

# Greater Essex Area Profile

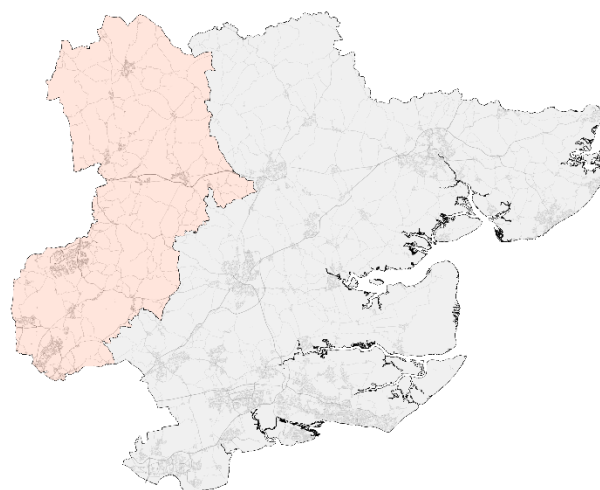
## West Essex Unitary Authority

Public Health Intelligence  
Research & Citizen Insight  
Policy Unit

## West Essex Unitary Area Profile

This profile gives a high-level picture of the health of a new West Essex Unitary Authority, made up of the current Epping Forest, Harlow, and Uttlesford districts.

The report looks at demographics, mortality, disease prevalence, early years, and socioeconomic factors. Area profiles are updated annually by Essex County Councils Public Health Intelligence team. The PHI team have also produced a comprehensive [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#) suite of dashboards, which covers the topics in this report and the wider determinants of health. These dashboards are regularly updated and are the best source of local health data.



### Demographic characteristics

West Essex UA area is home to c.320k residents (17.2% of the Greater Essex population). The population is projected to grow by 6% in the years to 2040, with the fastest growth being seen amongst the 65+ age group. The area is less ethnically diverse than England as a whole.

### The health of the population

Life expectancy in West Essex UA is 84 years for females and 80 years for males, broadly similar to figures for England as a whole. The preventable mortality rate is significantly lower than England, but this varies across the patch. Harlow has higher levels of preventable mortality compared to other areas, particularly in preventable cancer and cardiovascular deaths.

### Inequalities

There are inequalities within the area. Women born in the most deprived parts of West Essex die 1.5 years earlier than in the least deprived areas. For men the gap is 4.8 years. Deprivation in West Essex is relatively low, though there are pockets of high deprivation in parts of Epping Forest and Harlow. There is a high demand for housing in West Essex, and the median house price is circa 9 times the median salary.

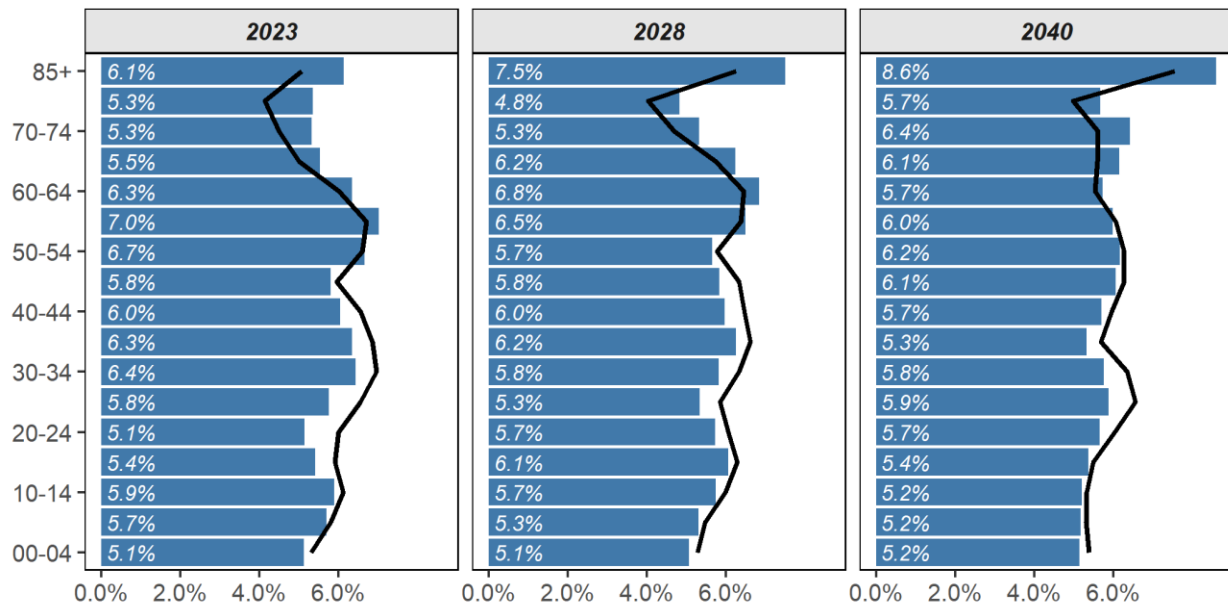
## Demographic characteristics

West Essex has a population of 319,650 according to the latest 2023 ONS population estimates. This is 17.2% of the Greater Essex population. The population is set to increase to 325,185 and 340,230 in 2028 and 2040.

63,098 (19.7%) residents are aged 0-15, 198,249 (62.0%) are age 16-64, and 58,305 (18.2%) are age 65+.

### Current & future population structure

*Black line is England*



The median age in West Essex is 41, similar to the England median age (40). There is a roughly equal sex split with females making up 51.3% of West Essex residents.

68,410 (21.4%) of residents in West Essex identify as an ethnicity other than White British. This is lower than England, where 26.5% identify as an ethnicity other than White British.

93.5% of residents speak English as their main language.

After English, the three most common languages spoken in West Essex are 'Any other European languages' (7,620, 2.5%), Polish (2,720, 0.9%), and Turkish (1,130, 0.4%).

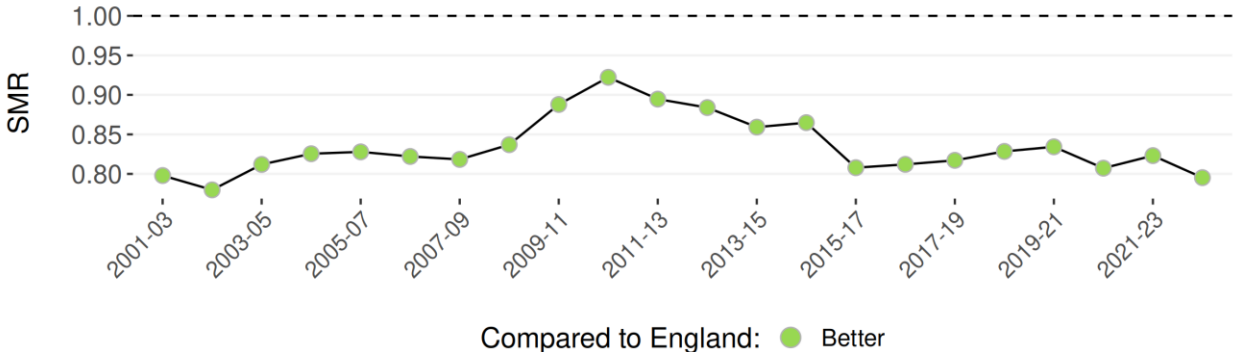
## Mortality

Mortality is an important measure of the health of a population. Some key indicators are preventable mortality rates, suicide rates, and child mortality.

The charts below show the standardised mortality rate (SMR) for preventable deaths in West Essex. The SMR shows if West Essex sees more or fewer preventable deaths than we would expect, based on England’s overall rates. SMRs account for differences in the age and sex profile of the local population to make this a fair comparison. A SMR greater than 1 means that preventable deaths are higher than expected, and lower than 1 means preventable deaths are lower than expected. If the preventable mortality rate is significantly higher than England, the point is shown in red. Mortality rates which are lower or similar to England may still represent important public health issues – for example if there has been year on year increases locally which haven’t been seen nationally.

**Standardised preventable mortality rates, residents aged under 75**

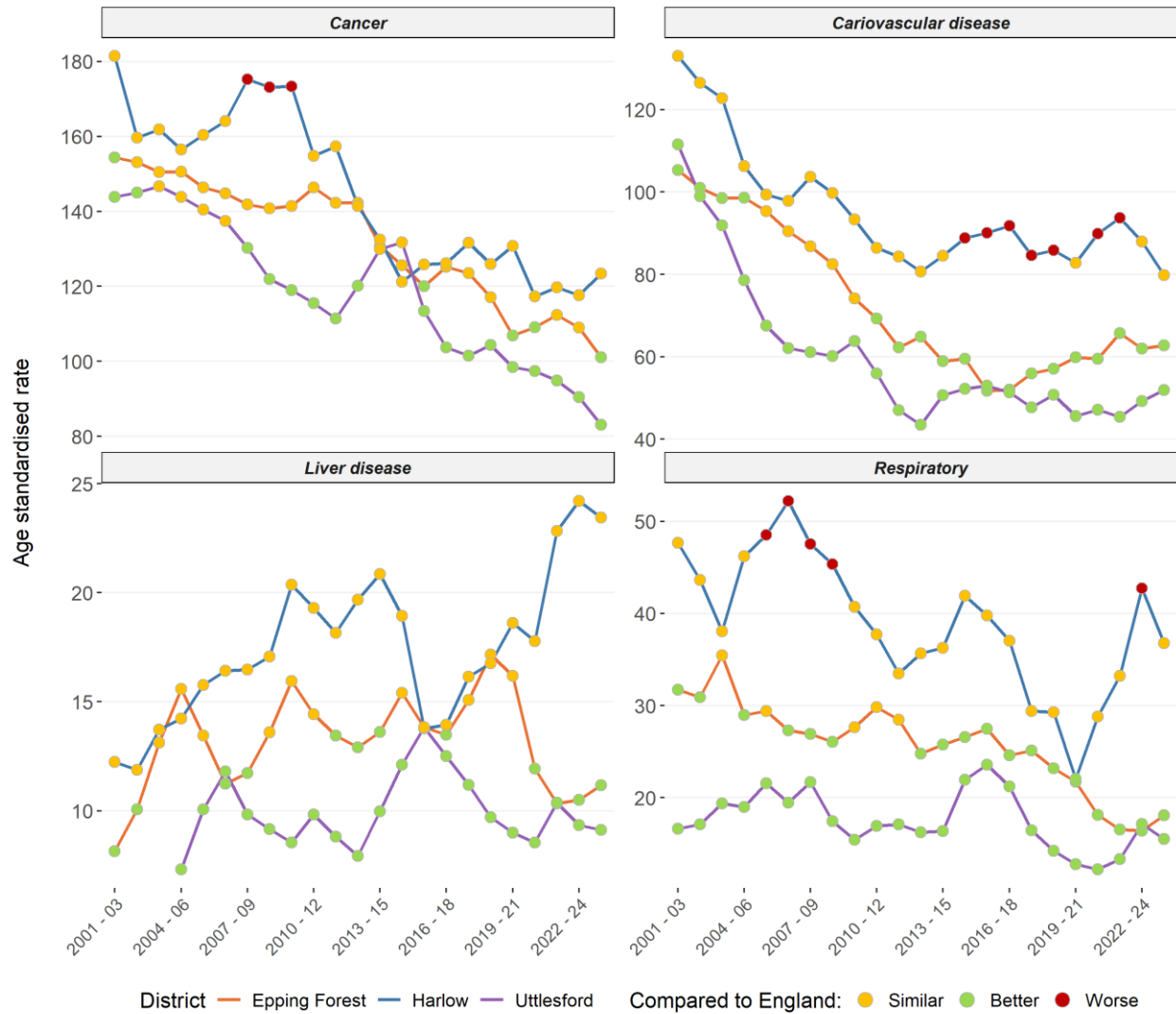
Values above 1 indicate higher than expected mortality



Compared to England, West Essex has a lower level of preventable mortality. Preventable deaths can be grouped into four main causes – deaths which are considered preventable due to cancer, circulatory disease, liver disease, or respiratory disease. Trends in preventable mortality are shown on the next page, split by the cause of death and current LTLA.

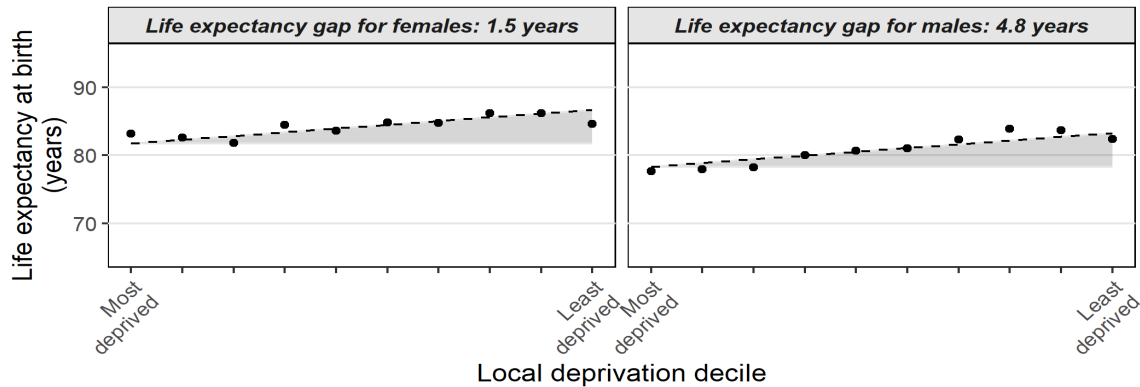
Preventable mortality in West Essex is consistently higher in Harlow compared to other areas. Harlow has seen large increases in preventable mortality due to liver and respiratory disease in recent years.

**Preventable mortality rates per 100,000 residents aged under 75**



Preventable mortality is concentrated in deprived areas. People living in the most deprived parts of West Essex die roughly 3 years earlier than people living in the least deprived areas.

### ***Inequality in life expectancy within West Essex***



In the chart above the area is split into 10 groups based on their index of multiple deprivation decile. Life expectancy is calculated for each area. If there is no inequality then the dotted line on the chart will be flat. The chart shows that life expectancy generally increases as deprivation decreases.

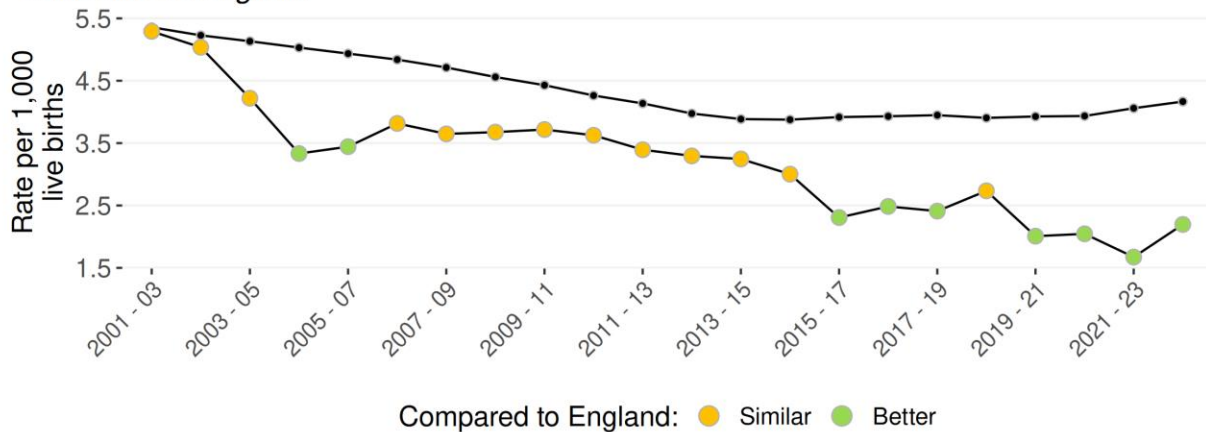
Infant mortality is influenced by the ‘upstream determinants’ of health such as social, economic, and environmental conditions. Infant mortality can be thought of as an indicator of the general health of an area.

Similarly suicide is high level indicator of the mental health of an area. The drivers of suicide are complex and can vary person to person. Some of the nationally recognised risk factors for suicide include poor mental health, loneliness and isolation, history of self-harm, and (in adults) long term unemployment. There is also a link to physical health and distressing events, such as being recently diagnosed with a terminal illness.

The charts below show infant mortality and suicide rates in West Essex:

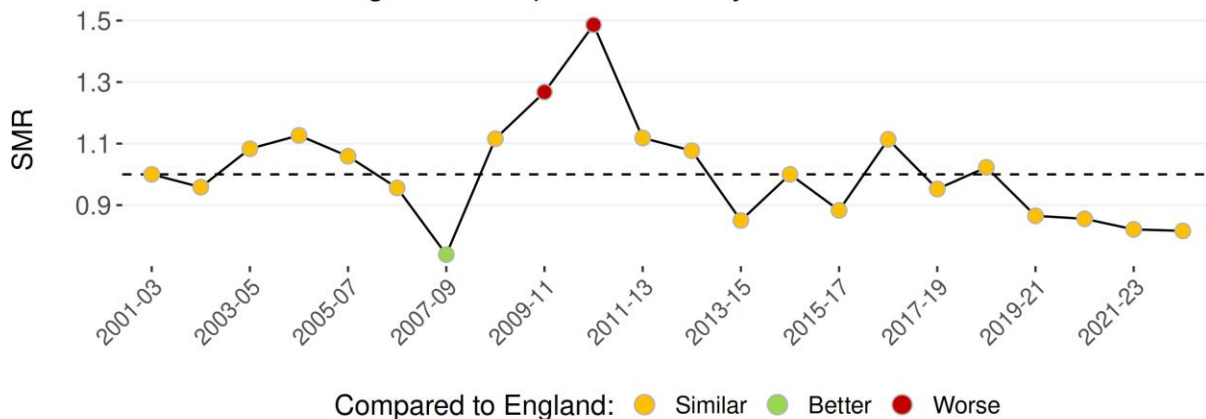
### Infant mortality rate

Black line is England



### Standardised suicide mortality rates

Values above 1 indicate higher than expected mortality



## Disease prevalence and hospital activity

GPs maintain registers of their patients who have been diagnosed with certain conditions. This data can be used to estimate the disease prevalence of some common conditions in West Essex (table below). West Essex has lower estimated prevalence for Asthma, COPD, and Osteoporosis. Estimated prevalence is higher for Rheumatoid Arthritis.

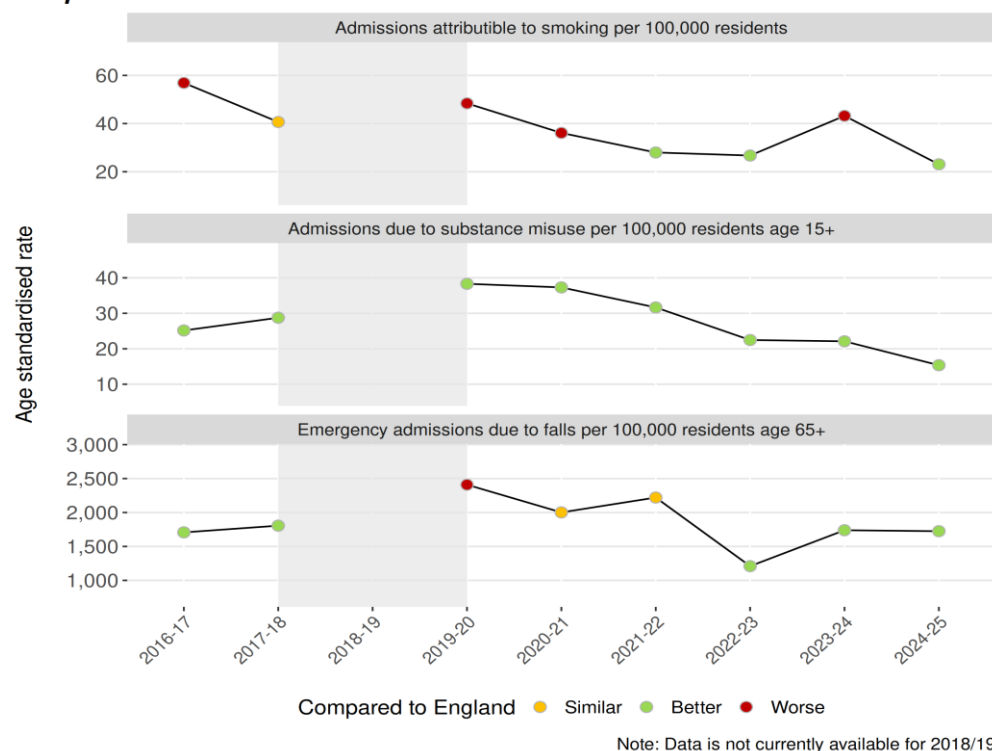
The prevalences in the table above are based on people who have been diagnosed with each condition. This will miss people who have the condition but haven't been diagnosed, so the true prevalence is likely higher than the figures in the table.

Condition	Residents diagnosed	West Essex %	England %
Asthma	19,540	6.4%	6.6%
COPD	5,269	1.6%	1.9%

Condition	Residents diagnosed	West Essex %	England %
Osteoporosis	814	0.7%	1.2%
Rheumatoid Arthritis	2,357	0.9%	0.8%

Hospital admissions due to smoking, substance misuse, and (in older people) falls are largely preventable. Older people who fall usually present to hospitals as emergency admissions, which are typically more expensive compared to other admissions. Public health interventions such as smoking cessation, drug and alcohol services, and strength and balance programmes can all help to reduce demand on health care services. The charts below show admission rates for these three causes in West Essex:

### Hospital admission rates in West Essex



## Early years

A child's early years can have a lifelong impact on their health behaviours and outcomes in later life. Some indicators in this area include childhood obesity, admissions to hospital due to injuries, oral health, the proportion of children who are living in poverty, and educational attainment and attendance.

- The proportion of **year 6 children in West Essex who are overweight or obese between 2022/23 - 24/25 is 33.1%**, similar to the England proportion (36.2%). Since 2008/09 - 10/11 the proportion of children who are overweight or obese has **increased by 0.4%** (compared to 3.1% in England).

- **17.7% of West Essex 5 year olds have visually obvious dental decay in 2023/24**, similar to England (22.4%). Since 2007/08 the proportion has **decreased by 8.6%** (compared to 8.5% in England).
- There are **8,482 (13.0%) children living in absolute poverty** in West Essex in 2024/25 (defined as households with a total income below 60% of the 2011 median income, adjusted for inflation). This is similar to England (19.8% of children live in absolute poverty). Since 2021/22 the proportion of children living in absolute poverty in West Essex has decreased by 1.1%.

## Socioeconomic

The area a person lives in, their employment, and their financial situation all influence health. This section looks at affordability of housing, average weekly earnings, and violent crimes in West Essex.

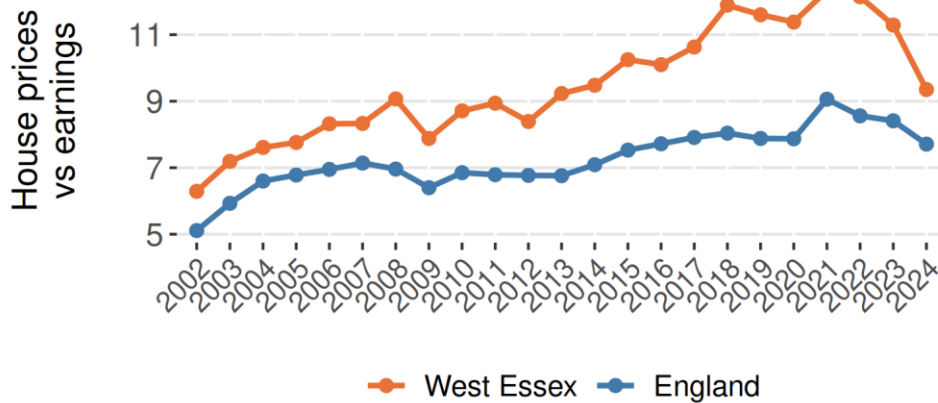
**Median weekly earnings have increased by £287 between 2011 and 2025 in West Essex.** Over the same period median earnings for England increased by £242. In 2025 the median gross weekly earnings in West Essex was £742, compared to £632 for England.

The chart below shows the ratio of median house prices to median gross annual earnings. This is a indicator of housing affordability – a value of 2 for example means that the median house price is twice the median income. The higher this ratio is, the less affordable houses are. In 2024 the median West Essex house price in 2024 was £440,000 and the median annual gross income was £46,639, giving an affordability ratio of 9.3. England's affordability ratio was 7.7 – **houses in West Essex are less affordable compared to England.**

**Since 2014 the housing affordability ratio in West Essex has increased by -1.4%**, slower than England (over the same period England's ratio increased by 8.7%).

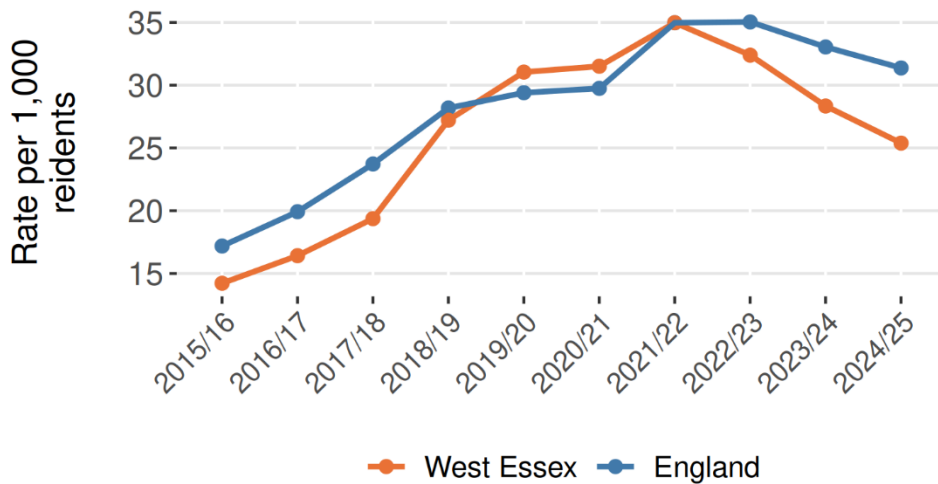
## Housing affordability ratio

Higher values indicate lower affordability



Violent crime rates have been increasing across England – this is due to a combination of an increase in the number of crimes, and improvements in crime reporting. In 2024/25 the violent crime rate in West Essex was 25.387, lower than the England rate (31.375). The chart below shows how the violent crime rate has changed over time.

## Violent crime rate



Contact us:  
Public Health Intelligence [PHI@Essex.gov.uk](mailto:PHI@Essex.gov.uk)

Essex County Council  
County Hall, Chelmsford  
Essex, CM1 1QH



**Essex\_CC**



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