

Sandwell Council Public Sector Equality Duty – **Service Users Report** 2021 – 2022





Contents

Introduction	4-5
Sandwell: The Place	6-7
Sandwell: Our Residents Demographics	8-12
Accessible Services	13-15
Protecting individuals and promoting independence	16-23
Promoting Healthier Lives	24-26
Creating Safer and Stronger Communities	27-29
Maximising Value Through Partnerships	30
Celebrating Diversity	30
Building EDI into Council Decision-Making	31
Summary	32

Introduction

This is the first year that Sandwell has completed a separate Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Report for its services to ensure compliance with the Specific Duty requirements.

The majority of the data in this report relates to the reporting period 2021/22.

The report provides a general overview of how Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is embedded across Council Services and the work that is been undertaken to ensure that equity and fairness is built into every aspect of service delivery by the Council and its partners.

Sandwell's annual Public Sector Equality Duty Service User Report will be produced and published for 22/23, in line with the legal publication timelines. The Council can now provide assurances that all future reports will be complied with and published to ensure compliance with the Specific Duty requirements.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on nine specific protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Under the 'Public Sector Equality Duty'

The Equality Duty places a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It ensures that public bodies consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees.

The Equality Duty supports good decision-making it encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs.

By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people's opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

The Equality Duty therefore helps public bodies to deliver the Government's overall objectives for public services. The Equality Duty is set out in section 149 of the Act.

The Equality Duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have **due regard** to the need to:

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;

- **Advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- **Foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristics and people who do not share it.

The **PSED** is supported by specific duties, which require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the PSED.

The Specific Duties require public bodies to:

- Publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually
- Set and publish SMART equality objectives, at least every four years.
- All information must be published in a way that makes it easy for people to access it.

The **information** published must include:

- Information relating to people who are affected by Sandwell Council's policies and practices who share protected characteristics (for example, service users) and;
- Information relating to employees who share protected characteristics (for public bodies with 150 or more employees) – A separate report has been produced relating to the workforce, linked here.

Policy and Service User information could be related to:

- The number of people with different protected characteristics who access and use services in different ways;
- Customer satisfaction levels and informal feedback from service users with different protected characteristics and results of consultations.
- Complaints about discrimination and complaints from people with different protected characteristics.
- Service outcomes for people with different protected characteristics.

Published information could also include details of policies and programmes that have been put in place to address equality concerns in service delivery.



Sandwell: The Place

Sandwell is a local government administrative area created in 1974 following successive local government reorganisations that brought together six boroughs: Oldbury, Rowley Regis and Smethwick in the south, and Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich in the north.

Sandwell covers many historically disparate towns and urbanised villages at the core of the Birmingham- Black Country conurbation; places with distinctive identities that flourished along with their many world-class firms. With post-war economic decentralisation and deindustrialisation, this urban core entered decline.

Deprivation intensified from the 1970s, and some neighbourhoods became stigmatised, unpopular, and needed housing clearance.

Most twentieth-century housing was Council-built, especially in the north and was often of high quality but eventually culminated in concrete estates of flats. In an area of low incomes, some **28,600** homes were still managed by the Council in 2019 accounting for **21.6%** of the borough housing stock.

A legacy of intensive manufacturing and extractive industry, rail and canal corridors, and pockets of Victorian housing marks Sandwell today, but so too do its many parks, and quality open spaces like the **Rowley Hills** and **Sandwell Valley**.

Sandwell has since the 1980s attracted significant **government regeneration investment**, often through area-based initiatives. This has addressed many physical problems such as dereliction, poor transport and local facilities. There is an approved Regeneration Pipeline for the Borough that expects £2.3 billion invested in 66 strategically significant projects between 2022 – 2027 across towns.

The borough's strategic advantage as a business location has been reinforced and investment continues with a **new hospital**, a **new Aquatics Centre**, the extension to the West Midlands **Metro line**, and funding through the Towns Fund Programme.

Significant **new housing** (4,727 units in 2012-20 alone) built on 'brownfield' ex-industrial sites has expanded and fused residential neighbourhoods, supported the historic centres and since the turn of the century, helped retain and attract working-age aspirational households. However, the industrial legacy has left significant underground contamination across many brownfield sites in Sandwell making them very challenging to deliver new homes due to the costs of decontamination.

International migration has been a major driver of change, first from the Commonwealth then from Europe and globally, including asylum seekers and refugees.

From 2002-20, some **58,000 national insurance** registrations were given in Sandwell to overseas nationals from 136 countries, although many have not remained.

So, it is now increasingly ethnically diverse, with an estimated **37% Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority** population in 2019, when **37% of births** also were to women not UK-born. This contributes to a young age profile, with **40% of people under 30 in 2019**, although some neighbourhoods are rapidly ageing.

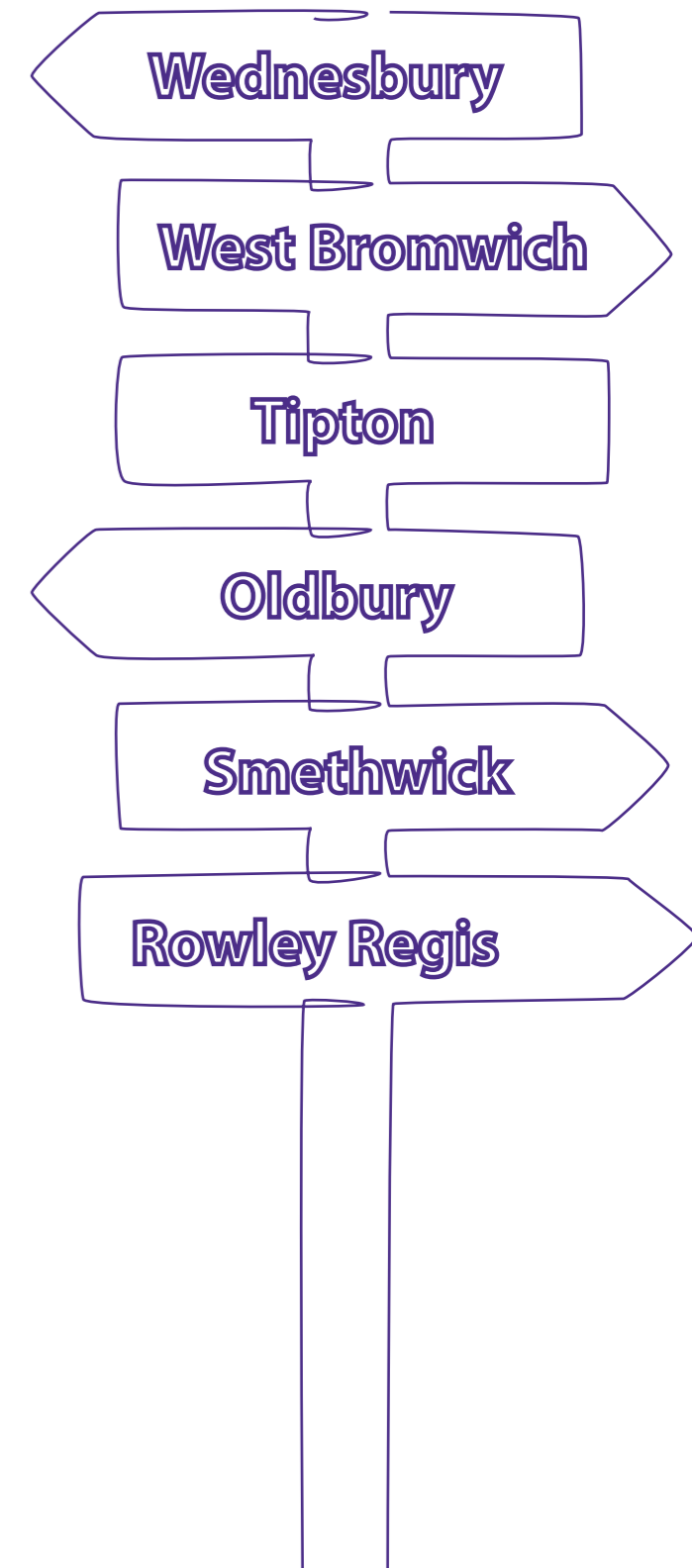
The number of localities in the **worst 1% nationally** has noticeably dropped but overall Sandwell remains the **eighth most deprived English district**. This reflects place-based issues but most seriously, people-based outcomes: low skills and educational attainment leading to labour market exclusion; child and family poverty; and poor health and life expectancy.

Its demography and urban structure recently exposed it to Covid. The £6 billion local economy has **8,775** businesses employing **136,000** people. It retains a significant manufacturing sector, with strengths in logistics, health and social care as well as retail and wholesale.

Sandwell has nevertheless been better at adding population than jobs with employment growth generally in low-skill and pay occupations.

That's why the six strategic outcomes outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 is aiming to address the imbalance in relation to the inequalities and disparities that affect the borough of Sandwell.

Sandwell Wards and Towns



Sandwell: Our Residents Demographics

The **Census 2021** found that Sandwell's population is **341,835** with an increase of **11%** since 2011, this is the highest growth across the Black Country at **6.4%**, West Midlands **6.7%** and England and Wales **6.3%**. However, there has been a large variation by ward, with the majority of wards seeing an increase in population. Notably Blackheath has seen a decline in the number of residents (-1.9%), whereas Smethwick town saw the largest population increase overall, with a rise of 16%.

Age

Sandwell has a much **younger population** than England overall, with:

- A larger proportion of the population aged under 20. The number of under 20s has been steadily rising since 2001, with a 13.1% increase between 2011 and 2021.
- Residents aged 30 to 49 is also much larger compared to England.
- The proportion of the population aged 50 and over in England is much larger than in Sandwell, particularly in the 65-69 and 70-74 age groups.

Health, Disability and Unpaid Care

- Life Expectancy at birth in Sandwell is **76.1 years** for males and **80.7 years** for females compared to **79.4 years for males** and **83.1 for females** in England (Fingertips PHE, 2018/20)
- In Sandwell, **20% of residents were disabled** under the Equality Act, compared with **17.8%** in England and Wales.
- **9.9%** of Sandwell residents were disabled and said their disability limits their day-to-day activities a lot.
- **4%** of Sandwell households included 1 disabled person (25.6% in England and Wales), whilst 8.3% of households contained 2 or more disabled people (6.7% in England and Wales).
- In Sandwell almost 30,000 residents aged 5 years and over provided unpaid care in 2021.
- **5%** of residents aged 5 years and over provided 50 or more hours unpaid care a week.

- In Sandwell, **40.8%** of people reported very good health, compared with **47.5%** in England and Wales.
- **8%** reported bad or very bad health (5.4% in England and Wales).

Ethnic Groups

- In 2021, **57.3%** (195,620) of residents in Sandwell identified their ethnic group within the **"White"** category, compared with **81.7%** in England and Wales. Sandwell has seen a decrease from **69.9%** in the 2011 Census.
- As part of the "White" ethnic group, **52.1%** (177,930) of the total population in Sandwell identified their ethnic group as "English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" (compared with **74.4% in England & Wales**), this is a continued decrease from 65.8% in 2011, and from 78.0% who identified this way in 2001.
- The next most common high-level ethnic group was **"Asian or Asian British"** accounting for **25.8%** (88,020) of the overall population, this ethnic group also saw the largest percentage point increase from 2011, up from 19.2% (59,260 people).
- Across the **19 ethnic groups**, large changes were seen in the numbers of people identifying their ethnic group as "Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group" (3.4%, 11,710 in 2021, up from 1.3%, 3,880 in 2011), and "Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: African" (3.7%, 12,670 in 2021, up from 1.4%, 4,400).
- In Sandwell, **10.6%** (13,840) of households consisted of members identifying with two or more different ethnic groups, an increase from 9.1% (11,035) in 2011.
- The Census 2021 reported **324** (0.1%) residents as from a Gypsy and Traveller background which is similar to the Gypsy and Traveller community, regionally and nationally.
- Where respondents selected, they identified as one of the "other" ethnic groups within each broad category, they were able to write in their ethnicity. In Sandwell, the largest of these groups in 2021 are **"Sikh", accounting for 2.3%** of the population, and **"Polish"** (1.7%).

Language

- The Census 2021 stated that **83.6%** (274, 710) of Sandwell residents, aged three years and over, had English as a main language, compared with **91.1%** in England and Wales. The Sandwell figure is down from 88.0% in 2011.
- In 2021, a further **5.2%** (17,230) of the overall population were **proficient in English** (saying they speak it very well) but did not speak it as their main language.
- The most common main languages spoken in Sandwell, other than English were **Punjabi (6.4%), Polish (1.7%), Bengali (1.0%) and Urdu (1.0%)**.
- The **largest increase** was for people who specified **Punjabi** as a main language, who accounted for 6.4% (20,980) of residents in 2021, up from 4.3% (12,520) in 2011.
- In 2021, **11.3%** (14,750) of households consisted of members who had different main languages.

Country of Birth and National Identity

- In 2021, almost **one in four (23.6%)** residents of Sandwell were **born outside the UK**, compared with **one in six nationally**. This proportion puts Sandwell in the **top 50 Local Authorities** across England and Wales. In 2011, **15.9%** of Sandwell residents were born outside the UK.
- **India remained the most common country of birth** outside the UK in 2021 (23,530 people, 6.9% of all residents). Relatively large proportions of Sandwell residents were born in Pakistan (2.3%) and Bangladesh (1.3%).
- The number of people who were born in **Poland grew by 12.5%** since the previous census, from 5,670 in 2011 to 6,380 in 2021. The number born in **Romania rose** by almost **1200%**, from 210 in 2011 to 2,710 in 2021.
- **47,670 residents (13.9%) held a non-UK passport**; one of the most common non-UK passports held was **Polish (6,860, 2.0%** of all usual residents).

- **2,620 residents** (0.8% of the population) had an address outside the UK one year before the census, up 11.4% from 2,350 (0.8%) in 2011.
- In 2021, **84.6%** of Sandwell residents identified with at least one UK national identity (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, and Cornish); this compares with 90.3% in England and Wales.
- People who identified with at least one UK and one non-UK identity accounted for **1.6%** of the overall population, compared with **2.0%** in England and Wales.
- Those selecting a non-UK identity accounted for **13.5% of the overall population (46,170)**, compared with **9.7% nationally**. Among those who described a non-UK national identity, the most common response was those describing **"Indian"** only as their identity (3.1%, 10,600). **"Polish"** was the second most commonly reported non-UK national identity in Sandwell (1.6%, 5,540), and **"Italian"** the third (1.3%, 4,570).

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to a person's sense of their own gender, whether male, female or another category such as non-binary. This may or may not be the same as their sex registered at birth.

The question on gender identity was new for Census 2021. It was added to provide the first official data on the size of the transgender population in England and Wales, and was a voluntary question asked of those aged 16 years and over. The question asked, "Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?"

- Nationally, **45.7 million (94.0%** of the population aged 16 years and over) answered the question. In Sandwell, this fell to **92.6%** (meaning 7.4% did not answer the question).
- In total, **244,450 (91.9%)** of Sandwell residents answered "Yes" and **1,970 (0.7%)** answered "No".
- Among those who answered "No" in Sandwell:
 - **1,150 (0.4%)** answered "No" but did not provide a write-in response
 - **350 (0.1%)** identified as a trans man
 - **360 (0.1%)** identified as a trans woman

Economic Activity and Travel to Work

Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the labour market topic. Take care when using these data for planning and policy purposes.

- On Census Day, 21 March 2021, **155,190** residents aged 16 years and over in Sandwell were economically active (**58.4% compared with 60.6%** in England and Wales), while **110,830 (41.7%)** were economically inactive (compared with **39.4%** nationally).
- Among residents aged 16 years and over, almost half were employees (**46.3%, 123,000**, compared with **47.6% nationally**),
- Almost **1 in 15** were self-employed (6.8%, 18,070) and a further **5.3% (14,125)** were unemployed but looking for work. This compares with 9.6% and 3.4% nationally.
- **4%** of residents aged 16 years and over were economically inactive because of retirement (compared with 21.6% in England and Wales).

- Census 2021 estimates that **26,350 (18.7%)** residents aged 16 years and over in employment in Sandwell worked mainly at or from home in the week before Census Day, 21 March 2021. This compares with 31.2% nationally.
- Almost 115,000 residents aged 16 years and over in employment (81.3%) gave a method other than "at or from home".
- The most selected mode of travel to work was driving a car or a van (52.9%, 74,590 of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment).

Religion

- The religion question is voluntary; **94.6%** of Sandwell's residents answered the question in 2021, an increase from 93.9% in 2011.
- For the first time in a census of England and Wales, less than half of the population (**46.2%**) described themselves as "Christian", a **13.1 %** decrease from 59.3% in 2011.
- This pattern was mirrored in Sandwell, where **39.9%** (136,350) residents described themselves as "Christian" in 2021, compared with **55.2%** (170,075) in 2011. Despite this decrease, "Christian" remained the most common response to the religion question.
- "No religion" was the second most common response in Sandwell, increasing by **7.4% to 26.1%** (89,100) from **18.7%** (57,720) in 2011.
- There were increases in the number of people who described themselves as "Muslim" (**45,760, 13.4% in 2021, up from 25,250, 8.2% in 2011**) and "Sikh" (**39,250, 11.5% in 2021, up from 26,930, 8.7% in 2011**).

Sex

- Of the 341,900 residents in Sandwell in 2021, **168,200 (49.2%)** are male and **173,600 (50.8%)** are female. There are now 130,200 households in Sandwell, compared to 121,500 in 2011 - a rise of **7.2%**. The population density in Sandwell stands at 3,996 people per square kilometre in 2021, compared to 3,600 in 2011.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term covering sexual identity, attraction, and behaviour. For an individual respondent, these may not be the same. For example, someone in an opposite-sex relationship may also experience same-sex attraction, and vice versa.

This means the statistics should be interpreted purely as showing how people responded to the question, rather than being about whom they are attracted to or their actual relationships.

The census question on sexual orientation was a voluntary question asked of those aged 16 years and over.

- Nationally, **44.9 million** people (**92.5%** of the population aged 16 years and over) answered the question. In Sandwell this fell to **91.6%** (meaning **8.4%** did not answer the question).
- In Sandwell, 237,540 people (**89.3%**) identified as straight or heterosexual.
- Around 6,100 people (**2.3%**) identified with an LGB+ orientation ("Gay or Lesbian", "Bisexual" or "Other sexual orientation").

Veterans

- In 2021, **5,844 (2.2%)** people in Sandwell reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. This compares with **3.8%** in England and Wales.
- Of the UK Armed Forces Veterans in Sandwell, 72.3% (**4,224 people**) previously served in the regular forces, **23.5%** (1,375 people) in the reserve forces, and **4.2%** (244 people) served in both the regular and reserve forces.
- **2%** of Sandwell armed forces veterans lived in households (rather than communal establishments).
- There were 5,644 Sandwell households (**4.3%**) with one or more persons who had served in the UK Armed Forces, compared with **6.5%** in the West Midlands Region.

Education

- There were 75,640 schoolchildren and full-time students (**23.7%**) in 2021 across Sandwell, higher than the England and Wales figure of **20.4%**.
- More than 1 in 5 (**22.7%**) Sandwell residents aged 16 years and over had **Level 4 or above qualifications** (for example, Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor's degree and post-graduate qualifications). This compares with **33.8%** in England and Wales.
- In 2021, almost **30%** of Sandwell residents aged 16 and over (**28.9%, 76,840**), reported having no qualifications. This is much higher than the England and Wales figure of **18.2%**.
- Across Sandwell, apprenticeships were the highest qualification for **4.8%** of people (12,760).

Industry and Occupation

- The largest number of Sandwell residents aged 16 years and over in employment the week before Census Day, 21 March 2021, worked within the broad wholesale, retail and motor trade industry (**17.4%, 24,550 out of 141,070** in employment, compared with **15.0%** in England and Wales).
- Employment in the manufacturing industry decreased by 3.1% (**11.5%, 16,280** in 2021, compared with **14.6%, 18,740** in 2011), whereas employment in health and social work activities increased by **2.7%** (**15.8%, 22,320** in 2021, compared with **13.1%, 16,810** in 2011).
- In Sandwell, more people were employed in elementary occupations compared with any other broad occupation categories (**15.6%, 21,980** people). Nationally the category which employs the largest number of people is professional occupations (**20.2%**).
- The most common socio-economic classification in Sandwell was routine occupations (**18.1%** of residents aged 16 years and over, **48,140**). In England and Wales, the most common was lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations (**19.9%**).

Households

- There are **130,246** households with residents in Sandwell. The average household size in Sandwell is **2.42**, which is slightly above the England and Wales average of **2.4**.
- **339,791** Sandwell residents live in households, whilst **2,041** live in communal establishments (managed residential establishments).
- In terms of household composition, in 2021, **38,042** households in Sandwell are made up of only **one person**.
- There has been an increase of **2.0%** in the number of married or civil partnership couple households since 2011, whilst there has been a large percentage increase in the number of cohabiting couple households (**+15.8%**).
- The proportion of lone parent households (with dependent children) has increased from **9.0%** in 2011 to **9.4%** in 2021. Sandwell ranks **15th out of 331** Local Authorities on this indicator.
- There has also been a large rise in the number of lone parents with non-dependent children (**+31.4%**), although these only account for **5.5%** of all households.
- **62.1 %** of households in Sandwell are deprived in at least one dimension or measure of household deprivation (compared with **51.7%** in England and Wales); this number has decreased since 2011, when it was **69.5%**.

Household change since 2011

- Since 2011, Sandwell overall has seen an increase of **7.2%** in the number of households. According to the 2021 Census, the ward with the largest number of households is **Soho and Victoria (6,277)**, whilst the smallest is **Bristnall (4,765)**.
- Only one ward has seen a fall in the number of households - **Smethwick (-0.5%)**. This is despite the ward seeing an increase in population.
- **Six wards** have seen an increase of more than **10%** in the number of households since 2011. The rise is particularly high in Soho and Victoria, Wednesbury South, and Greets Green and Lyng (at 21.6%, 18.8% and 18.0% respectively). Soho and Victoria also saw a large increase between 2001 and 2011.



Accessible Services

The Council has developed a Reasonable Adjustment Policy for residents/tenants which sets out the intention to meet the needs of disabled residents. Reasonable Adjustments are changes made to the Council's usual practices or provision of services to reduce the disadvantage that disabled people may face in accessing them. The adjustments made will depend on the specific needs of the individual and the situation. Customers can request reasonable adjustments in the following ways: in person, in writing (e.g., by email or post), by text or by telephone.

One of the Council's flagship **accessible buildings** is the Oldbury Council house. The building has accessible doors, clear signage for induction loops, accessible toilets, parking spaces and evacuation chairs located on all floors.

The Council has a number of buildings that vary in the range of accessibility available. However, the Council recognises there are some buildings that are not accessible due to their listed building status which restricts the levels of accessibility that are provided e.g. lifts not being installed.

There is not a defined capital improvement plan specifically for improving accessibility, however any future works undertaken to Council buildings will always look at improving accessibility in line with the current regulations including automated doors, accessible entrances, lifts/access platforms, changing places facilities etc where feasible to do so in terms of budgets and building constraints.

Libraries and Resources

The **Outreach Library Service** is a Division of Sandwell **Library and Information Services**, providing essential support to residents facing challenges in accessing conventional library facilities. The Home Library Service is specifically designed for individuals who cannot visit the library due to disabilities, illness, frailty, or other circumstances.

It also caters to those requiring temporary library services during their recovery from illness or injury, as well as full-time caregivers. The dedicated, trained, and experienced staff members deliver a monthly supply of books to the homes of residents, residential

nursing homes, and sheltered accommodations.

Public Library Service offers a diverse range of reading resources, including books in regular and large print, talking books, materials promoting health, happiness, and wellbeing. Pictures to Share books, reminiscence collections, community language books, and free request options. To extend the reach further, opportunities are available to provide bulk loans to community rooms and lounges in residential homes, sheltered accommodations, and day centres.

Furthermore, the **Mobile Library** is equipped with low floors for easy accessibility and reaches areas where community libraries are scarce. It offers public stops and visits to locations such as day centres, sheltered accommodations, community centres, schools, nurseries, and children's centres through pre-arrangements. Through these extensive outreach efforts, the **Outreach Library Services** attempts to ensure that all members of the community have access to enriching reading and valuable information resources.

Museums

There are a range of museums throughout Sandwell, many of them providing fun, creative activities for residents throughout the summer. Not all of them are accessible to all of Sandwell's residents. See here for more information on what the museums have to offer.

Communication support

The **Sandwell Language Network (SLN)** provides a programme of free, community-based English language learning support across the borough for migrants and ethnic minority communities. The network is led by a partnership of local organisations that include Sandwell Council, Sandwell Consortium, Sandwell College, Sandwell Public Health and Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

The need to improve health literacy within Sandwell's ethnic minority communities and the demand for community language learning is increasing. The Council is proposing to continue to fund this project for an additional 2 years.

Website

The Council is committed to ensuring the accessibility of its website for all users. The goal is to create an inclusive online platform that caters to diverse needs. To achieve this, user friendly features have been implemented, such as customised colours, contrast levels, fonts, as well as zooming up to 300% without text overflow, benefiting those with visual impairments.

The website has been optimised for keyboard navigation and made it fully compatible with speech recognition software, enabling browsing through voice commands. For users relying on screen readers like JAWS, NVDA, and VoiceOver, this will ensure compatibility to provide an accessible auditory experience.

While an accessible section is already in place, the Council acknowledges that the website does not fully comply with the national standards **WCAG VERSION 2.1AA**. However, they are actively working on updating all areas to achieve compliance and are dedicated to continuous improvement to enhance accessibility for all users.

Digital Inclusion

Sandwell Council, in collaboration with **the Black Country Housing Group (BCHG) and social enterprise Repc Ltd**, has launched an innovative initiative known as **Sandwell Digital Donations**. The primary aim is to address the **“digital divide”** by encouraging businesses and residents to donate their unwanted PCs, laptops, and tablets. The recipients include refugees, school children, veterans, and young carers.

This initiative provided these individuals with access to valuable online resources, enhancing their digital skills and creating opportunities for personal growth and development. By extending the benefits of technology to underserved groups, Sandwell Digital Donations is playing a pivotal role in creating a more inclusive and connected society.

In addition, one of the Towns Fund projects is the creation of a **Digital Den** in Greets Green, West Bromwich at a local community centre. This has now opened and offers both free digital skills training as well as English language skills at the same time. This is a model which it is hoped can be rolled out across other locations in the Borough.

One Stop Shop

The Council offers a **One Stop Shop Operating Model**, which provides a range of different ways to access Council services, this is supported **QMATIC** which is the virtual queuing system utilised by the One Stop Shop. This can be used by all officers to create appointments at Oldbury Council House for both internal and external officers as well as customers. With regards to Customer Feedback (Complaints and General Enquiries), the Council uses 2 separate systems – Firmstep and Open Housing as well as immediate online satisfaction surveys for customers who have interacted with the Council online.

The Council acknowledge the room for improvements in enhancing the customer experience. To address this, four strategic objectives have been identified to ensure the best possible journey for customers (the Council is at the early stage of implementation of the strategic objectives).

The objectives are:

- **Objective 1** - To always put customers first by delivering a customer first focused culture within our organisation.
- **Objective 2** - To provide excellent customer service regardless of the channel of communication.
- **Objective 3** - Specifically refers to inclusion - To create inclusive, accessible services that meet the changing needs of customers.
- **Objective 4** - Listen, learn and improve services based on Customer Feedback

New Square Shopping Centre

- The **New Square Shopping Centre** at West Bromwich has a range of accessible stores all on one level. The shopping Centre aims to ensure all visitors have an enjoyable visit.
- **Facilities** include accessible toilets and Baby Changing Rooms, that are all in compliance with the latest health and safety standards.
- The Shopmobility **service** can be pre-booked by calling the Shop Mobility Team, and users can take out a membership or loan service (for wheelchairs, electric/manual as well as scooters). The service enables customers with limited mobility to use the

Shopmobility Services for 2 or 3 hours giving them the opportunity to complete their shopping.

- Parking spaces are reserved for disabled access at New Square.

The Council is committed that all **Pedestrian crossings** have tactile facilities and that buttons have been to meet the needs of disabled residents.

Inclusive Green Spaces

Sandwell benefits from **543** green spaces, with **323** green spaces (59%) having unrestricted access to the public.

This is **3.63 hectares** per 1,000 population and has more unrestricted green space access than some other comparable local authorities. Further information can be found in the Promoting Healthier Lives Section

Travel Assistance

The Council provides **travel assistance** to children and young people with special education needs who require support getting to school.

For eligible children assistance with travel can take a number of forms:

- a course of **independent travel training** so that the child or young person can travel safely by themselves
- a **travel pass** for the child or young person and an accompanying adult
- **reimbursement of mileage costs** to a parent / carer who transports the child or young person
- **provision of a place in a vehicle** will transport the child or young person to school.

All submissions will be evaluated in accordance with the updated Travel Assistance Policy, which can be accessed here. Although there is an open referral system for travel aid, it is recommended that parents or caregivers contemplating an application for travel assistance on behalf of their child first engage in consultation with their child's respective school, setting, or college. The Travel Assistance Service (TAS) has also produced a Parent / Carer / Adult Guide re transport for children and young people with SEND.



Protecting Individuals and Promoting Independence

Protecting Individuals Work of the Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB)

The Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board is a multi-agency partnership made up of statutory sector member organisations and other non-statutory partner agencies providing strategic leadership for adult safeguarding work and ensuring there is a consistent professional response to actual or suspected abuse. The remit of the board is not operational but one of co-ordination, quality assurance, planning, policy and development.

It contributes to the partnership's wider goals of improving the well-being of adults in the borough and promotes and develops campaigns examples of which is the current campaign 'See Something, Do Something'

Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP)

SCSP brings together Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) (with Sandwell Children's Trust delivering services on their behalf), Sandwell Clinical Commissioning Group and West Midlands Police as the key statutory safeguarding partners who have equal responsibility for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in Sandwell.

In consultation with the other partners and relevant agencies; such as health providers, schools and education settings, probation providers, the voluntary/community sector, and others, have agreed and launched the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and structure for Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP).

This 'Statutory SCSP' will agree on ways to co-ordinate the safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership in supporting and engaging others; implement local and national learning including serious child safeguarding incidents, improve local safeguarding arrangements and hold each other to account as to how they are keeping children safe.

SCSP aim is to ensure all children in Sandwell are safe, happy, healthy and achieving.

Supporting children and young people with additional needs

The Sandwell Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) offers a free, confidential and impartial service for all parents and carers of children with special educational needs in Sandwell to help them navigate a way through the new SEND legislation.

The Council recognises that it is vital for parents and carers to be fully involved in discussions about their children. To help with this Sandwell has issued **A Guide for Parents and Carers which is a full guide to the support available to children with special educational needs and disabilities** in schools, including statutory assessment and Education, Health and Care Plans.

Malthouse Outdoor Activity Centre is a multi-activity centre for children and young people from 8 years old and is well equipped to cater for a range of practical experiences which include: Climbing and Abseiling, Mountain Biking, Canoeing and Kayaking and Archery. Malthouse provides dedicated support specifically for children and young people with SEND from special schools and alternative education provision.

Enhanced Youth Support (EYS) is a targeted offer within the Youth Service. The offer consists of one to ones, hand holding, specialist young women's provisions and targeted interventions. EYS works with individual young people and creates bespoke support packages to tackle their issues they may be facing. The EYS offer includes Marvel Youth Club, a SEND provision for young people aged 11 to 25 years based at Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery; together with a range of holiday activities specifically for children and young people with SEND. EYS also delivers holiday activities specifically for young women aged 11 to 19 years.

Support for young carers

A young carer is someone under 18 who helps look after someone in their family, or a friend, who is ill, disabled or misuses drugs or alcohol. In Sandwell young carers can access all aspects of support, including short breaks, advocacy and mentoring from Sandwell Young Carers.

Corporate Parenting Services – looked after children

Corporate parenting means providing secure, nurturing and positive experiences for children and young people in the Council's care wherever they live. Where a child or young person can't safely stay at home, it's up to the Council to provide them with the care, support and stability that they deserve.

Public Service Partners have a shared responsibility to act for the children and young people in the Council's care as a parent would for their own child. Those partners come together with young people as a Corporate Parenting Board.

The Council's responsibilities involve considering the impact on young people within the Council's care when services are being reviewed, when reports are being received and when gathering feedback.

With a large percentage of young people within Sandwell in the care system the Council is taking its Corporate Parenting role seriously.

The Council aims to ensure that their needs are met by working with partners to deliver the following:

- Education
- health and welfare
- leisure time and holidays
- cultural celebrations
- praise and encouragement

The Council understands that not all individuals will recognise the importance of being a good Corporate Parent in their roles and services. In order to improve this, the Council is committed to promoting Corporate Parenting throughout the Council. This is achieved through the annual Corporate Parenting Week which focussed on:

- Raising the profile of Corporate Parenting across partnerships.
- Ensure a clear understanding of what it means to be a Corporate Parent.

- For individuals to develop the confidence to support and be a Corporate Parent. The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines 10 messages that will steer the Council's work in this area. The strategy can be accessed here.

Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on children and young people, Sandwell Council had the foresight to support the rising demand for emotional wellbeing and low-level mental health service.

The emotional wellbeing programme is managed by SCVO who grant funds to VCS providers to deliver a range of programmes with the purpose of:

- Make available to all school aged children (5 – 18 years) in Sandwell support that enables them to address challenges with their emotional wellbeing and mental health, and to develop personal strategies that build confidence and resilience.
- Target those children and young people who are identified as requiring additional support or access to specialist services where such support is currently not provided.
- Provide support for children and young people identified as being impacted by domestic abuse, including family support where possible.
- The programme has provided general and targeted support which has focused on specific groups including, young girls, SEND, children in care, Black Boys, UACS, Young carers and children who have witnessed domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse

Sandwell Council plays a lead role in the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP) which is responsible for bringing together partners and agencies to address domestic abuse. The partnership has produced a strategy entitled **Sandwell Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 24** and this sets out the partnership priorities for action.

The range of accommodation types and levels of support provided **by Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA)** means that survivors are routinely accepted regardless of the level of risk or complexity of presenting needs. There is also good outcome tracking for those who are declined a space in accommodation.

Alcohol and Drug Dependency

Sandwell ranked as the **13th** most deprived borough in England with notable challenges related to alcohol. There are over **2,000** alcohol related hospital admissions and **170** premature deaths annually, surpassing the national average.

Additionally, the borough experience more than **1,400** alcohol related crimes each year. Despite an estimated **4,700** dependent drinkers in the region, only **16%** receive essential alcohol treatment services.

Currently, the specialist provider's hub is situated in **Smethwick**, serving as the central location for groups and clinical interventions.

Additionally, some one-to-one sessions take place at various community venues, including GP surgeries and community buildings across the Borough. Moreover, Sandwell offers several standalone Recovery Projects to address addiction concerns.

The **Blue Light Project** focuses on providing comprehensive support to alcohol-dependent individuals who show reluctance towards treatment. Through a multi-agency approach involving various stakeholders like the local hospital trust, Integrated Care Services (ICS), public health, social care, and police, the project aims to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group. The success of the **Blue Light Project** led to its continuation, with public health funding, and its principles are now being extended to support drug users and homeless individuals in the borough.

The primary service provider, Cranstoun, is resuming various recovery services that were disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Stakeholders' engagement has revealed challenges in delivering specialist drug and alcohol intervention to **Polish speaking residents** with limited or no English proficiency in Sandwell. The need to effectively address alcohol-related concerns within this community highlights the importance of tailored services and support to ensure the well-being of the residents.

Activities to support children during school (children's trust/ children services)

Residents who live in Sandwell and are looking for activities to keep their children entertained during the holidays can access the activity finder and discover all the options on offer in Sandwell. The Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) is funded by the Department of Education.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.

The Department for Education funded HAF programme is available to school aged children who are eligible for and receive benefits-related free school meals during Easter, Summer and Winter holiday periods.

Sandwell has extended this offer to a wider cohort of children and **young people who may not meet eligibility criteria but have a "holiday experience gap" which means they are less likely to access organised out of school activities; more likely to experience "unhealthy holidays" in terms of nutrition and physical health and more likely to experience social isolation. Whilst maintaining the integrity of the HAF programme framework standards in meeting the core aims and objectives:**

- Healthy meal provision
- Enriching activities
- Physical activities which meet the Physical Activity Guidelines
- Nutritional education
- Signposting and referrals
- Reducing social isolation

Currently, children in Sandwell who have an Education Health Care Plan, Looked After Children in Education and those with No Recourse to Public Funding can access HAF activity during the longer holiday periods, as well as those in receipt of benefit related free school meals.

As part of improving access to services, the HAF programme will deliver a range of workshops and webinars to providers so that they can have a better awareness and understanding of working with communities in terms of Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

Go Play Sandwell – Sandwell MBC play service

This service is commissioned by the Council to provide a universal boroughwide free at the point of access play service. Sessions run in term time after school and in all school holidays; a calendar of events and access to free play resources are available by visiting <https://goplaysandwell.co.uk/>

Go Play also commissions a small grants programme 'Creating a Playable Sandwell' that supports grassroots voluntary sector organisations to provide hyper local play provision during half term holidays.

Go Play will be conducting a play sufficiency assessment 2023 – 2024 to discover if children have enough time, space and permission to play throughout all aspects of their lives. It also provides an opportunity to identify ways in which adult-run organisations can improve their responsibilities towards children and their play. This will in turn inform the development of a strategic action plan aimed at cultivating more favourable conditions for children's play, resulting in children's and adult's increased satisfaction with opportunities for play.



Promoting Independence

Independent Travel Training

The above training teaches individuals to learn how to travel a specific route on their own and in a safe and responsible way.

The service will work with young people from the age of eleven, all the way up to adults in their eighties. Anyone who would like to improve their skills and confidence when making journeys in their local area and by using public transport:

- A unique learning programme specifically designed to meet each trainee's individual needs
- One-to-one flexible bespoke training by a qualified travel trainer
- Support gradually phased out until the individual feels confident and competent enough to do the journey alone

As an Independent traveller you will:

- Find it easier to get to school, college, or work
- Have more choices and be able to go to new places on your own
- Have more freedom and independence
- Learn how to be safe on, and near, roads and in the community
- Find out more about the community where you live
- Be less reliant on family or carers

At the Council's discretion Special Educational Needs (SEN) may provide a West Midlands Travel Pass upon completion of travel training when your current transport arrangements cease.

Travel and Transport

The Council provides a range of services that disabled residents can access, this includes:

- **Integrated Passenger Transport Unit (IPTU)**, door to door accessible transport, plus home to school transport for SEN children and adults
- Blue Badge car parking for people with disabilities
- Community Learning Disability Team
- Radar Keys
- Ring and Ride
- The Disabled Motorists Federation
- Travel Assistance Service (TAS)

Home Adaptations

This service is available to permanent Sandwell residents, it doesn't matter if you're a home owner or rent. **West Midlands Fire Service** provides **'Safe and Well'** visits which are targeted at vulnerable members of society including those with disabilities.

Telecare Alarms and Equipment

Telecare refers to a range of **electronic tools and services designed** to support individuals facing physical, sensory, or mental health challenges in maintaining their autonomy and safety within their homes.

This technology is particularly advantageous for caregivers, granting them more flexibility to engage in daily tasks without concerns for the well-being of those they care for.

Telecare equipment has the ability to identify potential hazards such as fire or floods, offer medication reminders, and even trigger emergency assistance in case of falls. It accomplishes this through various alerts such as alarms, flashing lights, or vibrations.

The telecare equipment is installed and maintained for free for Sandwell residents by Sandwell Joint Prevention Stores. The available equipment includes:

- Movement sensors
- Smoke, heat and flood detectors
- Door and window opening alarms
- Automatic medication reminder boxes

- Room temperature sensors
- Devices that switch a light on automatically
- Alarm buttons or pendants.

Sight and Hearing loss

A specialist team - Sensory Services is available to provide advice and support on independent living for adults with sensory impairments. This team engages mainly with adults; however, they also engage with residents at the transition age (16- 18 years) for visually impaired children to be introduced to the team to assess their future needs. Hearing Impaired Children are assessed within the team and they supply deaf equipment to meet their needs.

The specialist team consists of Rehabilitation Officers for Visually Impaired, an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer and specialist Social Care Officers.

The team works closely with other health and social care services to help residents get the support they need. This includes care and support assessments, equipment and adaptations to your home.

Carer Service

There are a number of carers groups across Sandwell supporting a variety of carers for different illnesses and from various ethnic backgrounds. This includes:

- Autism West Midlands (Family and group support)
- Halesowen Asian Elderly Association
- Sandwell Parents for Disabled Children (SPDC)
- West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre (Health & Well Being Division)

Housing Sandwell's Housing Market

- In March 2021, Sandwell had 130,246 household spaces. 54% of households were in owner-occupation, 27% social rented and 19% rented from a private landlord.
- Sandwell's housing market has changed significantly over the last decade and continues to evolve.
- In recent years the private rental market has expanded greatly whilst the local authority sector, once the numerically highest sector, continues to decline in numbers.

- Property values remain low compared to the wider West Midlands region but remain outside the reach of many households living locally.
- As at March 2020 there were 133,085 residential units in Sandwell.
- There is a significant gap between Housing Needs in the Borough and the delivery of housing supply: only about 50% of the identified need for housing is being met currently.

Council Stock Profile

- Within SMBC's stock, there are 29,598 properties (27,277 of these properties are managed by Sandwell Council). 51.0% of units are houses, 41.0% are flats, 5.0% are bungalows and 3.0% are maisonettes.
- Council stock distribution by town area is uneven, with West Bromwich accommodating the highest share, whilst Smethwick has the lowest number. There is a fairly even distribution of houses across the Borough; however, the share of flats, maisonettes and bungalows appears to be unequal.
- Around a third of the Council stock is affected by under-occupation with an additional 12.0% being classified under the Bedroom Standard as overcrowded.
- Sandwell Borough has around 3,500 empty residential properties currently, according to Council tax records.
- Sales under the Right to Buy have accounted for the loss of 457 homes in 2019/20 and 2021/22. To counter these losses, during the same period 160 homes were added to the Council stock.
- Affordable housing needs have increased in recent years along with overall demand.
- Longer term future housing need is 27,873 new homes by 2039.
- Currently, Sandwell is not meeting its housing need for both market and affordable housing, with a 51% shortfall annually.

Vulnerable People Housing Service

The Vulnerable People Housing Service provides a specialist housing service for vulnerable people aged 16 and over, supporting customers to access the right housing and support to meet their individual needs and aspirations.

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

The Council's Homelessness Service delivers statutory support to households who are at risk of homelessness or already homeless. This service is responsible for preventing and relieving homelessness and making homeless application decisions.

The purpose of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is to fully understand the system and to take a whole system view and approach to design.

The Council with its partners will work together to make the best use of their collective resources to drive earlier intervention and prevention principles, irrelevant of where a person may first present at risk.

It is vital to operate within one system with coordinated holistic advice, help and support based on an understanding of the real problems to solve.

To break the cycle of homelessness and to create sustainable solutions the Council must move away from quick fixes and solely addressing presenting demand, irrelevant of where it presents within the wider economy/partnership

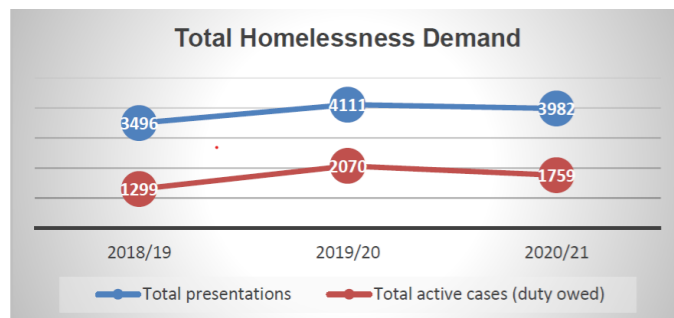
This strategy sets out the six priorities/ objectives for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2021- 2024. The priorities have been developed in conjunction with partners and will drive the delivery/ action plan for the forthcoming years.

Each priority/ objective is supported by a delivery/action plan, with each thematic area supported by a key partner – with the associated governance arrangements in place, the six priorities are detailed below:

- **Preventing Homelessness** – how to embed prevention approach and early intervention model across the whole system
- **Improve Communication, Education and Engagement** – ensuring people know what help is available and approach for support sooner

- **Enhancing Housing Options** – how to access the whole housing market and incentivise providers to work with partners
- **Improving partnership collaboration and the whole system** – how to work better together, reduce handoffs and design the system around the customer flow
- **Eliminating rough sleeping**
- **Making best use of resources** – how to make best use of our total whole system resources and reduce any duplication

The chart shows the number of presentations and the cases progressing to a duty (prevention, relief or main duty each year from 2018/19 to 2020/21).



Cost of Living Support

The Council has regularly supported residents with the cost of living crisis by offering a range of different support packages, which have included:

- Help with their utility bills
- Budget management
- Warm Spaces
- General Tips and Advice
- Health and Wellbeing
- Help with food

Underlying poverty in Sandwell is a long-standing issue and over time, strong local networks with a focus on building resilience have been developed. The Council have been working to respond to the current cost of living crisis, as they did during the COVID pandemic. The Council has supported a number of activities to support the most vulnerable. Below gives a flavour of the activities that have taken place:

- Sandwell Advice Providers Network of 18+ organisations, including the Council's welfare rights team, in 2021/22 the Network supported

over 35,000 people, helping them to access £30m in benefits and advising on £21m problem debt.

- Getting critical information out fast has been a priority and so the Supporting Sandwell website was created.
- Opening up Warm Spaces across Sandwell, providing warm spaces in 59 community venues.
- Sandwell has a strong network of food banks, food pantries and other community-based food provision such as the Holiday Activities and Food programme
- The voluntary sector has also provided support around financial literacy, energy advice, digital support, healthy food and job/training support
- The Council has widened the eligibility of Local Welfare Provision and Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Creatively used the Household Support Fund to provide support to the most vulnerable – additional support to foodbanks, Free School Meal support in the holidays, support to low income households not eligible for energy rebate payment, support to Council and PRS tenants who are struggling to pay their on-going rent and or repayment of rent arrears.
- Continuing to provide 100% discount on Council Tax for lowest income households.
- Training 80 Cost of Living Champions to give advice and guidance
- Poverty Proofing initiative in schools underway
- Hundreds of Winter Warmth gift packs distributed to the most in need

Partners across Sandwell are drafting a **Tackling Poverty Plan** to build upon this support and put in place sustainable longer-term activities to address the underlying causes of poverty. This plan is based on evidence provided by partners and will be launched at the second Cost of Living Summit, hosted by the Council

Community Care Offers Floating Support Services

The Council's Floating Support Service is dedicated to assisting vulnerable individuals in maintaining their independence while living in their own homes.

The Council caters to a wide range of individuals who may benefit from Council support, including those who have recently been discharged from hospital, individuals struggling with drugs and / or alcohol problems, victims of domestic abuse or violence, those facing mental health difficulties, individuals with physical or learning disabilities, and those with visual or hearing impairments.

Additionally, the Council extends assistance to young people who are vulnerable or have recently left care, teenage parents, troubled families, offenders at risk of re-offending, refugees, and travellers.

The services are comprehensive, covering various aspects of individuals' lives, including help with settling them into new homes, providing guidance for residence maintenance, budgeting, and debt management.

Assistance in claiming benefits and tackling alcohol/drug issues while facilitating access to healthcare and employment/education opportunities. Additionally, the service will also focus on developing domestic and life skills to empower individuals, ensuring personalised and effective assistance to enhance their quality of life.

Skills and Employability

- Sandwell Adult Family Learning engages with:
- Specific cultural groups such as the Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisation
- Adults services at Windmill community centre for adults with learning difficulties
- Specific charity, community groups such as Jigsaw. Offering opportunities to residents of Sandwell with a learning difficulty or disability
- Black Country Women's aid to offer learning opportunities to survivors of domestic abuse
- Adults 50+ and above to support social interaction within delivery such as art for well-being

Employment and Skills

- The Specialist Employment Team collects demographic data on referrals and analysed this earlier in the year. They aim to embed this approach, so it informs service delivery changes in the future, but are not there yet. This is required as part of the supported employment quality kite mark that the Team are working towards.

- Employment and Skills developed an electronic feedback survey during the pandemic which it is regularly sent out to customers including young people and people with protected characteristics.
- The Employment and Skills team managed a Black Country wide 50 Plus programme to support social engagement of older people who were predominantly economically disadvantaged. This included local community wide delivery with a range of diverse partners to engage with different communities.
- The Specialist Employment team have more detailed customer feedback surveys, which have been relaunched as a requirement of the supported employment quality kite mark.
- The Specialist Employment Team is an all-age, pan-disability, supported employment service for unemployed Sandwell residents including young people with SEND and Care Leavers with SEND.
- Whilst the Specialist Employment Team doesn't focus specifically on excluded groups, some young people being supported have disengaged from education and receive intensive support. TS was 18 when he was referred to the service 10 months ago. He has SEND, is from a Black and Ethnic Minority (BEM) group, is a Care Leaver and has a forensic history. His engagement initially was patchy, but as his relationship with his adviser has developed and his engagement has improved. He has completed a Vocational Profile, received a better off in work benefit calculation, has an action plan and has shown an interest in working in conservation and applying for apprenticeships. Joint working with the Area Employment Team has opened up opportunities for TS to apply for with companies such as Dooceys and he has recently started a work placement at Sandwell Valley twice a week. On his first day at Sandwell Valley his employment adviser said it was the first time I'd seen him smile since I'd been working with him.
- Whether to undertake equality impact assessment – in order to inform project/service development
- Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken when new contracts (where required), are awarded.

Promoting Healthier Lives

Inclusive Green Spaces

Sandwell benefits from **543** green spaces, with **323** green spaces (59%) having unrestricted access to the public.

This is **3.63 hectares** per 1,000 population and has more unrestricted green space access than some other comparable local authorities. Green Spaces include:

- 32 parks and gardens (including 9 Green Flag Parks).
- 211 amenity green spaces (from small local spaces to larger communal green spaces).
- 75 natural and semi-natural green spaces (including 9 recognised nature reserves).
- 22 green corridors (such as green walkways, and green space that connects areas)
- 48 outdoor sports sites (including 15 playing pitches, 27 Multi Use Games Areas, 33 outdoor gyms, 4 Bowling Greens, and 12 BMX and skate facilities)
- 34 Allotment sites (with 1,336 plots)
- 69 play areas (including toddler and junior play facilities).

Sandwell Valley Country Park, is large and can take a day to walk around, some paths are suitable for wheelchair access. There are no steep hills although, a number of the paths have inclines while others are bridleways.

Within the Country Park there are two visitor centres with ground floor access throughout. The main visitor centre, Sandwell Park Farm is a Grade II Listed Building and has steps in the reception, though these can be bypassed via the ramp.

The Council offers accessible services, guide dogs are permitted, parking areas for disabled visitors and ramp/ level access.

The **Britannia Park at Rowley Regis** is benefiting from a £2.4m investment from the Town's Fund and Sandwell Council funding. The investment in Britannia Park aims to enhance its infrastructure, facilities, and quality. This will result in increased utilization of the park for informal sports, improved disabled access and a wide range of events and

activities. The project seeks to boost the health and wellbeing of residents across Rowley Regis.

Sandwell Residential Education Service

Sandwell Council owns and operates 4 residential education centres located in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gwynedd. They are self-funded, and generate a 20% to 30% subsidy to remove finance as a barrier to attendance for Sandwell children and young people that attend with their school. The educational visits are outcome led; co-designed with teachers and group leaders and tailored to the specific context of the group. Every visit provides an opportunity to develop **resilience, confidence and independence;** know how to keep **physically and emotionally healthy;** become more **environmentally aware**, and to support **students' achievement**. The service exists to help Sandwell's residents to live happier, healthier, and more successful lives.

Greenspaces Activities

The Albion Foundation and Sandwell Council are delivering a range of fitness and social activities for Sandwell's residents and workforce to improve their health and wellbeing.

The **Active Greenspaces** programme provides various outdoor activities in the parks including walks, exercise classes, stay and play toddler groups, wellbeing hubs, coffee mornings and more. These activities help combat social isolation by enabling participants to meet new people, decrease loneliness and improve mental health.

With funding from Sandwell Council, **The Albion Foundation** delivers a physical activity programme within the green space of each of the borough's six towns with a focus on improving public health outcomes and increase physical activity levels of those who are inactive.

The sessions are in two seasonal phases, and the spring to summer activities, which are mainly held outdoors, are as follows:

- Outdoor fit/boot camps (Adult and children sessions)
- Health walks (Adult and family, family during school holidays)

- Sensory walks
- Family wellbeing (Mothers and toddlers/dads groups)
- Weight management (Fit baggies on tour)
- Forestry/environmental play (Family)
- Walk and draw (Adult/family)
- Yoga outside (Adult)
- Mini tennis/badminton (Adults/family)
- From fork to fork (Grow your own food)

Sandwell Aquatics Centre

Following the successful hosting of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games swimming and diving events, the Sandwell Aquatics Centre has been transformed into a state-of-the-art leisure facility, managed by the Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT). The centre now offers an impressive range of amenities, including a 50-meter Olympic sized swimming pool, a 10-meter high competitive dive tower, a 25-meter dive pool, and seating capacity for 1,000 spectators.

Additionally, the centre boasts a community swimming pool, three 150sqm activity studios, two 4-court sports halls, a 108-station gym, a 25-station ladies only gym, an indoor cycling studio, a changing village for up to 600 individuals, a dry diving centre with mini floor trampolines, a sauna/steam room, a new football pitch with changing facilities, a brand new urban park, a children's play area, ample parking spaces for up to 300 vehicles and a café. The facility is designed to cater to a diverse range of recreational and fitness needs and it is a critical principle that this facility is inclusive and caters for the different needs of different communities.

Furthermore, Sandwell Council offers free swimming sessions at all leisure centres with swimming pools for the following groups: children aged 18 and under during school holidays, residents aged 60 and over, and registered disabled residents. This initiative aims to encourage and promote active lifestyles among the members of the community.

Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP)

The Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP) is an example of one of the funds/grants available to local community and voluntary sector organisations. SHIP is a three-year grant funded programme developed with local community organisations. It aims to deliver health improvement for local residents through a varied programme of activities in 11 community centres across Sandwell.

Each centre will run activities during the three-years, including projects to tackle childhood and adult obesity, such as:

- Zumba classes
- Maternity and women's health groups
- Exercise groups for over 50s
- Postural gentle exercise for older residents
- Community swimming group
- Football sessions for adults and young people

There are also multiple activities aimed at preventing and managing diabetes, cancer and other long-term conditions.

These are complemented by wellbeing activities, social groups and coffee mornings in local community settings, which bring people together, to reduce isolation and improve mental health. The majority of the organisations responsible for delivering SHIP are from across ethnic minority communities and voluntary groups.

LGBTQ+ Health Needs

Public Health undertook consultation/engagement with LGBTQ+ community, to look at the health inequalities of this community. This took the form of a digital survey of 45 questions and also a discussion with community groups and individuals focusing on their experiences with health care (over 75 contacts). A key outcome has been the proposal to run a small grants scheme with **Sandwell Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations (SCVO)** to support the Council to address the health inequalities. The fund seeks to bids from community organisations that can meet the needs of this protected group.

Public Health with Healthy Sandwell

The Public Health (PH) - Healthy Sandwell and Partnership aims to get Sandwell healthier, happier and to keep people well for longer. "Bringing together skills and knowledge to prevent, protect and promote the health and wellbeing of Sandwell". This was achieved by providing advice, information on health and lifestyle improvement support services, carrying out behaviour change motivational conversations and enabling accessibility to these services by referring to PH commissioned services and signposting to other local support services.

Integrated Health Care

The **Integrated Care System (ICS)**, known as **Healthier Futures**, brings providers and commissioners of NHS services together with local authorities and other local partners to **plan and deliver joined up services** and to **improve the lives of people** who live and work in the Black Country.

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board is a statutory committee made up of councillors, local GPs, Council officers and members from the faith and voluntary community sector.

The board has been transforming into a place that welcomes local community groups to share their stories and experiences. Hearing the real voices of local people brought the meetings to life and inspired board members to take action.

By showcasing the work being done on the ground alongside the strategies behind it, the board has generated new ideas and in-depth discussions for plans in the future, knowing that local people can genuinely benefit.

The **Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2025** outlines the socioeconomic challenges and health inequalities faced by many in the Borough.

Warm spaces

The Council responded quickly to the cost-of-living crisis by establishing a number of "Warm Spaces" that are free, safe and supportive spaces that residents can visit during the colder months. All Sandwell libraries are identified as Warm Spaces and some of the community and leisure centres.

The warm spaces provide an opportunity for staff to chat to residents and offer support services and advice and information about benefits, energy support, managing bills, how local charities can help and how to access community support to combat isolation.

Creating Safer and Stronger Communities

Safer Sandwell Partnership



The Safer Sandwell Partnership works closely with the Council, police, fire service, health and probation services and many others to tackle crime and improve community safety. Additionally, the partnership includes:

- Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board
- Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership
- Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board

More information on how the four boards work together can be found here and is also referenced above in Protecting Individuals and Promoting Independence.

The partnership also works closely with the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, West Midlands Community Safety Partnership, local community and voluntary organisations and councillors to set out priorities.

Priorities for 2022-26 and the Cross-Cutting Priorities are detailed below:

- Prevent violence and exploitation
- Reduce offending, reoffending and serious organised crime
- Prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- **Cross Cutting Priority 1:** Protect and support vulnerable victims
- **Cross Cutting Priority 2:** Tackling substance misuse - saving lives and reducing crime
- **Cross Cutting Priority 3:** Serious violence duty

Community Safety and Resilience Teams

Sandwell Council has dedicated Community Safety and Resilience teams, working with a wide range of partner organisations to tackle issues including:

Anti-social Behaviour

- The Council is committed to making sure all residents enjoy their right to peace, quiet and security in their neighbourhood, and recognises that anti-social behaviour can have a severe effect on the well-being of residents and that the Council wants to take action to minimise it.
- The Council has a variety of powers and options to tackle anti-social behaviour. Examples of Council action to tackle anti-social behaviour include:
 - Verbal warnings
 - Anti-social behaviour injunctions
 - Warning letters
 - Premises closure powers
 - Mediation
 - Fixed penalty notices
 - Parenting contracts
 - Restorative justice

Read the Council's policy statement for anti-social behaviour.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

- The Council has a Modern-Day Slavery Team, who work in partnership with a number of partners. The team is intelligence led and use a Power BI interactive dashboard which includes nationality, localities, landlords and recruitment agency data.
- The team works on all areas that come under the remit of modern slavery and the data is benchmarked against national data and Sandwell is showing that they have the same issues as other local authorities.
- Due to Sandwell's unique location as it borders the majority of the other larger West Midlands authorities, these issues are coming from all areas across the region and further afield. The modern slavery annual report is available to read here

Hate crime

- There are many ways for victims and witnesses to report a hate crime, this includes the Police, Crimestoppers and Online. Hate crime can be reported anonymously by visiting the Crimestoppers website or True Vision Website anonymously
- Victims can also report by downloading the West Midlands Police hate crime reporting app: App Store / Google Play

Third Party Reporting Centres

Third Party Reporting Centres are places within the community where you can report a hate crime confidentially whether you are a victim or witness, if you do not want to report directly to the police. A list of Third Party Reporting Centres can be found here

Reducing and dealing with Domestic Abuse

- The Council has recently developed a Strategy to support Domestic Abuse (Sandwell Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024).
- A range of services and organisations are available to support survivors of domestic abuse and their families. These organisations aim to prevent this abuse from occurring and work with perpetrators to address their behaviour.
- Of these, **Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA)** are the most significant. They provide a range of specialist support which is commissioned by Sandwell Council or funded by a variety of external sources including the Ministry of Justice and the West Midlands Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (WMOPCC).
- These services include the refuge and dispersed accommodation provision, the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) community services, the children and young people's service (including support provided in relation to Operation Encompass), a stalking and harassment-focused service, a modern slavery service and a forced marriage service.
- They also are commissioned to provide the **Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS)** programme to improve the response of primary care to domestic abuse along with a

dedicated IDVA located in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). These services are provided to both males and females and have recently been enhanced even further by the inception of the **'Ask Marc' domestic and sexual abuse male-specific service.**

- Birmingham LGBT is commissioned by WMOPCC to deliver additional specialist domestic abuse support to LGBT+ victims.
- A family intervention programme (Families Together) is also in place – **Family Action** are currently commissioned to deliver this intervention.
- In addition, a dedicated **IDVA** service was introduced in 2018 to cover the Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust area. Two IDVAs are now based within the Emergency Departments at Sandwell Hospital and City Hospital (in Birmingham, but borders Sandwell).
- These IDVAs are funded jointly through the WMOPCC (allocated via the Safer Sandwell Partnership) and Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust. The IDVAs were initially managed by BCWA but, from July 2021, have now transferred directly to the NHS Trust.
- Statutory partners provide support for survivors of domestic abuse and their families and to address perpetrators of this abuse. These partners include those represented **on Sandwell's DASP** such as adult social care, public health and housing within the local authority structure, Sandwell Children's Trust, West Midlands Police, health services (primary care, mental health and hospital trusts) and the Probation service. Voluntary and community organisations are also involved.
- The **Safeguarding Adults Board, Children's Safeguarding Partnership, the MASH and the dedicated MARAC** aims to develop actions for higher risk victims referred by partner agencies.
- At a regional level Sandwell is actively engaged with the work of the **West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership**, including the development of good practice and identification of evidence-based approaches to inform the West Midlands response to domestic abuse and exploitation.

Sandwell Safe Spaces Scheme

The Sandwell Safe Spaces Scheme is based in Bearwood in Smethwick and West Bromwich town centre. It provides a safe place indoors for anyone who may feel vulnerable, distressed or worried while out and about in Bearwood and West Bromwich town centre.

Safe Spaces are buildings such as shops, libraries and other organisations where you can go if you feel unsafe outside while you call and wait for a family member or friend, for example, to collect you or for the police to arrive.

The Safe Spaces Scheme is supported by West Midlands Police and in West Bromwich by West Bromwich Business Improvement District too.

Borough of Sanctuary – Welcoming Newer Communities

The Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary network of partners aims to engage individuals and organisations across the borough to join in enacting the principles of the Cities of Sanctuary movement.

Sandwell is working to become a recognised Borough of Sanctuary, working alongside partners to take practical steps to welcome and include refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in activities, and to actively seek ways of supporting them wherever possible.



Maximising Value Through Partnerships

Delivering Social Value through procurement

The Social Value Policy provides a consistent and collaborative approach to achieving social value when working with contractors and outlines three main areas that need to be considered when implementing the Social Value Act:

- 1. Economic:** Generation of savings for the public purse; Boost local economy; Innovation and Skills Training
- 2. Environmental:** Controlled consumption; Biodiversity; Carbon Reduction and Sustainability.
- 3. Social:** Equality & Diversity; Social Inclusion; Fair and Ethical Trade and Apprenticeships.

The current framework aims to reflect the priorities of the Council which are:

- Great People
- Great Place
- Great Prospects
- Great Performance

Value from Partnership working with service users

Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

SCVO serves the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors in the metropolitan borough of Sandwell. A variety of support services are available, including:

- Financial management and support
- Specialist funding, local grants and training courses to support the Sector within Sandwell
- Governance and committee support
- Help for small and new groups

West Midlands Combined Authority – Race Equality Taskforce

The West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce is an independent group launched in 2021 by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Sandwell Council is one of the many public bodies working to tackle race inequality and contributing to the vision 'that in the West Midlands, ethnicity, race and heritage should never be obstacles to people having a fair start in life, or the opportunity for people to reach their full potential and flourish'.

The advisory group is made up of local political leaders with a responsibility for equalities in their own authorities, and is chaired by Cllr Kerrie Carmichael, the WMCA's portfolio lead for inclusive communities, and leader of Sandwell Council

The Taskforce's priorities are:

- Jobs, living standards, skills and education
- Transport and connectivity
- Housing and homelessness
- Health and wellbeing
- Criminal justice
- Improving data, leadership diversity and cultural intelligence

For more information, please visit the Taskforce site.

Sandwell Faith Sector Network

The Council held an event in March 2022 at Holy Trinity Church, Church Hill Street, Smethwick to launch the Sandwell Faith Sector Network and to thank the faith sector for their fantastic support during the pandemic.

Faith communities' work during the pandemic has shone a light on the great work they do but also highlights the need to continue to engage local faith communities in all Sandwell Council's public health work. This event was a chance to launch the Sandwell Faith Sector Network which will continue to work with the sector on all kinds of issues which existed before the pandemic and will continue after, some exacerbated by the pandemic.

PREVENT

PREVENT is the safeguarding part of the National Counter Terrorism Strategy and aims to stop people from being drawn into or supporting terrorism.

The strategy focuses on three key areas:

- Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism
- Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support
- Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate

More information about the Council's PREVENT work can be accessed via the following link

Celebrating Diversity

Throughout the year, the Council supported and attended various events in the community. This included:

- Jubilee Celebration events
- Pride in the Park
- Windrush Day
- National Citizenship Service to Support Young People's Community Projects
- Care Leavers Award Ceremony
- Women's Health Day
- Sandwell Against Racism
- Armed Forces Day



Building EDI into Council Decision Making

The following Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) were undertaken during the reporting period (2021/2022):

Implementation of a proposed Golden Hello and Market Supplement Payment scheme	Admission Priorities for Sandwell’s Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2024/25
Admission Priorities for Sandwell’s Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2024/25	Demolition Framework 2023-2027 (Demolition allows redevelopment, delivering sites for new housing, new education spaces, improvements to community assets, improvements to transport links, and will support the creation of new jobs and learning opportunities)
Procurement of the Young People’s Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Training and Support Services in Sandwell	Expansion of the Cooperative working agreement
Tenant Fees Act Policy	Final Market Sustainability Plan for The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)
Young People’s Substance Misuse -annual budget increase	Cape Primary School and Uplands Manor Primary School – reduction in Pupil Admission Number
Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing

Further information about EIAS can be accessed by contacting the EDI Team on edi_team@sandwell.gov.uk

Summary

Overall, this report highlights the range of services that the Council and its partners are delivering to ensure that the residents and visitors to Sandwell are receiving equitable, fair and inclusive services.

This report demonstrates a lot of good work that the Council is delivering but recognises that much more can be done to improve service user satisfaction, experience and outcomes and it is envisaged that going forward in future reports, the Council will be in a better position to provide more qualitative and quantitative data.

A number of the gaps identified in the Initial Internal EFLG audit report and therefore the actions will be captured in the over-arching EDI Roadmap Action 2022/24

If you would like this document to be explained in an alternative format and/or language or want to give comments about the contents, please email: EDI_Team@sandwell.gov.uk or contact the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team on [].





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