

Housing Tenure

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Aims of briefing

This briefing provides a summary of the housing tenure patterns of West Sussex residents, drawing on analysis from the [Office for National Statistics Household characteristics by tenure, England and Wales publication](#), alongside data extracted from Nomis.

Background

Housing has an important influence on our health and wellbeing through several routes, such as:

- affordability (e.g., stress from rent, mortgage, utility bills)
- quality (e.g., cold or damp conditions causing respiratory issues)
- security (e.g., impact of household instability and supply on mental health)

Further reading: [Housing | The Health Foundation](#), [The role of homes and buildings in levelling up health and wellbeing - House of Commons Library](#), [How does housing influence our health?](#).

Housing was recognised as a ‘social determinant’¹ in the Marmot Review (2010) which can affect physical and mental health inequalities throughout life (Bentley, et al., 2025; Wilson & Barton, 2022).

An important dimension of housing is tenure, which refers to whether a household (either one person or group of people who share the same residence) rents or owns the accommodation they live in (Murphy & Grundy, 2024; Office for National Statistics, 2023). Measuring patterns in housing tenure can help us to understand differences in people’s living conditions across the country and whether the proportion of households renting or owning their accommodation is related to factors such as household composition, age and income (Murphy & Grundy, 2024).

For local authorities, data on housing tenure can highlight specific areas of need, such as those struggling to access secure and affordable housing and support the development of targeted policies and frameworks (Tinson & Clair, 2020).

How is housing tenure measured?

The Office for National Statistics 2021 Census collects data on tenure and household composition. As part of this survey, all households were asked whether they owned or rented their accommodation.

Households who owned their accommodation were asked if they owned it outright, had a mortgage/loan or owned via a shared ownership scheme where they own a share of the property and pay rent on the rest (GOV.UK, n.d).

Households who rented their accommodation were asked what type of landlord (either private or social) owned or managed their property (East Sussex County Council, 2023).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) then classified responses into the following categories:

Table 1 Description of owner-occupied category

Tenure category	Definition
Owned outright	Household owns their home without mortgage of loan.
Owned with a mortgage or loan	Households own their home with the help of a mortgage of loan.
Part-owned on a shared ownership scheme	Household partly owns and partly rents their home, typically through a housing association or local authority.

Table 2 Description of rented category

Tenure category	Definition
Private rented or living rent free	Household rents their home from a private landlord, letting agent of individual.
Social rented	Household rents their home through a local authority or housing association.

Good to know

Whilst Census data provides valuable insight into patterns of housing tenure and household composition, it does not take into account contextual factors such as the impact of financial constraints (e.g. cost of living, rising interest rates), legislative changes (e.g., Housing Act 2004) or supply of suitable housing (e.g., size or availability) on tenure (Barton, 2017).

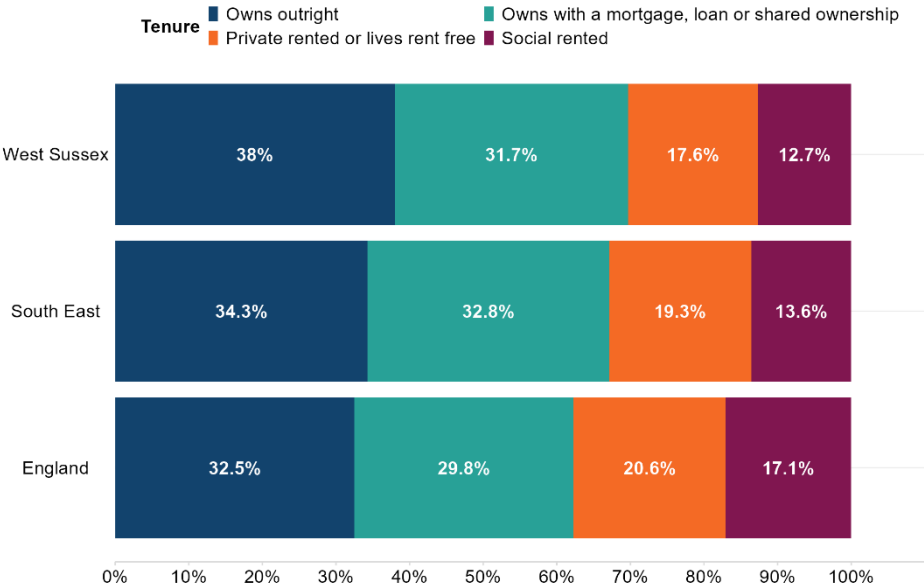
Tenure by county

In 2021, West Sussex has approximately 375,200 households with at least one usual resident - an increase of 29,600 (8.6%) households since 2011, This growth is slightly higher than the 7.7% rise between 2001 and 2011.

The majority of households in West Sussex (69.7%) owned their home, either outright or with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership. This is similar to the South East (67.1%) and higher than England (62.4%). Of these homeowners, 38% owned outright and 31.7% households had a mortgage, loan or shared ownership arrangement.

In West Sussex, 30.3% of households rented their home, either privately, socially or lived ‘rent free’. This is lower than the South East (32.9%) and England (37.7%). Of those who rented their home, 12.7% socially rented and 17.6% privately rented or lived ‘rent free’.

Figure 1 Percentage of households by tenure, West Sussex, South East and England. Census 2021.



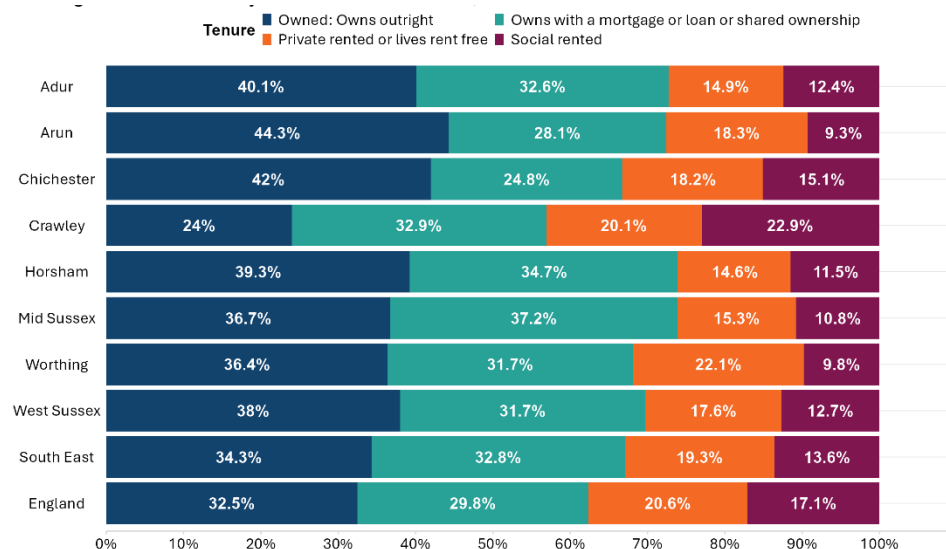
Source: England and Wales: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS054.

Tenure by district and boroughs

There was variation in housing tenure across West Sussex:

- Arun has the highest proportion of households who owned their home outright (44.3%)
- Mid Sussex had the highest proportion of households who owned their home with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (37.2%)
- Worthing had the highest proportion of households who privately rented or lived rent free (22.1%). **This was higher than the South East (13.6%) and England (17.1%).**
- Crawley had the highest proportion of households in socially rented housing (22.9%). **This was higher than the South East (19.3%) and England (20.6%).**

Figure 2 Percentage of households by tenure in West Sussex; Census 2021



Source: England and Wales: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS054.

Tenure by district and boroughs: 2011 vs 2021

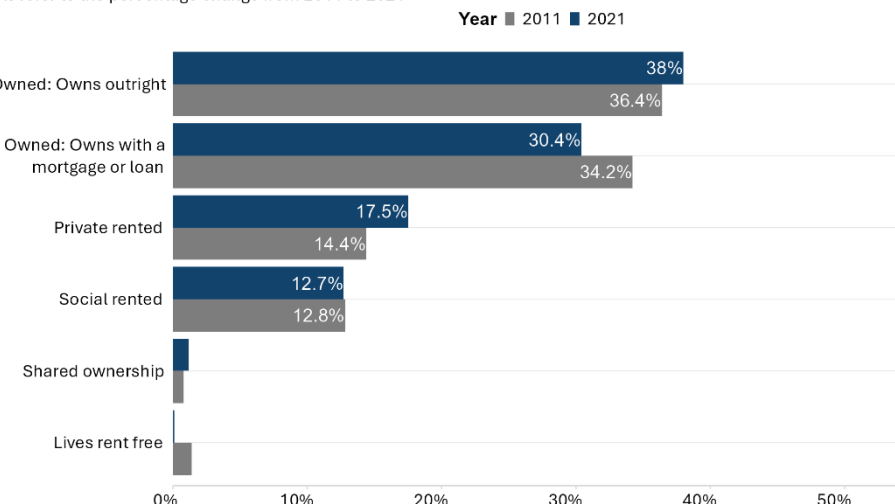
Outright ownership was the most common tenure type amongst households in West Sussex for both 2011 (36.4%) and 2021 (38%).

Between 2011 and 2021, the biggest increase was in the percentage of households in West Sussex privately renting, which increased by 3.1% over the 10-year period. This pattern is aligned with the South East and England.

The biggest decrease was in the percentage of households who owned their home with a mortgage or loan which decreased by 3.8% to 30.4%.

Figure 3 Change in the percentage split of tenure for West Sussex; 2011 vs 2021 Census.

Labels refer to the percentage change from 2011 to 2021



Note: Labels are not shown if percentage is <2%.
Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Similar patterns were observed across the county - all district and boroughs reported an increase in the percentage of households owned outright and privately renting and decrease in the percentage of households who owned their home with a mortgage or loan.

Crawley had the largest increase in private renters between 2011 and 2021 (4.4%), higher than the South East (1.7%) and England (2.4%). It also had the biggest fall in social renters, down 1%, compared to the South East (-0.1%) and England (-0.6%).

This fall in social renters could reflect long-term changes in the sector due to factors such as the increase of 'right to buy' sales, where houses are being converted from social rent to 'affordable rent', and demolitions (Cromarty & Burton, 2024; Shelter, n.d.). Further information on 'right to buy' sales and 'affordable rent' (as part of the Affordable Homes Programme government initiative) can be found in Appendix A.

Good to know

For further information on the percentage change of households by area and tenure category between 2011 and 2021, view the accompanying [percentage of households by housing tenure in 2011 compared to 2021 document](#).

Tenure by small areas

The 2021 Census data on tenure is available down to smaller areas such as middle layer super output areas (MSOAs). These are medium-sized areas within local authorities which each represent a population of between 2,000-6,000 residents (ONS, n.d.).

To provide an overview of tenure across small areas in West Sussex, data was split into five approximately equal groups (quintiles) and plotted onto a series of static maps, with darker colours showing a greater proportion of households in each tenure category. For a detailed breakdown of tenure differences, view the [housing tenure map of lower super output areas](#).

The proportion of households in West Sussex who owned their homes outright ranged from 15.3% to 65.9%. The table below shows the ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households within this tenure category, ranging from 52.7-65.9%.

Table 3 Ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households owned outright in West Sussex

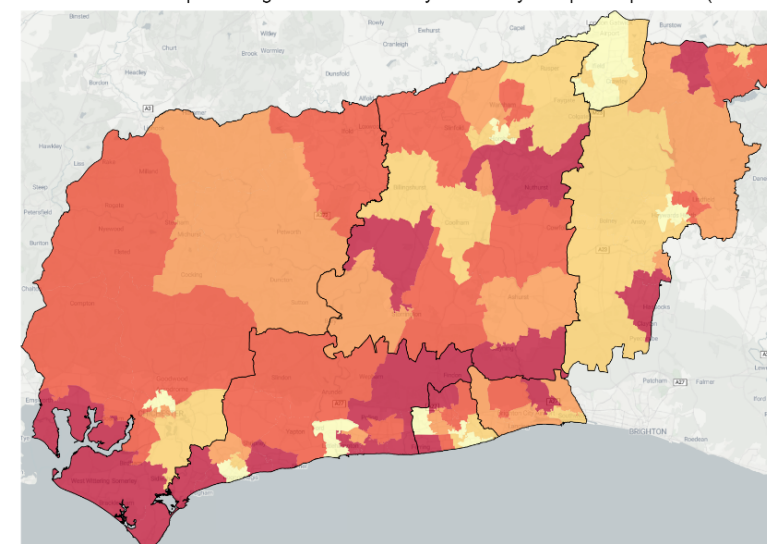
MSOA name	Area	%
Aldwick	Arun	65.9%
Ferring & Kingston Gorse	Arun	65.1%
East Preston & Rustington East	Arun	64.6%
West Chiltington Common	Horsham	60.9%
High Salvington & Findon Valley	Worthing	58.2%

MSOA name	Area	%
Goring-by-Sea	Worthing	56.0%
Nyetimber & Pagham	Arun	55.0%
Middleton-on-Sea	Arun	54.1%
Selsey	Chichester	54.1%
Steyning & Upper Beeding	Horsham	52.7%

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS0544

Figure 4 Percentage of households owned outright in West Sussex; 2021 Census

Fill colour indicates percentage of households by middle layer super output area (MSOA)



% 15.3% - 27.9% 28.3% - 34.8% 35.0% - 42.0%
42.3% - 46.1% 46.6% - 65.9%

Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown copyright and database right 2024
Source: England and Wales: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS054

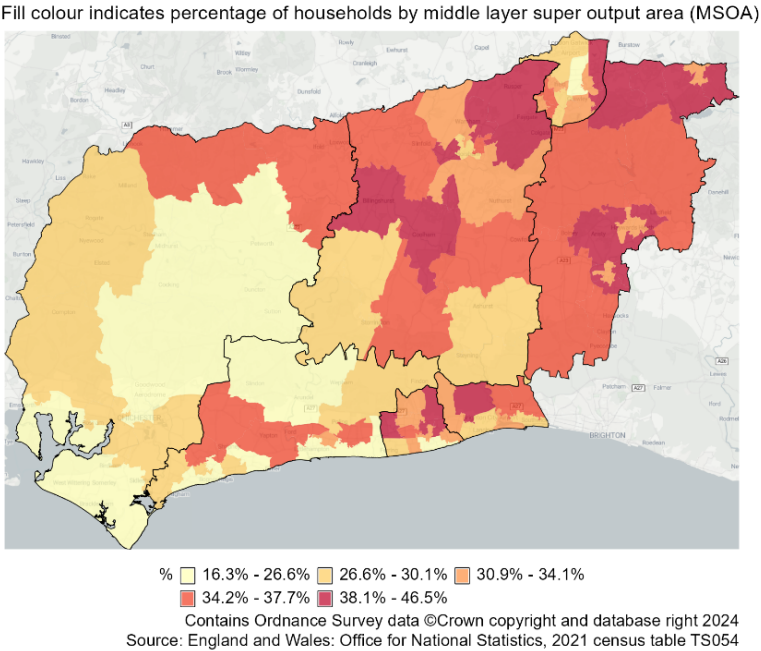
The proportion of households in West Sussex who owned their home with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership ranged from 16.3% to 46.5%. The table below shows the ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households within this tenure category, ranging from 46.5-40.4%.

Table 4 Ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households who owned their home with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership in West Sussex

MSOA name	Area	%
Pound Hill	Crawley	46.5%
Maidenbower East & Worth	Crawley	45.5%
Burgess Hill West	Mid Sussex	45.5%
Southwater	Horsham	44.6%
Burgess Hill East	Mid Sussex	43.4%
Broadwater West	Worthing	43.4%
Horsham West	Horsham	42.3%
Broadwater East	Worthing	41.9%
Haywards Heath South & Cuckfield	Mid Sussex	40.8%
Copthorne & Turners Hill	Mid Sussex	40.4%

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS0544

Figure 5 Percentage of households owned with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership in West Sussex; 2021 Census



The proportion of households in West Sussex who privately rented or lived rent free ranged from 6.7% to 48.2%. The table below shows the ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households within this tenure category, ranging from 24.3-48.2%.

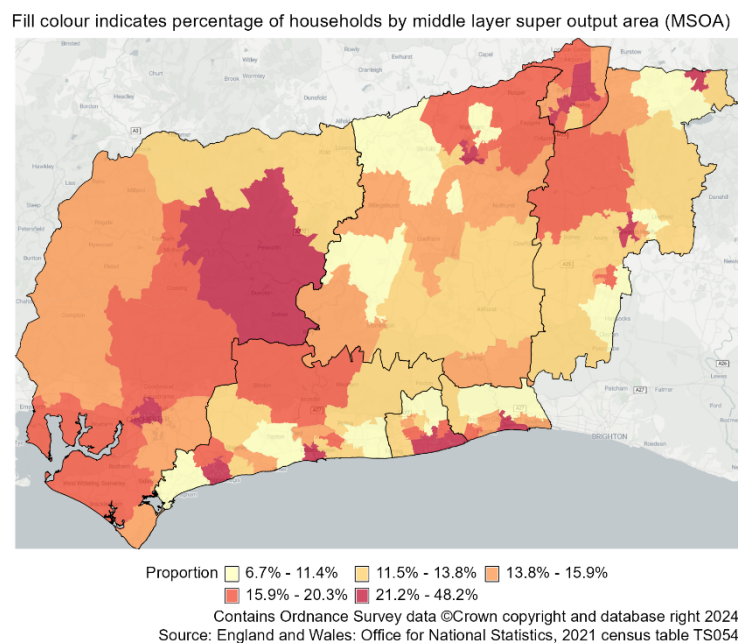
Table 5 Ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households who privately rented or lived rent free in West Sussex

MSOA name	Area	%
Bognor Regis Central	Arun	48.2%
Worthing Central	Worthing	47.9%
Littlehampton West and River	Arun	45.6%
Heene	Worthing	38.9%

MSOA name	Area	%
Manor Royal & Northgate	Crawley	35.1%
Central Chichester	Chichester	30.9%
Haywards Heath West	Mid Sussex	30.9%
Broadwater South	Worthing	29.4%
Southgate	Crawley	24.5%
South Bersted	Arun	24.3%

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS0544

Figure 6 Percentage of households privately rented in West Sussex; 2021 Census



The proportion of households in West Sussex who socially rented their home ranged from 0.9% to 38%. The table below shows the ten MSOAs with the

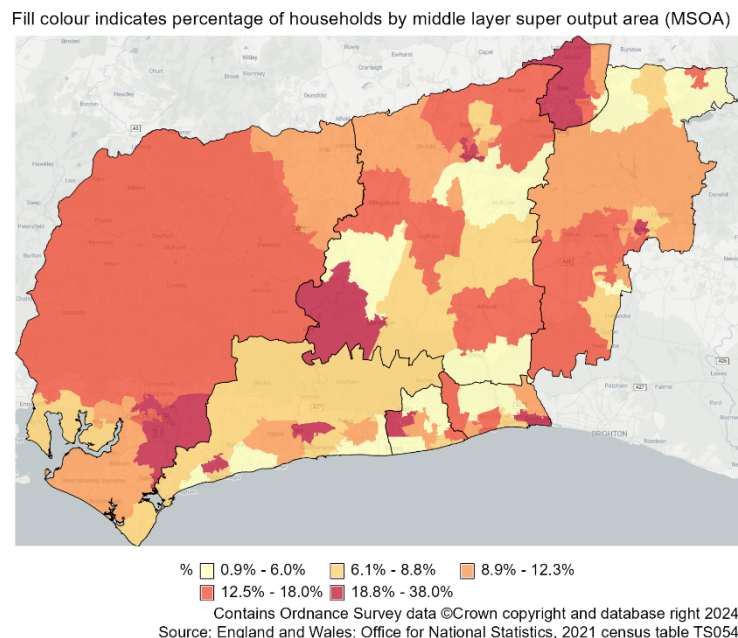
highest proportion of households within this tenure category, ranging from 24.3-38%.

Table 6 Ten MSOAs with the highest proportion of households who socially rented in West Sussex

MSOA name	Area	%
Broadfield East	Crawley	38.0%
Bewbush	Crawley	36.3%
Ewhurst & West Green	Crawley	30.7%
College Lane & Oaklands	Chichester	29.8%
Tilgate	Crawley	28.6%
Langley Green & Gatwick Airport	Crawley	28.1%
Kingston & Southwick	Adur	27.2%
Broadfield West	Crawley	25.6%
Haywards Heath East	Mid Sussex	24.5%
Northbrook	Worthing	24.3%

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 census table TS0544

Figure 7 Percentage of households socially rented in West Sussex; 2021 Census



Household characteristics by tenure

This section of the briefing will explore the differences in the distribution of tenure across the county, taking into account household characteristics such as size, age and family composition.

Household size

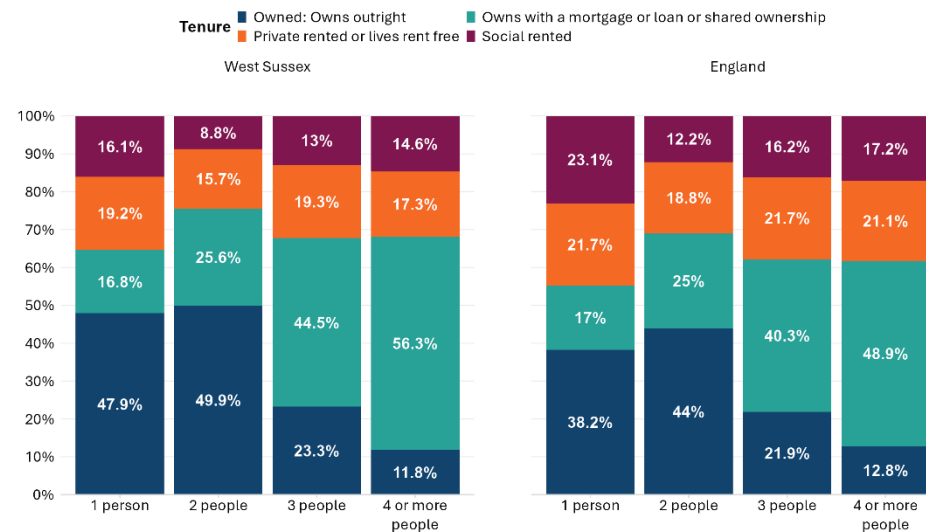
In West Sussex, households with fewer people were more likely to own their accommodation outright compared with larger household sizes. For example, households of two people were most likely to own their accommodation outright (49.9%), aligned with the national picture.

Households with four or more people in West Sussex were more likely to own their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (56.3%). This is higher than England (48.9%). One person households had

the lowest percentages of accommodation owned with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership.

Households of one person had the latest percentage of private renting or living rent free (19.2%) and social renting (16.1%).

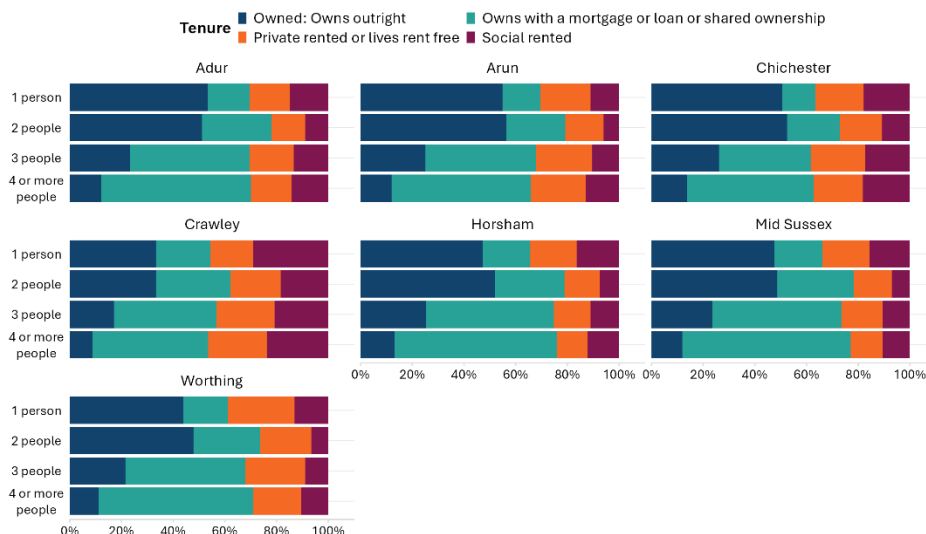
Figure 8 Percentage of households by tenure and household size, West Sussex and England; Census 2021



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Similar patterns were observed amongst the district and boroughs, such as smaller households more likely to own their accommodation outright (indicated by the dark blue bars).

Figure 9 Percentage of households by tenure and household size, West Sussex and England; 2021 Census



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Age of the household reference person

There are different approaches to explore housing tenure by age. One method is to look at the age of the Household Reference Person (HRP), which typically refers to the person who owns, rents or has primary responsibility for the accommodation, as a 'household representative' (ONS, 2024). By using the HRP as a reference point, this means each household can be grouped and compared in the same way (GSS Harmonisation Team, 2020). You can find further information on HRPs on the [Office for National Statistics Families and households statistics explained page](#).

Good to know

It is important to note that the age of the HRP is not the average age of the household and in mixed-age households (e.g., adult children living with parents), the age of the HRP may skew older. You can find further information on the caveats surrounding the use of HRPs on the [Government Analysis Function page](#).

In West Sussex, households with a HRP aged 65 years and over were the most likely to own their accommodation outright (76.2%).

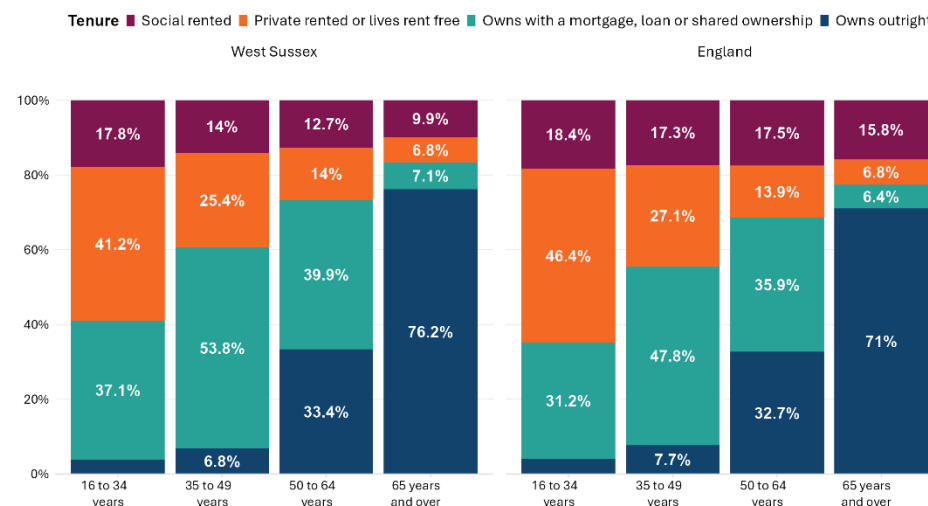
Households with a HRP aged between 50-64 were more likely to own their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (39.9%).

Households with a HRP aged between 35-49 were more likely to own their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (53.8%).

Households with a HRP aged between 16-34 years were more likely to privately rent their accommodation or live rent free (41.2%) or socially rent (17.8%) compared to HRPs within other age groups.

This is similar to the patterns observed across England.

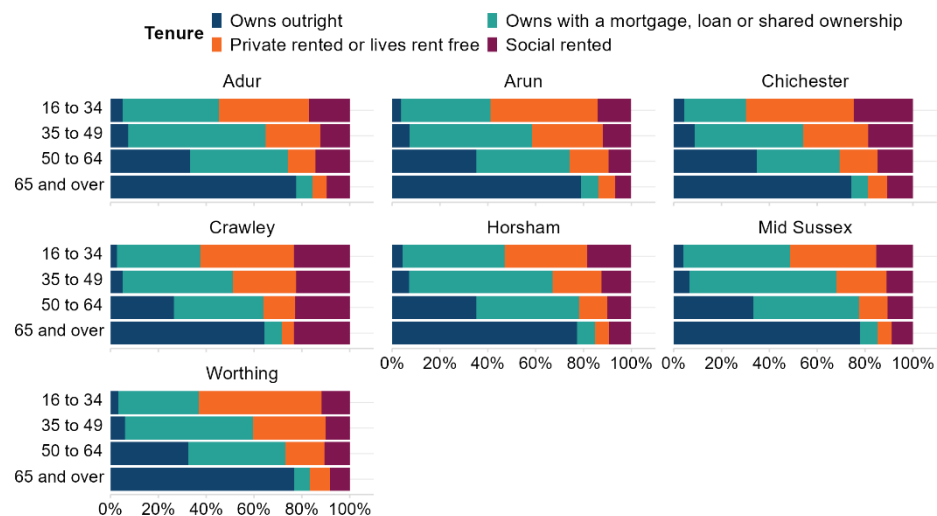
Figure 10 Percentage of households by tenure and age of household reference person, West Sussex and England; Census 2021



Note: Labels are not shown if percentage is <5%. Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Across the district and boroughs, the percentage of households who socially rented their accommodation in Crawley appeared similar regardless of the age of the HRP (as indicated by the purple bars).

Figure 11 Percentage of households by tenure and age of household reference person, West Sussex districts; Census 2021



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Family composition

The 2021 Census can be used to classify households according to the relationships between household members, known as ‘household composition’ (ONS, 2023). This can tell us whether the household consists of one-person, one-family (referred to as ‘single family households’ or multiple people living together (Barton, Constituency data: Household composition, 2024).

In West Sussex, single family households where all residents were aged 66 years and over had the highest percentages that owned their accommodation outright (86.1%), compared with other household family compositions. This was higher than the England average (84.2%).

In West Sussex, single family households were most likely to own their home with mortgage, loan or shared ownership (78%). One person households

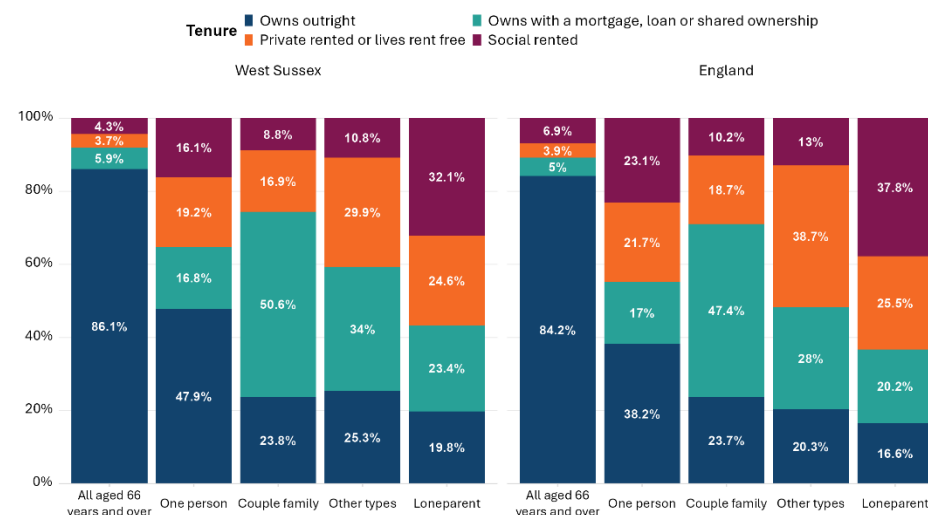
were most likely to socially rent (37%). Other household types were most likely to privately rent.

Single family couple households in West Sussex were the most likely to own their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (46.1%).

Single family lone parent households in West Sussex were the most likely to socially rent their accommodation (32.1%) compared with other family compositions. Those with dependent children had a higher percentage (37%), compared with those with all non-dependent children (24%).

Single family couple households and ‘other’ households (such as those in full-time education) were most likely to privately rent their accommodation (29.9%) compared to other family compositions.

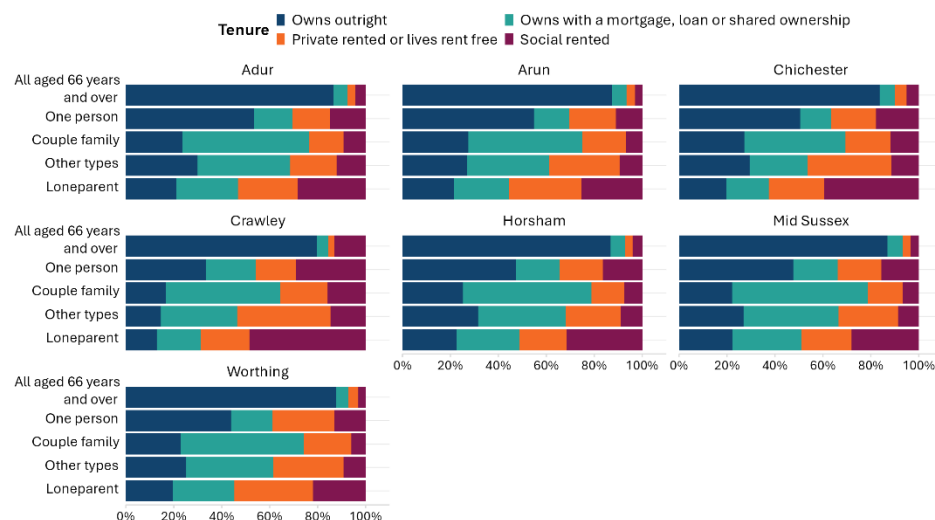
Figure 12 Percentage of households by tenure and household family composition, West Sussex and England; Census 2021



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Similar patterns were observed amongst the district and boroughs.

Figure 13 Percentage of households by tenure and household family composition, West Sussex districts; Census 2021



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Multi-generational households

The 2021 Census can be used to classify households based on whether multiple generations of the same family live together. This includes households with grandparents and grandchildren whether or not the intervening generation also live in the household (ONS, 2023).

Multi-generational households made up 6,280 (1.7%) of households in West Sussex. Across the county, the percentage of multi-generational households ranged from 1.3% in Horsham and Mid Sussex to 2.6% of households in Crawley.

Figure 14 Number and percentage of multi-generational households by household tenure, 2021 Census

Area	Is a multi-generational household	Not a multi-generational household
Adur	560 (2%)	27,120 (98%)
Arun	1,340 (1.8%)	71,320 (98.2%)

Area	Is a multi-generational household	Not a multi-generational household
Chichester	740 (1.4%)	53,380 (98.6%)
Crawley	1,200 (2.6%)	44,300 (97.4%)
Horsham	800 (1.3%)	61,560 (98.7%)
Mid Sussex	850 (1.3%)	62,500 (98.7%)
Worthing	790 (1.6%)	48,740 (98.4%)
West Sussex	6,280 (1.7%)	368,930 (98.3%)
Southeast	73,040 (1.9%)	3,734,920 (98.1%)
England	500,410 (2.1%)	22,935,670 (97.9%)

Values rounded to the nearest 10.

Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Compared with households not classified as multi-generational, multi-generational households in West Sussex had:

- Lower levels who owned their accommodation outright (35.4% vs 38.1%).
- Slightly higher levels who owned their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (34.1% vs 31.6%)
- Lower levels in the private rental sector (14% vs 17.7%)
- Higher levels in the social rental sector (16.5% vs 12.6%)

Across the county, all district and boroughs had lower levels of multi-generational families in the private rental sector.

Figure 15 Percentage of multi-generational households by household tenure across West Sussex districts, 2021 Census

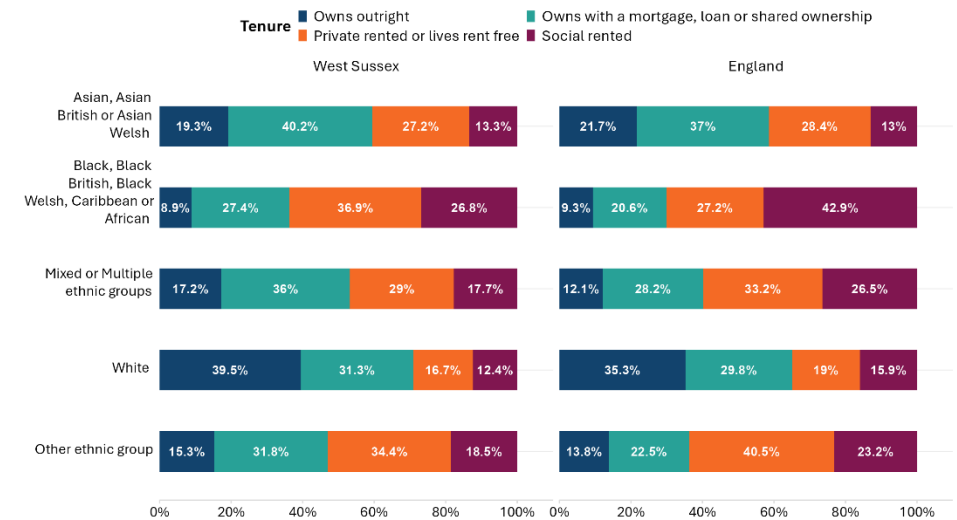
person's ethnicity (GOV.UK, 2024). Data is presented for West Sussex overall.

In West Sussex, 39.5% of households with a household reference person identifying as White owned their accommodation outright, compared with 35.3% in England.

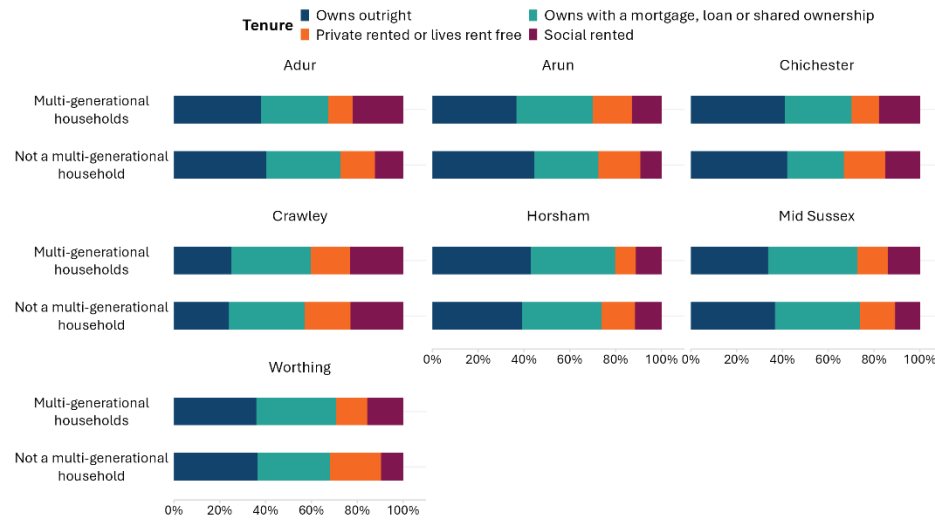
Households with a household reference person identifying as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh were more likely to own their home with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (indicated by the green bars; 40.2%; compared with other ethnic groups). This is a similar pattern to the England average.

Households with a household reference person identifying as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African had the highest percentage in the social rented sector (36.9%) and private rented sector (26.8%), compared with other ethnic groups.

Figure 16 Percentage of households by tenure and ethnic group of household reference person, West Sussex and England; 2021 Census



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics



Source: Census 2021 from the Office for National Statistics

Ethnicity of the household reference person

In the 2021 Census, people were asked to identify which ethnic group they felt they belonged to which could be based on their culture, family background, identity or physical appearance. This question had two stages. Firstly, a person identified through one of the following five high-level ethnic groups:

- "Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh"
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African"
- "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups"
- "White"
- "Other ethnic group"

Secondly, a person could choose one of nineteen response options, which included write-in response options (ONS, 2023).

This briefing refers to the ethnic group of the household reference person. It is important to note that in households with members from different ethnic backgrounds, the diversity is represented only by the household reference

Conclusion

The aim of this briefing was to provide an updated summary of housing tenure in West Sussex, based on data from the 2021 Census.

When compared to the 2011 Census, outright ownership continued to be the most common tenure type amongst households in West Sussex. However, the biggest increase over the past decade was in the percentage of households in West Sussex privately renting (+3.1%). The size of the private rental sector has increased significantly in recent decades with demand from a more diverse range of households (Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022), including more families with children (Marsh & Gibb, 2019). From May 2026, there will be major reforms to how the private rental sector is regulated, through the Renters Rights Act 2025. This Act aims to give greater rights and protections to people renting their homes, including abolishing 'no fault' evictions and limiting rent increases (Cromarty, 2025).

Whilst Census data provides useful insight which helps to inform decisions such as planning policies and housing need (ONS, 2025), there are caveats to be aware of when interpreting findings. As discussed, Census data does not take into account contextual factors such as the supply of housing or legislative changes. This means recent reforms such as the Renters Right Act 2025 could impact future Census data on housing tenure.

Alongside an overall summary of housing tenure, this briefing also explored differences in household characteristics such as size, age and family composition on tenure across the county. For example, younger household reference persons (HRPs; seen as the 'representative of the household') in West Sussex were more likely to either privately or socially rent their accommodation compared with older households. However, when exploring the differences in household characteristics, a HRP was used for some areas of analysis e.g., age and ethnicity. Whilst this provides a consistent approach for comparison, it does not capture the full diversity of households (GSS Harmonisation Team, 2020).

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Appendix A

This briefing reported that between 2011 and 2021, Crawley had the largest proportional decrease in households living in socially rented accommodation between the 2011 and 2021 Census at -1%. The percentage of households who socially rented also decreased to a lesser extent in the South East (-0.1%) and England (-0.6%).

Briefings by the House of Commons Library (2024) and Shelter (n.d.) have cited potential contributory factors for this decline in households socially

renting, such as the increase of ‘right to buy’ sales, houses being converted from social rent to ‘affordable rent’, and demolitions.

‘Right to buy’ (RTB) refers to a government scheme which allows eligible council and housing association tenants to buy their council home at a discounted price (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025). In July 2025, the UK government responded to a consultation on RTB and confirmed reforms to the scheme such as extending the qualifying tenancy period from 3 to 10 years and providing exemptions to protect newly built social homes from being sold (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024). [Read the Government’s response to the consultation on Reforming the Right to Buy on GOV.UK.](#)

‘Affordable rent’ was introduced by the governments’ ‘affordable housing programme’ in 2011 and allows social housing providers to charge up to 80% of the local market rent² under certain conditions (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025). Under the programme, existing vacant properties can be converted from social rent (where providers can charge around 50% of the local market rent) to affordable rent in certain circumstances (Cromarty et al., 2024; Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021), 2022).

Further reading

[Read the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's \(2025\) literature review on ethnicity and homeownership in the UK.](#)

² Market rent refers to the cost of renting a house in the private sector, taking into account the property size, type and location (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021), 2022).