

## Introduction to The Black Country

The Black Country is a sub-region of the West Midlands located to the west of Birmingham. In local government terms the Black Country is defined as the four local authority districts of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The Location of the Black Country Local Authority Districts in Relation to the West Midlands conurbation and Great Britain



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## Walsall Introduction

Walsall Metropolitan Borough is in the West Midlands region and lies to the north-west of Birmingham. The borough covers an area of some 41 square miles (104 km<sup>2</sup>) of which over one third is greenbelt and around 20% is classified as Urban Open Space / Greenspace.

## **Demographic Profile**

According to 2012 mid-year estimates the Black Country had a population of 1,146,800. Dudley has the largest population of the four Black Country districts at 313,600, followed by Sandwell (311,300), Walsall (270,900) and Wolverhampton (251,900). The districts have a similar proportion of their population in the 20-59 age ranges, varying from 50.9 to 53.3%. Sandwell and Walsall have a younger population structure with 20.4% and 19.5% respectively aged 0-14, compared to 18.6% in Wolverhampton and 17.7% in Dudley. Conversely Dudley has the largest percentage of people aged 60 and over (25.2%) and Sandwell the smallest (20.1%).

Analysis of population relative to the size of each district shows that Sandwell and Wolverhampton have similar population densities at 36.6 and 36.4 people per square hectare respectively. Dudley has 32 and Walsall 26.

The latest figures on ethnic group from the 2011 Census show that Wolverhampton has the greatest proportion of minority groups (defined as non-White British) at 35.5%, with Sandwell having 34.2%, Walsall 23% and Dudley 11.5%. Asian groups are the largest minorities in each area; Pakistani in Dudley and Indian in the other three districts.

2011-based projections suggest that if recent demographic trends continue Sandwell will have the largest population in the Black Country by 2014 and experience a total increase of 8.5% by 2021 to reach 335,400. If the projections are realised the other Black Country districts will also grow by 3.9-4.5%, resulting in populations of 325,400 in Dudley, 281,700 in Walsall and 260,200 in Wolverhampton. These projections do not take account of policy or development aims that have not yet had an impact on observed trends so should be treated as indicative only.

## **Economic Profile**

Vitality amongst the labour market can be measured through the proportion of working age (16-64) people who are in, or actively seeking, employment. Figures from 2012/13 show that the economic activity rate was 78.7% in Dudley, 73.9% in Wolverhampton, 73.6% in Sandwell and 71.1% in Walsall.

In terms of employment there remains a large reliance on manufacturing, which employs around 1 in 7 workers in the Black Country and is the largest of 18 industrial sectors in Sandwell and Walsall; Dudley and Wolverhampton have the largest proportion of their workforce employed in the health sector (16.1% and 14.2% respectively). Health, retail and education are the other large employers across the Black Country. Comparison with national figures demonstrates the importance of manufacturing (Black Country 15.1%; England 8.4%) but shows a relative under-representation in the information / communication, finance and professional / scientific / technical sectors.

Figures from 2012 show average earnings of those working in the Black Country districts vary from £22,224 (Dudley) to £24,989 (Wolverhampton). Whilst these figures are considered reasonably precise the way they are collected makes comparisons between areas and over time difficult, but the trend over previous years shows that the Black Country districts have consistently lower earnings levels than the West Midlands (£25,446 in 2012) and England as a whole (£26,800).

As of September 2013 there were 41,174 Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants in the Black Country. Data from the last two years shows that the number of claimants in each district remained relatively stable until February 2013, but has since decreased month on month, mirroring the pattern seen nationally but with notably higher rates. 3.1% of the working age population in England were claiming JSA compared to 4.6% in Dudley, 5.3% in Walsall, 6.3% in Sandwell and 7.1% in Wolverhampton.

Long-term unemployment is also higher in the Black Country. Data from September 2013 shows that around 37% of JSA claimants in each district have been on the benefit for a year or more (Sandwell and Wolverhampton 37.3%, Walsall 37.4%, Dudley 38.1%); the equivalent figure for England is 30.9%.

Though showing signs of improvement the unemployment figures are symptomatic of the recessionary period. Business creation in the Black Country also declined under recent economic conditions, with the number of new businesses per 10,000 adult population decreasing from 2007 to 2010. However, the latest 2011 figures indicate an upturn with all four districts experiencing an increase in business creation rates to stand at 34 per 10,000 adult population in Walsall, 35.9 in Dudley, 36.7 in Dudley and 39.2 in Wolverhampton. There is still a struggle to sustain new businesses activity as illustrated by the proportion of new Black Country businesses that ceased trading within a year, which more than trebled from 3.5% in 2006 to 12.1% in 2010.

Developing a skills base amongst the workforce is essential to economic development. Figures from 2012 indicate that the percentage of working age people with no qualifications is greater amongst most of the Black Country districts than for England (9.5%). Wolverhampton has 21.9% with no qualifications, Sandwell 19.2%, Walsall 17% and Dudley 9%. Conversely fewer people have higher skills of NVQ level 4 (and equivalent) and above; Sandwell has 19.5%, Wolverhampton 20.5%, Walsall 23.4% and Dudley 25.8%, compared to 34.2% for England. The figures at the district level are subject to a degree of accuracy of approximately +/- 3%, but taking this into account it is clear that a disparity in levels exists. The proportion with higher skills in the Black Country has increased over recent years, but this is also true at the national level, meaning there has been no significant narrowing in the skills gap.

## **Housing Profile**

As of April 2011 there were nearly half a million dwellings in the Black Country. Dudley has the largest number amongst the four districts at 133,606, followed by Sandwell with 127,845, Walsall 112,016 and Wolverhampton 105,426. These figures are reflective of population size, but the structure of the population in terms of households (family groupings) is also an important determinant in the requirement for dwellings.

The large majority of dwellings are in the owner-occupied / private rented sectors (Dudley 79.4%; Walsall 75.3%; Wolverhampton 71.6%; Sandwell 71.3%). Local authority housing is still a key sector in Sandwell (24%), Wolverhampton (22.7%) and Dudley (17.4%), with Walsall having transferred its stock into registered social landlord ownership, which now accounts for 24.7% of dwellings.

There is some variation in the proportion of vacant housing, with Dudley at the same level as England (2.9%) and Walsall (3.3%), Sandwell (3.7%) and Wolverhampton (4.4%) having marginally higher rates.

House prices at the national level had been on a general downward trend since the last peak in 2007, but are now showing signs of a reversal. The Black Country districts demonstrate the same pattern but have lower average prices. As of July 2013 the average house price in Dudley was £120,257, with Walsall at £108,598, Wolverhampton £98,698 and Sandwell £90,014; this compares to £164,456 for England and Wales.

## **Transport Profile**

2011 Census results show that Dudley is most reliant on private methods of travelling to work compared to other areas, with 76.3% using a car / motorcycle. The equivalent for Walsall is 73.5%, and Wolverhampton (68.1%) and Sandwell (67.7%) are closer to the national figure (62.9%). The largest proportions travelling by bus are seen in Sandwell (14.2%) and by train / Metro in Wolverhampton (4.3%). 9-10% of people walk to work in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, representative of the national picture (10.7%), but in Dudley the figure is lower at 7.9%.

These differences between public / private transport are also seen in data from 2010-11 / 2011-12 analysing peak morning trips into centres across the four districts. Bus trips only account for 11.6% of journeys into Brierley Hill and 13.5% into Dudley town centre. For Walsall city centre (30.9%), West Bromwich (31.1%) and Wolverhampton city centre (22.1%) the percentages are significantly higher. Walsall and Wolverhampton also have inbound trips by rail, with 2.1% and 4.1% of journeys respectively by this method. 2.7% of trips to West Bromwich are via Metro.

## **Socio-Cultural Profile**

The Indices Of Deprivation provide a measure of relative deprivation levels across England. Deprivation scores are calculated for each district across a number of measures; these are then converted into a national ranking system where a rank of 1 equals the most deprived district in England. The most recent indices from 2010 show that Sandwell was ranked 12<sup>th</sup> of 326 local authority districts, followed by Wolverhampton with a ranking of 21, Walsall 30 and Dudley 104. Measures at the district level can mask pockets of significant deprivation. Each district can be sub-divided into areas called Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA). These are used for the presentation of statistics such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which is part of the national indices. Analysis shows that in 2010 9.4% of Dudley's LSOA were amongst the 10% most deprived in England, compared to 24.3% in Walsall, 26.6% in Wolverhampton and 30.5% in Sandwell.

The percentage of Black Country pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE (and equivalent) grades A\*-C, including English and Maths, showed a continued increase over the five years to 2011, but fell slightly in three of the four districts in 2012. Although results are below the England average of 59.4%, all four districts have narrowed the gap between their results and those at the national level over recent years. 53.8% of Sandwell pupils achieved the standard, along with 56.1% in Dudley, 55.9% in Walsall and 56.7% in Wolverhampton.

Male and female life expectancies are on an upward trend inline with the pattern seen for the West Midlands and England. Data from 2009-2011 shows that male life expectancy at birth in the Black Country districts varies from 76.3 years in Sandwell to 78.7 in Dudley, with 77.3 for both Wolverhampton and Walsall. Women have longer life expectancies, with 81.4 years in Sandwell, 81.6 in Wolverhampton, 82.3 in Walsall and 82.8 in Dudley.

All four districts have expectancies below those of males (78.9) and females (82.9) at the national level.

Childhood obesity levels can be viewed as an indicator of future health issues. Obesity amongst Black Country reception year school children is more prevalent than the 9.5% seen at the England level. Data for 2011/12 reported that 11.2% of reception children in Dudley and Sandwell were obese, compared to 11.3% in Walsall and 13.1% in Wolverhampton.

Crime levels in all four districts have seen a steady and sustained decrease over the past few years. In the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 the crime rates per thousand people were 43.7 in Dudley, 55.7 in Sandwell, 55.8 in Walsall and 64.2 in Wolverhampton.