



WEST MIDLANDS
VIOLENCE
REDUCTION UNIT

Strategic Needs Assessment - Sandwell

An Assessment of the Risk of Violence in Sandwell

March 2021

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Introduction

This report by West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WM VRU) assesses the risk to children and young people in Sandwell of experiencing violence and exploitation, particularly in view of the relaxing of lockdown restrictions in the spring and summer of 2021.

It draws on data from a range of sources - data has been selected based on what it tells us about the extent of violence in Sandwell, but also based on what it reveals about the risk factors that increase the likelihood of young people being drawn into violence and the threat of exploitation. Full details of the data used and the sources are available in the references on page 19.

The risk factors are varied and should not be considered direct causes, but there are strong correlations between rates of child poverty, adversity, mental health and school exclusions, and rates of violence.

The report focuses on youth violence and knife crime. It begins by looking at the extent of youth violence in Sandwell in recent years, according to Police incident data and NHS data on hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object (usually knife wounds). There is a section on the threat of exploitation from County Lines,

revealing the parts of Sandwell where young people are most at risk and the young people at risk.

Public place violence reduced during lockdown as the night-time economy and places of education shut down, but data shows other forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, has increased over this time and the threat of County Lines and exploitation has remained consistently high over the same time period.

The longer-term impact of the pandemic on young people in Sandwell, and the additional risk of experiencing violence, is likely to be most keenly felt in the education sector and in the economy.

Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs of young people are understood to have a strong bearing on their chances of being permanently excluded from school, which elevates their risk of exploitation. The report examines SEMH rates in primary schools to help identify where best to invest in early prevention and support.

The economic impact of the pandemic will be felt by many in the country, but Sandwell, with its high proportion of young people, many of whom will have been employed in low-skilled, elementary jobs in sectors that have been hardest hit, such as hospitality, is likely to suffer a particularly acute economic shock.

The risk from the potential loss of employment of large numbers of young people, exacerbated by a lack of skills and training, presents a stern challenge for the borough and risks further hardship, deprivation and the worrying possibility of an increase in exploitation and violence.

Context

Sandwell has a young and ethnically diverse population. Like many parts of the UK, it experiences inequalities and deprivation. There are areas of deep poverty. Many of its young people live in low-income families.

Sandwell, along with neighbouring Birmingham and Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, is one of the 20 most deprived local authorities in the country. All are more deprived in 2019 than they were in 2004.

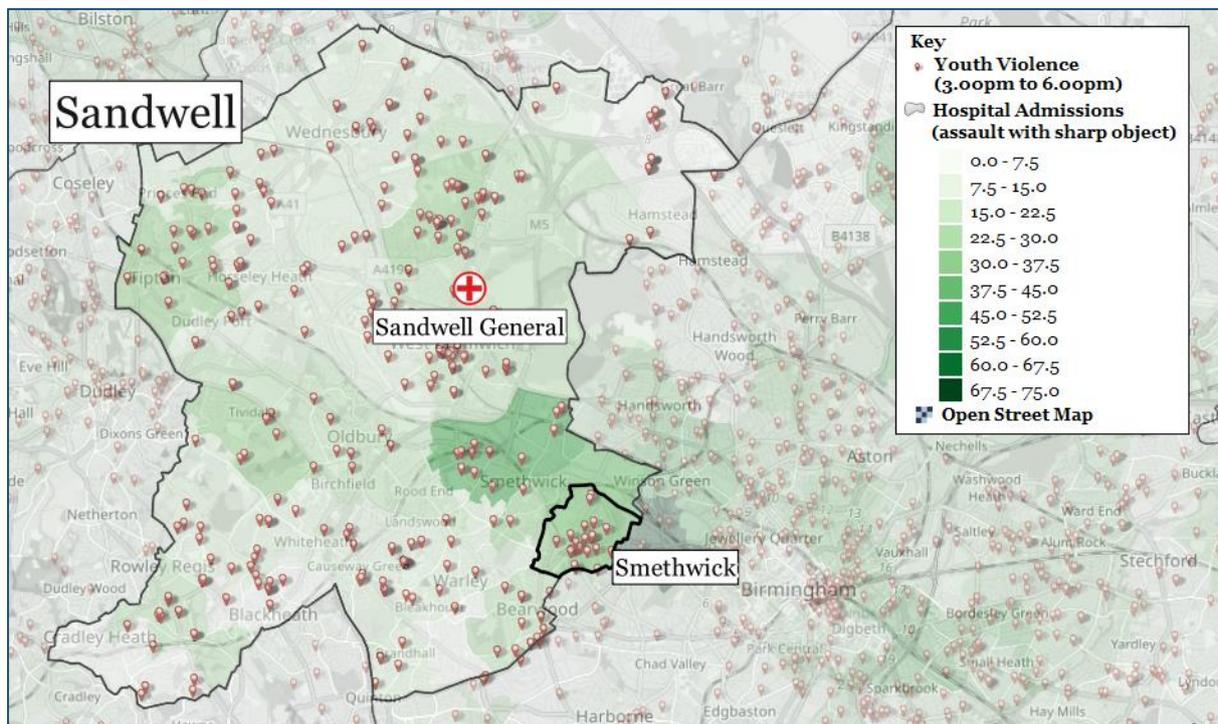
Violence in Sandwell

Hospital admissions for Assault with a sharp object and Youth Violenceⁱ

The map below reveals hotspots of violence in Sandwell in the years leading up to the pandemic. It includes three years' worth of hospital admissions data for assault (April 2016 to March 2019) with a sharp object, based on where the patient lives and aggregated to neighbourhood level. Dark green indicates higher numbers of people from that neighbourhood being admitted to hospital for assault with a sharp object during the three-year period.

Youth violence, as recorded by West Midlands Police, increases dramatically between the hours of 3.00pm and 6.00pm. The red pins illustrate the approximate locations of

police-recorded violence in the calendar year 2019, between the hours of 3.00pm and 6.00pm and where the age of victim or suspect was 18 or less.



Summary

- The map highlights the overlaps between police and NHS data, which show that the hotspots for youth violence are often the same neighbourhoods with the highest numbers of people attending hospital for assault with a sharp object.
- The areas most affected include much of the borough, but especially Smethwick which is also one of the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Smethwick, an area of focus for West Midlands VRU place-based pilot activity, is highlighted on the map in black outline.
- Knife crime more than doubled in the West Midlands between 2015 and 2019 and a third of victims of violent crime are young people aged 10-24.
- Although public place violence and hospital admissions reduced during the first lockdown, rates started climbing again in the respite in the summer of 2020 and are expected to increase again as lockdown is eased in 2021.

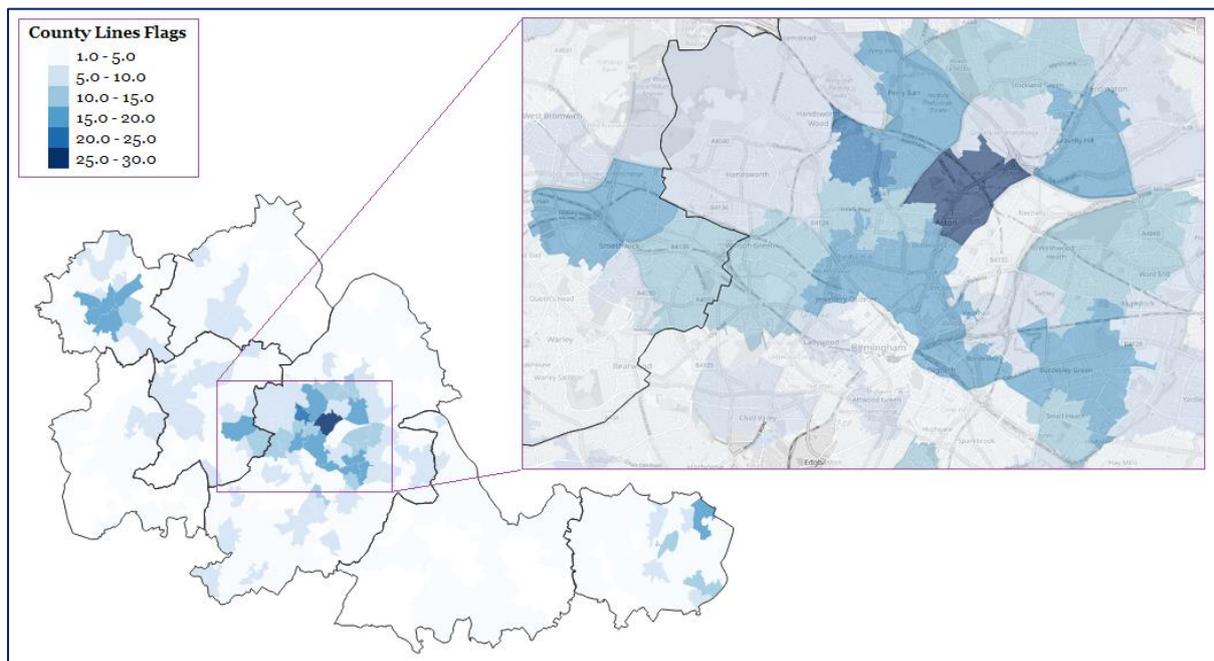
County Lines

West Midlands Police dataⁱⁱ includes markers for people involved in county lines as victims, perpetrators or suspects. This data, which has been aggregated and anonymised, has been used to provide the charts and maps in this section.

The date range is from April 2018 to November 2020, so includes the first lockdown.

Where are people involved in County Lines from?

The map shows where people with county lines markers in WM Police data live. A significant proportion are from inner-city Birmingham and Smethwick.



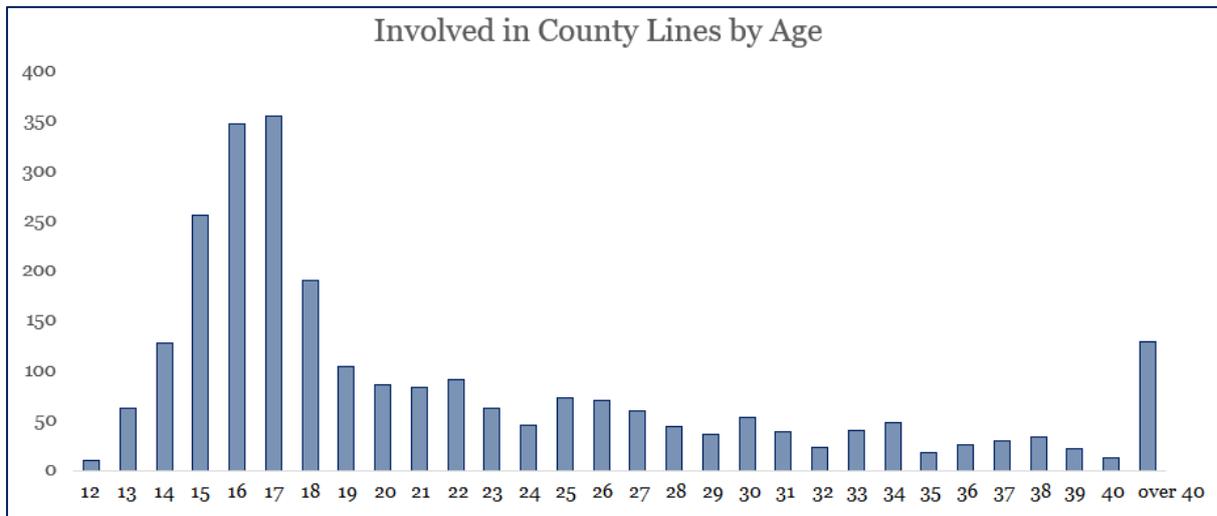
Summary

- The insert box shows the areas with the greatest concentration of people identified within this dataset. This includes Smethwick (in Sandwell) and much of inner-city and central Birmingham, including Aston, Lozells, Handsworth, Small Heath and Sparkbrook
- Many of these neighbourhoods also experience high rates of youth violence and have higher risk factors linked to violence (see Section 6)
- West Midlands VRU is focussing its place-based pilots on areas with high rates of violence and high risk, which includes neighbourhoods with high numbers of people involved in County Lines activity

County Lines – Who is involved?

The following chart shows a breakdown of people involved (as victims, perpetrators or suspects) in County Lines drugs distribution activity by age. The breakdown is by

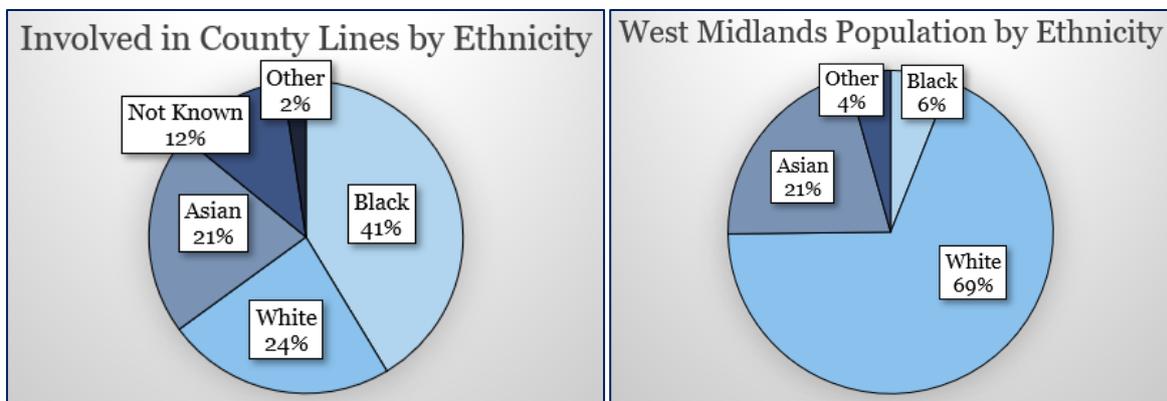
individual age rather than age band and is a record of age at the time of their involvement. The young age of those involved is both revealing and quite shocking.



Ethnicity and Gender

The pie charts show the breakdown by ethnicity.

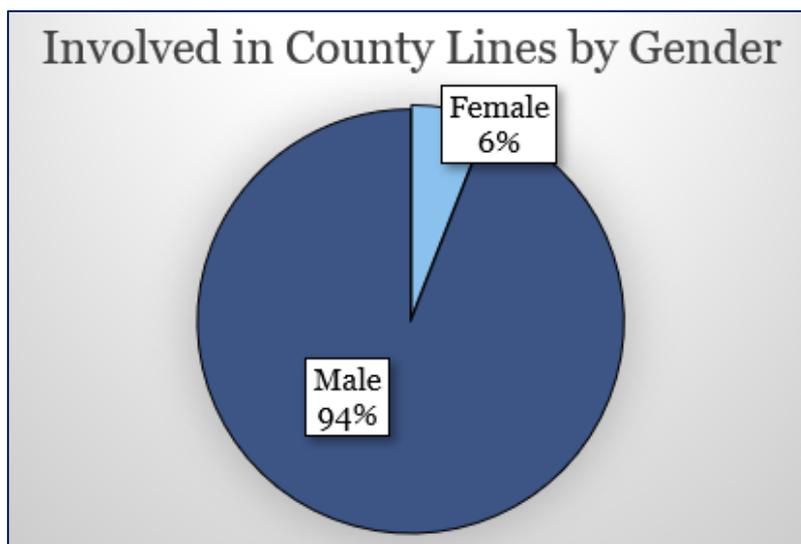
The chart on the left shows those identified by police information as involved County Lines by their recorded ethnicity. The chart on the right shows the population in the West Midlands for comparison.



Age and Ethnicity - Key Findings

- 73% of people linked to county lines activity between April 2018 and November 2020 were young people aged 25 or under, 52% were aged 18 or under and 31% were 16 or under.
- 41% of people identified in this data as involved in county lines activity – as a victim, perpetrator or suspect – were recorded as of black ethnicity. This is significantly higher than the data for the wider West Midlands population, which has a 6% black population.
- The overwhelming conclusion is that young males with Black ethnicity, most often from the most deprived parts of the West Midlands, are hugely over-represented in police information about County Lines activity
- There is a need for further work in the region to understand how far young Black people and their over-representation in the data may be partly down to the result of police activity, such as stop and search

Understanding the role of gender in Exploitation



Multi-agency practitioners have identified concerns that there are low levels of recognition and identification across the sector of the way in which women and girls are exploited through county lines drugs distribution.

There are ongoing projects to explore ways of improving the response. The current police data reinforces the existing picture but should be treated with caution when designing services.

The West Midlands regional criminal exploitation and missing board has identified the under-representation of young women in terms of exploitation and are looking to further understand this.

Professionals may stereotype females as victims of sexual exploitation and there is a risk of unknown numbers of females involved in County Lines and other forms of exploitation as victims and perpetrators that will not be apparent in the data.

County Lines during Lockdown

West Midlands Police and West Midlands VRU produced a briefing paper on County Lines, exploitation and lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2020. Some of the key highlights are listed below. The information was collated from third sector partners, providers, multi-agency forums and local authorities in the West Midlands.

- Research in the West Midlands found that County Lines drug networks adapted to the restrictions of the first lockdown in the spring of 2020.
- Initially, with the closure of the night-time economy and low usage of public transport, it was easier for authorities to spot children away from home, with exploited young people often using false Covid-related excuses for their presence on the rail network.
- Children continued to be identified far from home carrying large quantities of cash or drugs, but county lines were also being run more locally.
- There was subsequently a preference to use private hired vehicles, with bulk deliveries to provincial areas in the region.
- To avoid detection, gangs shifted to using busy public areas, such as supermarket car parks, rather than from residential addresses.
- Perpetrators used online platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok in grooming for the purposes of criminal exploitation.
- Lockdown inhibited opportunities for face-to-face safeguarding, creating challenges for child protection services and other frontline services. Young people were often less comfortable making disclosures over the phone.
- Court and school closures, and delays to CPS processes further exacerbated the risk to vulnerable young people.

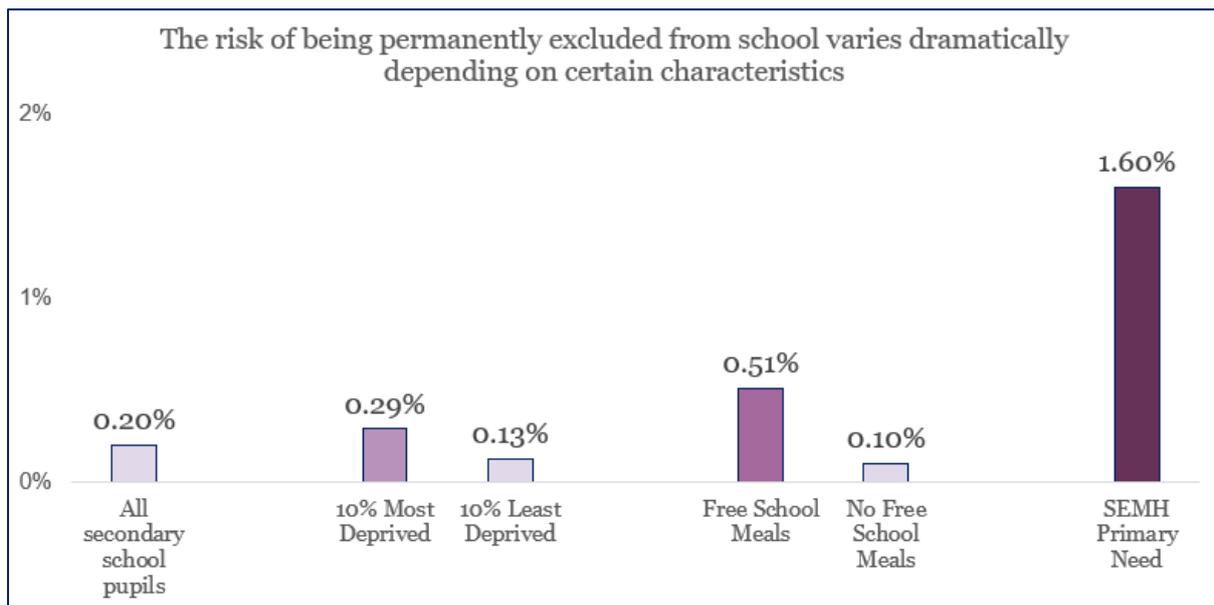
Schools and Education

Research links poor pupil attainment, absenteeism, special educational needs and deprivation to an increased risk of being excluded from school.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is no evidence that permanent school exclusion directly causes violent behaviour or involvement in crime, but there are strong correlations.

One in four young people in custody that have been excluded from school, compared to one in 1,000 of the whole secondary school population.

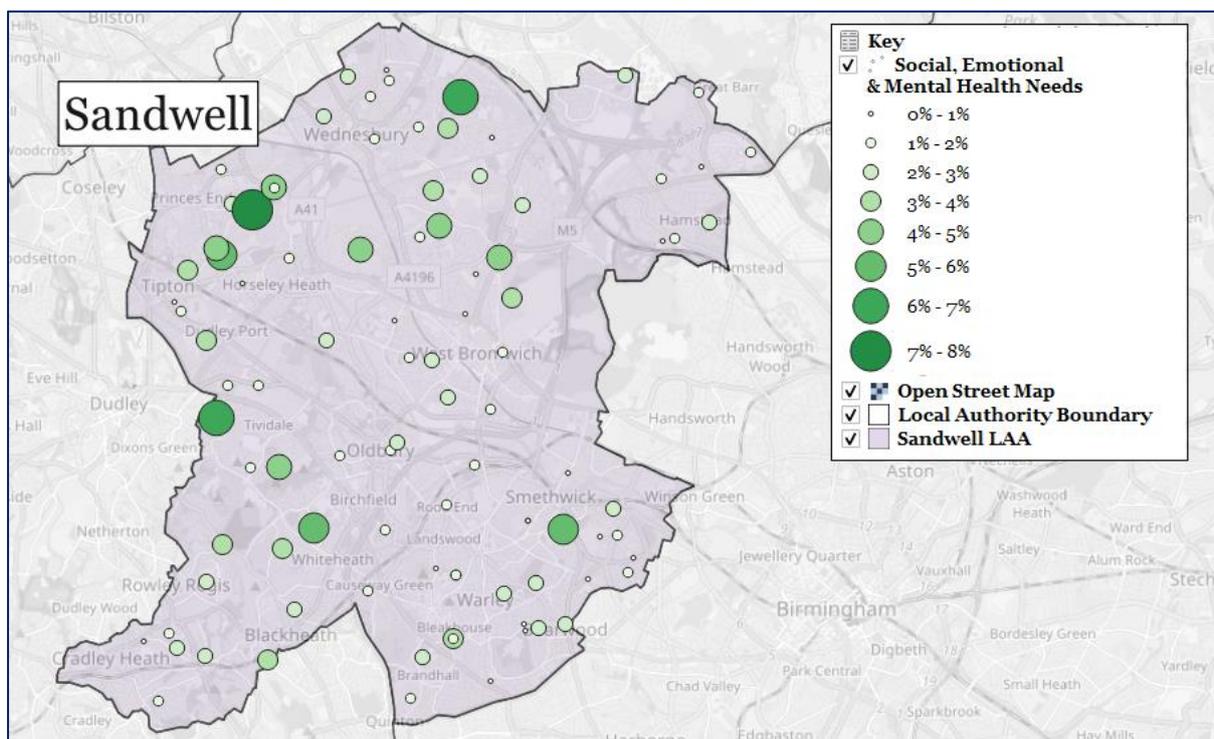
Who is most at risk of school exclusion?



Pupils with identified social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs are permanently excluded at an eight times higher rate than average at 1.6%^{iv}.

The following map shows primary schools in Sandwell with rates of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, according to school pupil characteristics from the most recent School Census published by the Department for Education in January 2020.^v

Primary Schools in Sandwell with Social, Emotional & Mental Health rates



Summary

- The map shows state-funded primary schools in Sandwell as green bubbles, with larger, dark green bubbles representing schools with the highest rates of pupils with SEMH needs.
- There are clusters of schools with higher rates of SEMH in Tibbington, Tipton and Stone Cross.
- Young people with identified needs in these schools may find the return to educational settings and transition particularly challenging.
- This may indicate a higher risk of exclusion later if support is not provided.

Children in Care

There is evidence that children in care - particularly those in unregulated settings – are at greater risk of going missing.

“Unregulated provision is a type of accommodation used for children in care, usually aged 16 or 17. The number of children aged 16 or 17 placed in unregulated settings has more than doubled from 2,900 in 2009 to 6,100 children in 2019. Unlike children’s homes, Ofsted does not inspect these settings.”^{vi}

National Youth Advocacy Service

A report by Crest Advisory crime and justice consultancy in November 2020^{vii} found that “in North Wales 31% of missing incidents were reported from care and in Merseyside, 41% of incidents were reported missing from residential care and unregulated settings”.

“When looked after children are placed in settings at distance from their home area, or in unregulated settings, their vulnerability to exploitation is amplified. Looked after children are at particular risk of exploitation in county lines drugs networks.”

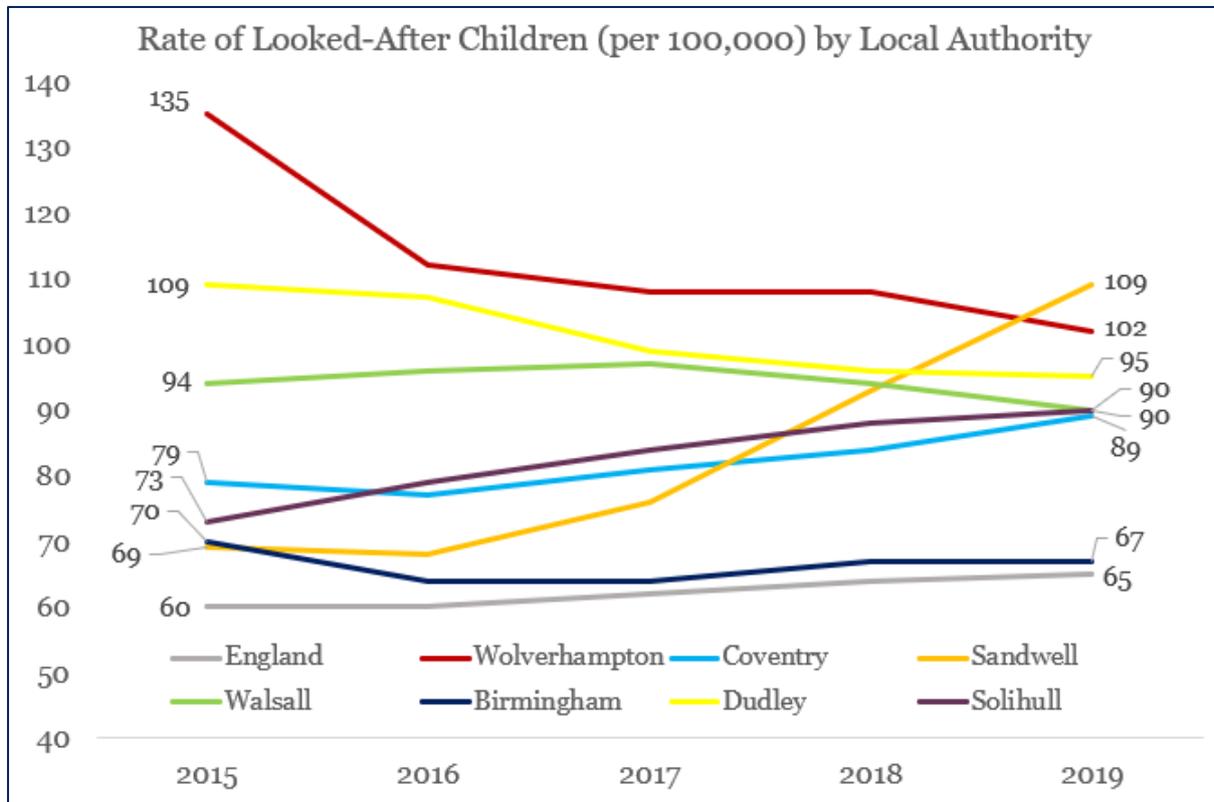
Nationally, the number of children in local authority care has been increasing for 25 years, from 50,000 in 1996 to 60,000 in 2010 and more than 80,000 in 2020, according to the latest statistics published by the Department for Education^{viii}.

The total number of Children in Care in England has gone up from 69,470 in 2015 to 78,150 in 2019 - a rise of 12%. In the West Midlands, the number has increased from 9,360 in 2015 to 10,560 in 2019 - a rise of just under 13%.

The chart below shows the rate of Children in Care per 100,000 of the population. This takes account of changes in population over time and differences in population size between local authorities. It is notable that the rate of children in care in

Sandwell has increased from 69 per 100,000 in 2015 to more than 100 per 100,000 in 2019.

Children in Care – trends in the West Midlands



Risk Factors

Some young people are more likely to become involved in violence than others and it is by identifying the factors which correlate with the risks of violence increasing and understanding the profile of these risk factors across the region, that agencies can seek to prevent violence from happening and focus their work more effectively.

Research by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in collaboration with the Mayor’s Office of Policing & Crime (MOPAC) in 2018 reveals a strong statistical association between rates of serious youth violence and social, economic and health inequalities^{ix}

Deprivation features prominently in the analysis and may be the single biggest determining factor in explaining the prevalence and risk of violence in populations and communities.^x

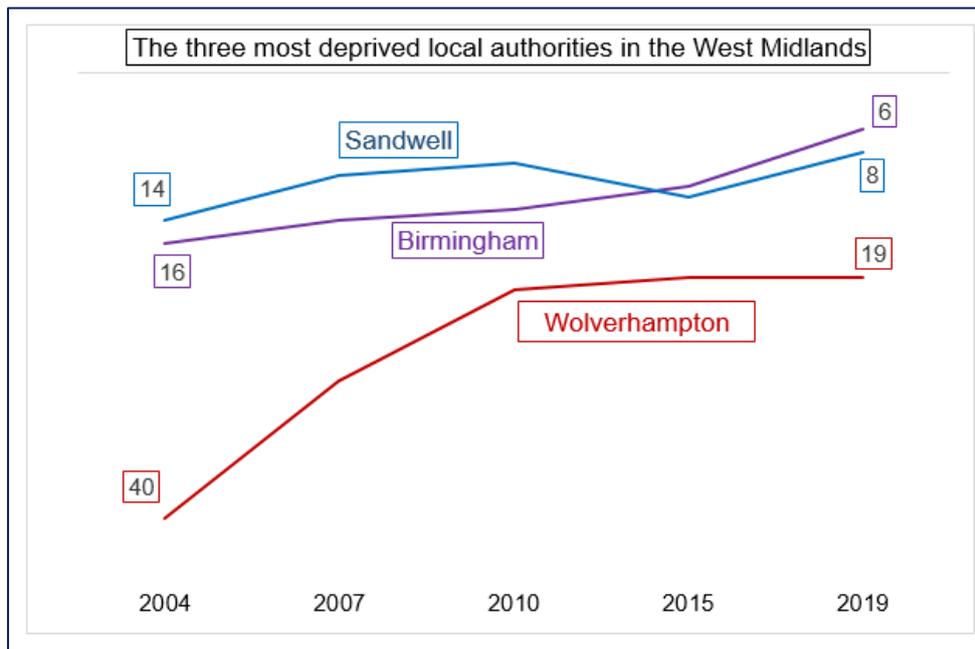
“More than any demographic characteristic, area-level deprivation is a key risk factor for violent victimisation.”

Victims of Serious Violence in England and Wales, 2011–2017,
University of Hull

Deprivation and Inequalities

The West Midlands is one of the most deprived parts of England, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) statistics of 2019^{xi} and Sandwell is not only one of the most deprived in the West Midlands, but in the country.

In the last 15 years, Sandwell has become more deprived, moving from the 14th most deprived local authority in England in 2004 to the eighth most deprived in 2019.



Deprivation is not the same as low income and relates more to how people live. It may be best described as a consequence of low income as well as having limited access to other resources.

To understand the additional inequalities and risk to young people in particular, West Midlands VRU has used the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index^{xii}.

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income-deprived families. It is a subset of the Income Deprivation Domain of the IMD statistics, which measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income.

West Midlands VRU Risk Index

West Midlands VRU have designed a risk index based on three factors with the strongest correlations towards violence:

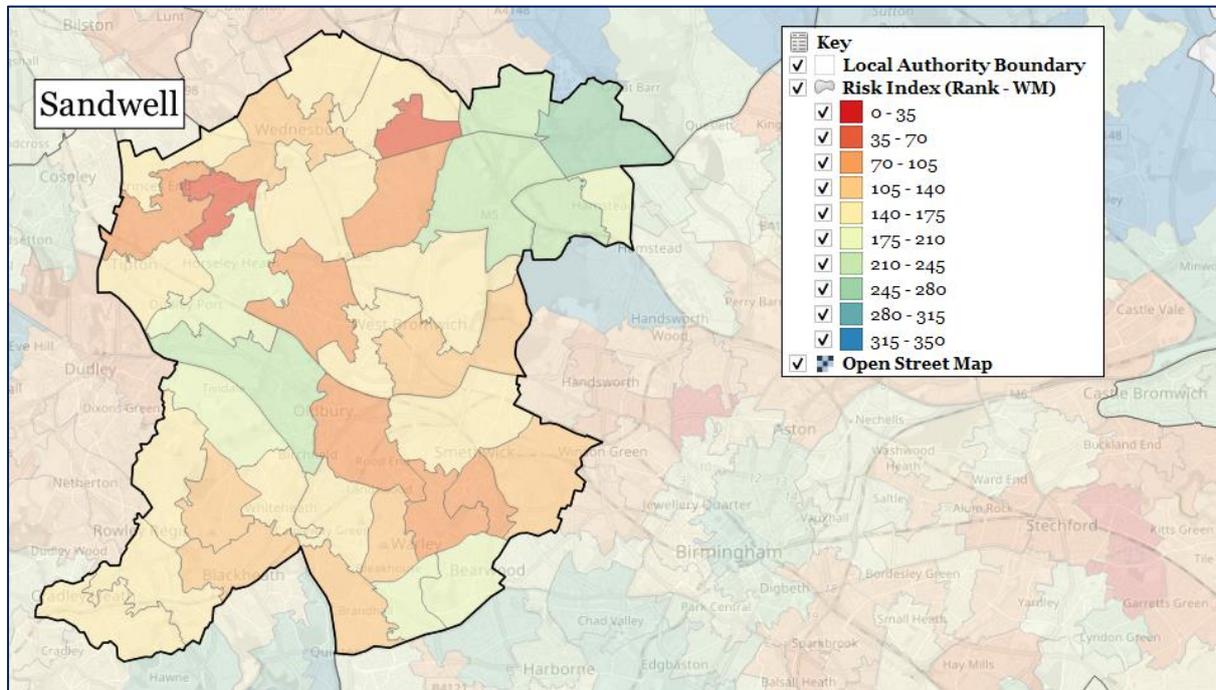
- Deprivation affecting children;
- Rates of mental health;
- Lack of educational development in early years^{xiii}.

No causation between these factors can be implied in terms of violence, but the data can help us to understand risk at neighbourhood level.

The neighbourhoods referred to here are MSOAs^{xiv}, small areas with broadly similar population sizes that can be compared within local authority areas and nationally.

For more information on the measures included in the Risk Index, including a detailed explanation and source, see references in the appendix^{xv}

Map of Neighbourhoods in Sandwell with VRU Risk Index Ranking



Summary

- The map shows the city neighbourhoods shaded from red (high risk) to blue (low risk).
- Neighbourhoods shaded red are in the top 10% highest risk in the West Midlands according to the VRU risk index.
- The neighbourhoods shaded orange are considered as medium and medium to high risk.

Comparing neighbourhoods with high risk and high rates of violence

The following map shows the top 100 ranked neighbourhoods in the Risk Index in the West Midlands (cross hatch pattern) which also have rates of knife crime at 30 or higher per 10,000 population (blue shading) with a focus on Sandwell.

These neighbourhoods are frequently some of the most deprived in the city and there are strong overlaps with the clusters of primary schools with the highest SEMH rates (see page 9) such as Tibbington, Tipton and Stone Cross.

Map of neighbourhoods with high risk and high rates of violence

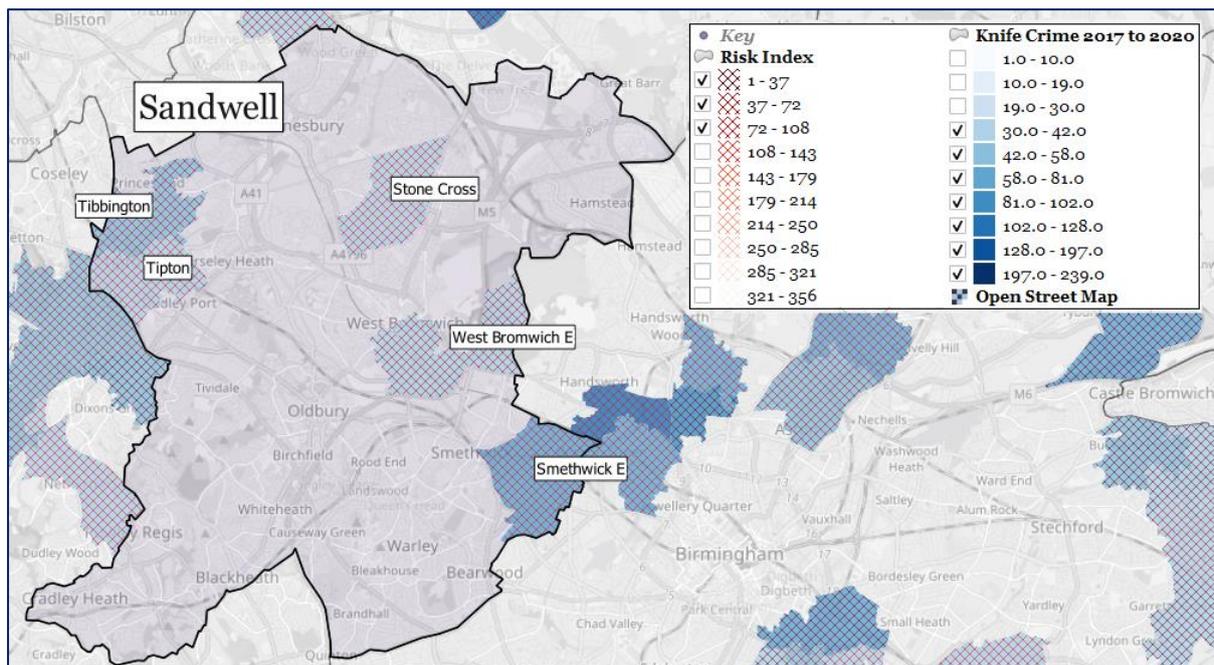


Table of neighbourhoods with high risk and high rates of violence

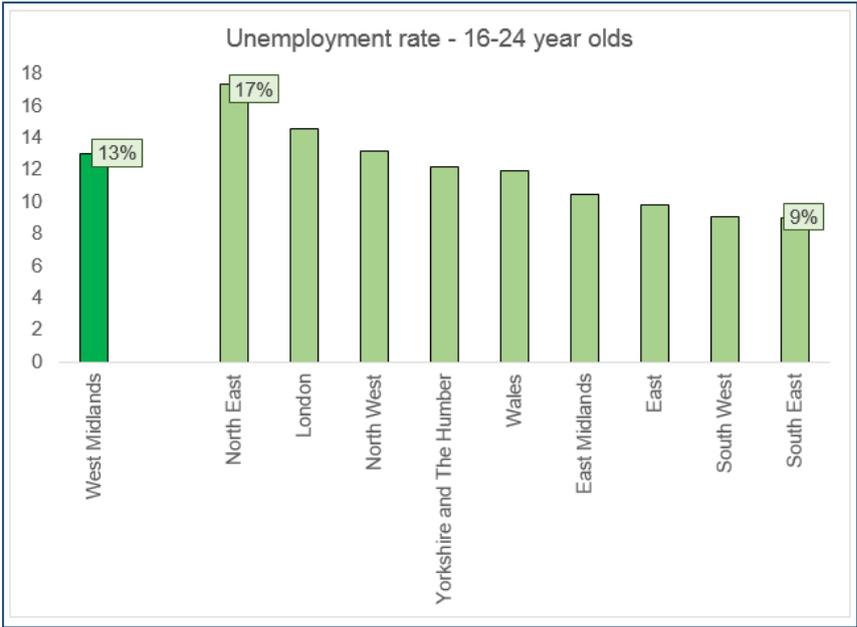
The following table lists the same neighbourhoods shown on the map above in order of risk index ranking and rate of knife crime.

Priority	Neighbourhood	Local Authority	Knife Crime (Volume)	Knife Crime Priority (West Midlands)	Risk Priority (Local Authority)	Risk Priority (West Midlands)
1	Smethwick East	Sandwell	79	19	11	83
2	Tibbington	Sandwell	44	60	5	54
3	West Bromwich East & Kenrick Park	Sandwell	37	81	3	47
4	Tipton	Sandwell	35	91	7	76
5	Stone Cross & Hateley Heath	Sandwell	35	89	13	86

Risk to young people from economic impact of Covid-19 in Sandwell

Youth unemployment (16 to 24 year olds)

The youth unemployment rate in the West Midlands region is 13%^{xvi}. Only London and the North East have higher unemployment rates for this age group.

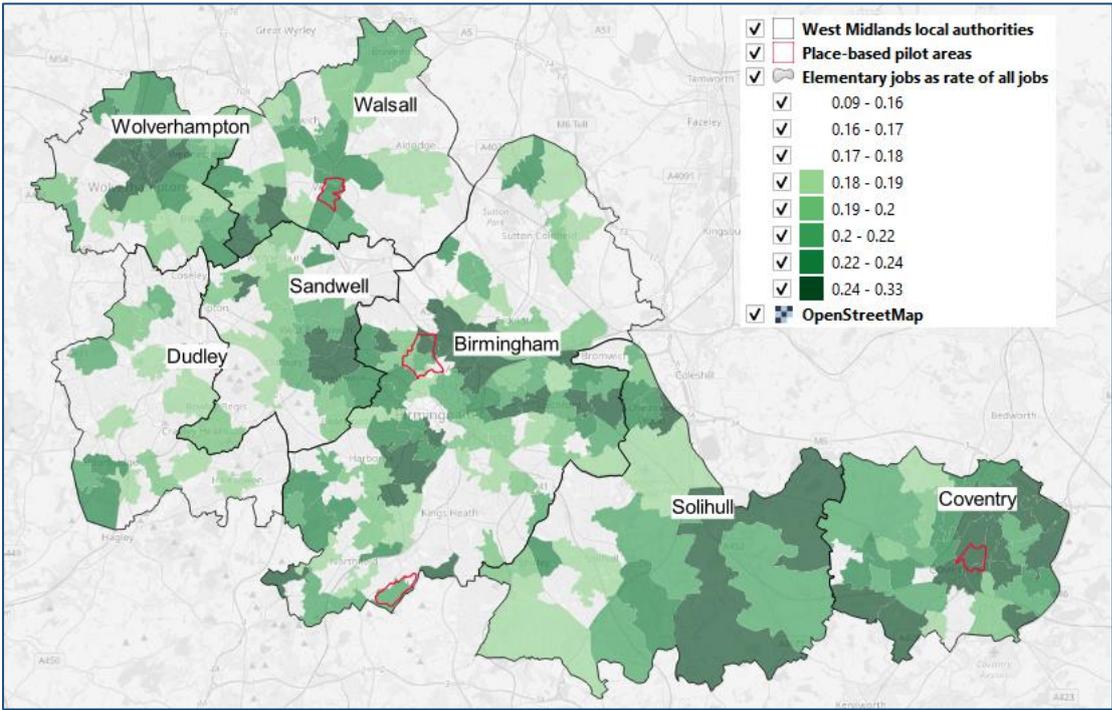


Employment Type

The International Standard Classification of Occupations is used by the United Nations and the Office of National Statistics. Group 9 - elementary occupations - includes jobs such as cleaners, kitchen assistants, waiters, bar staff, labourers and service workers.

These are typically low-skilled, low-paid jobs and do not require special qualifications. They are often filled by young people and, in some parts of the West Midlands, make up 25% to 33% of all young people’s employment.

Proportion of elementary jobs filled by 18-24 year olds



Summary

- Elementary jobs are frequently occupied by women and ethnic minorities.
- The dark green areas on the following map show where more than half – in some cases up to 90% - of elementary jobs are filled by Black and Asian minority ethnic workers.
- These elementary jobs are most at risk as a result of the pandemic.

A report by McKinsey in May 2020^{xvii} found that 7.6 million jobs are at risk nationally as a result of Covid-19 and the risks are highly skewed.

“People and places with the lowest incomes are the most vulnerable to job loss. Nearly 50% of all the jobs at risk are in occupations earning less than £10 per hour.

“The proportion of jobs at risk in elementary occupations - which employed 3.3 million people in 2019 - is around 44%.”

The report writers make an important link between jobs at risk and education.

“Not surprisingly, jobs at risk and pay are both correlated with levels of education. Only around 24% of employees in the hospitality, retail and construction sectors have a higher-education qualification; more than 50% of workers in each of these sectors do not have qualifications beyond General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs).”

On the additional risk to part-time workers and younger people:

“Part-time workers, who make up 24% of the UK workforce, account for 35% of jobs at risk. In terms of age, around 45% of the more vulnerable jobs are held by younger people aged 35 years or less.”

On the additional risk to BAME communities:

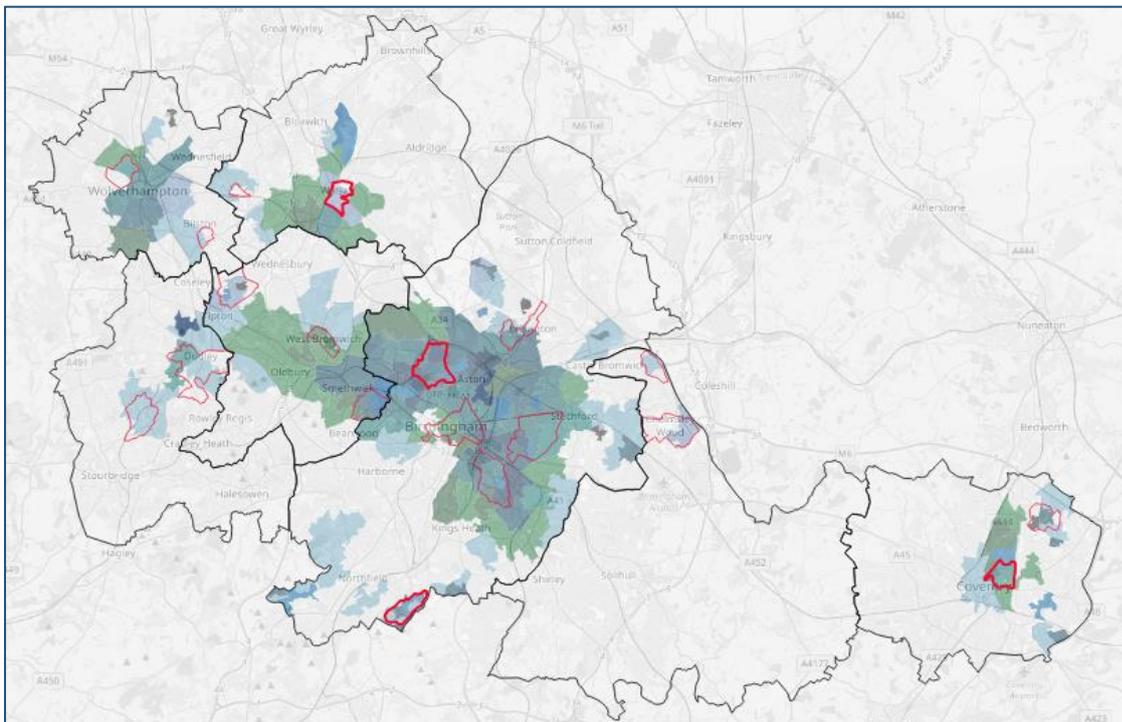
“Certain at-risk occupations tend to be disproportionately filled by BAME workers. Examples include taxi drivers and chauffeurs, where BAME groups make up 13%, 5% and 4% of employment, respectively. People of Asian ethnicity, who account for 7% of the UK workforce, make up 13% of cooks, chefs, catering, bar managers and driving instructors.”

Summary and Conclusion

Sandwell is a vibrant, young borough with great diversity, but also areas of deep deprivation and poverty. Educational outcomes, youth unemployment and violent youth crime are all higher than the national average.

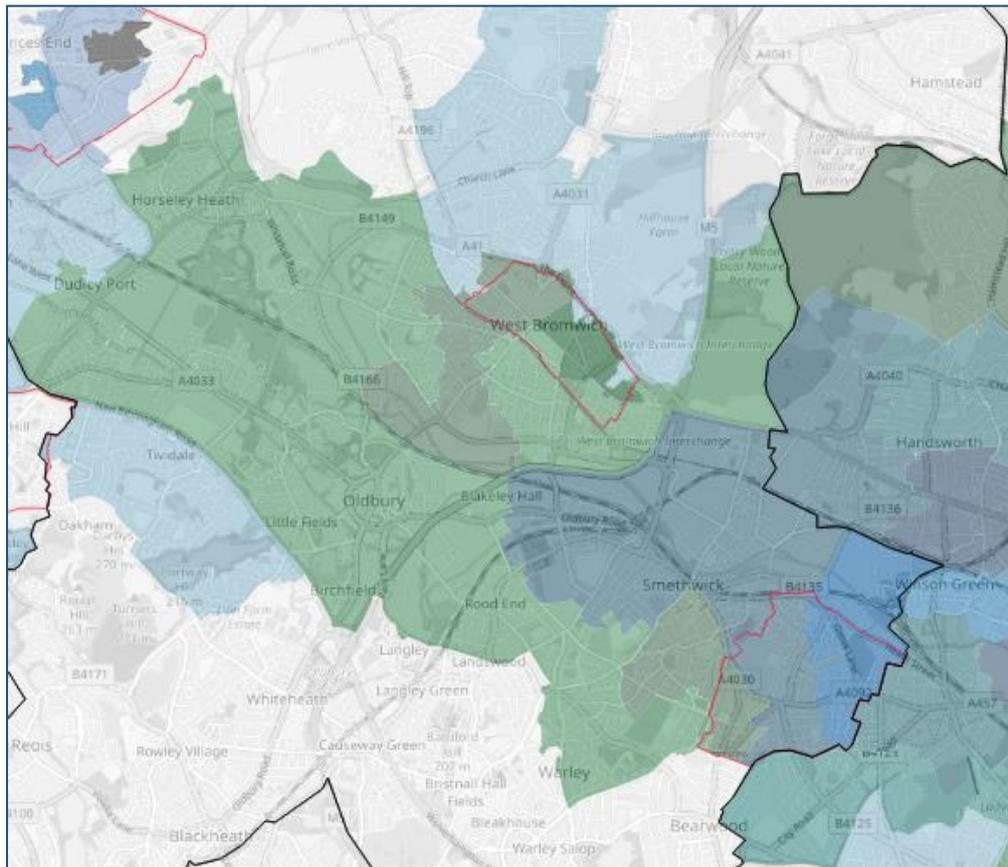
Some parts of Sandwell are adversely affected by combinations of these factors. Darker green areas on the following map show deprivation, unemployment and high numbers of young people in elementary jobs. Green also shows the areas where large proportions of elementary jobs are filled by BAME workers.

Blue shading shows areas with high claimant counts and income deprivation affecting children. The red outlines show the neighbourhoods that are a focus of locality work for WM VRU and West Midlands Police Impact Areas.



The forecasted economic effect of Covid-19 is likely to hit already disadvantaged communities hard. Some of the areas with the highest risk are shown in sharper focus below.

Sandwell (Smethwick, West Bromwich)



References

ⁱ Hospital Admissions for Sharp Object (by MSOA, April 2016 to March 2019) Public Health England Hospital Episode Statistics; Youth Violence between 3.00pm and 6.00pm (Jan to Dec 2019) West Midlands Police

ⁱⁱ WM Police internal systems, includes all incidents from April 2018 to December 2020 inclusive with “County Lines” marker

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800028/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion_literature_review.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020>

^v <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020>

^{vi} Definition of “unregulated settings” from National Youth Advocacy Service (<https://www.nyas.net/campaigns/ending-the-use-of-unregulated-accommodation/#:text=Unregulated%20provision%20is%20a%20type,does%20not%20inspect%20these%20settings.>)

^{vii} County Lines and Looked After Children by Crest Advisory crime and justice consultancy – https://b9cf6cd4-6aad-4419-a368-724e7d1352b9.usfiles.com/ugd/b9cf6c_83c53411e21d4d40a79a6e0966ad7ea5.pdf

^{viii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2019-to-2020>

^{ix} <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/a-public-health-approach-to-serious-youth-violence>

^x What Works Centre for Crime Reduction ([College published research | What Works Centre for Crime Reduction](https://www.whatworkscentre.org.uk/research/college-published-research/))

^{xi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>

^{xii} <https://opendatacommunities.org/def/concept/general-concepts/imd/idaci#:~:text=The%20Income%20Deprivation%20Affecting%20Children,deprivation%20relating%20to%20low%20income>

^{xiii} Full list of protective and risk factors showing significant statistical association with rates of serious youth violence, in order of strength of correlation (from GLA: Progressing a Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention and Reduction)

- Proportion of children aged under 20 living in poverty
- Positive Life Satisfaction amongst 15-year olds
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- Estimated prevalence of emotional disorders amongst 5 to 16-year olds
- Social integration as measured by voter registration rates
- Proportion of 10 to 17-year olds who were given a custodial sentence
- Estimated prevalence of conduct disorders amongst 5 to 16-year olds
- Rate of Looked-After Children (LAC)
- Proportion of residents aged 18 to 24
- First-time entrants into the criminal justice system (10 to 17-year olds)
- Social, Emotional, Mental, Health Needs (SEMH)
- Persistent absentees from school
- Hospital admissions for self-harm (10 to 24-year olds)

^{xiv} <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/censusgeography>

^{xv} The Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>) comprises children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families, here defined as families that either receive Income Support or income-based Jobseekers Allowance or income-based Employment and Support Allowance or Pension Credit (Guarantee) or Universal Credit (in the 'Searching for work', 'No work requirements', 'Planning for work', 'Working with requirements' and 'Preparing for work' conditionality groups) or families not in receipt of these benefits but in receipt of Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit with an equivalised income (excluding housing benefit) below 60% of the national median before housing costs. Child asylum seekers are not included in the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. A higher score indicates that an area is experiencing high levels of deprivation. Rate calculated as = (ID 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) numerator)/(ID 2019 Dependent Children aged 0-15: mid 2015 (excluding prisoners))*100

The Small Area Mental Health Index (SAMHI) (<https://pldr.org/dataset/2noyv/small-area-mental-health-index-samhi>) is a composite annual measure of population mental health for each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in England. The SAMHI combines data on mental health from multiple sources (NHS-Mental health related hospital attendances, GP Patient Survey "Q34 Best describe your own health state today, Prescribing data: "Antidepressants, QOF - depression, and DWP - Incapacity benefit and Employment support allowance for mental illness) into a single index. A higher score indicates that an area is experiencing high levels of mental health need

Pupils achieving a 'good level of development' at Early Years Foundation stage (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2018-to-2019>) shows the proportion of pupils achieving a 'good level of development' at Early Years Foundation stage (an assessment of pupils in foundation year at school (aged 4 to 5). A pupil achieving six or more points across the seven scales of PSE and CLL and who also achieves 78 or more points across all 13 scales is classed as having a good level of development

^{xvi} A Future Generations Deal - <https://www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/pcc-publishes-report-calling-for-a-future-generations-deal-to-avoid-the-ticking-time-bomb-of-youth-unemployment-and-crime-in-the-west-midlands/>

^{xvii} <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-in-the-united-kingdom-assessing-jobs-at-risk-and-the-impact-on-people-and-places#>