West Sussex Economic Strategy

West Sussex Economic Strategy – Economic Indicators Analysis – May 2026

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. Summary 4
3. Economic Growth– Performance: Above Target 9
4. Productivity – Performance: Above Target 12
5. Business Resilience – Performance: Above Target 15
6. Qualifications – Performance: Below Target 17
7. Apprenticeships – Performance: Below Target 20
8. Claimant Count Unemployment – Performance: Below Target 22
9. Employment Rate – Performance: Above Target 24
10. Workplace Earnings – Performance: Above Target 27
11. Working Age Population – Performance: At Target 30
12. Housing Affordability – Performance: Above Target 33
13. Overall Summary and Conclusions 36

1. Introduction

This paper provides an update on the progress that West Sussex has made against the selection of indicators that were agreed as part of the West Sussex Economic Strategy (2025-2035).

Each indicator includes the following information

- A short description;
- A short commentary on the dataset; any issues that need to be considered in their interpretation; changes to the baseline; and, where appropriate, recommended changes to the indicator;
- Performance, including a table that sets out the baseline, the target and progress that has been made measured against the agreed benchmark; and
- A short summary of what this means for West Sussex.

Progress against each indicator has been assessed as either above, at or below target.

2. Summary

Table 1 below shows West Sussex's performance on the indicators that inform the county's progress. Information about each dataset is shown in the main report.

Table 1 - Economic Indicators Summary

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change	Above/Below target (value)	Above or Below Target
Economic Growth (£m) (Current prices)	£26,727 (2022)	£25,406 (2022)	£27,962 (2023)	+£2,556	+10.06%	+8.69%	+£347.04	Above Target
Economic Growth (Chained Volume) 2022 prices	£26,727 (2022)	£25,406 (2022)	£25,962 (2023)	+£556	+2.19%	-0.03%	+£562.78	Above Target
Productivity (Current Prices)	£39.35 (2022)	£39.42 (2022)	£40.10 (2023)	+£0.68	+1.7%	+1.4%	+£0.12	Above Target
Productivity (Chained Volume) 2022 prices	£39.35 (2022)	£39.42 (2022)	£37.70 (2023)	-£1.72	-4.4%	-4.6%	+£0.12	Above Target
3 Year Business Survival Rate	63.6% (2019 births)	63.6% (2019 births)	59.5% (2021 births)	-4.1%	N/A	57.8%	+1.7%	Above Target
Level 4+ Qualifications (16-64 Year Olds)	49.1% (2023)	49.1% (2023)	42.2% (2024)	-31,700	-6.9%	48.2%	-5.9%	Below Target
Apprenticeships	2,350 (2023/4)	2,350 (2024/4)	2,630 (2024/5)	+280	+11.9%	+15.1%	-75	Below Target
Claimant count	2.6% (11/23)	2.6% (11/23)	3.0% (11/25)	+2,090	+0.4% points	+0.2% points	0.0% points	At Target
Employment rate	77.6% (Jun 2024)	77.6% (Jun 2024)	81.1% (Jun 2025)	+20,500	+3.5% points	78.2%	+2.9% points	Above Target
Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers - Current Prices	£34,094 (2023)	£34,094 (2023)	£37,916 (2025)	+£3,822	+11.2%	+9.5%	+£596	Above Target
Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers - Chained Volume (2023	£34,094 (2023)	£34,094 (2023)	£35,299 (2025)	+£1,205	+3.5%	+1.9%	+£555	Above Target
Working Age Population (16-64 years)	59.31% (2023)	59.20% (2023)	59.20% (2024)	No change	N/A	No change	No change	At Target
House Price Affordability Ratio	11.59 (2023)	11.59 (2023)	10.15 (2025)	-1.44	N/A	-0.96	-0.48	Above Target

Indicator Summary:

- **Economic Growth (£m) Current Prices.** The baseline is from 2022, and it has been revised following revisions to the ONS in the latest release. The updated value is based on current prices for 2023. The West Sussex economy grew by +10.06% and the South East economy grew by +8.69%. Had the West Sussex economy grown at the same rate as the South East region, it would have been worth -£347.04 million less than it was.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Economic Growth (£m) Chained Volume (2022 prices).** The chained volume measure removes inflation effects. It is a better measure than current prices for monitoring real economic growth. The baseline is the same as the Current Prices indicator. West Sussex's economy grew by +£556 million (+2.19%) in real terms between 2022 and 2023. The South East economy contracted by -£87 million (-0.03%) over the period. Had the West Sussex economy grown by the same rate as the South East's economy in real terms, it would be -£563 million less than its actual real terms value in 2023.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Productivity (£) Current Prices.** The baseline is from 2022. It has been amended slightly following revisions in the ONS' latest release. The updated value is based on current prices for 2023. Productivity in the West Sussex economy grew by £0.68 (+1.7%) per hour worked. Productivity in the South East grew by +1.4%. Had productivity in West Sussex grown at the same rate as the South East region, it would have been -£0.12 lower than its actual 2023 value.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Productivity (£) Chained Volume (2022 prices).** The chained volume measure removes inflation effects. It is a better measure than current prices for monitoring real productivity growth. The baseline is the same as the Current Prices indicator. Productivity in West Sussex fell by -£1.72 (-4.4%) per hour worked in real terms between 2022 and 2023. Productivity in the South East region fell -£2.07 (-4.6%) per hour worked in real terms over the period. Had productivity in West Sussex changed by the same rate as the South East's, real terms Gross Value Added per hour would have been (-£0.12) lower than it was.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Three Year Business Survival Rate.** 63.3% of businesses that were established in West Sussex in 2019 were still trading three years later. 59.5% of businesses that were established in the county in 2021 were still trading three years later. In the South East region, the three-year business survival rate for businesses that were established in 2019 was 58.4%. The three-year business survival rate for businesses in the South East region that were established in 2021 was 57.8%. The three-year business survival rate in West Sussex was, therefore, 1.7% points above the South East business survival rate in 2024.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Level 4+ Qualifications (16-64 Year Olds).** In 2023, 49.1% of West Sussex's working age residents were qualified at RQF Level 4+ or above. In 2024, the proportion had fallen to 42.2%. This is a reduction of (-6.9% points). In the South East region, the proportion of higher qualified residents fell from 49.0% to 48.0% over the period. A reduction of -1.0% points. Had the change in the proportion of higher qualified working age residents in the county matched that of the South East region, there would have been 234,834 higher qualified residents in the county in 2024 instead of 213,600. This is a shortfall of -29,834 higher qualified residents. The qualifications data comes from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS), which is reliable nationally but less precise at local levels because it is a sample survey. Local authority estimates—especially for qualifications—have wide confidence intervals, meaning the apparent drop in people with Level 4+ qualifications from 2023 to 2024 is not statistically significant.

  PROGRESS: BELOW TARGET

- **Apprenticeships.** In 2023/24, there were 2,350 apprenticeship completions in West Sussex. In 2024/25, this had increased to 2,630 – an increase of +280 (+11.9%). Over the same period, the number of apprenticeship completions in the South East region increased by +4,060 (+15.1%). Had the increase in the number of apprenticeship completions in West Sussex matched that of the South East, there would have been 2,705 apprenticeship completions in the county in 2024/25. This is a shortfall of -75 compared with the change in the South East region.

  PROGRESS: BELOW TARGET

- **Claimant Count Unemployment.** In November 2023, claimant count unemployment in West Sussex was 2.6%. In November 2025, it was 3.0%. This is an increase of +2,090 unemployed residents. In the South East, the unemployment rate increased from 2.8% to 3.0% over the period. The original indicator was to reduce the unemployment rate compared with the 2023 baseline, without a benchmark. The revised indicator benchmark's the West Sussex Claimant Count unemployment rate so that it remains at or below the South East rate.
  As, both rates were at 3.0% in November 2025, the county is 'at target' by this new indicator, despite a faster increase in the rate of unemployment compared with the South East Region.

  PROGRESS: AT TARGET

- **Employment Rate.** In the year to June 2024, the West Sussex employment rate was 77.6%. In the year to June 2024/25, it was 81.1%. This is an increase of +3.5% points and an increase of +20,500 people in work. In the South East region, the employment rate changed from 79.2% to 78.2%, a reduction of -1.0% points. This indicator is for the West Sussex employment rate to continue to exceed the South East employment rate. In the twelve months to June 2025, it did so by +2.9% points.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Gross Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers (Current Prices).** In 2023, gross median earnings for full-time workers in West Sussex were £34,094, In 2025, they were £37,916. This is an increase of +£3,822 (+11.2%). Over the same period gross median earnings for full-time workers in the South East region increased from £36,527 to £39,983, an increase of +9.5%. If gross median earnings for full-time workers had increased at the same rate as in the South East region they would have been £37,320 in 2025, -£596 below their actual level.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Gross Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers (Chained Volume) – 2023 prices.** The chained volume measure removes inflation effects. It is a better measure than current prices for monitoring real earnings growth. The baseline is the same as the Current Prices indicator. In 2023, gross median earnings for full-time workers in West Sussex were £34,094, in 2025, they were £35,299. This is an increase of +£1,205 (+3.5%). Over the same period gross median earnings for full-time workers in the South East region increased from £36,527 to £37,224, an increase of +1.9%. If gross median earnings for full-time workers had increased at the same rate as in the South East region they would have been £34,744 in 2025, -£555 below their actual level.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

- **Working Age Population.** According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) midyear population estimates, 16-64 year olds accounted for 59.20% of West Sussex's residents in 2023. In 2024, the proportion remained the same at 59.20%. ONS population estimates suggest that 16-64 year olds accounted for 61.71% of residents in the South East region 2023, and it remained the same in 2024.
  The original target was for the proportion of residents who are working age to remain the same or rise above the benchmark. The revised indicator is for the change to match or be above the South East benchmark. As the proportions of the working age population remained the same for both West Sussex and the South East, this indicator remains at the target.

  PROGRESS: AT TARGET

- **House Price Affordability Ratio.** In 2023, median house prices in West Sussex were 11.59 gross median earnings. In 2025, they were 10.15 times gross median earnings. This is a reduction of -1.44. Over the same period, the median house price to median earnings ratio fell from 10.54 to 9.58, a reduction of -0.96. The original target was to reduce the median house price to gross median earnings ratio compared with the 2023 baseline. There was no benchmark to the South East. The new indicator is for the house price to earnings ratio in West Sussex to fall faster or rise more slowly than the change in the South East. Had the house price to earnings ratio fallen by the same amount as in the South East region, it would have been 10.63 in 2025, instead of 10.54.

  PROGRESS: ABOVE TARGET

3. Economic Growth– Performance: Above Target

The performance indicator was for West Sussex economic growth to 'match or exceed' the growth rate of the South East region. The baseline dataset was from 2022 (the latest published data).

About the Dataset

The latest published data is for the year 2023. The data is taken from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) dataset: *Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: All International Territorial Level (ITL) Regions,* which was published on 17th April 2025. The West Sussex estimates have been calculated by aggregating its two ITL 3 regions (West Sussex – South West; and West Sussex – North East).

GVA (Gross Value Added) is the value that is produced by industries or sectors within a specified area, minus the value of the goods and services that are used in the production process. This excludes employee's costs and capital investment. GVA is a component of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which also includes taxes and subsidies on products.

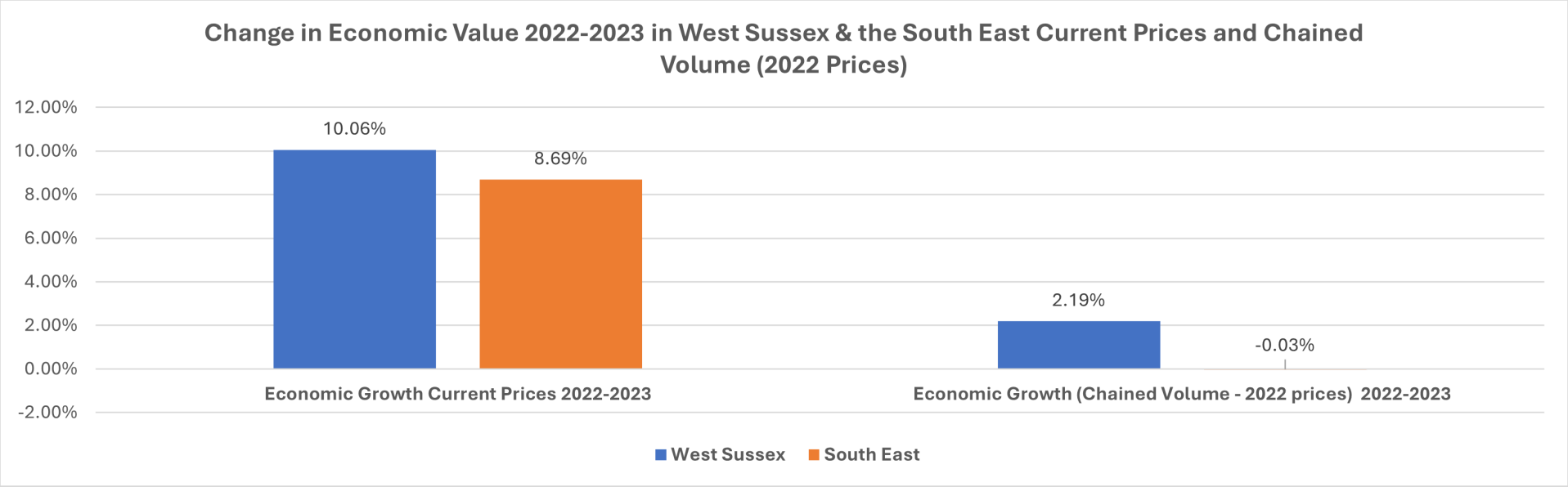
Both current prices and chained volume (2022 prices) estimates have been used at South East and West Sussex level. Information at District/Borough level is only provided in chained volume terms (2022 prices). Chained volume means that inflation has been removed from the estimates, providing a more realistic assessment of economic growth. The ONS has made some corrections to its 2022 estimates based on revisions to the deflators that have been used. This has had the effect of slightly altering the baseline estimates in the data that was used in the original economic growth indicator for the West Sussex Economic Strategy.

Performance

Table 2 - Economic Growth Indicator Performance

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Economic Growth (£m) (Current prices)	£26,727(2022)	£25,406 (2022)	£27,962 (2023)	+£2,556	+10.06%	+8.69%	+£347.04
Economic Growth (£m) (Chained Volume) - 2022 prices	£26,727 (2022)	£25,406 (2022)	£25,962 (2023)	+£556	+2.19%	-0.03%	+£562.78

Figure 1: Change in economic value in West Sussex and the South East between 2022-2023



Between 2022 and 2023, the West Sussex economy grew from £25.41 billion (based on the revised baseline estimates) to £27.96 billion in current prices. This is an increase of +£2.56 billion, or +10.06% over the period. Between 2022 and 2023, the South East regional economy grew by 8.69% over the period.

Had the West Sussex economy increased at the same rate as that of the South East region over the period, it would have grown by +£2.21 billion in real terms. This means that it has outperformed economic growth in the South East by +£0.35 billion.

In chained volume terms, the West Sussex economy grew by +£0.56 billion (+2.19%) over the period. The value of the South East economy reduced by -0.03% over the period. Had the West Sussex economy performed at the same level as the South East economy, it would have been worth £25.40 billion in 2022 prices, instead of £25.96 million. By this measure, the West Sussex economy outperformed the economy of the South East region by £0.56 billion in chained volume terms (2022 prices).

Components of Growth

At district/borough level, Horsham was the strongest performing district/borough in both monetary terms (+£289 million) and in percentage terms (+7.8%). Arun also performed strongly, with its economy increasing in real terms value by +£96 million (+3.5%). There were modest real terms reductions in the size of Adur's economy (-1.0%) and Worthing's economy (-1.2%).

At West Sussex level, Real Estate (excluding owner-occupiers imputed rental) was the main driver of economic growth, increasing its value to the county by +£223 million. This sector includes residential and commercial rental and property services and development. It does not include the actual construction of buildings, which is attributed to the construction sector. Within West Sussex, the Real Estate sector performed most strongly in Horsham (+34%) and Arun (+48%) between 2022 and 2023.

Other sectors that performed strongly in GVA value terms were:

- *Construction:* +£175 million, including Horsham (+£88 million), Crawley (+£35 million), Chichester (+£20 million) and Arun (+£20 million)
- *Financial & Insurance Services:* +£124 million, including Crawley (+£67 million), Worthing (+£58 million) and
- *Land, water and air transport*: +£101 million, including Crawley (+£64 million), Horsham (+£19 million), and Adur (+£11 million).

Sectors that saw reductions in their economic output included:

- *Manufacture of electrical products & machinery:* -£131 million, including Worthing (-£48 million) and Crawley (-£43 million)
- *Professional, scientific & technical activities:* - £67 million, including Mid Sussex (-£80 million)
- *Information & communication:* -£76 million, including Chichester (-£31 million), Mid Sussex (-£21 million)
- *Employment activities: tourism and security services:* - £50 million, including Crawley (-£66 million)

Summary

West Sussex's economy performed strongly between 2022 and 2023, largely driven by activities linked to real estate, including the commercial property market and the construction of buildings. Financial and Insurance services also contributed to the county's economic growth, whilst the strength of its transport sector, particularly around Crawley (but also in Adur, perhaps linked to Shoreham Port) was also a notable feature of the county's economic performance. Horsham's economy made the most significant contribution to the county's economic growth, whilst Adur and Worthing's economies were more sluggish.

The economic contribution of county's manufacturing sector declined at a faster rate (-3.6%) than the manufacturing sector in the South East region (-1.6%). Other sectors, linked to information technology and, perhaps, tourism and security services linked to Gatwick Airport also saw their economic output fall over the period.

4. Productivity – Performance: Above Target

The productivity performance indicator was for output per hour in West Sussex to 'match or exceed' the growth rate in the South East region. The baseline dataset was from 2022 (the latest published data).

About the Dataset

Productivity data is shown as Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked. The data is taken from the Sub-Regional Productivity: Labour Productivity Indices by Local Authority District dataset, which was published by the ONS on 19 June 2025. The data is produced annually, and the latest data is for 2023.

Productivity data is only available at district and borough and ITL2 (regional) and ITL3 levels. The ITLs in West Sussex are West Sussex (South West), which includes Adur, Arun, Chichester and Worthing; and West Sussex (North East), which includes Crawley, Horsham and Mid Sussex. The methodology that was used to calculate West Sussex productivity in 2023 is the same that was used by West Sussex County Council in the original baseline.

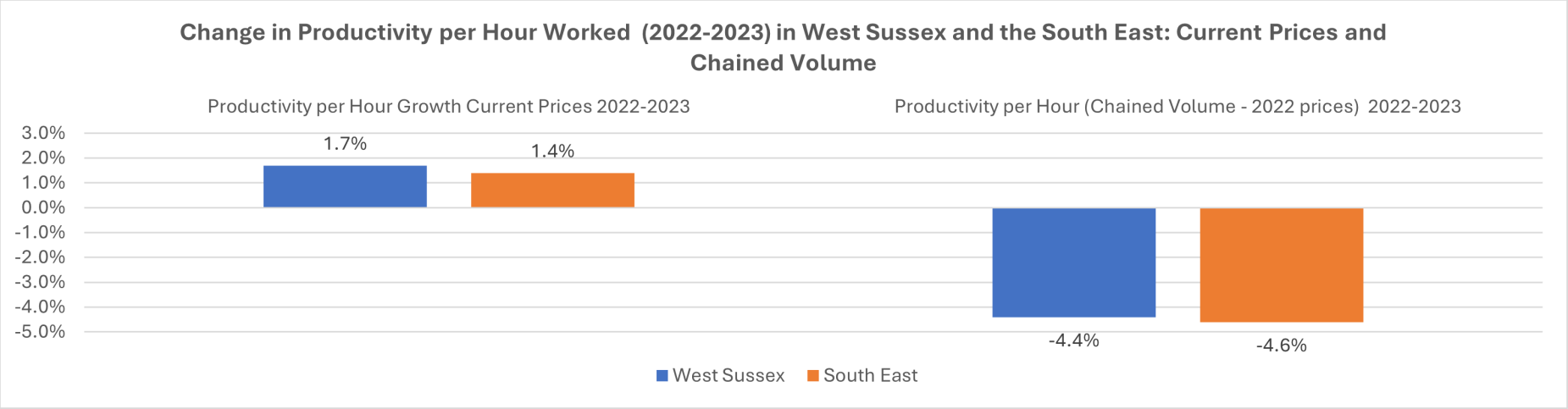
ONS productivity data are shown in current prices. This means that it excludes inflation effects. The performance table below shows both the current and real terms (chained volume) measures.

Performance

Table 3 - Productivity Indicator Performance

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Productivity (Current Prices)	£39.35 (2022)	£39.42 (2022)	£40.10 (2023)	+£0.68	+1.7%	1.4%	+£0.12
Productivity (Chained Volume) - 2022 prices	£39.35 (2022)	£39.42 (2022)	£37.70 (2023)	-£1.72	-4.4%	-4.6%	+£0.12

Figure *2*: Change in productivity in West Sussex and the South East between 2022-2023



Between 2022 and 2023, GVA per hour in West Sussex increased from £39.42 to £40.10. In current prices this is an increase of +£0.68, or +1.7% over the period. Between 2022 and 2023, productivity in the South East region increased from £44.59 per hour worked to £45.22, an increase of +£0.63 or +1.4% over the period. If productivity in West Sussex had increased at the same rate as in the South East, GVA per hour would have been £39.98 per hour, £0.12 per hour below what it was in 2023.

If inflation is removed, (chained volume) productivity in West Sussex would have been £37.70 per hour, a decrease of -£1.72 or -4.4%. In the South East, real terms GVA per hour in 2023 was £42.52, a decrease of -£2.07 or -4.6% per hour worked.

Components of Productivity

Productivity in West Sussex - South West (£42.87 per hour) is higher than it is in West Sussex – North East (£37.94). This is likely to be due to the very high productivity levels in Worthing. Between 2022 and 2023 GVA per hour worked in West Sussex - South West increased by £1.35 (+3.3%) and by +£0.21 (+0.6%) in West Sussex - North East based on current prices. Once inflation is removed, productivity in West Sussex - South West decreased by -2.9%, and in West Sussex - North East it decreased by -5.5%.

Worthing is the most productive district/borough in West Sussex. In 2023, GVA per hour was £53.86. The next most productive district/borough was Adur (£41.60). GVA per hour worked was lowest in Horsham (£37.05) and Chichester (£37.41). Between 2022 and 2023 GVA per hour increased by +£2.55 (+6.5%) in Adur, +£2.07 (+5.7%) in Arun, +£1.23 (+3.4%) in Chichester and +£0.56 (+1.5%) per hour in Crawley. Elsewhere GVA per hour worked either remained broadly the same or decreased.

Once inflation effects are removed, the only district/borough where productivity increased between 2022 and 2023 was Adur: +£0.06 (+0.2%). In all other districts/boroughs GVA per hour in real terms decreased, with the most significant reductions in Horsham (-6.4%) and Worthing (-6.0%).

Summary

Economic growth is delivered by a combination of having more people in work and by increasing the productivity of those in work. High levels of employment boost economic growth, but they do not increase the efficiency of the economy. Progress also depends on what is driving the increase in labour market participation. If it is reductions in economic inactivity, this probably has a beneficial impact on economic performance. If the driver of participation is driven by in-migration, but does not translate to higher levels of productivity, then the benefits may be negligible.

There was no real terms economic growth in South East between 2022 and 2023, and a real terms decrease in productivity. This suggests that it has taken more hours worked to achieve virtually zero economic growth in the South East region. For West Sussex, real terms economic growth increased faster than real terms productivity growth. This also suggests that economic growth is more likely to have been driven by more hours worked than by more economically efficient working.

Between 2022 and 2023, West Sussex performed marginally better than the South East in terms of GVA per hour worked. However, real terms productivity in 2023 was below what it had been in 2022. Horsham provides the clearest example of the difference between economic growth and productivity growth: Its economy grew strongly in real terms (+7.8%), but productivity decreased significantly in real terms (-6.4%). This suggests that Horsham's economic growth has been driven by more work being done, rather than it being done more productively.

5. Business Resilience – Performance: Above Target

The business resilience performance indicator was for West Sussex's businesses' three-year survival rate to remain above the 3-year survival rate of businesses in the South East region as a whole.

About the Dataset

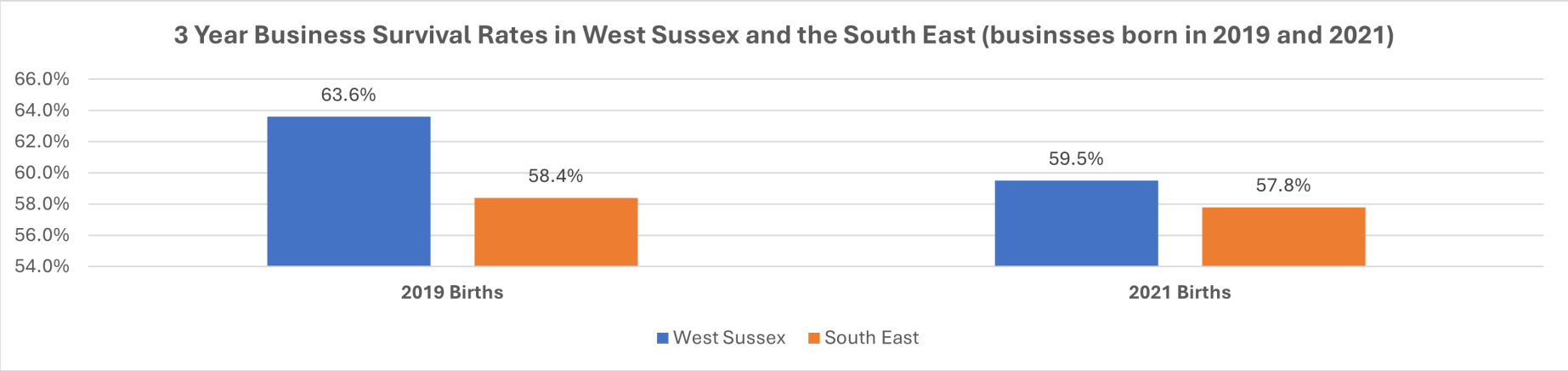
This dataset is produced annually by the Office for National Statistics. The latest available dataset shows three-year survival rates for businesses that were established in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Performance

Table 4 - Business Survival Rate Indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
3 Year Business Survival Rate	63.6%	63.6%	59.5%	-4.1%	N/A	57.8%	+1.7%

Figure 3: Change in business survival rates in West Sussex and the South East (business born in 2019 and 2021)



In West Sussex 63.6% of businesses that were established in 2019 were still operational three years later. In the South East 58.4% of businesses had survived for three years. This means that, at the time, the 3 year business survival rate in West Sussex was +5.2% points higher than in the South East.

The latest data show that 59.5% of businesses that were established in West Sussex in 2021 had survived three years. This is a reduction of -4.1% points compared with businesses that were established in the county in 2019. In the South East, the three year business survival rate fell from 58.4% to 57.8%, a reduction of -0.6% points. Although the gap between West Sussex and the South East had closed, businesses that were established in West Sussex in 2021 were still more likely to survive three years than businesses that were established across the South East region as a whole.

The overall number of active businesses in the county fell from 38,950 in 2019 to 38,800 in 2024 (-0.4%). Over the same period, the number of active businesses in the South East fell by 16,655 (-3.9%).

Three-year business survival rates were higher in all the West Sussex districts & boroughs than in the South East region, except for in Crawley (52.8%) and Arun (57.1%). Adur (68.6%), Horsham (61.8%) and Mid Sussex (61.3%) had the highest three-year business survival rates in the county.

Summary

The three-year business survival rate dropped sharply for businesses that were established in 2021 compared with those that had been established two years early and compared with the change in the South East region.

The sharpest drop was in Arun (-8.2%), but three year business survival rates fell in all the county's districts and boroughs. However, the three-year business survival rate across the county remained above the three-year business survival rate in the South East region.

Business survival rates can fluctuate significantly, particularly at very local level, where the actual number of new businesses is often small. There is often a lot of churn in more urban areas and this is not necessarily a negative economic phenomenon. Business survival does not necessarily equate with business growth.

It is also much easier to establish some types of business than others. From an economic growth perspective, what matters is the sector that new businesses are in and their growth orientation. In 2024, West Sussex had 195 "high growth' businesses, 35 more than there had been in 2019.

6. Qualifications – Performance: Below Target

The qualification levels indicator target was for the increase in the proportion of working age (16-64 year old) residents to match or exceed the increase in the South East region.

About the Dataset

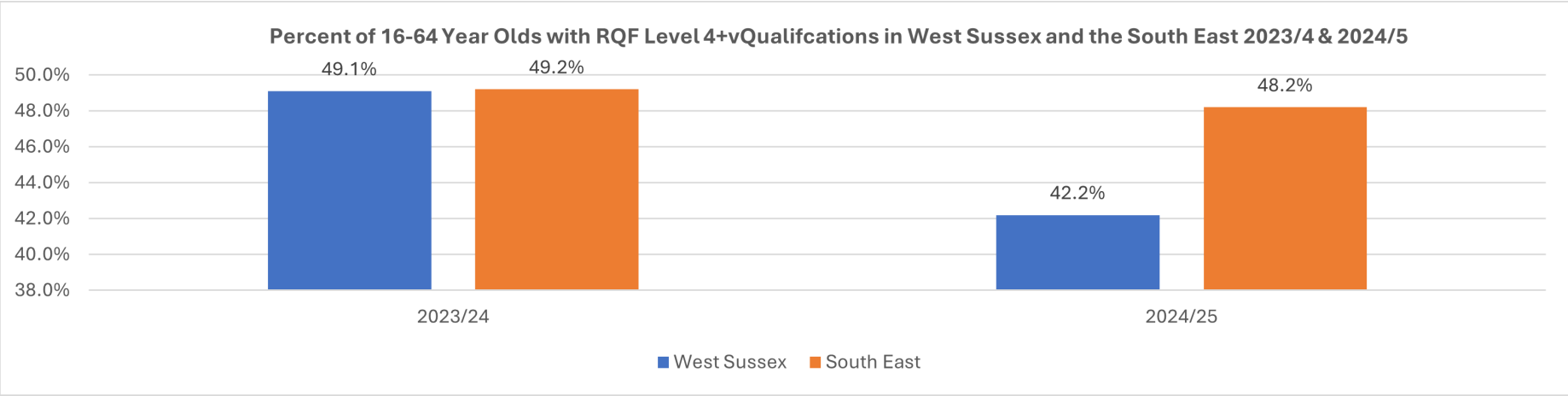
The qualifications data is taken from the Annual Population Survey (APS) that is produced each year by the Office for National Statistics. The data is only published for the period covering the 12 months to December each year. At West Sussex level, there is a 95% confidence interval of +/- 4.3% for 2023/4 and of +/-4.0% for 2024/25. Confidence intervals at district/borough level are often much wider. The APS is a large, nationally representative household survey, but it remains a sample survey rather than a census. As a result, all estimates are subject to sampling variability, which becomes more pronounced at local authority level and for characteristics such as qualifications. The confidence intervals overlap substantially. This means that, statistically, we cannot be confident that the Level 4+ population is genuinely lower in 2024 than in 2023. We will monitor longer term trends and rolling averages for this indicator to understand if there is an overall decline in the longer term.

Performance

Table 5 - Qualifications Indicator Performance

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Qualifications (RQF Level 4)	49.1%	49.1%	42.2%	-31,700	-6.9%	48.2%	-5.9%

Figure 4: Change in qualifications in West Sussex and the South East between 2024-2025



In 2023, 49.1% of the county's residents held a qualification at RQF Level 4 or above. This equated to 245,300 people out of a working age population of 499,300. The proportion of higher qualified working age residents in West Sussex was similar to the proportion of higher qualified working age residents in the South East region (49.2%).

In 2024, the percentage of higher qualified working age residents in the county fell by -6.9 percentage points to reach 42.2% of the county's working age population, which had risen to 506,100. This is a reduction of -31,700 higher qualified residents in the county. Over the same period, the proportion of higher qualified residents in the South East region fell by -1.0 percentage points to 48.2% - a reduction of -31,000 higher qualified working age residents.

Data at sub-county level is subject to wide confidence intervals, so it should be treated with some caution. Within this context, Horsham (54.1%) and Chichester (53.8%) had the highest proportion of higher qualified working age residents in the county and Crawley (27.6%), Worthing (37.2%) and Mid Sussex (39.1%) had the lowest proportion of higher qualified residents.

Crawley (-11,400) had the largest drop in the number of higher qualified working age residents in the county between 2023 and 2024, whilst Horsham (-300) and Chichester (-400) had the smallest reduction.

Summary

West Sussex seems to have had a significant fall in the number of higher qualified residents between 2023 and 2024 – a much more significant fall than in the South East region. However, this is likely due to the small sampling size for the APS and therefore there is no clear evidence of a genuine reduction in the proportion of West Sussex residents qualified to Level 4+. The ONS have suggested analysis over longer-term trends and rolling averages to understand if there has been a genuine decline and cause for concern.

It is not always clear that qualification levels translate easily to economic growth and higher productivity: What might matter more is what is studied, rather than simply the level of attainment. It should also be noted that this dataset refers to residents, not to people in the workplace: Some of the county's most highly qualified residents are likely to work outside West Sussex, particularly in London.

7. Apprenticeships – Performance: Below Target

This indicator is to 'match or exceed' the percentage increase in apprenticeship completions in the South East region from the 2023/24 baseline.

About the Dataset

This data is produced annually by the Department for Education. It shows the total number of apprenticeship completions by where learners live. The whole dataset also includes starts and achievements by age, sex, ethnicity, level and sector subject area, although these are not these are not included in this indicator.

Performance

Table 6 - Apprenticeship indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Apprenticeships	2,350	2,350	2,630	+280	+11.9%	+15.1%	-75

Figure 5: Percent increase in the number of apprenticeship achievements between 2023/24 and 2024/5 in West Sussex and the South East

There were 2,350 apprenticeship completions in West Sussex in 2023/24. This had increased to 2,630 in 2024/25 – an increase of +280 or +11.9%. Over the same period, the number of apprenticeship completions in the South East increased from 26,850 to 30,910 – an increase of +4,060 or +15.1%. If the number of apprenticeship completions in West Sussex had increased at the same rate as in the South East, there would have been +355 apprenticeship completions across the county, instead of +280. This means that West Sussex is -75 below the target on this indicator.

Within West Sussex, the largest increase in the number of apprenticeship completions were in Arun (+20%) and Crawley (+19.4%) and Adur (+18.8%) and the smallest increases were in Mid Sussex (+2.2%) and Worthing (+3.0%).

Summary

The number of apprenticeship completions in the county increased between 2023/4 and 2024/5, but not as fast as the increase in the region. However, neither the subject being studied or the level of the apprenticeship is clear from the indicator. This may need to be explored in more detail.

8. Claimant Count Unemployment – Performance: Below Target

This indicator is to 'maintain or reduce' the claimant count unemployment rate compared with its 2023 levels. No benchmark to the South East was used.

About the Dataset

Claimant count unemployment is a monthly indicator produced by the Office for National Statistics. It measures the number of people claiming benefit principally for the reason of being unemployed, even if they do not receive payment. It does not meet the internationally agreed definition of unemployment specified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Nevertheless, it is a useful indicator of wider labour market trends based on real data (rather than survey data) that is produced more regularly than most other labour market datasets.

The original indicator referred to the whole year of 2023. However, claimant count in West Sussex peaked at 2.8% in April that year and fell to fell to 2.5% in June 2023. However, for most of the year, it was 2.6%. Claimant count rates can change seasonally. This review is therefore, based on a single month (November) in both 2023 (for the baseline) and 2025 (for the update).

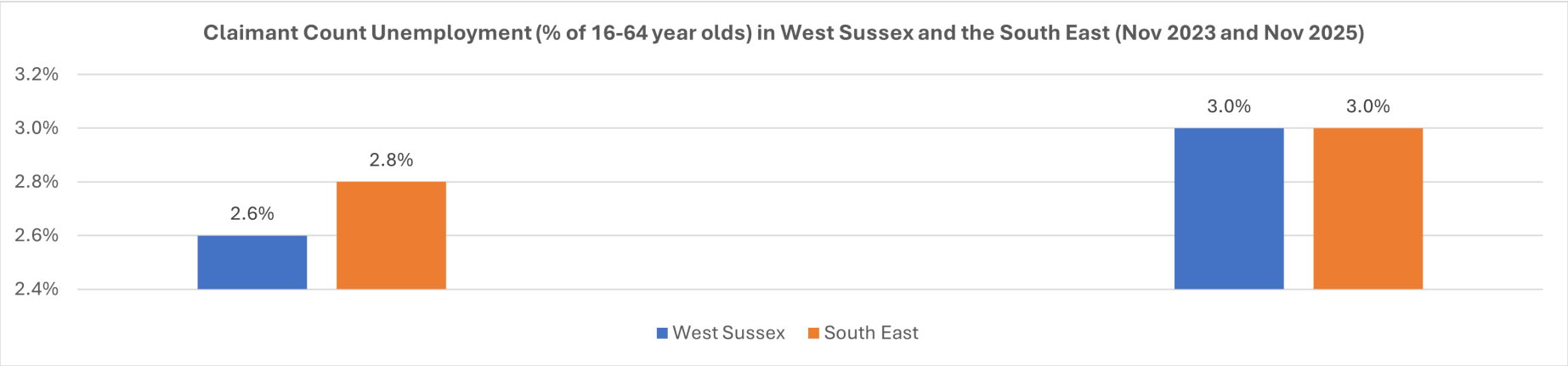
The original indicator did not benchmark the target to the South East. This means that it is not possible to determine whether or not West Sussex is performing better or worse than might be expected, given wider economic influences. This review has reinstated the benchmark to the South East and recommends continuing to do so. The recommended revised indicator is, therefore, for the claimant count rate to rise at a slower rate or fall at a faster rate than the claimant count rate across the South East region.

Performance

Table 7 - Claimant Count Unemployment Indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Claimant count	2.6%	2.6%	3.0%	2,090	+0.4% points	+0.2% points	+749

Figure 6: Claimant Count Unemployment (% of 16-64 year olds) in West Sussex and the South East (Nov 2023 and Nov 2025)



In November 2023, 2.6% of West Sussex's working age residents were claimant count unemployed. This was 13,970 people. By November 2025 the claimant count rate had increased to 3.0% and the number of claimant count working age residents was 16,060. This is an increase of +2,090 or +0.4% points

In November 2023, the claimant count unemployment rate in the South East region was 2.8% (163,505 people). In November 2025, the claimant count rate in the region had increased to 3.0% (179,250). This was an increase of +15,745 or +0.2% points. If the number of working age people in West Sussex claiming out of work benefits had increased at the same rate as in the South East, there would have been 15,311 claimant count residents in the county, instead of 16,090. This means that West Sussex had an excess of +749 claimant count unemployed working age residents, when benchmarked to the South East region.

Within West Sussex, Crawley (4.4%) and Arun (3.6%) had the highest claimant count unemployment rates in November 2025; Horsham (1.9%) and Mid Sussex (1.9%) had the lowest rates. The largest increases between November 2023 and November 2025 were in Crawley (+615 or +0.7% points) and Arun (+560 or +0.6% points). The only district & borough West Sussex where the claimant count unemployment rates did not increase faster than in the South East region was Horsham (no change).

Summary

Claimant count unemployment has risen faster than in the South East region, but by national standards, it is still low. The employment rate in the county is high, and the labour market appears to be buoyant. Claimant count does not fully measure worklessness, however, and there are many more people who

are not in work who are not claiming unemployment related benefits. Furthermore, there are many people in insecure or low-paying work who are eligible for Universal Credit.

9. Employment Rate – Performance: Above Target

This indicator is for West Sussex to continue to' exceed the employment rate' in the South East region, from a baseline of 77.6% in the year to July 2024.

About the Dataset

The employment rate is taken from the Annual Population Survey that is produced by the Office for National Statistics. It shows the number and proportion of 16-64 residents who are in work compared with the total number of 16-64 year old residents. At West Sussex level, the standard error is between +/- 2.8% and +/-3.6%, but in smaller geographies it can be much higher. For this reason, employment rate data at sub-county level should be interpreted with caution.

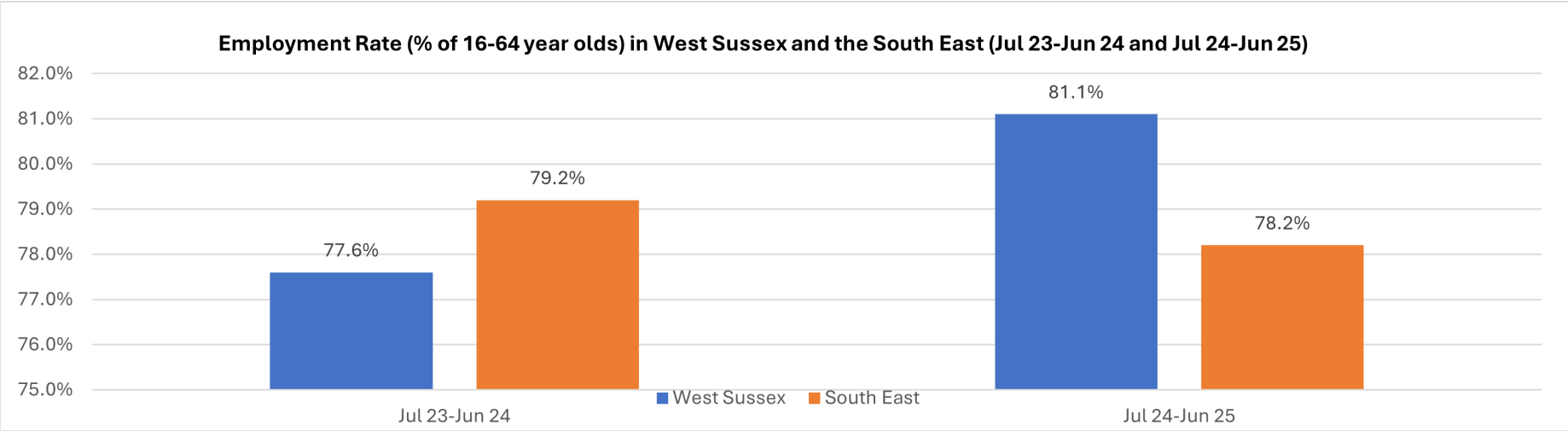
The employment rate data does not include people who are aged 64+ years, even though the state retirement age is between 66 and 67 years. There are several factors that influence an employment rate. For example, areas with large numbers of students or those with large numbers of older people who have withdrawn from the labour market before they have reached 65 years, might have lower employment rates that are not necessarily driven by labour market disadvantage. Areas in which unemployment and health-related economic inactivity make a significant contribution to the employment rate are more likely to have higher levels of disadvantage.

Performance

Table 8 - Employment Rate indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Employment rate	77.6%	77.6%	81.1%	20,500	+5.2% points	78.2%	+2.9% points

Figure 7: Employment Rate (% of 16-64 year olds) in West Sussex and the South East (Jul 23-Jun 24 and Jul 24-Jun 25)



In the year to July 2024, the West Sussex employment rate was 77.6% and there were 395,100 16-64 year old residents in work. The employment rate in the South East region at the time was 79.2%. In. the year to July 2025, the employment rate in West Sussex increased to 81.1% and the number of 16-64 year old residents in work increased by 20,500 (+5.2%) to 415,600. Over the same period, the employment rate in the South East decreased to 78.2% and the number of working age residents in work decreased by -39,000 (-0.9%).

If West Sussex had the same employment rate as the South East region (78.2%) in the year to July 2025, there would have been 400,931 people in work. Based on this, West Sussex is exceeding its employment rate target by +14,669 jobs.

Employment rates at sub-county level are subject to wide confidence intervals and should, therefore, be treated with caution. Within this context, only Crawley (78.0%) and Adur (67.5%) had lower employment rates than the regional average in the year to July 2025. Worthing (85.6%) had the highest employment rate.

Arun (+8,100), Chichester (+7,200) Horsham (+5,600) and Worthing (+5,600) all saw significant increases in the numbers of residents in employment. In Adur (-5,500) and Crawley (-1,900), there were fewer residents in work in the year to July 2025 than there had been in the year to July 2023.

Summary

The Employment Rate in West Sussex is very high. This suggests that the labour market is buoyant, but from an employers' perspective, it is tight. This may provide recruitment challenges, and it may result on an upward pressure on earnings.

10. Workplace Earnings – Performance: Above Target

This indicator is for the gross median earnings for full-time workers who are employed in West Sussex to 'match or exceed' the increase in the median workplace earnings for full-time workers in the South East region.

About the dataset

Workplace earnings data is taken from the Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE). It is updated annually. The ASHE datasets provides hourly, weekly and annual earnings for full and part-time workers and for males and females. As well as median earnings, data is shown for the mean and a range of percentiles.

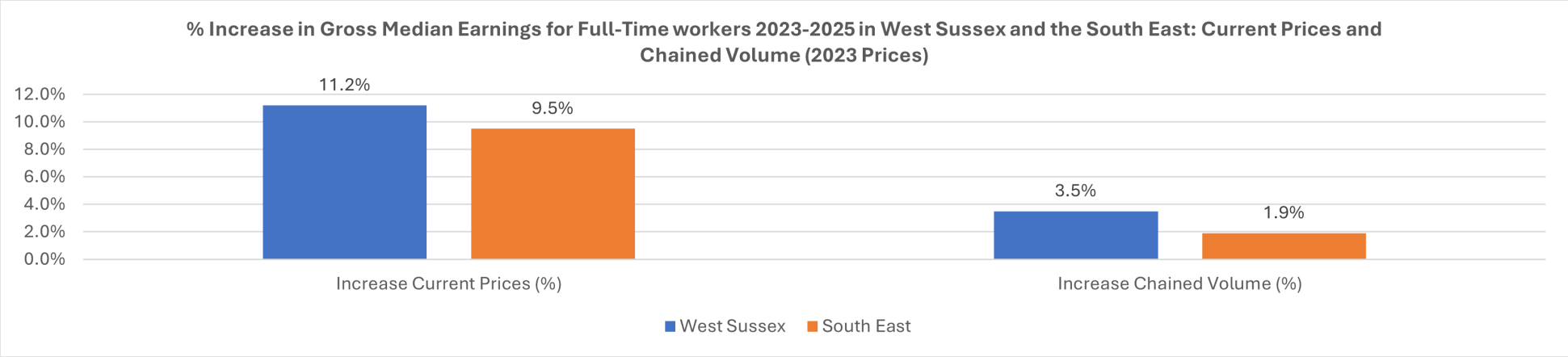
All data points are shown in current prices. This means that they do not take into account inflation effects. The standard error for West Sussex is between 3.0% and 3.5%, but at district and borough level, it is often much wider than this. This means that some caution should be applied when interpreting earnings data at very local levels. The performance table below shows changes in workplace median earnings in both current and chained volume (real terms).

Performance

Table 9 - Workplace Earnings indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value (2025)	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers - Current Prices	£34,094	£34,094	£37,916	+£3,822	+11.2%	+9.5%	+£596
Median Earnings for Full-Time Workers - Chained Volume (2023 prices)	£34,094	£34,094	£35,299	+£1,205	+3.5%	+1.9%	+£555

Figure 8: Percent Increase in Gross Median Earnings for Full-Time workers 2023-2025 in West Sussex and the South East: Current Prices and Chained Volume (2023 Prices)



In 2023, gross median earnings for full-time workers in West Sussex were £34,094. In 2025, they had increased to £37,916. This is an increase of +£3,822 or +11.2%. Over the same period, gross median earnings for full-time workers in the South East region increased from £36,527 to £39,056. This is an increase of +£3,456 or +9.5%. Had gross median earnings for full-time workers increased at the same rate as in the South East region, they would have been £37,320, instead of £37,916. This means that gross median earnings for full-time workers in the county are +£596 higher than the target.

Within West Sussex, gross median earnings for full-time workers are highest in Crawley (£41,977) and Adur (£41,005); and they are lowest in Arun (£32,213) and Chichester (£33,692). In current prices, gross median earnings for full-time workers increased fastest in Adur (+23.6%) and slowest in Crawley (+7.9%), but the wide range of standard errors at district & borough level means that these changes should be interpreted with caution.

Current prices do not accurately reflect increases in earnings because they do not take into account inflation. The table above does this by applying 2023 prices to all the data. This is known as 'chained volume' or 'real terms' change. When this is applied, gross median earnings for full-time workers increased by +£1,205 or 3.5% between 2023 and 2025. For the South East, they increased by +£697 or +1.9% over the period. If earnings had increased in West Sussex at the same rate as in the South East, they would have been +£555 above target.

Within West Sussex, gross median earnings (current prices) for full-time workers increased by +15.0% in Adur, +6.7% in Worthing and +6.3% in Horsham, but by +0.4% in Crawley and +1.7% in Arun between 2023 and 2025.

Summary

Median earnings in West Sussex increased faster in West Sussex than in the South East region, but the real terms (chained volume) increase between 2023 and 2025 was quite modest, averaging at 1.75% per year. There is no productivity data for the same period, but between 2022 and 2023, productivity per hour worked declined by -4.4%. If earnings are growing, we would expect to see chained volume productivity growth between 2023 and 2025, when the next data is released. If this is not the case, West Sussex will have a situation in which earnings are increasing faster than productivity and where economic growth is being driven by more hours being worked, rather than through efficiency gains.

11. Working Age Population – Performance: At Target

This indicator is for the proportion of West Sussex's residents who are aged 16-64 years to 'remain the same or be above' the baseline (59.3%). There is no reference to a benchmark area.

About the dataset

This data comes from the Midyear Population estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics.

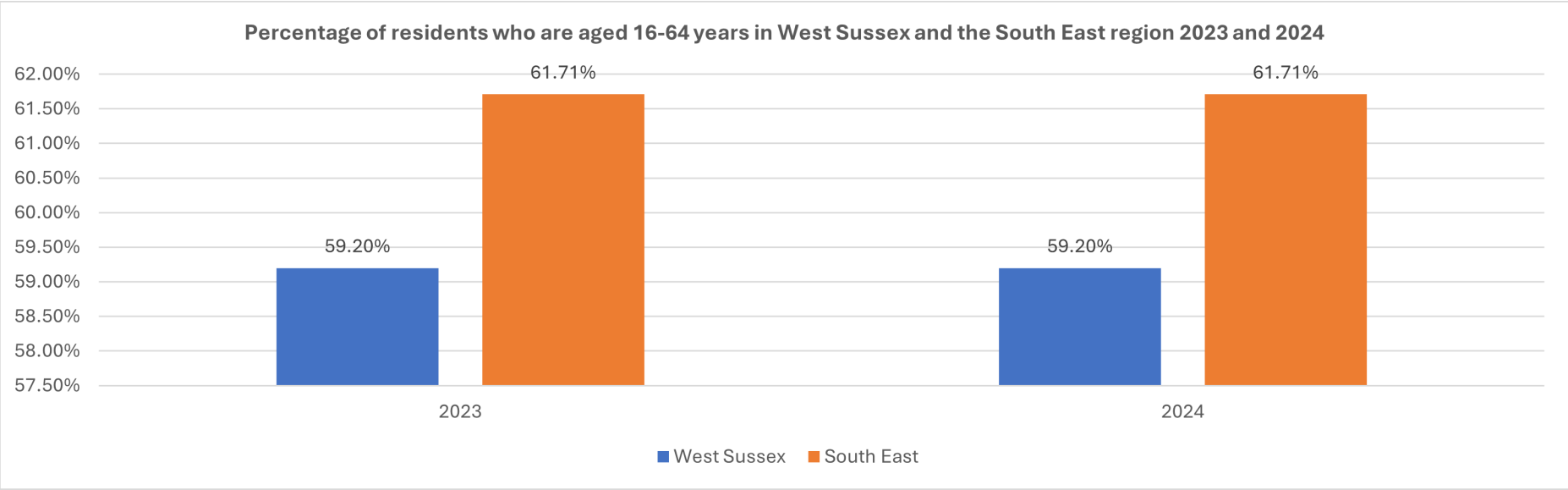
The original performance measure for West Sussex was not benchmarked to the South East, unlike most other measures. This has now been changed, so that the target is for the percentage of West Sussex's population that is aged 16-64 years to rise at a faster rate or fall at a slower rate than the South East benchmark.

Performance

Table 10 - Working Age Population indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change (percent)	Above/Below target (value)
Working Age Population	59.31%	59.20%	59.20%	N/A	No change	No change	No change

Figure 9: Percentage of residents who are aged 16-64 years in West Sussex and the South East region 2023 and 2024



In 2023, working age (16-64 year olds) residents accounted for 59.20% of West Sussex's resident population. The proportion remained the same in 2024 at 59.20%. The South East had a higher proportion of residents who were aged 16-64 years (61.71%) in 2023, and the proportion remained the same in 2024. The original target was for the proportion of residents who are working age to remain the same or rise above the benchmark. The revised indicator is for the change to match or be above the South East benchmark. As the proportions of the working age population remained the same for both West Sussex and the South East, this indicator remains at the target.

Although the proportion of working age residents in West Sussex between 2023 and 2024 remained the same, the actual number of 16-64 year olds increased by +6,246 (+1.2%). It is likely the proportion remained the same as the entire resident population grew at the same rate.

Within West Sussex, Crawley (65.28%) had the highest proportion of working age residents in 2024 and is the only district/borough in West Sussex that has a higher proportion of working age residents than the South East region. Arun (55.80%) had the lowest proportion of working age residents in the county.

Between 2023 and 2024, the number of working age residents increased fastest in Mid Sussex (+2.1%) and slowest in Adur (+0.6%) and Worthing (+0.8%).

Summary

Changes in West Sussex's age profile are likely to be slow and modest. The changes in the proportion of working age residents in the county virtually match the changes in the South East region. There were more working age residents in the county in 2024 than there had been in 2023. However, West Sussex continues to have a much smaller proportion of working age residents than the South East region, with only Crawley being the exception to this.

West Sussex has demographic challenges that impact on the economy and the labour market. The labour market is also tight, with a high employment rate. This can result in recruitment challenges for businesses, and it could mean that there is merit in devising ways of encouraging more older people to remain active in the labour market for longer to help address this.

12. Housing Affordability – Performance: Above Target

This indicator is to 'reduce the ratio' of median house prices to median gross annual workplace earnings for full-time workers from the 2023 baseline: 11.59. The revised indicator is for the housing affordability ratio in West Sussex to fall faster or rise slower than the housing affordability ratio in the South East region.

About the dataset

This data is taken from house price to workplace-based earnings ratio dataset that is produced annually by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ratio is calculated by dividing median house prices over a 12-month period (year ending September) by gross median earnings for full-time workers as of April each year.

Changes in the housing affordability ratio can be influenced by a range of factors, including:

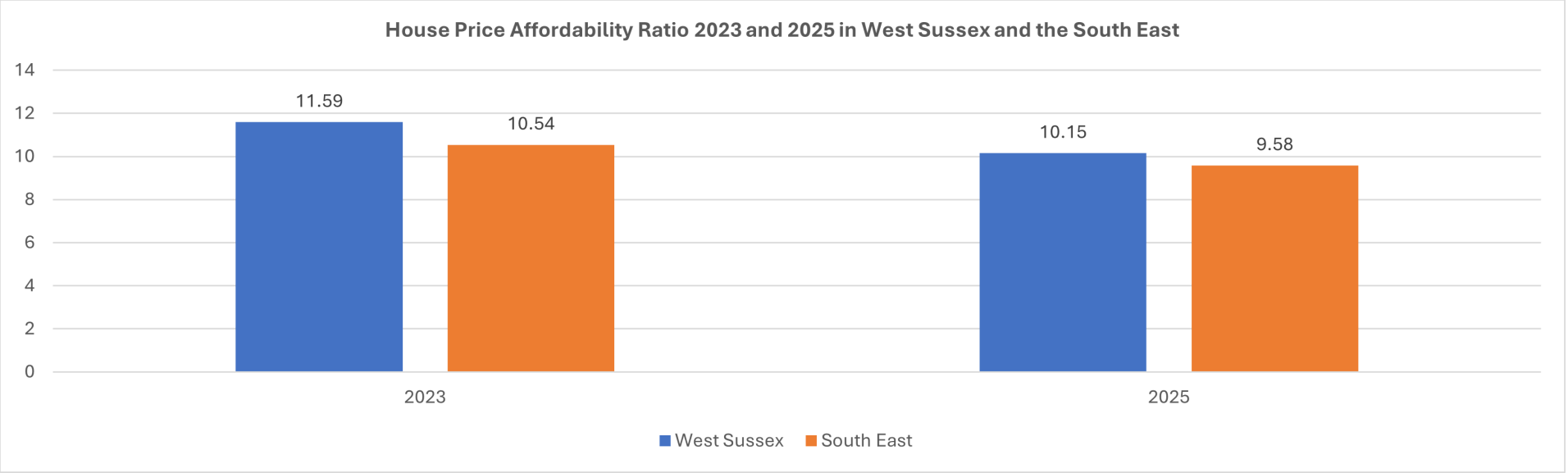
- A higher or lower increase workplace earnings relative to changes in median house prices; and
- Differences in the type of properties that are sold between different years. For example, if a larger number of smaller dwellings are sold in one year compared with another, this will reduce the median value of the properties that are sold. However, this may not be reflected in an actual reduction in property prices.

Performance

Table 11 - Housing Affordability indicator

Indicator	Original Baseline	Revised Baseline	Updated Value	Change (Count)	Change (percent)	South East Change	Above/Below target (value)
House Price Affordability Ratio	11.59	11.59	10.15	-1.44	N/A	-0.96	-0.48

Figure 10: House Price Affordability Ratio 2023 and 2025 in West Sussex and the South East



The housing affordability ratio in 2023 in West Sussex was 11.59. This means that median house prices averaged 11.59 times median gross workplace earnings for full-time workers across the county. In 2025, the average housing affordability ratio fell by 1.44 points to 10.15 - median house prices were 10.15 times median workplace earnings in 2025. In short, by this measure, housing in West Sussex became more affordable.

In the South East region, the housing affordability ratio fell from 10.54 in 2023 to 9.58 in 2025, a fall of -0.96 points. Although housing is still less affordable in West Sussex than it is in the South East region, as a whole, the housing affordability ratio in West Sussex fell faster in the county than it did in the region.

Within West Sussex, Chichester (12.32) and Horsham (11.51) had the highest housing affordability ratio in 2025. and Crawley (8.46) had the lowest. The housing affordability ratio was lower in all of the county's districts & boroughs in 2025 than it had been in 2023. The largest fall was in Adur (-2.35), and the smallest fall was in Crawley (-0.34).

Summary

The data suggests that, on average, housing became more affordable in West Sussex and in the South East region between 2023 and 2025. However, it is not possible from the indicator to establish what is driving this. Median earnings increased by just over 11% in current prices over the period and it's probable that median house prices did not increase by the same amount.

However, this may be because the stock of properties that were sold were smaller and, therefore, lower cost. It is quite possible for median prices of all categories of property to increase faster than median earnings, but for the median house price to median earnings ratio to come down.

The ONS has started to use five year averages for its housing affordability ratios. This has not been used for this review, but it could be considered in future reviews. This would help to smooth out data anomalies that might occur in any given year.

13. Overall Summary and Conclusions

The indicators suggest that, overall, the West Sussex economy has performed well compared with the South East region since the West Sussex Economic Strategy was launched. The economy has grown more strongly, the employment rate has increased more sharply, and median earnings have grown faster.

The indicators do not directly suggest what the main driver of this has been. However, between 2022 and 2023 the county's economy appears to have been driven mainly by an increase in the number of people in work, rather than through significant productivity gains. West Sussex residents will not feel better off just because the economy is bigger than it was. If the increased benefits have to be shared amongst more people, there is, arguably, little obvious benefit. Productivity improvements are likely to matter more than simply economic growth and the evidence suggests that in real terms (chained volume) there was a decrease in GVA per hour worked in both the county and in the South East.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that productivity improvements should lead to improvements in people's earnings. As stated previously, there is no productivity data for 2023-2025, the years for which there is earnings data. However, if West Sussex (and the South East) sees no increase in productivity, but increases in both the economy and median earnings, this is likely to put pressure on the profitability of local businesses. Currently, the employment rate is high, and unemployment is relatively low, but productivity improvements is likely to be key to long-term sustainable growth.