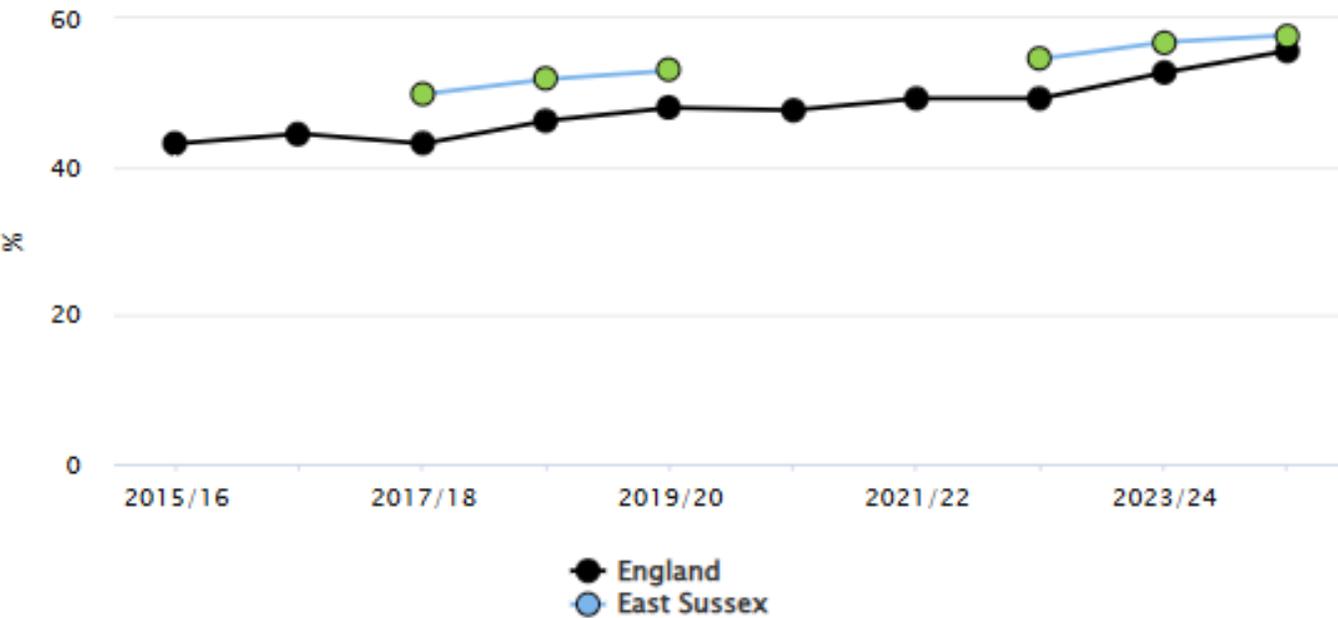
Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

Mothers who are smoking at the time of delivery, data to 2024/25



Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

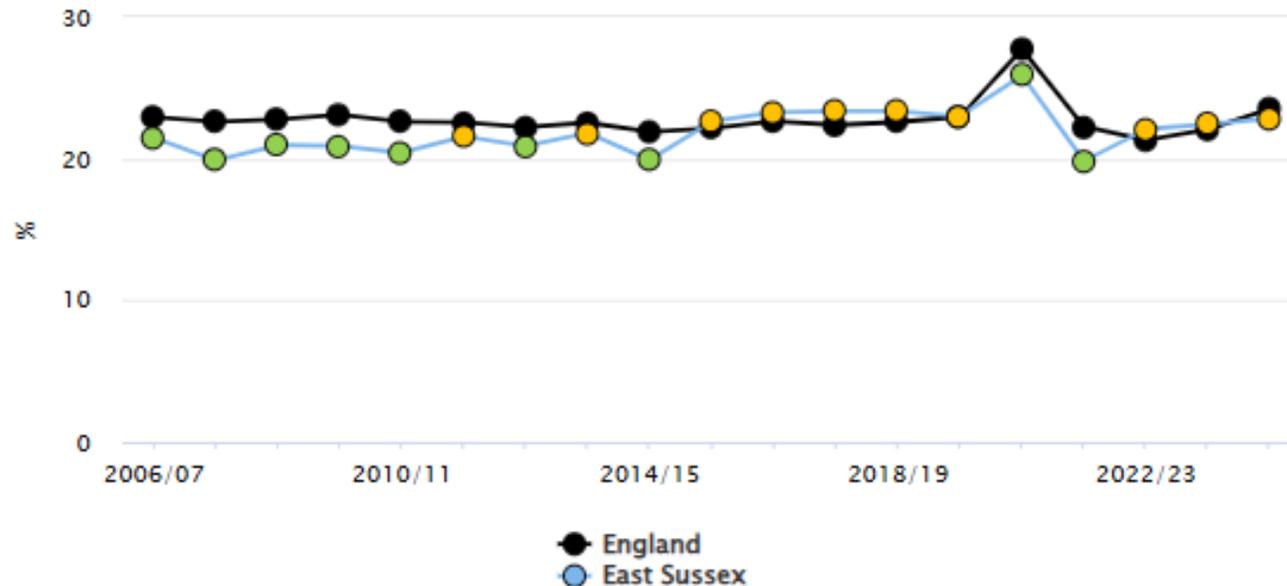
Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks, data to 2024/25



	Recent Trend	Count ▲▼	Value ▲▼	
England	➡	492,132	43.5	
East Sussex	➡	5,040	57.4	
Lewes	➡	1,010	65.6	
Eastbourne	➡	1,060	58.8	
Wealden	➡	1,460	58.6	
Rother	➡	735	56.3	
Hastings	➡	780	47.7	

Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

Prevalence of overweight (including obesity) in 4–5-year-olds, data to 2024/25

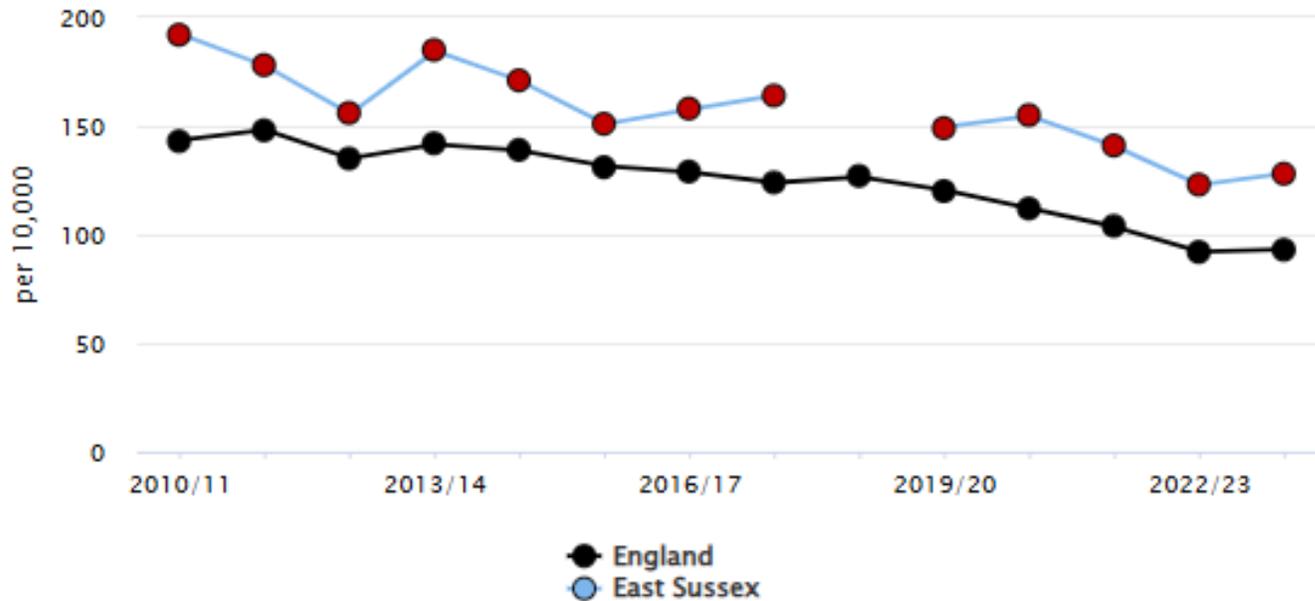


	Recent Trend	Count ▲▼	Value ▲▼	
England	→	128,255	23.5	
East Sussex	→	1,040	22.8	
Eastbourne	-	225	25.4	
Hastings	-	215	24.2	
Rother	-	165	23.2	
Lewes	-	185	22.8	
Wealden	-	255	20.2	

22.8% for 4-5 year olds and 32.4% for 10-11 year olds

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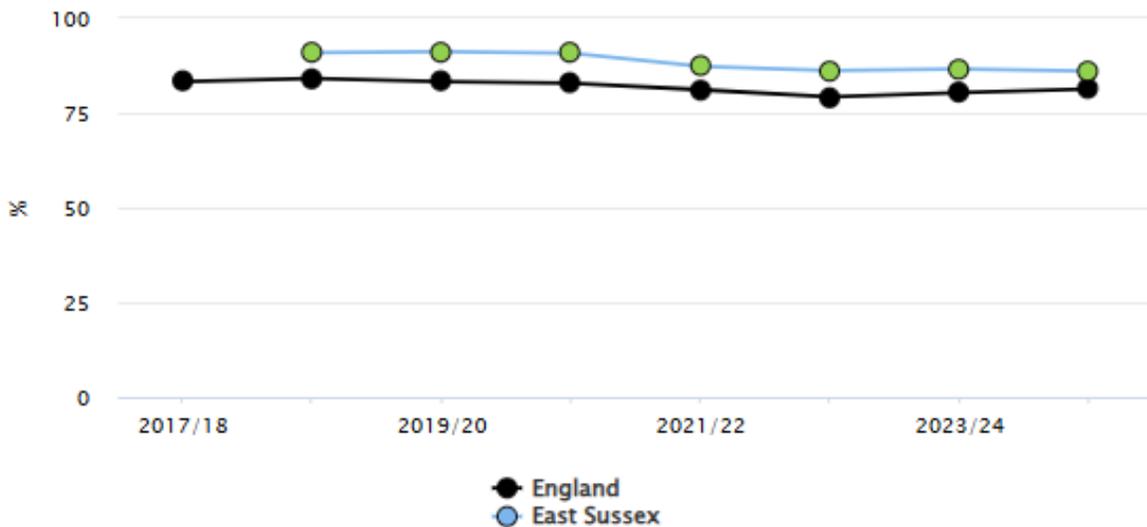
Emergency admissions to hospital caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries, ages 0-4, data to 2023/24



	Recent Trend	Count ▲▼	Value ▲▼	
England	↓	28,554	93.2	
East Sussex	↓	315	128.3	
Hastings	→	80	170.6	
Rother	→	55	150.9	
Eastbourne	→	55	121.1	
Lewes	→	50	117.6	
Wealden	→	75	101.0	

Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

Good Level of Development at age 2 to 2 and a half years, data to 2024/25



Measure	England	South East Region	East Sussex
Good level of development	81.4	81.3	86.1
- expected level in communication skills	87.6	89.8	92.7
- expected level in gross motor skills	93.6	93.7	95.5
- expected level in fine motor skills	93.7	91.8	97.6
- expected level in problem solving skills	93.0	93.9	94.7
- expected level in personal social skills	91.8	92.6	93.8

Picture of 0-5 year olds in East Sussex

Good Level of Development data at age 5

