

Scrutiny Board :	Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board
Report Title	Antisocial behaviour and low- level crime – Focus on Drug dealing
Date of Meeting	4 September 2025
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Lead Officer	Executive Director - Place
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Choose an item.
Appendices (if any)	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Scrutiny Board with an overview of drug-related crime in Sandwell, with a particular focus on drug dealing and its links to anti-social behaviour (ASB), criminal exploitation, and cuckooing. It draws on police and partnership data (2021–2025) to highlight trends in drug offences, enforcement outcomes, and associated safeguarding risks.

2. Recommendation

That the Board considers and comments upon the information presented and determines whether it wishes to make any recommendations to the Executive.

3. Background and Context

3.1 National Picture

Drug dealing and associated harms remain a national priority for policing and community safety. The UK drug market is estimated to be worth £4.9 billion annually, fuelling organised criminality and exploitation.

Controlled drugs are categorised into Class A, B and C, with Class A the most harmful. The Government's 10-Year Drug Strategy (2021–2031) sets out ambitions to reduce drug use, break supply chains, and reduce the harms to communities.

National drivers include:

- **County lines exploitation** of young people and vulnerable adults to transport drugs.
- **Organised immigration crime**, particularly Albanian and Eastern European networks in cultivation and supply.
- **Drug-related exploitation**, including modern slavery, with significant national investment in multi-agency disruption.
- **Cuckooing**, where organised groups take over vulnerable residents' homes, now recognised in draft legislation introducing a specific criminal offence.

3.2 Local Picture – Sandwell

Drug offences are reducing year on year, we are seeing strong improvements in outcomes, with more cases resulting in charges and community resolutions, which now make up more than half of all offences dealt with

Analysis of 3,778 drug offences over the last five years shows a clear split between low-level possession and possession with intent to supply.

Possession of cannabis: Over half of all offences are attributed to possession of Cannabis. This demonstrates significant low-level use.

Possession of other controlled drugs: 16% of all drug offences are attributed to other drugs.

Possession with intent to supply: Account for a quarter of all drug crimes. From 2023 to 2024, offences fell from 240 to 190 offences (-21%). with further reductions quarter-on-quarter:

- Q1 2024 (58) vs Q1 2025 (39): -33% reduction
- Q2 2024 (52) vs Q2 2025 (44): -15% reduction

3.3 Outcomes

Of the total analysed:

- Over 2,000 positive outcomes have been secured: 1,354 community resolutions, 534 charges, 95 cautions, and 17 cases where action was taken by other bodies.
- **Charges are increasing:** 99 (2023) → 133 (2024) → 95 already YTD 2025.
- **Community resolutions are rising:** 229 (2023) → 339 (2024) → 295 already YTD.

Despite these positives, a significant proportion of cases remain hindered by evidential difficulties, highlighting barriers to enforcement.

3.4 Links to Other Harms

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB):

Police ASB data show 228 cases linked to drugs over the last five years, including 41 related to drug dealing. Encouragingly, these are reducing year-on-year:

- 70 cases in 2023 → 56 in 2024 → 10 YTD 2025
- Drug dealing ASB fell from 15 in 2023 → 7 in 2024 → 2 YTD 2025

Criminal Exploitation:

Through the Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership (SHOP), 205 cases of criminal exploitation have been referred over the past five years. The majority relate to drug cultivation, often linked to organised crime.

- While referral numbers fluctuate, the overall picture points to increasing exploitation risk. Significant peaks occurred in 2021 (67 cases) and again in 2024 (60 cases), compared with much lower baselines in earlier years.
- 32 cases have direct links to organised networks
- Multi-agency disruption has increased significantly, with 169 interventions recorded in 2024, up from 81 in 2022.

Overall, the data shows that drug supply chains are a key driver of exploitation, with victims used as a disposable workforce within the drugs economy. This highlights the need for interventions that address both drug demand and organised exploitation, ensuring safeguarding responses are aligned with enforcement activity.

Cuckooing:

Cuckooing refers to the practice where organised crime groups take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to facilitate drug dealing, exploitation or other criminal activity. Victims are often coerced, intimidated, or manipulated into allowing their homes to be used.

First monitored locally in 2022, cuckooing cases have risen, with 44 referrals to date. Victims present predominantly older, British males over 60 living alone.

- Most cases are managed through injunctions, but outcomes are challenging as offenders move from household to household.
- The lack of a specific criminal offence has historically hindered enforcement, though this gap is set to be addressed through forthcoming national legislation.

From a criminal justice perspective, cuckooing remains a challenge. Unlike drug dealing or cultivation, there is no clear standalone criminal offence for cuckooing itself. Cases are usually managed through civil interventions such as injunctions or closure orders, which can safeguard individuals and properties but often result in offenders moving on to exploit another household.

A new criminal law to strengthen the response to cuckooing is currently progressing through Parliament, recognising the need for a more direct legislative tool. This may provide opportunities for police and local authorities to respond more robustly in future.

3.5 Links to Organised Crime

Drug offending in Sandwell cannot be viewed in isolation — it is a central enabler of serious and organised crime (SOC). The last SOC Local Profile identified drug supply, cannabis cultivation, county lines activity, and cuckooing as key threats, and current evidence confirms these remain highly relevant.

OCGs involved in the drugs market are highly likely to be involved in other criminal activities in order to operate their drug operation. This is highly likely to include Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT), Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), County Lines and the possession of firearms.

The updated Local SOC profile is currently being compiled.

3.6 Case Studies

Case Study 1 – Street-Level Dealing Disruption (Smethwick)

While on mobile patrol in a targeted drug dealing area, officers observed a vehicle acting suspiciously. The driver attempted to evade police, decamped, and was pursued on foot.

- The male was detained, and 150 wraps of Class A drugs were recovered.
- He was arrested and interviewed, demonstrating the value of visible patrols and rapid enforcement in disrupting local dealing.

Case Study 2 – Large-Scale Cannabis Cultivation and Firearms Recovery (Smethwick)

Intelligence was received that a premises in Smethwick was being used for cannabis cultivation. A warrant was executed and around 200 cannabis plants were discovered, with electrics bypassed. During the search, a firearm hidden inside a printer was recovered.

- One male was arrested for production of cannabis and possession of a firearm.
- The scale and sophistication of the set-up highlighted the involvement of a wider organised network, reflecting the exploitation and risks linked to cultivation sites.

Case Study 3 – Organised Crime Group (OCG) Enforcement (Oldbury)

Working alongside the County Lines Taskforce (CLTF), police executed warrants at multiple home addresses of OCG nominals in Oldbury.

- Vehicle keys were recovered from the addresses, and subsequent searches uncovered around 500g of heroin and 1.5kg of crack cocaine.
- Several nominals were arrested and remanded, with two recalled to prison for the remainder of their sentences.
- The operation significantly disrupted local supply and reduced the group's ability to coordinate street-level distribution.

3.7 Police and Crime Plan

The West Midlands Police and Crime Plan (2025–2029) makes clear that tackling drug markets is central to disrupting organised crime and reducing serious harm. The plan recognises that drugs drive violence, exploitation, and neighbourhood crime, and commits to a balanced approach that combines enforcement with prevention, treatment, and recovery. This directly aligns with Sandwell's partnership focus on disrupting supply chains, safeguarding exploited individuals, and reducing the wider harm caused by drugs in our communities.

Key priorities from the Plan include:

- Disrupting organised crime groups involved in trafficking, county lines, and cultivation.
- Tackling the links between drugs, modern slavery, cuckooing, and child criminal exploitation.
- Balancing enforcement with prevention and treatment, reducing demand alongside supply.
- Addressing the impact of drugs on antisocial behaviour, neighbourhood safety, and violence.
- Working with councils, health, and voluntary partners to expand treatment and recovery services.

3.8 Multi Agency Responses

Sandwell's approach is whole-system, multi-agency, including:

- **SOC Partnership Meetings** – oversight of OCGs and emerging threats.
- **SHOP** – criminal exploitation (cultivation, cuckooing) and safeguarding.
- **Intervention & Prevention Meeting** – repeat demand locations and ASB hotspots.
- **Sandwell Drug & Alcohol Partnership (SDAP)** – health and recovery alongside enforcement.
- **County Lines Taskforce** – disruption and safeguarding.
- **Operation Aidant (NCA-led)** – intensifications on exploitation.
- **Town & Borough Tasking** – local place-based enforcement and reassurance.
- **West Midlands Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership** – Chaired by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 The Safer Sandwell Partnership is in the process of delivering a Community Safety Survey, which will provide a broad evidence base on residents' perceptions of crime and community safety, including drug-related concerns.
- 4.2 Statutory compliance has been ensured through consultation with relevant stakeholders, including West Midlands Police, health partners, and safeguarding boards.
- 4.3 This layered consultation approach ensures that the strategy reflects both community concerns and professional expertise, while also aligning with national guidance and statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 No additional budget is requested as a result of through this report.

6. Legal and Governance Implications

- 6.1 The Council has a number of statutory duties and legal powers which underpin the partnership approach to tackling drug-related offending and associated antisocial behaviour:
 - **Crime and Disorder Act 1998:** Section 17 places a duty on the Council to exercise all its functions with due regard to the likely effect on crime and disorder, including drug-related crime, and to do all it reasonably can to prevent such activity.
 - **Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014:** Provides powers such as Community Protection Notices (CPNs), Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), and injunctions which are routinely used in cases of drug-related nuisance and cuckooing.
 - **Modern Slavery Act 2015:** Establishes responsibilities for identifying and safeguarding victims of exploitation, including those coerced into drug cultivation or trafficking.
 - **Serious Violence Duty (Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022):** Places a statutory requirement on specified authorities, including local government, to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence, including violence linked to drugs and organised crime.
 - **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971:** The legislative framework for drug possession, supply, and trafficking offences, with enforcement led by West Midlands Police and supported through local partnership interventions.
- 6.2 **Governance arrangements** are in place through the Safer Sandwell Partnership Board, with escalation to the respective partner agency structures. Specific delivery is coordinated through thematic multi-agency groups including the Serious Organised Crime Partnership, the Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership, and the Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership (SHOP).

7. Risks

- 7.1 A number of risks have been identified in relation to tackling drug-related crime and associated antisocial behaviour in Sandwell:

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Under-reporting & intelligence gaps	Gaps in intelligence hinder disruption of networks	Community engagement, anonymous reporting (Crimestoppers), partnership intel-sharing
Resource pressures	Demand may exceed service capacity	Partnership prioritisation, SOC/SDAP governance, external funding

- 7.2 These risks are actively managed through the Council's Community Safety Partnership Risk Register and are aligned with corporate risk management processes, ensuring regular oversight and mitigation planning.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 8.1 Drug-related crime and antisocial behaviour have a disproportionate impact on particular groups within Sandwell. Vulnerable adults (including those with disabilities, substance misuse issues, or mental health needs), young people, and older residents living alone (particularly in cuckooing cases) are at heightened risk of exploitation and harm. Criminal exploitation linked to drug markets (including county lines) often targets children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with long-term consequences for equality of opportunity.
- 8.2 The Council and its partners are committed to ensuring that interventions are designed and delivered in a way that is inclusive and accessible to all communities. This includes working closely with communities where under-reporting may be influenced by cultural or language barriers, and strengthening trust in services for groups who may be reluctant to engage with statutory agencies.

9. Other Relevant Implications

- 9.1 There are no direct workforce, ICT, procurement, or climate change implications arising from this report.
- 9.2 The work aligns with the Council's duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, helping reduce crime, antisocial behaviour, substance misuse, and reoffending, while also supporting the Prevent duty (2015).

10. Background Documents

Community safety strategy - [Download here](#)

Police and crime plan – [Download here](#)

10 year drug strategy - [Download here](#)

11. How does this deliver the Outcomes in the Council Plan?

- 11.1 This work contributes directly to the **Thriving Economy in Sandwell** theme. Tackling drug dealing, exploitation, and related anti-social behaviour reduces the harms that undermine communities and local businesses.
- 11.2 By addressing organised criminality and the drug markets that fuel it, the strategy helps to create safer town centres, more stable neighbourhoods, and environments where businesses can invest and residents can thrive.
- 11.3 Effective prevention and enforcement activity also reduce the costs of crime and exploitation on public services, enabling resources to be better directed toward growth, regeneration, and community wellbeing.