

## Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board - Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough

### Summary of Evidence Gathered

Evidence/Source	Findings Summary
<p>Local Data Platform – Sandwell Trends</p> <p><a href="https://www.sandwelltrends.info/town-profiles/">https://www.sandwelltrends.info/town-profiles/</a></p>	<p>Sandwell Trends provides a robust quantitative foundation for understanding the borough’s demographic profile, social indicators and patterns of need. The platform offers detailed data on population diversity, deprivation levels, migration flows and neighbourhood cohesion indicators, helping to identify where community vulnerabilities or pressures may exist. This makes it a valuable tool for mapping local context and informing strategic decisions.</p> <p>However, while the data is reliable and comprehensive, it cannot fully capture lived experience or the nuances of community relationships. For this reason, it must be supplemented with qualitative evidence from resident, partners and frontline practitioners to build a complete picture.</p>
<p>Sandwell Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) 2023–2024</p> <p><a href="https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/3524/sandwell-amr-2024">https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/3524/sandwell-amr-2024</a></p>	<p>The Sandwell Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) 2023–2024 was an important source of evidence for the Scrutiny Review, highlighting the borough’s rapid population growth, high diversity, and significant deprivation.</p> <p>The AMRs Report strengthened the case for improved ESOL pathways, clearer communication, better translation and interpretation services, and the development of a borough-wide Community Asset Map.</p>

<p>Community Engagement – Faith Sector Sessions</p>	<p>The Faith Sector Sessions brought together representatives from a range of local faith communities to discuss cohesion, community challenges and opportunities for collaboration.</p> <p>These sessions provided rich qualitative insights into interfaith relations, the role of faith groups in supporting local unity and the barriers that some communities face in engaging with public services.</p> <p>The evidence gathered highlighted the importance of trusted messengers and the central role faith organisations play in resilience and community support. While highly valuable for capturing lived experience, the sessions may not reflect the views of all faith groups equally, particularly smaller or less formally organised communities.</p>
<p>Public Consultations – Consultation and Communication Sessions</p>	<p>Public consultation sessions engaged residents, community leaders and stakeholders to explore communication barriers, trust in local institutions and opportunities to strengthen cohesion. These sessions revealed that many residents experience challenges accessing information, and that trust is often built through personal relationships and community-based communication.</p> <p>The consultations also demonstrated that different methods yield different types of insight: surveys provide broad reach, while focus groups offer depth, especially for sensitive topics such as Adult Social Care.</p> <p>However, the evidence also showed inconsistencies in demographic data collection across departments, suggesting that a more standardised approach such as using Census age brackets would improve reliability. Additionally, consultations tend to attract those already engaged, meaning some voices may remain under-represented.</p>

<p>Statistical Data – Civic Engagement and Voter Turnout</p>	<p>Statistical data on civic engagement, particularly voter turnout in local and national elections, offers an objective measure of democratic participation across Sandwell.</p> <p>These figures help identify communities or demographic groups where engagement is low, signalling potential disengagement, mistrust or barriers to participation. The strength of this evidence lies in its objectivity and usefulness for trend analysis over time.</p> <p>However, quantitative data alone cannot explain the underlying causes of low engagement, making it necessary to pair these findings with qualitative research to understand motivations, barriers and perceptions.</p>
<p>Comparative Research – Other Council Approaches</p>	<p>Desktop research into the approaches taken by other local authorities—such as Bradford, Rotherham and Stoke provided comparative models of community engagement, partnership working and cohesion strategies.</p> <p>The evidence helped identify best practice examples and offered benchmarking opportunities to assess Sandwell’s position relative to similar areas. While this comparative research is useful for inspiration and learning, its applicability is limited by differences in demographics, scale and local context.</p> <p>Not all external models can be directly transferred to Sandwell, and some statistical neighbours did not respond to engagement attempts, limiting the depth of comparison.</p>
<p>We Make Camden- Online Resources and Practical Tools.</p>	<p>The We Make Camden initiative demonstrated a practical, citizen-led approach to community development, where residents design and lead local projects supported by clear guidance and funding mechanisms.</p>

<a href="https://www.wemakecamden.org.uk/">https://www.wemakecamden.org.uk/</a>	<p>The example illustrated how councils can empower communities to take ownership of local issues and solutions, offering a model of participatory practice.</p> <p>However, Camden's demographic and socio-economic profile differs significantly from Sandwell's, meaning the approach cannot be replicated wholesale. Instead, it provides inspiration for how resident-led initiatives might be adapted locally.</p>
<p>Training Event – Council Culture Workshop (18 June 2025)</p> <a href="https://www.newcitizenproject.com/">https://www.newcitizenproject.com/</a>	<p>The Council Culture training session delivered by the New Citizen Project explored how local authorities can work more collaboratively with residents and shift organisational culture towards co-production and shared decision-making.</p> <p>The workshop emphasised the importance of trust, openness and partnership between councils and communities. While the session offered valuable conceptual insights and practical reflections, it was not a data-driven source and therefore serves as a complementary rather than primary evidence base.</p>
<p>Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (“Think Neighbourhoods”)</p> <p>(Policy Document)</p> <a href="https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/interim-report-think-neighbourhoods/">https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/interim-report-think-neighbourhoods/</a>	<p>The “Think Neighbourhoods” report provided national-level analysis on neighbourhood renewal, economic integration and community-led approaches to addressing complex social challenges. The report offered strategic frameworks and innovative ideas relevant to cohesion, empowerment and local resilience.</p> <p>However, because the report covers a national scope, its recommendations require careful adaptation to Sandwell's specific context, demographics and local priorities.</p>

<p>Local Trust “Left Behind?” Report.</p> <p>(Policy Document).</p> <p><a href="https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/">https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/</a></p>	<p>The Local Trust’s “Left Behind?” report examined the characteristics of communities experiencing persistent disadvantage and set out strategies for strengthening social infrastructure, local leadership and community capacity.</p> <p>The evidence highlighted the importance of investing in places where social capital is low, and community assets are limited. While the report provides a strong evidence base, its recommendations must be tailored to Sandwell’s neighbourhoods to ensure relevance and impact.</p>
<p>Interim Scrutiny Report (April 2025)</p> <p><a href="https://sandwellintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s26777/09%20-%20SNAC%20Review%20Interim%20Report.pdf">https://sandwellintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s26777/09%20-%20SNAC%20Review%20Interim%20Report.pdf</a></p>	<p>The Interim Report (April 2025) and subsequent work-programming discussions established the core themes: intersectionality, local identity, national best practice, and low community participation.</p> <p>The report provided the initial analytical framework and justified continuing the review, especially in light of the 2024 riots and calls for improved cohesion and cultural exchange.</p>
<p>Intensive Engagement Centre Meeting (15 September 2025)</p> <p><a href="https://www.intensiveengagement.com/">https://www.intensiveengagement.com/</a></p>	<p>The meeting with Intensive Engagement introduced an evidence-based framework for assessing and improving community engagement. It showed Members how to: assess current effectiveness, focus resources, measure progress over time, and embed sustainable approaches e.g. Diagnostic tool and Asset Map.</p> <p>Building on the engagement evidence, Members concluded that residents and services need a clear picture of community assets. The proposed Community</p>

	<p>Asset Map is an operational response: it helps residents and frontline teams identify organisations, services and resources by ward, supporting signposting, partnership working and event planning. This is now one of the formal recommendations.</p>
<p>Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS) visit (6 October 2025)</p> <p><a href="https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/schools-education/sandwell-transition-education-partnership-service">https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/schools-education/sandwell-transition-education-partnership-service</a></p>	<p>The STEPS visit provided strong, practical evidence on language barriers and access to ESOL. Members saw the success of STEPS in delivering English and life skills but also heard directly from Staff and Centre users about challenges in promotion, referral, and access.</p> <p>This visit directly shaped:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommendation to create a comprehensive ESOL directory as a clear first point of contact.</li> <li>• The idea of a referral system for language support through council services.</li> <li>• The impetus to review translation and interpretation services to ensure they meet the needs of diverse communities.</li> </ul>
<p>Meeting with Ethnic Minority Council CEO (19 November 2025)</p>	<p>This meeting reinforced the case for the recommendations from the perspective of a key community stakeholder. It provided qualitative evidence that English for Speakers of Other Languages and language barriers remain important an issue. The meeting also reinforced how critical Libraries and community venues are as infrastructure for cohesion and access.</p> <p>The meeting strengthened the legitimacy and community backing of the proposals.</p>
<p>Meeting with Operations Manager – Community Safety (17 December 2025)</p>	<p>The discussion with the Operations Manager for Community Safety reinforced that failing to improve cohesion carries risks, including tensions and reputational issues.</p> <p>It was noted that upcoming Sandwell Community Cohesion Strategy supported recommendations and broader community safety outcomes, as reflected in the</p>

	“Risks” section (e.g. risk of continued tensions, mitigation through monitoring and reporting).
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