

West Midlands State of the Region 2023 – 2024



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Research
and Insights

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Introduction

The West Midlands State of the Region is a high-level, annual review of the condition of the West Midlands. It provides context to help understand the region's performance. It brings attention to the opportunities and challenges in our region. This report, for 2023/24, sets out the latest available evidence up to January 2024. However, time lags mean that some data will relate to earlier years. Where available, this report uses evidence for the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) area, which covers the seven constituent metropolitan boroughs of the WMCA: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton.

The WMCA area



- Constituent member
- Non-constituent member

The West Midlands region



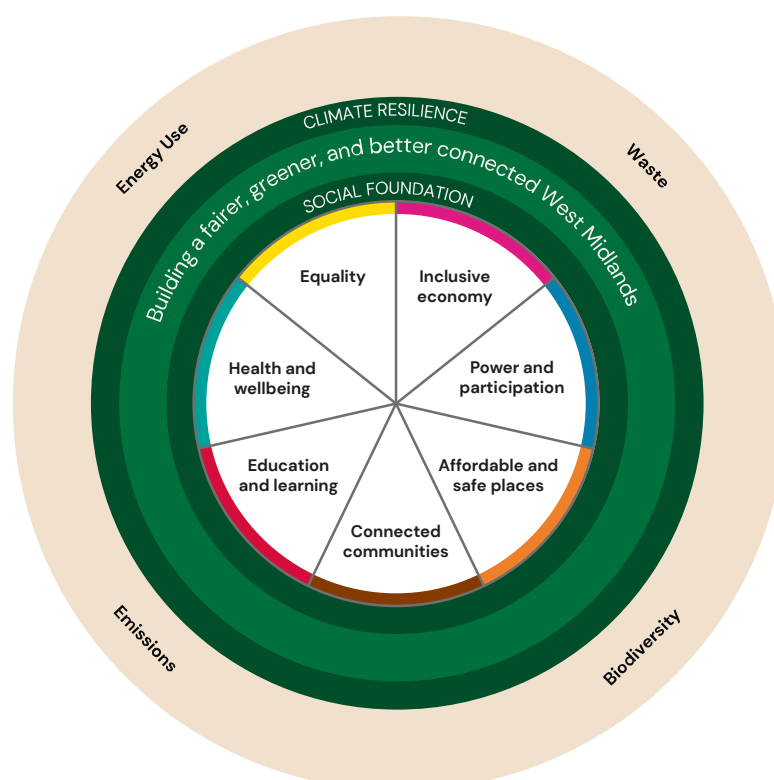
Executive summary

Building a better connected, more prosperous, fairer, greener, and healthier West Midlands requires a recognition and understanding that the challenges faced by the region are complex and multifaceted. Addressing the region's grand challenges, such as increasing economic growth or productivity or reducing carbon emissions, requires solutions that do not see these as isolated problems. Instead, it requires solutions that are framed as part of a holistic, dynamic 'ecosystem,' recognising that people's access to housing, work, skills and leisure opportunities, plus local and regional political, historical, and cultural context all impact and influence on the effectiveness of any solution.

Consequently, this **West Midlands State of the Region report** sets out its key messages and recommendations around the eight **West Midlands Inclusive Growth fundamentals**, which considers all types of investment – public, private, capital, revenue, time, attention – against a clear set of missions. These missions – the eight 'fundamentals' of inclusive growth – also connect to one another, ensuring that the real people, places, and businesses across the region are not lost in thematic silos.

The West Midlands 'trailblazer' deeper devolution deal, and in particular, the new single, departmental-style financial settlement create an unparalleled opportunity to address our grand challenges in a holistic way.

West Midlands Inclusive Growth Fundamentals¹



Demographics and communities

The WMCA area is home to 2.9 million people. It is home to one of the youngest populations in Europe; and one of the most ethnically diverse, with nearly four in ten from an ethnicity other than 'White British.' Over the past decade, the population has grown by some 183,000 people (6.7%) and has become increasingly ethnically diverse.

Climate

Carbon emissions per capita in the WMCA area were 3.6 tonnes per capita in 2021. This is a 0.3 tonne per capita increase from 2020, when emissions would have been reduced by lockdowns during the pandemic. However, the overall trajectory over the past decade demonstrates that the WMCA is heading towards net zero by our target of 2041.

Climate change will disproportionately affect our most deprived communities, with the WMCA climate risk and vulnerability index suggesting that people living in amongst our more deprived communities are at higher risk of overheating and flooding.

The transition to net zero is an opportunity and engine of growth for the WMCA area. However, the effects of climate change disproportionately affect our most deprived communities – and efforts must be made to mitigate against the worst effects of climate change through retrofitting homes and through nature-based solutions.

Inclusive economy

The latest available data, for 2021, suggests that the size of the WMCA area economy, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), is £74.2bn. This amounts to 3.5% of the UK's economy. The WMCA area economy has grown by 8.6% from 2020 to 2021. It has grown more slowly than the UK overall (8.9%). Additionally, the economy remains 4.8% smaller than it was than before the pandemic, when it was £77.9bn. This is in contrast to before the pandemic when economic growth in the WMCA area was better than the UK overall.

If the WMCA area's economy was divided equally between our 2.9 million people, our GDP per capita will be £25,437. This, however, masks significant diversity across the WMCA area, which ranges from just £19,638 in Walsall to £48,359 in Solihull – and there are further disparities within each local authority area.

GDP per capita, however, does not consider or measure how well income or wealth is created and shared across the whole population and place. In 2022, household incomes in the WMCA area varied from a median annual income of £21,209 in Castle Vale Ward in Birmingham to £59,666 in Dorridge and Hockley Heath Ward in Solihull. The gap between GDP per capita and gross disposable household income (GDHI) per capita has remained roughly consistent over the past few years.

While our economy has grown, it has grown more slowly than the UK overall – in contrast to before the pandemic. Our Plan for Growth sets out a number of strategic growth clusters where the WMCA area has a comparative advantage – and it is absolutely right that we focus on them. Our inclusive growth approach posits that the only way we can fully unlock the economic potential of the region is for there to be opportunity for all to participate and benefit from the proceeds of growth.

Power and participation

The vast majority (80%) of people across the West Midlands region are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. They are also more likely to trust local politicians and local councils most (74%) to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.

However, only 59% are satisfied with the way that their local Councils in the region run things – and only a quarter (24%) feel they have the ability to influence decisions that impact their local area – although this mirrors trends nationally. This is reflected in low voter turnout at local elections, with turnout ranging from 25.9% in Sandwell to 32.9% in Solihull in 2022, compared to an average of 34.3% across all local authorities.

Far too many residents still feel they have no influence over how things are run. The deeper devolution deal brings power and control to make decisions that matter to local residents back to the West Midlands – and in the implementation of the deal, the WMCA must ensure that residents and communities are included and involved in decision-making.

Affordable and safe places

5% of all habitable homes in the WMCA have been built since 2016 – contributing to the target of 215,000 new homes by 2031 with 20% being genuinely affordable. There are, however, vast differences, with some areas seeing even bigger growth: one in ten homes in Coventry have been built in the past decade.

This housebuilding has been much needed, as the West Midlands region is an expensive place to rent a home, with only residents in London, the South East, and the South West spending more of their incomes on rent. From April 2022 to March 2023, the average renter in the West Midlands region paid 4.3% more in rent; compared to an average increase in England of 3.8%.

With rising interest rates, mortgage repayments have become more costly for homeowners. Between December 2021 and December 2022, the indicative monthly mortgage payment in the West Midlands region has increased by some £428 for the average semi-detached house. In 2023, some 5,600 households across the WMCA area are living in temporary accommodation, that is, one out of every 200 households. This is roughly comparable to Greater Manchester – but the number of households in temporary accommodation continues to grow.

Rough sleeping has increased post-pandemic but has now stabilised.

Inflation has put pressure on household finances for homeowners and renters alike, with increases in monthly rental and mortgage costs. There is a need to recognise that the impacts of inflation have been different across income groups and places – doing so will help us design out homelessness and reverse the recent increase in rough sleeping. Given that the next biggest household costs are transport costs and food, investments and support with travel costs is also an important consideration in reducing cost pressures for households.

Connected communities

In the year to September 2023, over one-third of trips in the WMCA area involved active travel such as walking or cycling. This may be driven by cost of living pressures.

The volume of traffic on our roads has returned to near pre-pandemic levels, with 10.2 billion vehicle miles undertaken in 2022, just 0.5 billion vehicle miles (around 5 percentage points) less than the 10.7 billion in 2019. Public transportation usage has also increased – but has not returned to pre- pandemic levels.

Outside of London, the West Midlands region has gone the furthest in rolling out 5G connectivity to residents. In 2023, 51% of residents had access to a 5G network, compared to an average of 37% across England.

As economic growth rebounded after the pandemic, use of both public transport and the road network has increased. Investment into physical connectivity is essential to unlock the economic potential of the region, enabling residents and communities to access employment opportunities – as well as leisure and cultural events with friends and family. However, it is also important to recognise that many journeys involve active travel – and improving walking and cycling is just as important. In terms of digital connectivity, the WMCA area is one of the best digitally connected places in the UK, with access to high speed broadband and widespread 5G coverage. However, there are still communities at risk of digital exclusion.

Education and learning

In 2021, 54.9% of the working aged population in the WMCA area is qualified to level 3 or above (A-level or equivalent). While this has increased from around 42.2% a decade ago, this trails the West Midlands Region's rate of 57.2% and national rate of 61.5%.

In 2023, a smaller proportion of young people aged 16-17 in the WMCA area were not in education, employment, or training (4.8%) than in Greater Manchester (5.7%) or England (5.2%).

Encouragingly, more young people are entering higher education: more than half of Birmingham's young people enter higher education, and regional disparities in higher education participation have decreased.

Post-pandemic, school absences has skyrocketed, which will have downstream impact on our future 6 workforce.

Far too many people in the WMCA area still do not have a level 3 qualification. This places a ceiling on many people's employment, earnings, and puts them at risk of poorer life outcomes. Further investment enabling people to get a level 3 qualification, and ensuring that young people have the support they need to stay in school and succeed is essential to ensure that the WMCA area has a high-quality workforce that attracts inward investment.

Health and wellbeing

In 2018 - 2020, life expectancy in the WMCA area was 81.9 years for women and 77.6 years for men. People in the area continue to die earlier than the England average (83.1 years for women and 79.4 years for men). Aligning with national trends, life expectancy in the WMCA area has declined (from 82.2 years for women and 78 years for men in 2016 - 2018).

The impact of poor health extends beyond people and their families; it also affects the ability of our region's economy to thrive and generate value for reinvestment in our communities.

Strategies and policies need to address the declining life expectancy in the WMCA area need to focus on preventing ill health and addressing the causes of chronic illness. This is best done by ensuring that every strategy and policy promotes health and wellbeing – a health in all policies approach.

Equality

The WMCA area is amongst the most diverse areas in England. There are significant differences faced by people with a protected characteristic, from their access to a private car or natural spaces to their household income, and housing.

Addressing inequalities faced by people with a protected characteristic so that everyone has a fair chance in life is a fundamental part of creating a thriving economy and flourishing society.

The West Midlands region gender pay gap, the difference between average earnings between women and men, was 10.8% in 2022. This is a smaller pay gap than the England average.

The West Midlands region disability pay gap, the difference between average earnings between disabled people and non-disabled people, was 14.7% in 2021. This is a bigger pay gap than the England average.

To ensure that everybody in the WMCA area benefits from growth, factors that lead to inequalities in life chances faced by our diverse communities must be addressed. Our investments – from public transport to housing – can help address and reduce those inequalities.

In detail

Demographics and communities

Why is this important?

The WMCA area is young and highly ethnically diverse, with almost half of the population from an ethnic minority. Understanding how our demographics and communities are changing is essential for strategic planning.

What are the current conditions?

Population

On Census Day in 2021, there were **2,919,654** residents in the WMCA area. This has increased from 2,736,460 ten years ago.²



Age

One third (33.6%) of the WMCA area population is under the age of 25. This is higher than the England average of 29%.³ Our median age is 38 years; two years lower than the England average of 40 years.⁴

People of an ethnic minority group in the WMCA area are, on average, younger than people of a White ethnic group in the West Midlands.⁵ Of the under-24 population, 50.7% are from an ethnic minority group and 49.3% from a White ethnic group. In contrast, of the 65+ population, 15.8% are from an ethnic minority group and 84.2% from a White ethnic group.

Ethnicity

The WMCA area is the second-most ethnically diverse area in the country (after London). 55.8% of the population in the West Midlands identifying as White British, compared to 71.4% nationally.⁶

This report uses the term ‘ethnic minority.’ However, we acknowledge and recognise that such umbrella terms do not fully capture the diverse experiences and cultures of our different communities, nor does it capture the inequality that some minority white communities face. This report sets out to be as specific as possible about communities as data and evidence allows.⁷

Within the WMCA area, Dudley has the lowest percentage of people from an ethnic minority group, at 17.6%, and Birmingham has the highest, becoming one of the first ‘super diverse’ cities in the UK where ethnic minority groups make up the majority of the population, at 57.1%.

Disability

19.1% of people in the WMCA area are disabled. This is higher than the English national average of 17.7%.⁸

Of those with a disability, 74.7% are White, 14.6% are Asian, 5.3% are Black, 3.3% are Mixed and 2.1% are from an Other ethnic group. In the WMCA area, a greater proportion of disabled people have a White ethnicity than the proportion of White people in the general population. Conversely, all ethnic minority groups show a lower proportion of disabled people than the general population. This is because the average age for people from a White ethnic group is higher than the average age for people from an ethnic minority group – disability prevalence increases with age.

34.8% of disabled people in the WMCA area are aged 65+; compared to 7.5% of people aged 15 or under.

Gender and gender identity

51% of people in the WMCA area are women and 49% are men.

Roughly one in 400 people identify as transgender or nonbinary. In the WMCA area, 93.1% of the population have a gender identity that is the same as their sex that was registered at birth. This falls closely in line with the England national average of 93.5%.⁹

7.5% of the population have a gender identity that is different from their sex registered at birth.¹⁰

Note that it is important to consider the high likelihood that not all LGBT+ people will have disclosed this to their cohabitants and cohabitants may also be unwilling to disclose this in some instances.

Sexual orientation

Of those that declared a sexuality in the 2021 census, 97.1% identified as straight or heterosexual, and 2.9% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other minority sexual orientation. 8.1% did not declare an orientation.¹¹

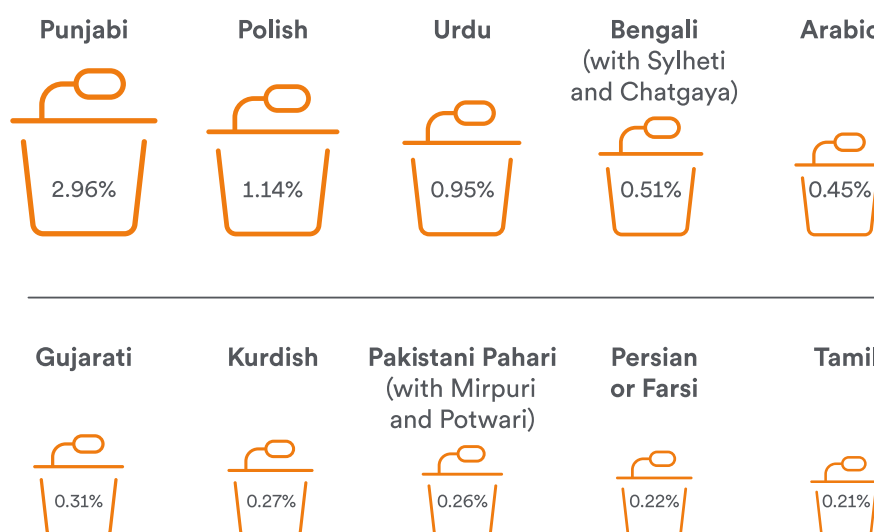
This is similar to the national figure of 96.6% and 3.4% respectively.¹²

It is important to consider the high likelihood that not all LGBT+ people will have disclosed this to their cohabitants and cohabitants may also be unwilling to disclose this in some instances.

Languages

88.1% of people in the WMCA area speak English as a first language. This is lower than the national average of 90.8%.¹³

The top ten languages spoken other than English in the WMCA area are:



Religion

66.4% of people in the WMCA area connected to or identified a religious affiliation in the 2021 Census.¹⁴ This is the highest of any combined authority area. The top religions in the WMCA area are: Christian (40.7%); Muslim (17.2%); Sikh (5.1%); and Hindu (2.3%).

27.9% described themselves as “no religion” – while this is an increase of 7.6 percentage points, it is the lowest proportion of people with “no religion” in any combined authority area.

The highest proportion of people reporting Sikh as their religion across all local authorities in England were Wolverhampton (12%) and Sandwell (11.5%).

Of those with a Christian faith, the greatest proportion are of White ethnicity (81.0%) and the lowest proportion are of Other ethnicity (1.0%). Of those with a Muslim faith, the greatest proportion are of an Asian ethnicity (74.8%) and the lowest proportion are of a White ethnicity (2.0%).

Of those with a Christian faith the greatest proportion (26%) was people aged 65+, with the lowest (8.6%) aged 16 to 24. This is likely due to a greater proportion of people with a Christian faith having a White ethnicity coupled with the White ethnicity having an older median age.

Conversely, of those with a Muslim faith the greatest proportion (32.9%) were aged 15 and under, with the lowest (4.3%) aged 65+. This is likely due to a greater proportion of people with a Muslim faith being ethnic minorities coupled with ethnic minorities having a younger median age.

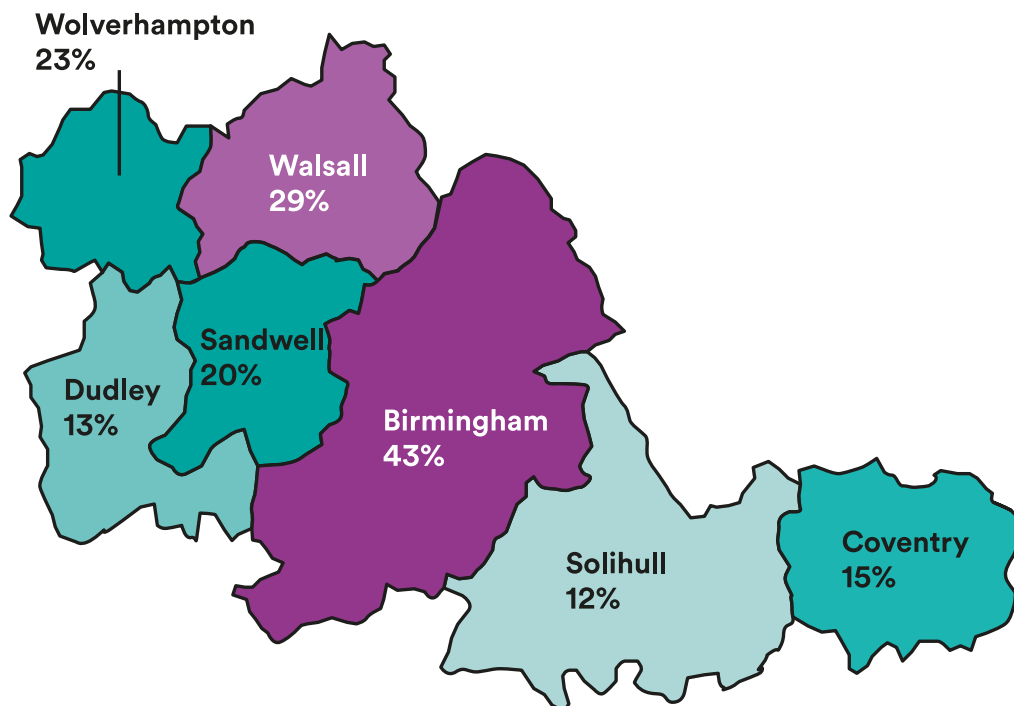
Deprivation

The English Indices of Deprivation (2019) provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small neighbourhood areas. It is based on seven different domains of deprivation: income, employment, education/skills/training; health & disability; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment.

28% of the West Midlands Combined Authority population are living in amongst England's top 10% most deprived areas.¹⁵

35% of children (aged 0-15 years) in the WMCA area are living in amongst England's top 10% most deprived areas.

% of population living amongst England's top 10% most deprived areas



Climate

Why is this important?

In 2019, the WMCA declared a climate emergency and vowed to take urgent action to cut harmful emissions.

There are limits to the capacity to which our social and economic ecosystems can cope with the multiple risks, uncertainty and threats posed by climate change. We can become more resilient to climate change if we work within the planetary limits, or by making adaptations which increase our ability to cope with the risks, uncertainties, and threats.

The climate fundamental reminds us that continuous growth is not sustainable if we use up natural resources faster than the Earth can renew them.

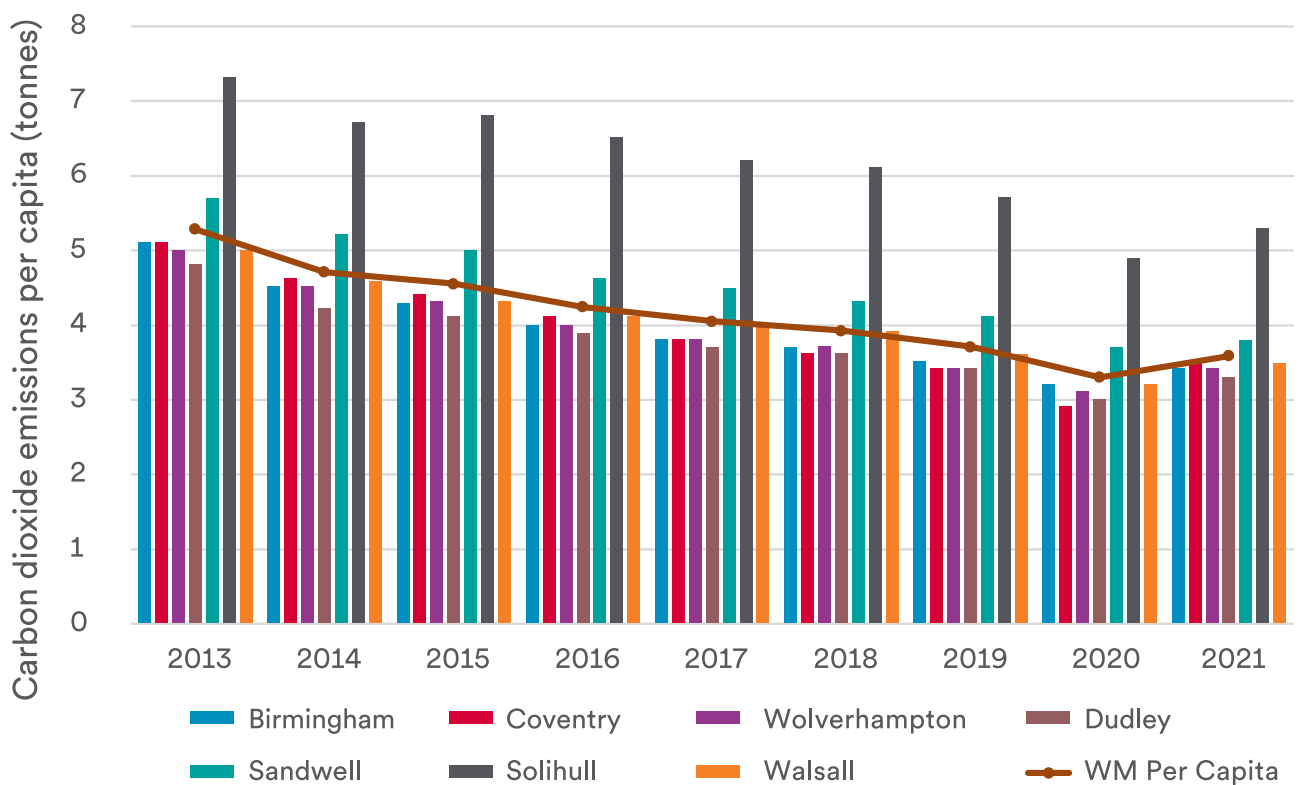
What are the current conditions?

Internationally, progress towards meeting climate goals are not enough. In December 2023, COP28 reinforced the 1.5°C goal and recognised the need for a 43% reduction in emissions by 2030 and 60% by 2035 relative to the 2019 level. The agreement made history by including language on reducing usage of fossil fuels, although this arguably did not go far enough. Agreement was met to triple renewable energy capacity globally and double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030. Limited progress was made on climate adaptation and finance, although the Loss and Damage fund was operationalised, with major detail still to be worked out. The agreement recognised the funding gap of trillions of dollars for adaptation and climate finance.

Nationally, the Government has committed to becoming Net Zero by 2050. However, the remains substantial policy gap UK' goal. In the 2023 progress report, the UK's Climate Change Committee, a non-departmental public body, expressed concerns to Parliament about the pace of change required to meet the UK's climate goals over the 2030s.

The WMCA has declared a climate emergency and aims for the WMCA area to be Net Zero by 2041. Carbon emissions per capita has decreased by 32% between 2013 and 2021, from 5.3 tonnes per capita to 3.6 tonnes per capita.¹⁶ While there is a 0.3 tonne per capita increase from 2020, the result in 2020 was reduced by lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two primary contributors to carbon emissions are residents using energy in their homes, and transport, with each factor the source of around a third of the WMCA area's carbon emissions in 2021.¹⁷

Carbon emissions has declined across the WMCA area between 2013 -2021, but there has been a slight increase between 2020 and 2021



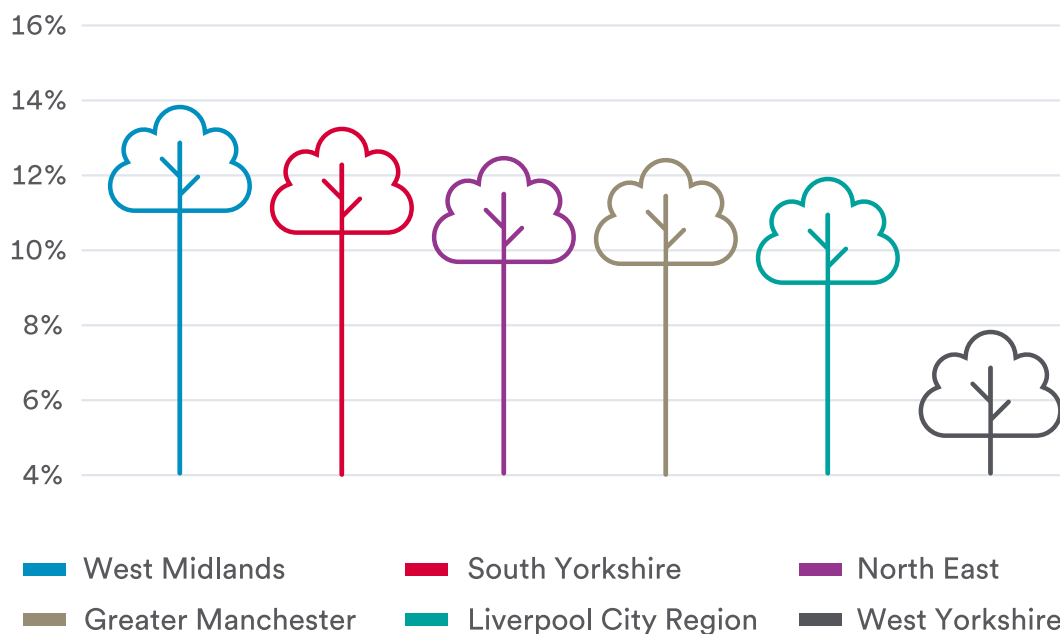
The biggest contributors to carbon emissions are domestic household and transport emissions.



The amount of waste sent to landfill per capita has declined consistently over the last half decade, with this number remaining firmly below the English average throughout this period.¹⁸

Despite its urban environment, the WMCA area is amongst the leafiest combined authority areas. The WMCA area enjoys an average tree coverage amongst constituent members of 13.7%, higher than any other combined authority with over one million residents.¹⁹

Tree coverage in the WMCA area is higher than in other combined authority areas

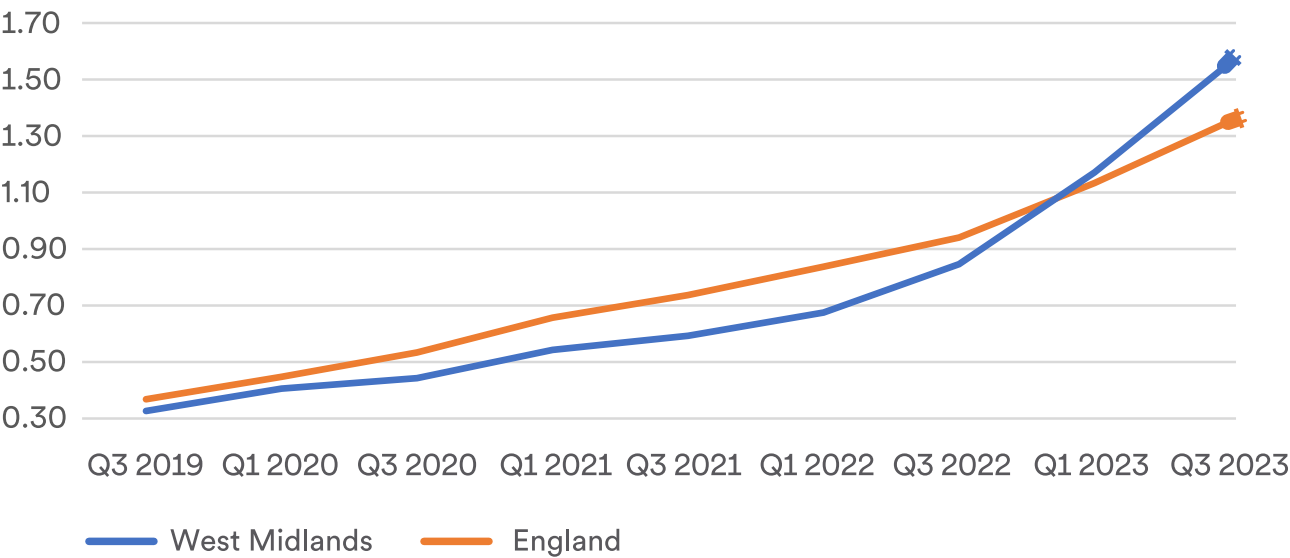


There is variation in tree coverage across the WMCA, with Birmingham having the highest tree coverage, and Coventry having the lowest tree coverage

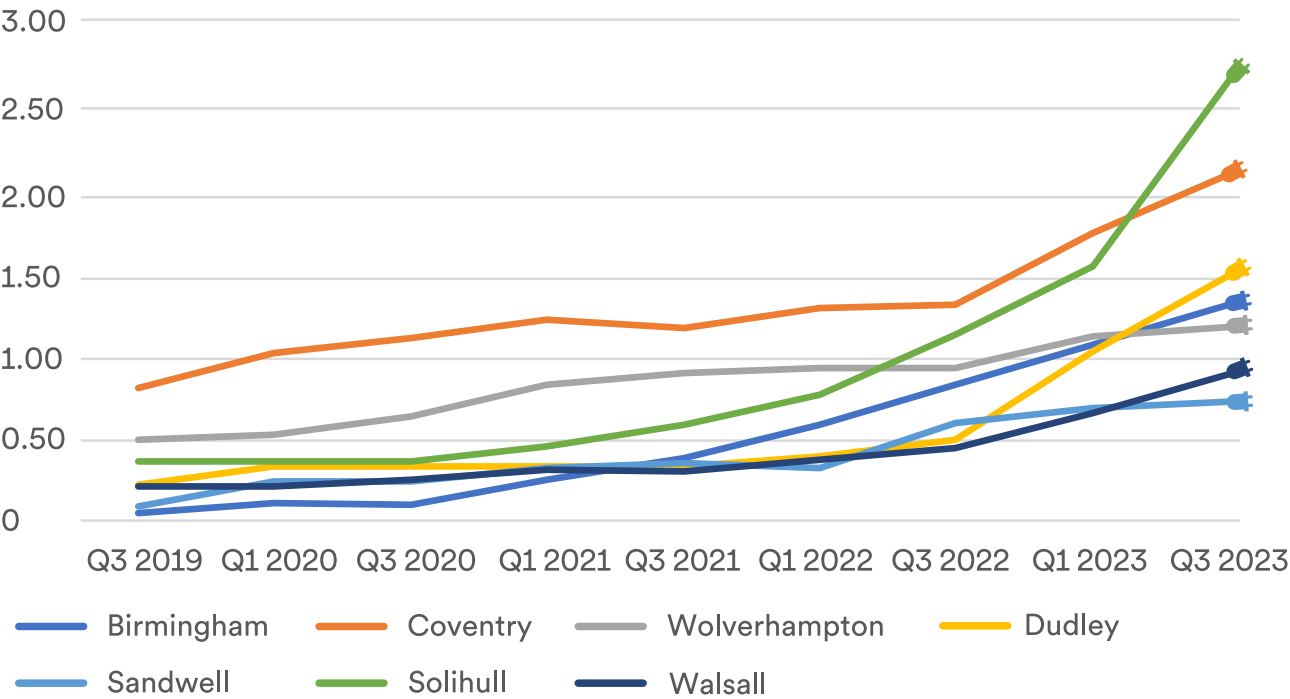


The availability of rapid electric vehicle charging devices in the WMCA area is above the national average. After lagging slightly behind for the last few years, the WMCA area has seen a significant uptick in its provision of rapid electric vehicle chargers, making it a more viable place to use an electric vehicle than much of the rest of England.²⁰

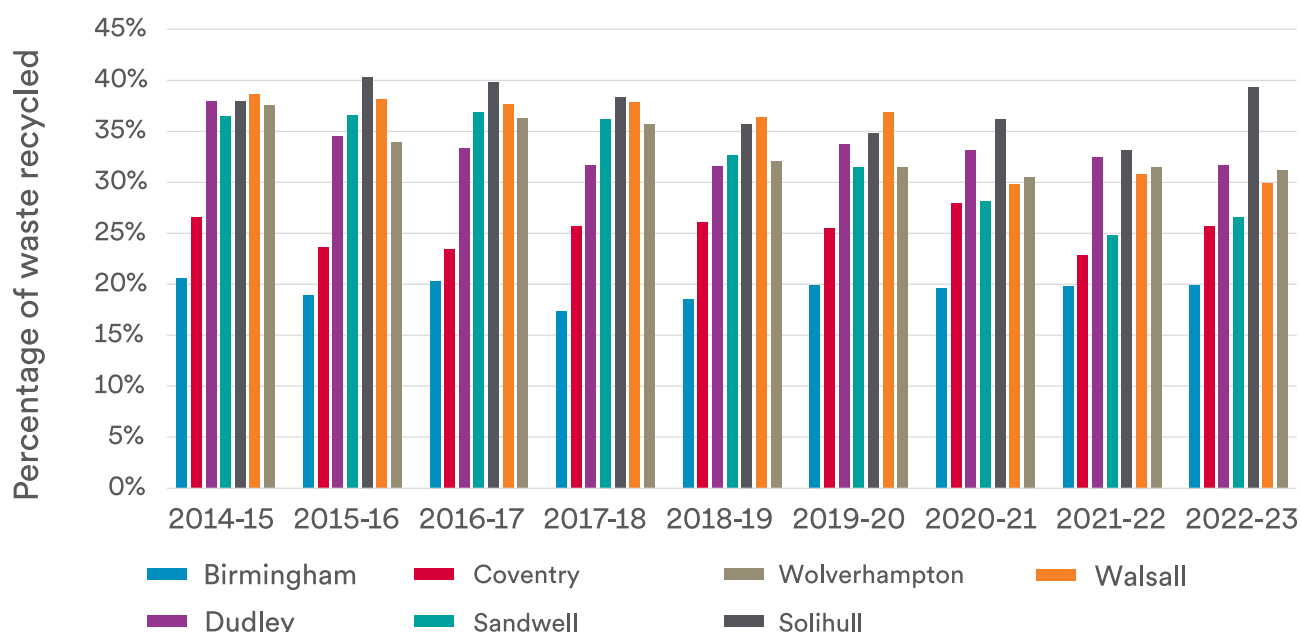
There are now more rapid electric vehicle chargers per 10,000 residents in the WMCA area than the England average



Rapid electric vehicle charging per 10,000 residents has increased across all seven constituent local authorities



Stark disparities between areas, however, still persist: CO2 emissions per capita in Solihull have remained over a tonne higher than elsewhere in the WMCA, partly explained by the presence of a number of key regional economic assets which inevitably result in higher carbon emissions; the amount of waste being sent to landfill per capita across constituent local authorities fluctuates significantly; and tree coverage in areas, particularly Coventry, lag behind elsewhere in the WMCA area.



Climate change will disproportionately affect our most deprived communities, with the WMCA climate risk and vulnerability index suggesting that people living in amongst our more deprived communities are at higher risk of the effects of climate change. In particular, three areas: the Black Country, central Birmingham, and east Coventry emerge as most vulnerable to climate change across a full range of indicators.²¹

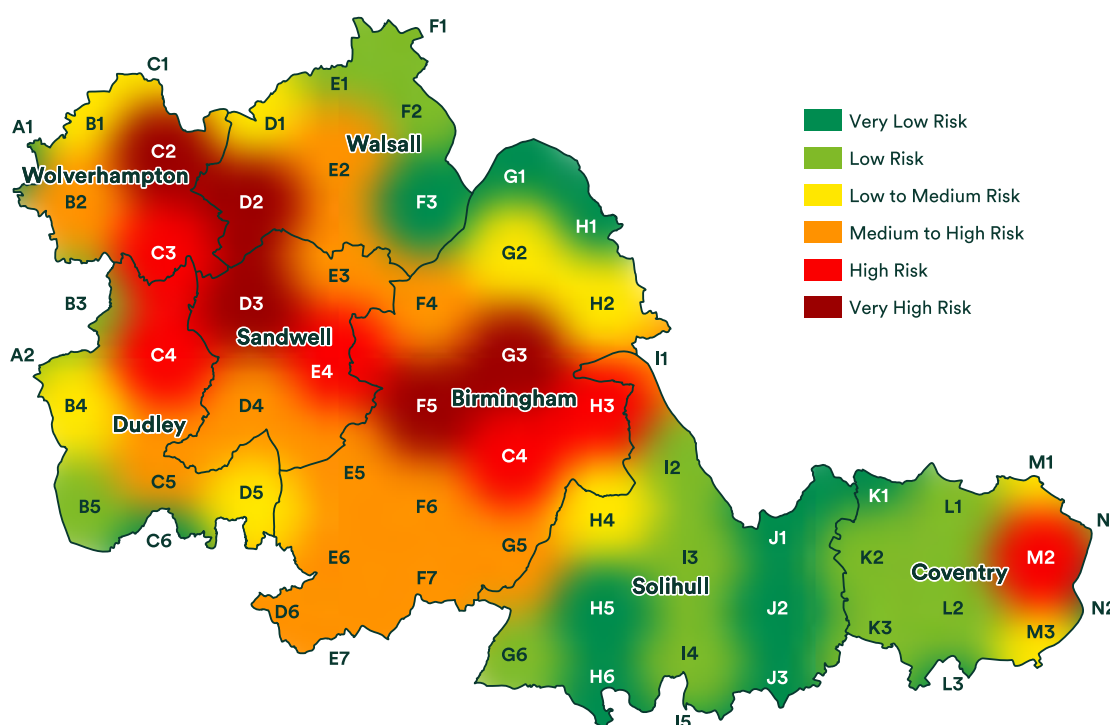
What can be, and is being done?

To reach Net Zero by 2041, the WMCA has put in a five-year plan to reduce carbon usage in the WMCA area by 33% across local transport, homes, and businesses by 2026. This has seen us retrofitting thousands of homes, investing in renewable energy sources for the West Midlands, making interventions in local transport to encourage more walking and cycling, increasing tree planting, encouraging growth in new sustainable sectors, and sponsoring training programmes to get the West Midlands' workforce ready for the net zero transition.

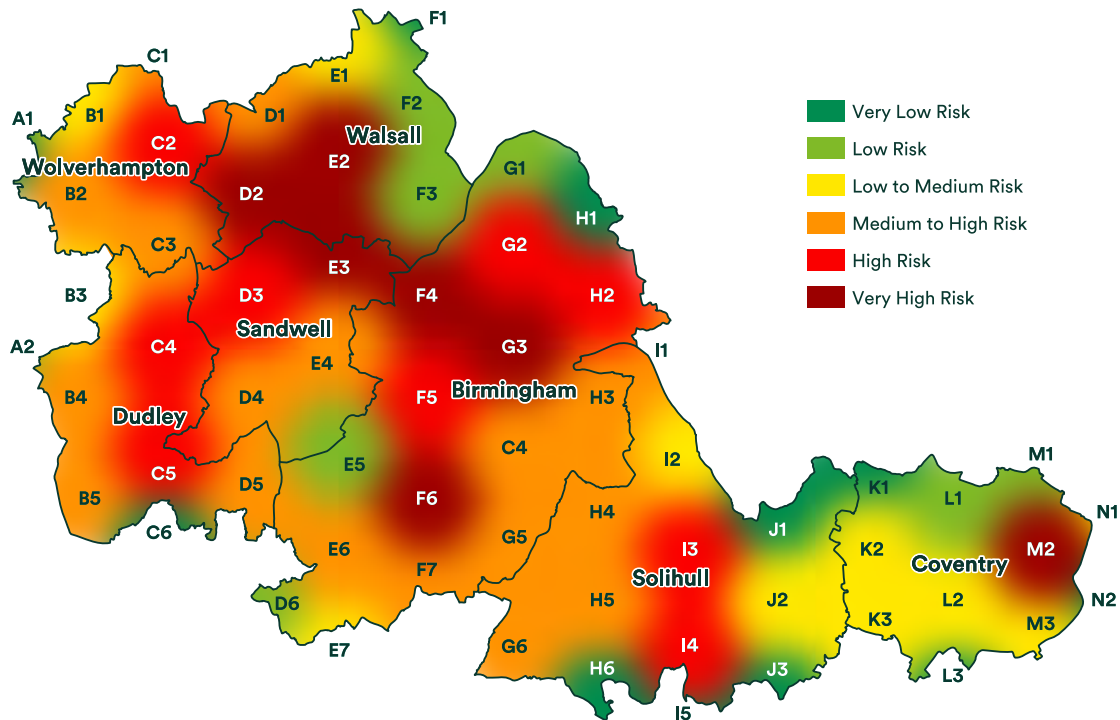
The transition to net zero is an opportunity and engine of growth for the WMCA. There are costs involved – but programmes ranging from housing retrofit to renewable energy has the potential to generate significant good work opportunities in 'green' jobs in line with the Plan for Growth.

The effects of climate change disproportionately affect our most deprived communities – and efforts must be made to mitigate against the worst effects of climate change everywhere, and in particular, in our most deprived communities at the highest risks of overheating and flooding.

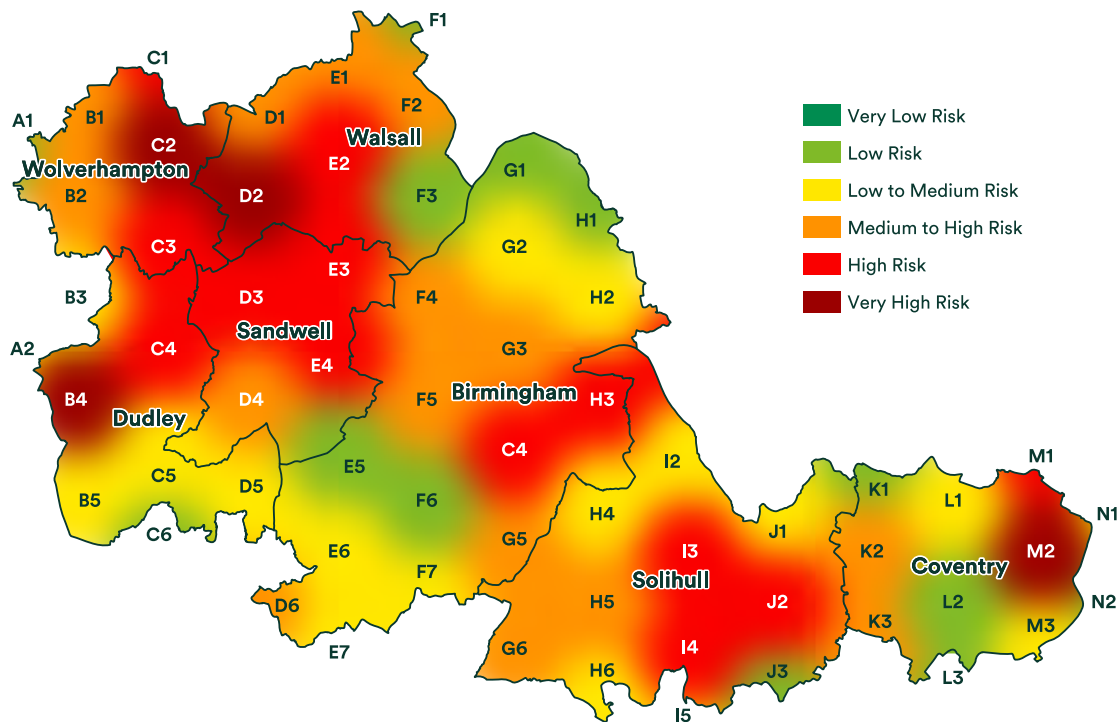
People-related climate vulnerability hotspots in the WMCA area²²



Infrastructure-related climate vulnerability hotspots in the WMCA area²³



Natural environment-related climate vulnerability hotspots in the WMCA area²⁴



Inclusive economy

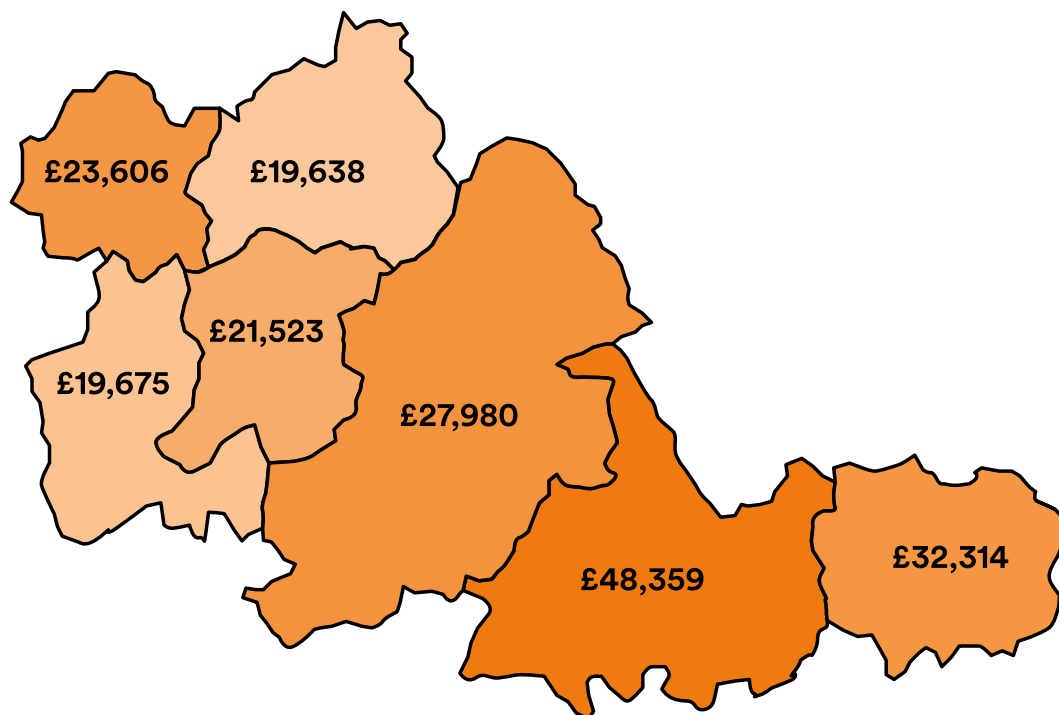
Why is this important?

An inclusive economy is one in which everyone has a part to play. The economy is flourishing and sustainable, and everyone benefits from it. This contrasts with an economy where a small group of people benefit first, and where wealth is then redistributed later or trickled down.

What are the current conditions?

The WMCA area economy remains 4.8% smaller in 2021 – the latest available year – than before the pandemic. The economy of the WMCA area as measured by gross value added was £66.6 billion in 2021. The economy was growing in the mid-2010s but has since stalled. Between 2020 and 2021, the economy grew in the region by 6.1%. This was preceded by a fall of 10.2% the year before - during the pandemic.²⁵

There are large differences in gross domestic product per capita across the WMCA area



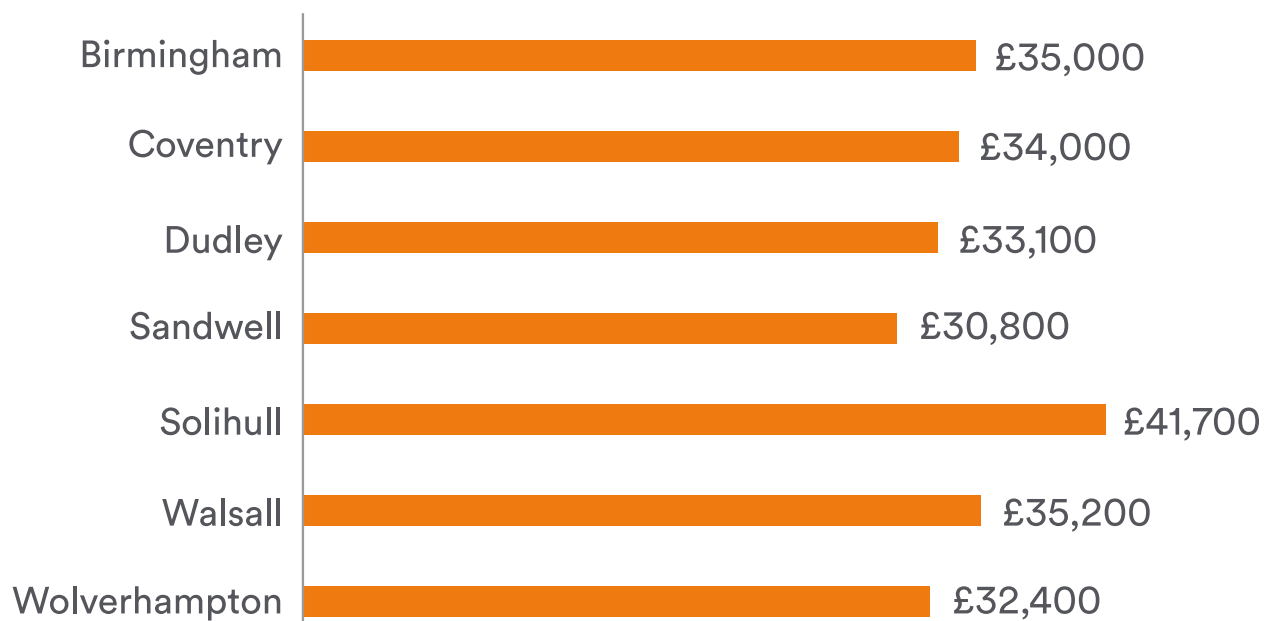
In 2022/23, inward investment into the wider former three West Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership areas was at its highest level since 2016.²⁶ In 2022/23, there were 160 foreign direct investment (FDI) projects, creating an estimated 7,605 jobs. This is the best result since 2018 when there were 140 FDI projects, creating some 7,933 jobs. Nationally, in 2022/23, job creation as a result of FDI has decreased – suggesting that WMCA area has bucked the trend.

Faster-moving metrics for the wider West Midlands region suggests that the economy has continued to recover in 2022 and 2023. Regional export of goods in the year to September 2023 reached £34.1 billion – an increase of some £6.2 billion (up 22%) compared to the year to September 2022.²⁷ This is higher than the previous peak before the pandemic, in the year to September 2019.

The reduction in productivity has been driven by a decline in the manufacturing sector since 2017. A reduction in manufacturing from 2017-18 can be largely explained by a sharp contraction in output by Jaguar Land Rover at their plant at Lode Lane. While other parts of the WMCA area have seen growth in their manufacturing sectors since 2019, the same is not true of Solihull or Coventry.

While wealth created in the region has increased, it is not always reaching the people and communities across the West Midlands. While there has been increases in both gross domestic product (GDP), a measure of the wealth produced by the region in a given period, and gross disposable household income (GDHI), a measure of the wealth creation kept by its residents, in 2020-21, there are substantial gaps in the two measures, especially in Birmingham, Coventry, and Solihull. As the economy bounced back from the pandemic, GDP rose by 8.6% after falling by 12.3% the year before.²⁸ GDHI remained the same between 2019 and 2020 before rising slightly through to 2021 by 0.6%.²⁹ Thus, while GDP is yet to recover from the pandemic, GDHI has marginally improved. Comparing the top 10% and bottom 10% of incomes, a measure of how wealth is distributed, reveals much higher inequality in Solihull than the rest of the WMCA, with Sandwell being the least unequal.

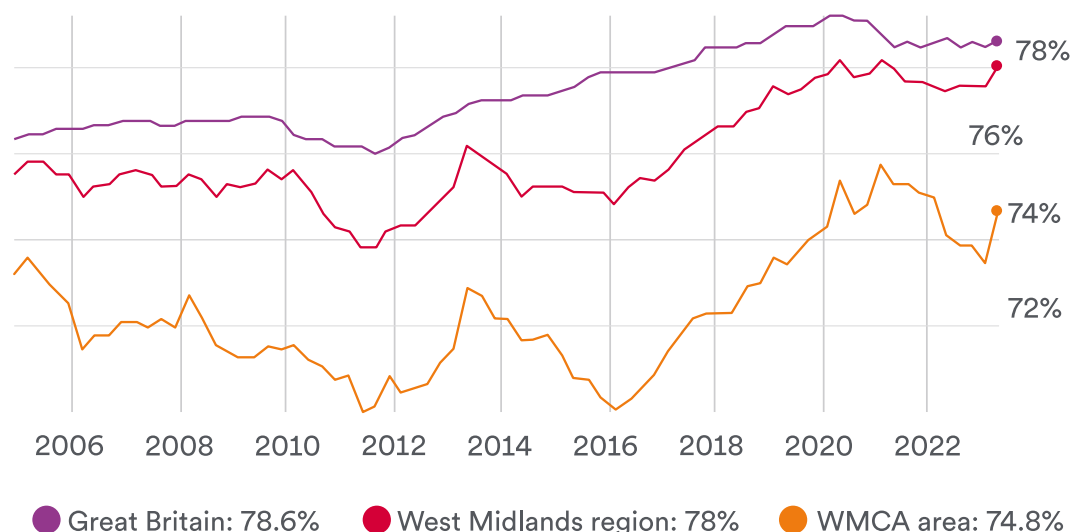
On average, the top 10% of households in the WMCA area have a household income of £36,000 more than the bottom 10% of households



Manufacturing, transportation and storage, education, and human health and social work industries remain comparatively strong in the West Midlands. Other parts of the UK are stronger in areas such as information and communication, financial and insurance, real estate, and professional, scientific, and technical industries.

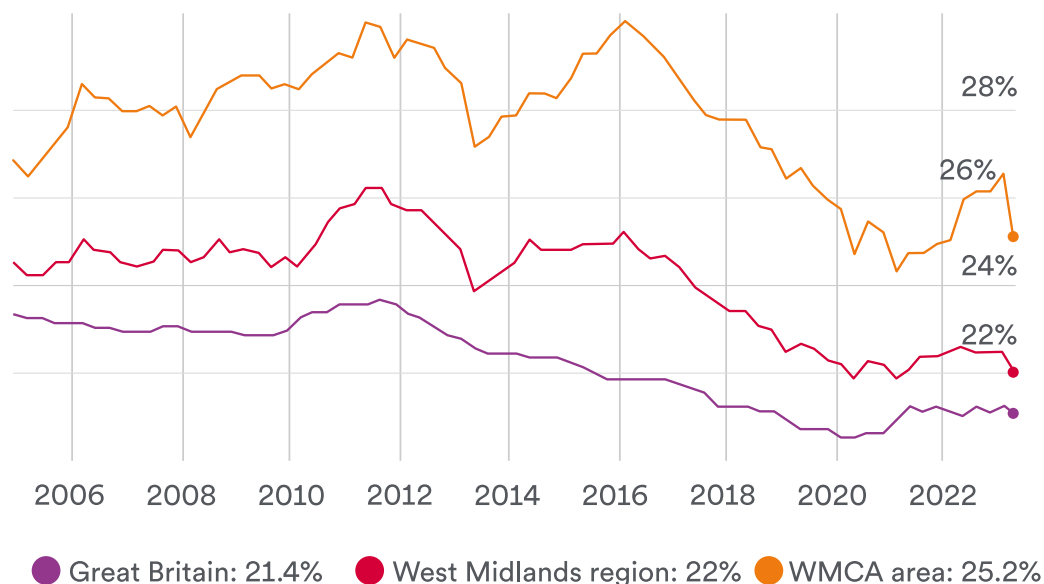
Estimates suggest that a greater proportion of people in the WMCA area are economically active than a year ago and that there is a decrease in people who are economically inactive – narrowing the gap with England. In the year to June 2023, around 1.4 million people, or 74.8% of the working aged population in the WMCA area were economically active.³⁰ This has increased from 74.1% in the year to June 2022 – however it is still below the peak of 75.7% in March 2021. Note that this is not statistically significant; but longer-term trends do show that progress has been made, with the gap between the WMCA area and England has narrowed from 7.7 percentage points in the year to March 2016 (70.1% in the WMCA area vs 77.8% for England) to 3.8 percentage points in the year to June 2023 (74.8% vs 78.6%).

The proportion of working aged population that are economically active population in the WMCA area (orange) has consistently lagged that of the West Midlands region (red), and Great Britain (purple).



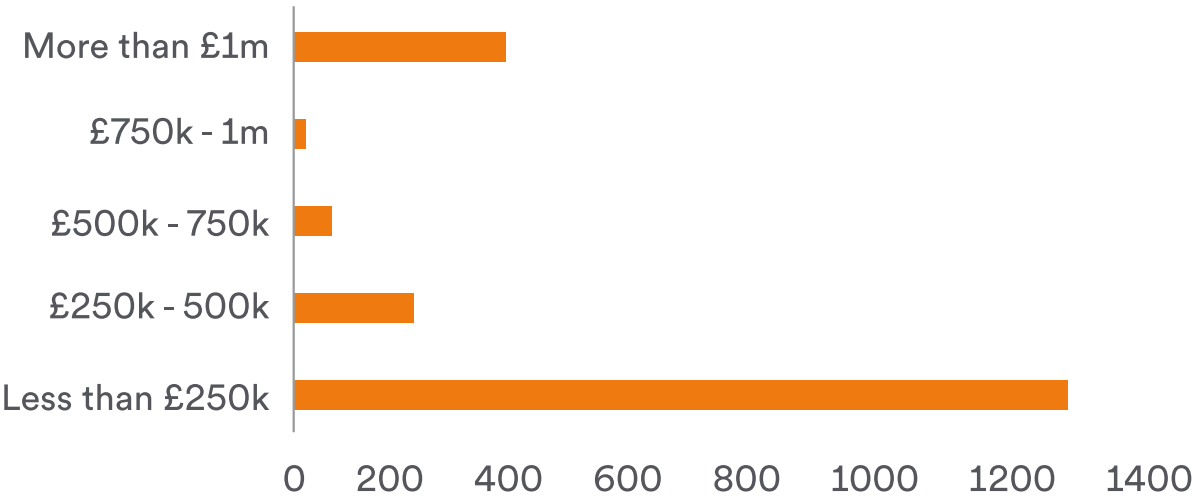
The proportion of people who are economically inactive has reduced – and the gap with England has narrowed. Post-pandemic, there was an increase in economic inactivity, peaking at 26.5% in the WMCA area in the year to March 2023, with a gap of 4.9% with England (21.6%). This has now reduced. In the year to June 2023, 25.2% of people in the WMCA area are economically inactive, compared to 21.4% in England – a gap of 3.8 percentage points. As above, this change is not statistically significant but longer-term trends suggest that the gap between the WMCA area and England has narrowed – back in March 2016, some 29.9% of the WMCA area population was economically inactive – a gap of 7.7 percentage point with England (22.2%).³¹

Proportion of working aged population that are economically inactive population in the WMCA area (orange), West Midlands region (red), and Great Britain (purple) in 2005-2023.

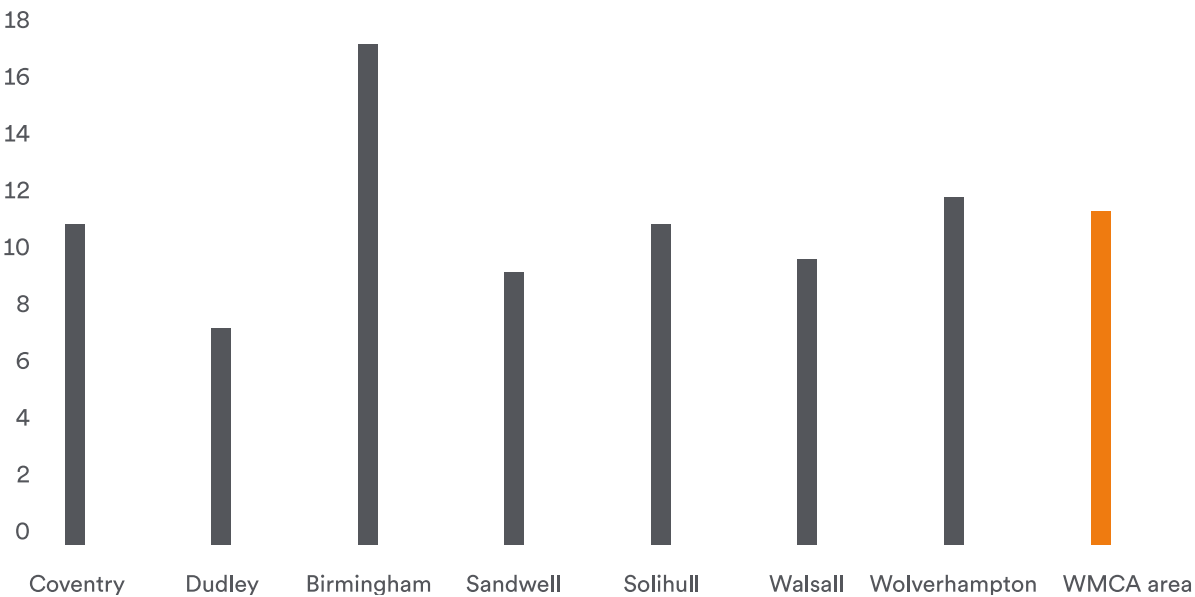


The social economy in the WMCA area has grown by some 18% since the pandemic – but there has been major churn in the sector. In 2023, over 10,000 social economy organisations are in operation in the West Midlands Region, an increase from approximately 8,500 before the pandemic.³² The social economy is a collective term for all ‘not for personal profit’ organisations that exist to improve disadvantaged communities, support disadvantaged people, and address social or environmental issues but do so using a trading (business) model to generate the majority or all the funds they need. Whilst growth sounds positive, it obscures the fact that 1,500 social businesses have closed since 2019. New organisations bring agility and fresh ideas, but established ones offer proven methods and accumulated wisdom.

Number of trading social businesses by turnover, WMCA



Trading social businesses per 10,000 population by local authority



What can be, and is being done?

The WMCA's Plan for Growth³³ has identified strategic growth clusters where the WMCA has comparative advantages. Re-doubling efforts to focus on these clusters is key to unlocking the economic potential of the region and to grow the economy. The clusters include: creative content production and gaming; health tech and med tech; professional and financial services and supply chain; aerospace; logistics and distribution; modern and low carbon utilities; manufacture of future housing; and manufacturing of electric light vehicles and associated battery devices.

Fully unlocking our economic potential requires ensuring that everybody has the opportunity to participate and benefit from the proceeds of growth. Increasing growth and reducing inequality is not a trade-off: reducing the barriers faced by people in accessing economic opportunities has a significant positive impact on the growth potential of our regional economy. For the West Midlands, this means working to ensure that people living in the West Midlands has access to the opportunities created by Plan for Growth through the deeper devolution levers on housing and regeneration, local growth, transport, skills – which will, in turn, attracts inward investment.

Targeted specialist business support can help our businesses grow. Business Growth West Midlands provides businesses across the West Midlands with expert advice on funding and growing their companies, expanding their businesses, further help to decarbonise, reduce energy costs, and make them more sustainable. Additionally, specialist support is provided to social enterprises as part of the WMCA's programme to double the size and impact of the Social Economy.

Power and participation

Why is this important?

Power and participation are about the extent to which people have a voice in influencing the things that matter to them. People who feel that they have power over their own personal circumstances will feel a greater share in the prospects of a place. Those who feel that they can participate and shape the places in which they live and work, will feel a greater sense of belonging.

What are the current conditions?

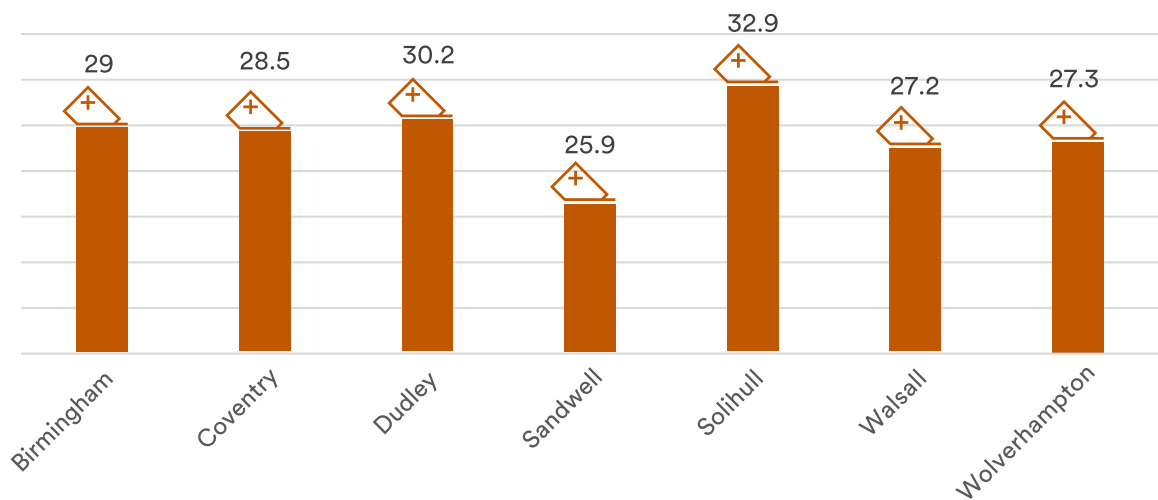
In the West Midlands region, the belief among our residents that they can influence decisions affecting their local area is low. A key concern is voter turnout at elections which is lower across the region than the national average for both local and general elections.

Volunteering rates in the West Midlands region are in line with the national average, although there is a decline in volunteering rates both locally and nationally over the last decade.

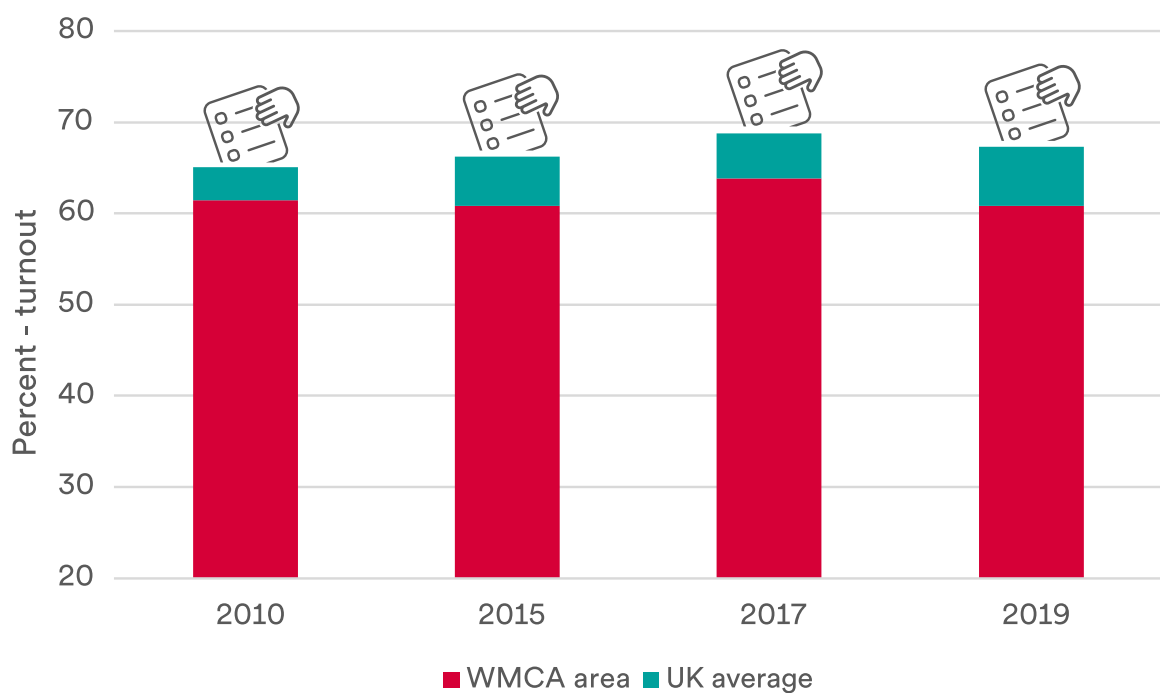
80% of respondents in the West Midlands region are satisfied with their local area as a place to live in.³⁴ This is in line with the overall rate for the UK (80%). 74% of residents in the Region say they are likely to trust their local councillors most to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area similar to the 72% for the UK. Satisfaction with local councils, however, trails that, with just 59% of respondents in the West Midlands satisfied with the way that Councils runs things; similar to the 63% for the UK.

Less than one-third of eligible voters exercised their democratic right to vote in local elections. Turnout in local elections in 2022 (the latest year with complete data) remained low, as it has been for the last decade.³⁵ Whilst participation in local elections is low across the UK, every part of the WMCA area still saw lower turnout than the national average - even Solihull, where turnout has climbed by 11% in the last decade. While broadly in line with the rest of the UK, voter turnout is a sign of the vitality of democracy, and the low turnout may reflect voter apathy and mistrust of the political process.³⁶ In 2021/22, only 24% of residents in the West Midlands region agreed that they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area.³⁷ This is similar to the UK average of 27% and is broadly unchanged from 2020/21. The picture improves somewhat for general elections, with over 60% of eligible voters in the WMCA area showing up on polling day in every election since 2010.³⁸ However, political participation is still lagging behind the national average, with a disappointingly lower proportion of WMCA area voters exercising their rights than elsewhere in England throughout this period.

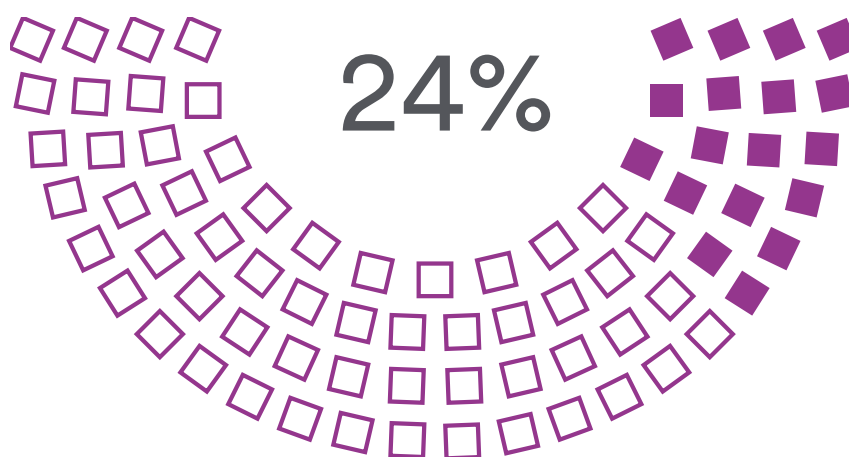
Election turnout in the region varies from 25.9% in Sandwell to 32.9% in Solihull.



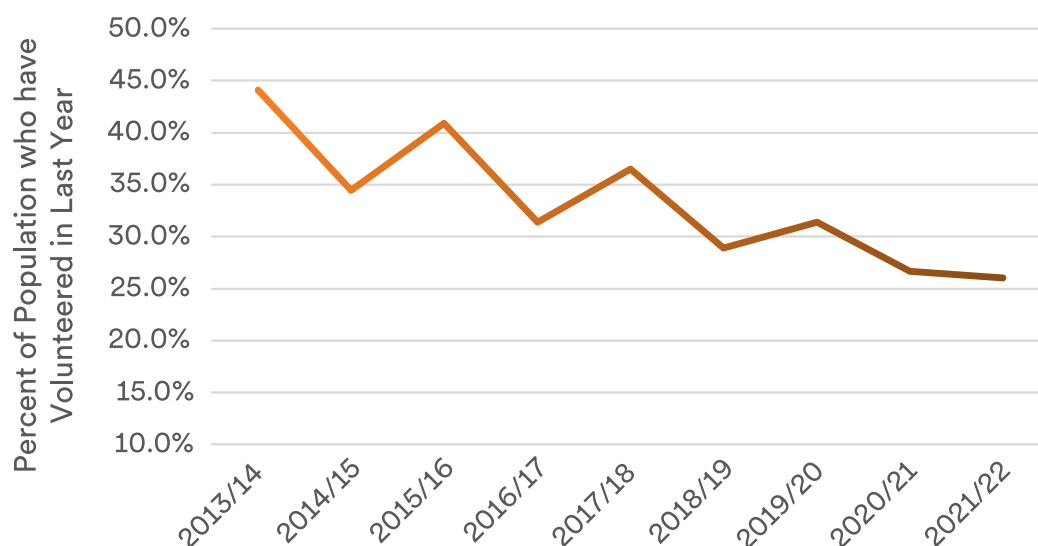
Turnout is typically higher in national elections – however the WMCA area average is below that of the UK average.



Around a quarter of residents feel they can personally influence decisions affecting their local area.



In 2021/22 only 32% of residents engaged in democratic processes outside of voting, such as signing a petition or attending a public rally.³⁹ This is broadly in line with the national average but is down from 40% in the previous year. 26% of people in the West Midlands region gave unpaid help through clubs or organisations in 2021/22. Volunteering rates have been declining in the region and across the country since records began in 2013/14.⁴⁰ National policies of austerity and a lack of dedicated national volunteering programmes in recent times has done nothing to abate the decline.



What can be, and is being done?

The deeper devolution deal brings power and control to make decisions that matter to local people back to the West Midlands. This opportunity cannot be squandered by merely recreating the structures of Whitehall in the West Midlands. Devolution provides an opportunity for the region to radically improve the relationship between local governments and people it serves. Examples where the West Midlands is leading in this area include the establishment of independent taskforces around homelessness, race equality; as well as the use of citizens panel, for instance, around Greener Together.

Affordable and safe places

Why is this important?

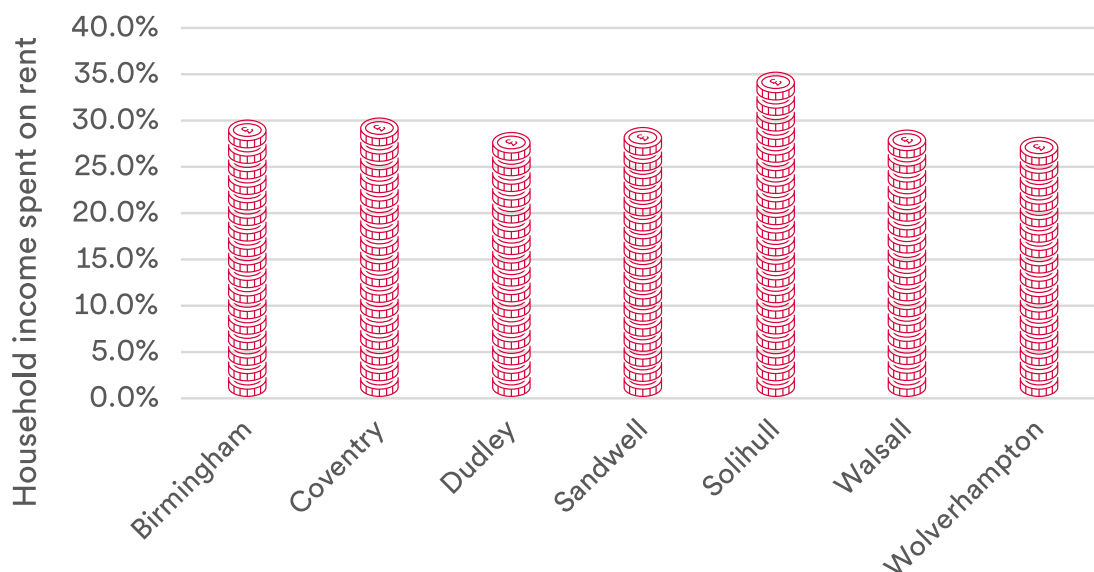
Affordable and safe places is about everyone having decent homes that they can afford, neighbourhoods where they feel secure, and feel a sense of belonging in the place that they live.

What are the current conditions?

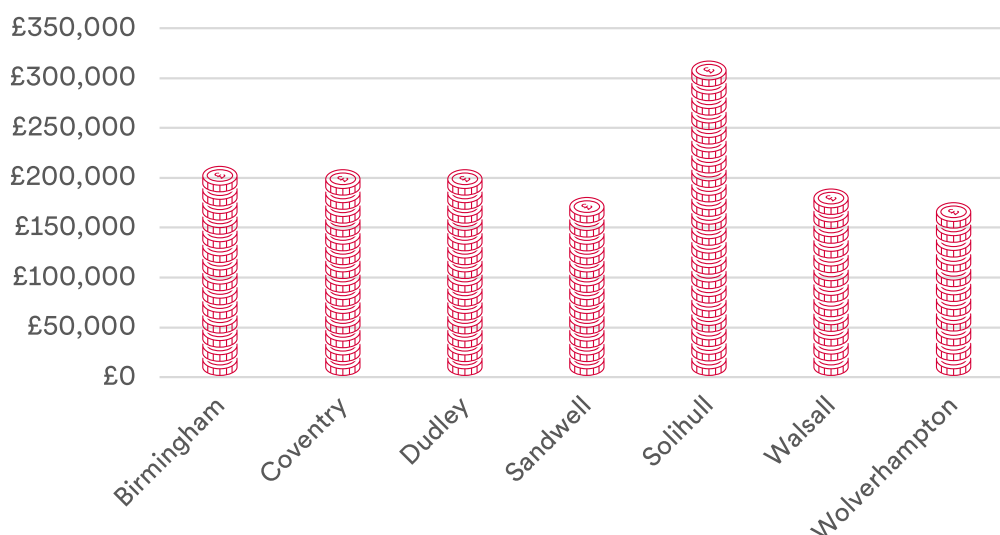
The West Midlands region is amongst UK' more expensive places to rent a home. In particular, those on lower incomes face the least affordable rent prices outside of London. From April 2022 to March 2023, the average renter in the West Midlands Region paid £725 in monthly rent (England: £825). This has increased from £695 the year before, an increase of 4.3% (England: £795, 3.8%).^{41,42} Overall, only residents in London, the South East, and the South West spend more of their incomes on rent than people in the West Midlands.⁴³

However, when broken down by income levels, those on lower incomes face the least affordable rent prices outside of London. In 2023, renters in Solihull were spending more of their take-home income on housing costs than anywhere else in the WMCA area, averaging 35%.⁴⁴ In contrast, residents in Wolverhampton saw the lowest proportion of their take-home pay going towards rent. Rental affordability has changed little in England over the last 10 years and there was no change in affordability in the West Midlands region between 2021 and 2022.

Household incomes spent on rental costs in the WMCA area



Average house prices in the WMCA area

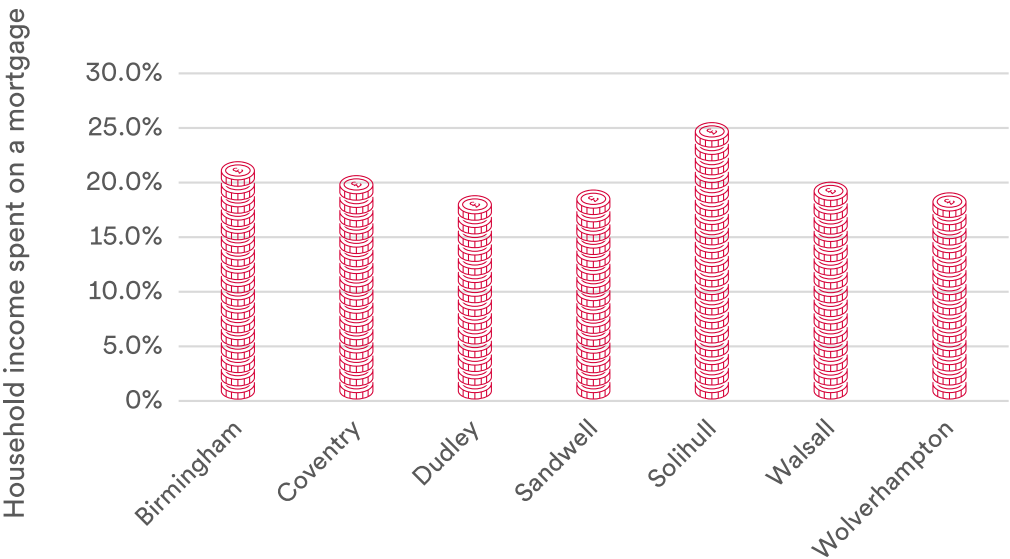


Mortgage costs as a proportion of residents' take-home income were highest in Solihull and lowest in Wolverhampton. With rising interest rates, mortgage repayments has become more costly for homeowners. Between December 2021 and December 2022, the indicative monthly mortgage payment in the West Midlands Region has increased by £703 for detached houses (UK: £771), £428 for semi-detached houses (UK: £481), £339 for terraced houses (UK: £397), and £247 for flats (UK: £363).⁴⁵

Recent interest rate rises have made mortgages less affordable, contributing towards a slight decrease of 0.6% in average house prices across the region from last year.⁴⁶ Interestingly, despite the uneven spread of mortgage prices across Birmingham, Coventry and Dudley, the average house price remains almost identical across the three areas.⁴⁷ This can be explained by a number of factors that reveal even more about the region’s housing landscape.

For example, 10.3% of homes in Coventry have been built since 2010, compared to only 5.1% in Dudley.⁴⁸ This indicates the presence of more new mortgages in Coventry than in Dudley. Equally, whilst house prices are lower in Sandwell, mortgages are marginally more affordable in Dudley. This reflects a take-home pay disparity between the two areas.

Household incomes spent on mortgage costs in the WMCA area

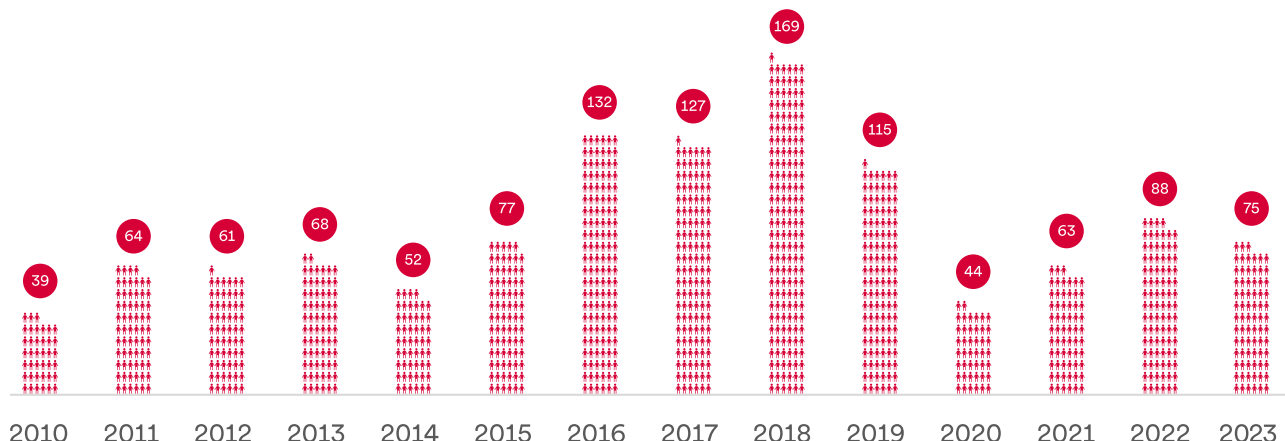


While rapid inflation is making things more expensive for mortgage-holders everywhere, homeowners still face lower housing costs than renters.

Homeowners continue to see around 10% less of their take-home income going towards their mortgage than renters spend on housing.⁴⁹

One in 200 households in the WMCA area is living in temporary accommodation.⁵⁰ This is particularly a challenge in Birmingham, where around 4,300 households are in temporary accommodation in 2023, a 12 percentage point increase on 2022, and accounts for around one in 100 households. While the WMCA’s overall figure is roughly comparable with Greater Manchester, it is well below the figures seen in London.

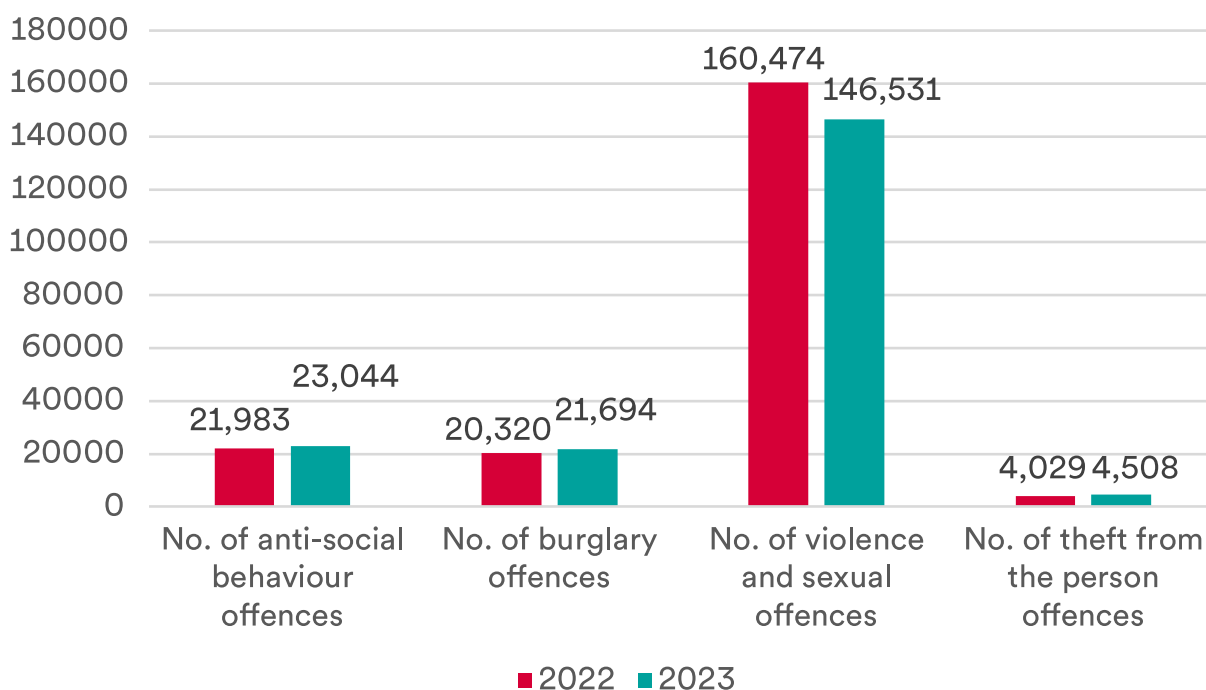
Rough sleeping has increased post-pandemic in 2020-2022; before decreasing in 2023.⁵¹ Rough sleeping tumbled in 2020 due to the UK Government's initiatives to house everyone during the pandemic – but has since increased.



Housing may be the biggest cost faced by households (accounting for some 17%) – but this is closely followed by transport costs (14%) and food and non-alcoholic drinks (12%).⁵²

9 in 10 residents across the West Midlands region reported feeling safe during the day; however this drops to around 55% after dark.⁵³ The fear of being a victim of crime will be a significant driver of this anxiety.

Reported crime data suggests a rise in antisocial behaviour, burglary, and thefts in 2023 (up 6.3 percentage points) and a decrease in violence and sexual offences (down 8.7 percentage points) across the WMCA area.⁵⁴ However, while rates of antisocial behaviour, burglary, and theft offences is around 39.9% lower per capita than the UK average; rates of violence and sexual offences per capita is around 48.3% higher – suggesting a mixed picture.



What can be, and is being done?

The WMCA's powers around identifying land and encouraging the redevelopment of brownfields sites and requirements around meeting local affordable housing have improved housing supply. The WMCA aims to design out homelessness in the West Midlands through prevention by design: ensuring a supply of affordable homes, tackling welfare related poverty, good employment, information, integrated prevention, advice, and guidance. It has a target for 215,000 new homes by 2031 and remains on course to achieve this – indeed, 5% of all homes in the WMCA area have been constructed since the establishment of the WMCA. Over time, this should reduce pressure on rising rents and mortgages, and address the rise in the use of temporary accommodation.

WMCA investments require developers to make a minimum 20% of the new homes affordable under its own definition of affordability which is linked to local wages rather than property prices – and WMCA evidence suggests around 25% of homes invested meet its own local definition of affordability.

Accelerating the development and manufacture of future housing will help the region address its housing needs. The Homes for the Future programme will help secure the delivery and investment in both advanced manufacturing in construction and zero carbon homes, which will get the region ready for the Government's forthcoming Future Homes Standard expected to come in force by 2025, and result in reduced occupier costs in the new homes.

Retrofitting existing homes is essential to address fuel poverty faced by residents. In 2021, the WMCA area had some 238,449 fuel poor homes, contributing to wider housing related costs.⁵⁵ The overall rate of fuel poverty, at 17.5% is amongst the highest in the UK – with some areas experiencing far higher rates of over 40%.

Investment into reducing the cost of travel is important in reducing cost pressures on households given that for the average household, transport costs is the next biggest cost after housing.

From May 2024, the Mayor of the West Midlands may gain responsibilities that are currently the responsibility of the separate post of Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This will create opportunities for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to addressing community safety issues.

Connected communities

Why is this important?

Connected communities mean how easily people can interact with the world around them. This includes physical and digital connectivity.

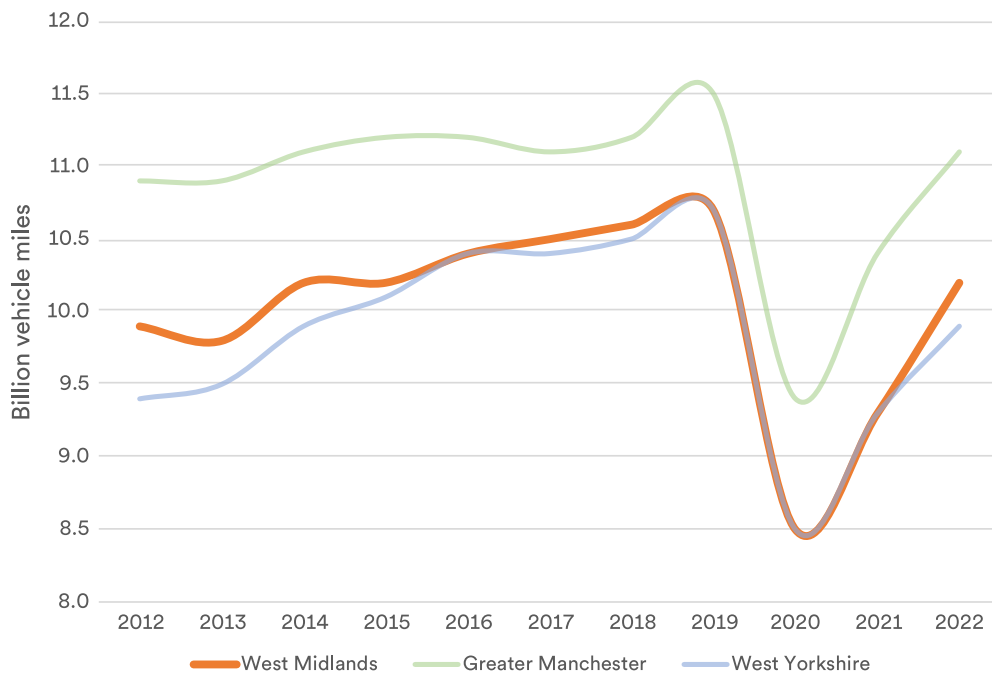
Physical connectivity helps people to reach places to live, work, have fun and meet up.

Digital connectivity and inclusion helps people to learn and get connected, for instance, through using a device and data.

What are the current conditions?

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed wholesale lifestyle changes – but some trends appear to be returning to pre-pandemic levels. Traffic delays and miles travelled by road are both increasing, despite a higher proportion of residents undertaking journeys on foot.

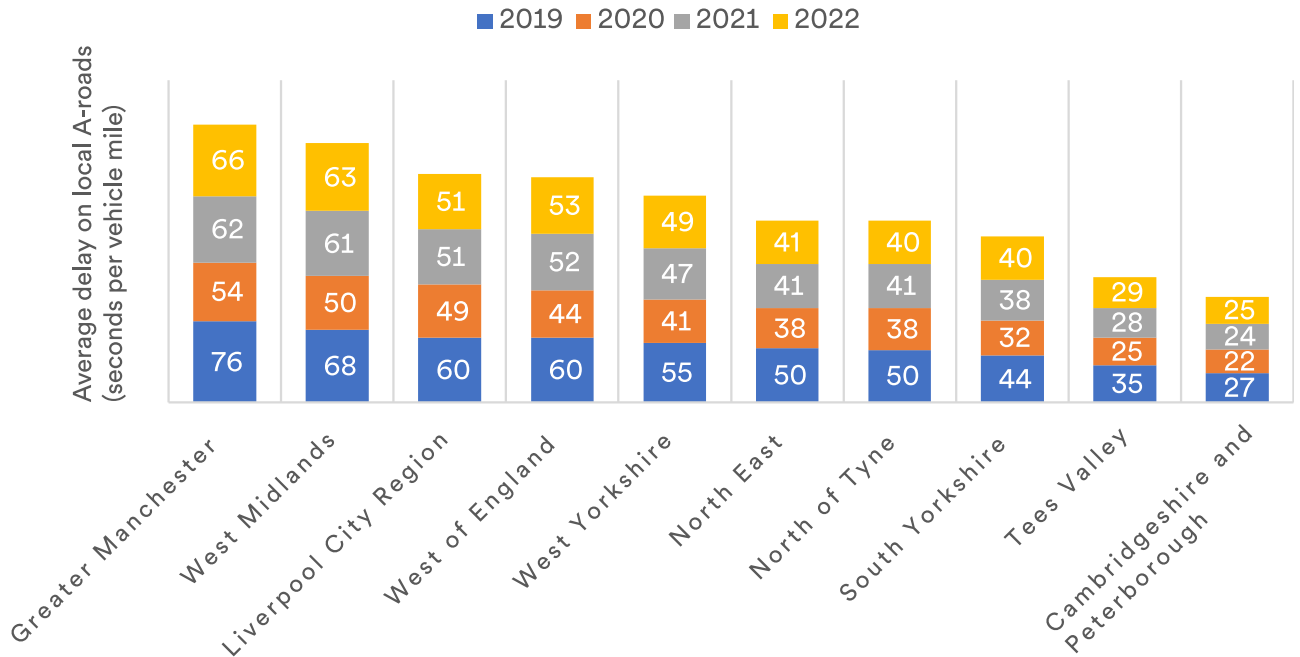
Vehicle journeys have returned to near pre-pandemic levels.



'A' roads in the WMCA area are the second-most congested of all UK mayoral combined authority areas, after Greater Manchester.

Drivers faced average delays of 63 seconds per mile when using the area's A-roads in 2022.⁵⁶ This reflects the built-up urban environment of the West Midlands conurbation, which generated some 10.2 billion vehicle miles in 2022, just shy of the 10.7 billion vehicle miles pre-pandemic in 2019.⁵⁷

Congestion in the WMCA area is the second highest after Greater Manchester.



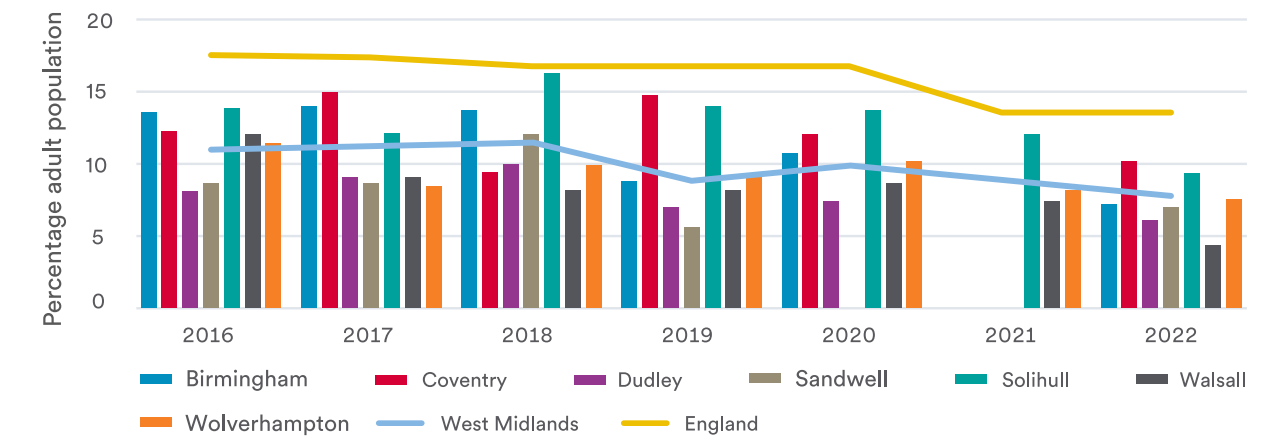
Over a third (35%) of journeys in the WMCA area involve active travel such as walking or cycling as the main mode in the twelve months to September 2023.⁵⁸ This has increased from before the pandemic. This compares to 32% for GMCA and 33% for England as a whole (2022).



The proportion of journeys made on foot in 2022 increased by 7 percentage points from 2019.⁵⁹ This may be driven by cost of living pressures.

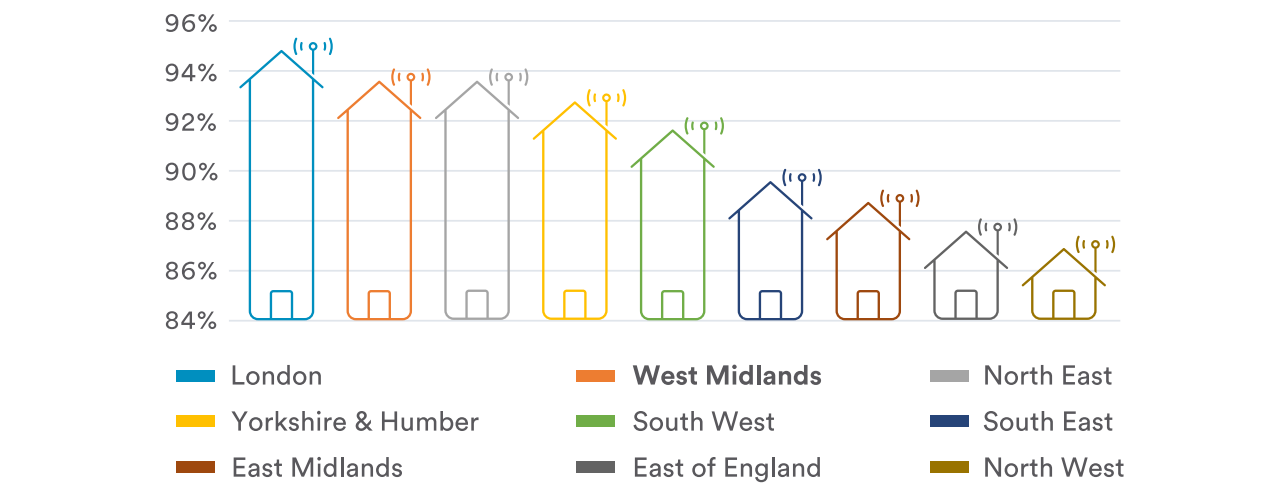
The proportion of journeys made on a bike saw a consistent decrease between 2016 and 2022.⁶⁰ There are some differences across local areas, with one in ten residents in Coventry riding a bike at least once a month, compared to less than one in twenty residents in Walsall.

The proportion of people cycling at least once a month has declined overall and in each of our local authority areas.

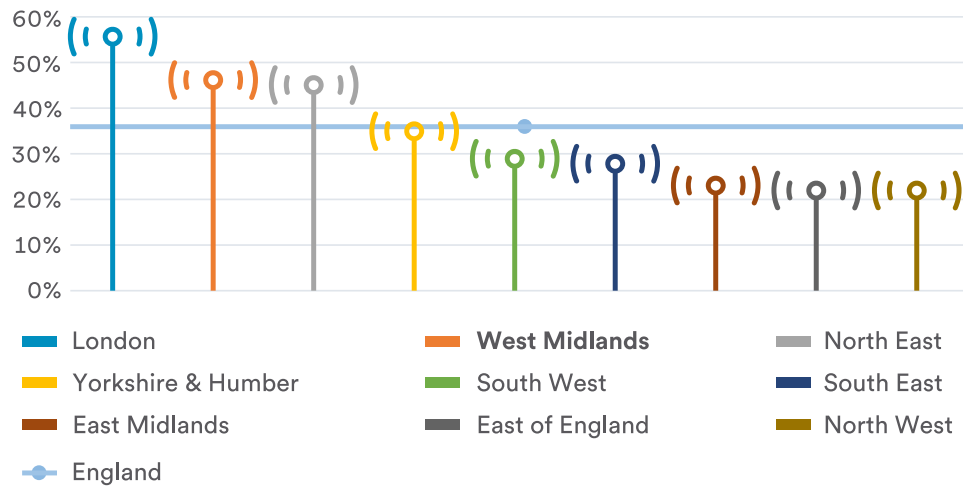


The WMCA area remains amongst the best digitally connected region with amongst the best for 5G coverage and broadband connectivity. 51% have 5G access, amongst the highest in the country⁶¹ and an overwhelming majority of households, just under 99%, have access to basic broadband at speeds of over 30 megabits per second.⁶²

The vast majority of people in the WMCA area have access to the internet at home.



The West Midlands region has the best 5G coverage outside of London.



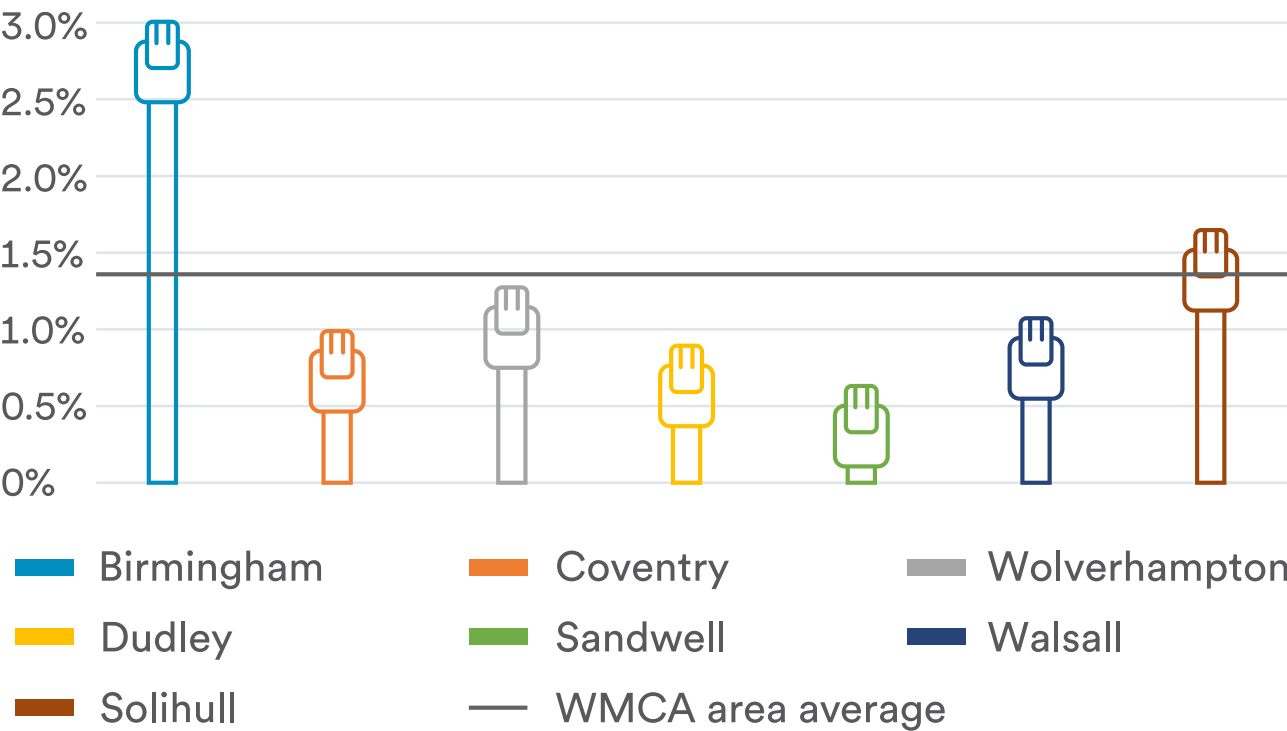
What can be, and is being done?

Continued investment into public transport and road networks, as outlined in the Local Transport Plan, are essential to unlock the economic potential of the region, enabling residents and communities to access employment opportunities as well as leisure and cultural events with friends and family. The Local Transport Plan sets out ‘six big moves’ which improves connectivity to access key services and shift travel modes to be more sustainable and accessible, and improve travel by designing out emissions. The WMCA is working on further expansion of the West Midlands Metro network such as from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill, rail improvements such as the work to reopen the Camp Hill Line, and plans for new stations for the Sutton Park line will help improve connectivity across the region. The WMCA also recognises that the vast majority of residents in the West Midlands are served by the bus network – therefore funding is also set aside to ensure network stability.

Active travel is an important and growing component – ensuring walking and cycling access to major housing and employment sites are just as important. This means ensuring that walkways are safe and well-maintained. The National Travel Attitudes Survey identified that improvements to safety and infrastructure including off-road and segregated cycle paths, safer roads, and well-maintained road surfaces for cycling are essential to increase cycling uptake. In 2020, the WMCA launched the Starley Network, a network of cycling and walking trails in the West Midlands covering 500 miles of connected safer cycling and walking routes. To maximise their effectiveness, walking and cycling needs to be better connected to housing and employment opportunities creating opportunity for active travel.

While the vast majority of households have access to broadband, some households remain digitally excluded. The West Midlands Digital Roadmap sets out five missions to securing access for everyone to digital opportunities, particularly those in poverty; sharing and using data to improve people’s lives; becoming the UK’s best-connected region; realising the potential of digital to transform our economy and build economic resilience; and using digital public services to build a fairer, greener, healthier region.

A minority of households are still unable to access basic broadband of at least 30 megabits per second.



Education and learning

Why is this important?

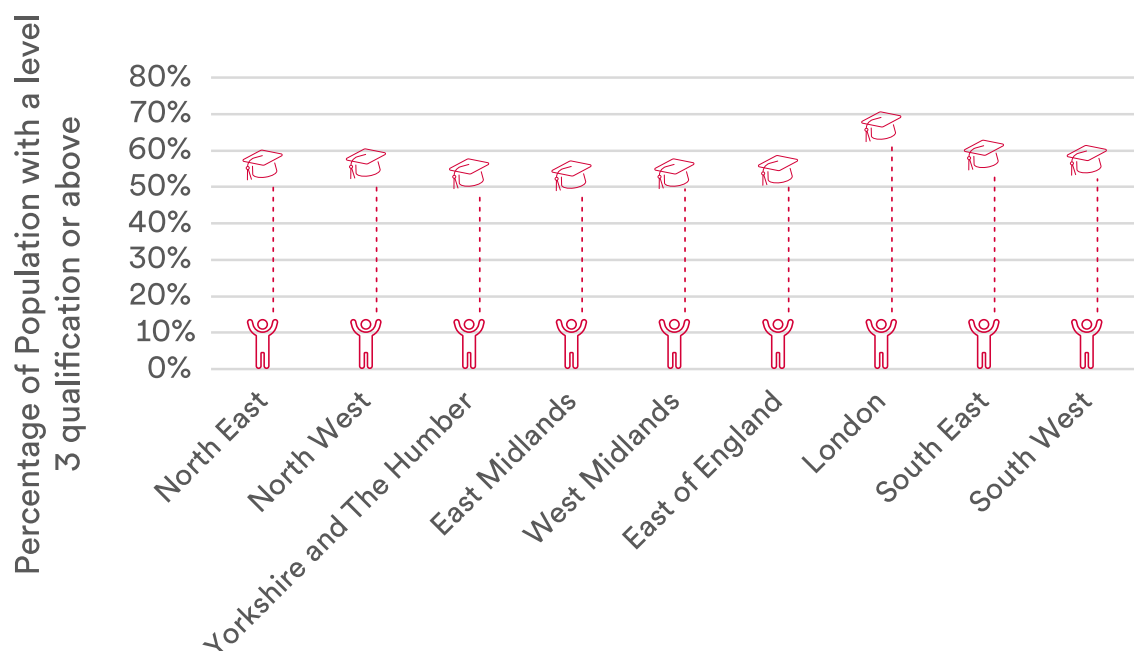
Education and learning opportunities are important for everyone at any age, to enable them to flourish and reach their potential. From giving children and young people the best start in life, to providing opportunities for working aged and older adults to gain new skills, retrain for a new job or just pursue their own interests for leisure. All types of learning are important for an inclusive society.

What are the current conditions?

In 2021, just 54.9% of the working aged population in the WMCA area was qualified to level 3 or above (A-level or equivalent).⁶³ While this has increased from around 42.2% a decade ago, this trails the West Midlands Region's rate of 57.2% and national rate of 61.5%. Research shows that people with a level 3 qualification are more likely to be employed, earn more when employed and less likely to claim out of work benefits than those qualified at level 2 or below.⁶⁴

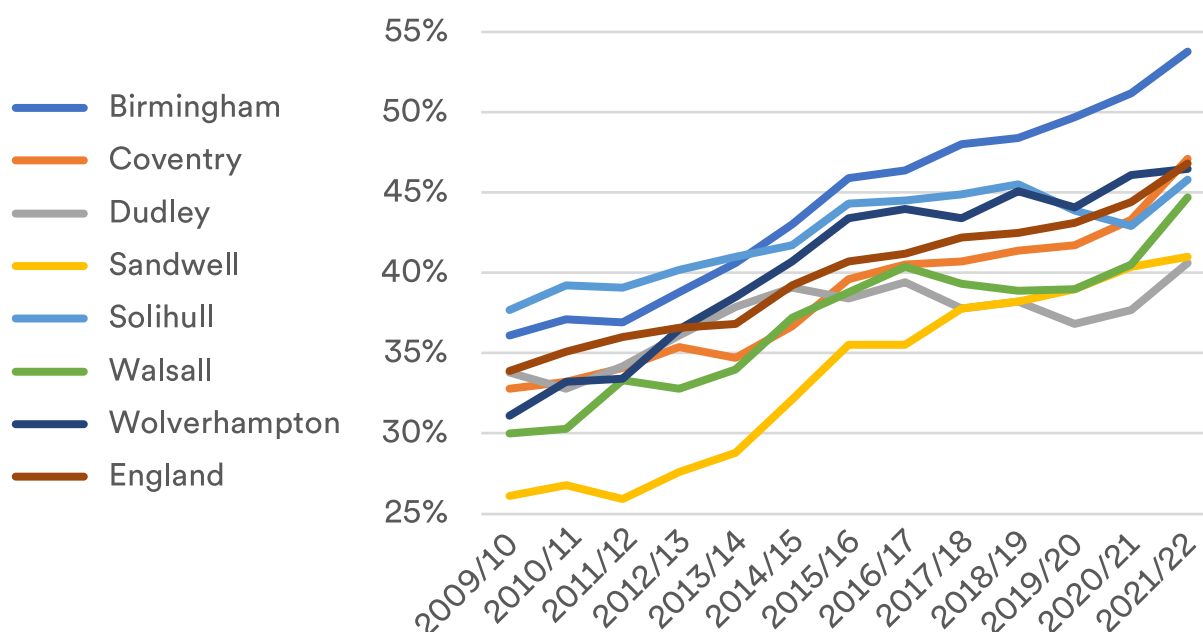
On average, level 3 qualifications result in a 16% earnings return and a 4% increase in the likelihood of being employed.⁶⁵ The WMCA is focused on improving the level 3 skills offer, with a focus on getting our residents into employment; upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy and to net zero; providing a good basic education up to Level 2 for those who need it; and supporting our communities to be stronger and to benefit from inclusive growth.

The proportion of the working aged population in the West Midlands qualified to a level 3 qualification lags behind other regions.



The proportion of school leavers progressing to higher education has increased right across the WMCA area.⁶⁶ Education is critical driver of social mobility, meaningful careers, and life satisfaction. Encouragingly, more young people are entering higher education: more than half of Birmingham's young people enter higher education, and regional disparities in higher education participation have decreased – with Sandwell in particular making significant progress.

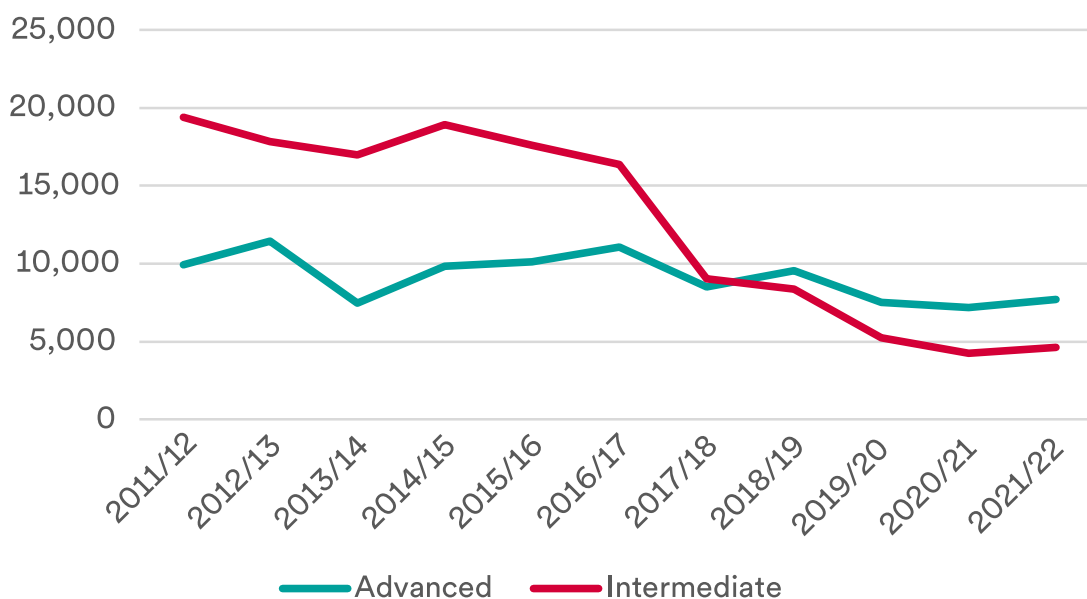
Not only is the proportion of young people in the WMCA area entering higher education increasing – but the gap with the England average has also narrowed.



There has been a decline in the uptake of apprenticeships across the WMCA area, with 2021/22 seeing under half of the enrolment figures seen in 2011/12.⁶⁷

This correlates with national figures and can partially be explained by the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 which has resulted in falls in apprenticeship starts and the proportion of apprenticeships reaching young people aged 19 or below.⁶⁸ Significantly, intermediate level apprenticeships have been much more adversely impacted than advanced apprenticeships, but both levels have seen sizeable declines in their uptake across the region.

Apprenticeship starts have decreased.

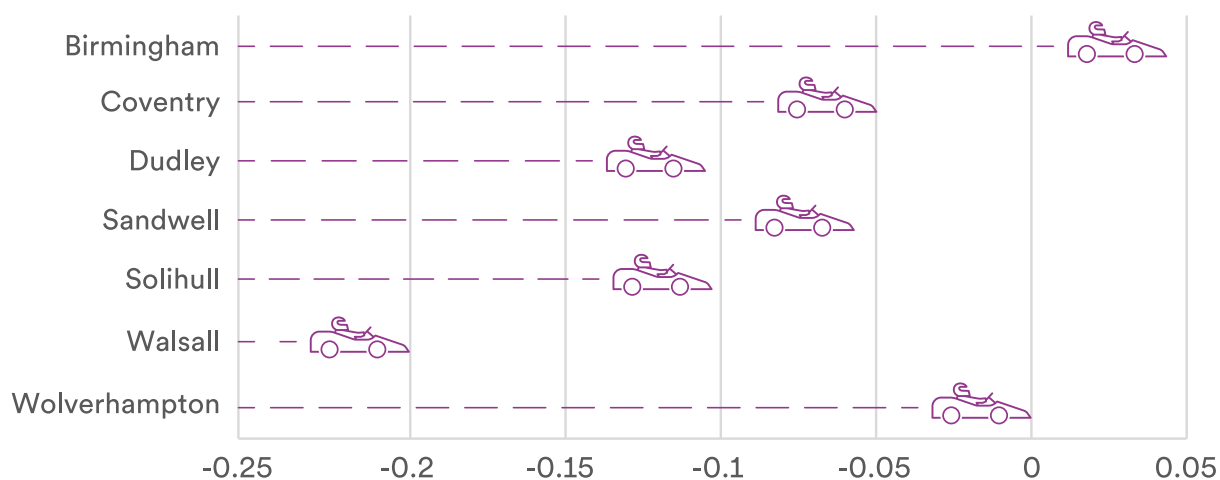


Pupils finishing secondary school in the WMCA area, and the broader West Midlands region generally end up with lower levels of attainment and make less progress than expected overall compared to London or the average for England. Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11) are measured using the attainment 8 benchmark (an average of pupils' grades across 8 qualifications including English and Maths at GCSE); and the progress 8 benchmark (a measure of the progress made between Year 6 and Year 11).

Across the West Midlands region, the average attainment 8 benchmark is 44.8 out of a possible 90, 1.5 points below the average for England and 0.4 points below five years ago (pre-pandemic).⁶⁹ Across WMCA area authorities, no single local authority area in the WMCA achieves higher than the England average. This means that on average, pupils completing Year 11 in the WMCA area end up with lower grades than those on average across England.

In terms of our progress 8 benchmark, the average in the West Midlands region is -0.09 (-0.08 in 2017/18).⁷⁰ This is a negative figure which suggests that pupils are completing Year 11 with lower grades than they would otherwise be expected to get, given their progress at the end of Year 6 (primary school). There are multiple reasons why pupils in the West Midlands region may not be doing as well as those in other parts of England, many of which bear no reflection on the quality of education they receive. Neither attainment 8 nor progress 8 can account for all the effects of factors such as socioeconomic circumstances which impact a child's learning.

In the WMCA area, only Birmingham has a positive progress 8 benchmark.



However, fewer young people aged 16-17 end up not in education, employment, or training (NEET), with the NEET rate at just 4.8% in the WMCA area in 2023 (2022: 5.1%).⁷¹ This was below Greater Manchester and the England average, but above London. However, there has been a concerning increase in not knowns – that is, young people whose destinations are unknown.



School absences has skyrocketed nationally, and the West Midlands region is no different; with 6.6% of sessions missed.⁷² Pupils who regularly attend school are more likely to do well in exams, get a better job, and reach their potential as adults. Before the pandemic, in the 2018/19 academic year, across state-funded primary, secondary, and special schools, around 4.8% of school sessions were missed in the West Midlands region, and 4.7% nationally. So far in the 2023/24 academic year, between 11 September 2023 and 8 December 2023, the absence rate has increased to 6.6% for both the West Midlands region and England. Week-to-week data suggest that local authorities in the WMCA area may have even higher absences. This may put additional pressures on workforce skills in the years ahead.

What can be, and is being done?

The implementation of the deeper devolution deal creates opportunities for the WMCA to better align post-16 and post-19 education and skills provision between our colleges and the growth sectors identified in our Plan for Growth. This includes all non-apprenticeship adult skills funding and functions, including ensuring that residents aged 19 and over in their area, who are eligible for funding, have access to appropriate education and training; encouraging and providing adults with the skills and learning they need to equip them to progress into, or within, work; or equip them for an apprenticeship or other learning; and provision of statutory entitlements to provide free courses for adults; so that the WMCA area can reduce the proportion of working age residents with no qualifications; increase the proportion of working age residents qualified to level 3 or above; and further reduce proportion of young people who are NEET.

Health and wellbeing

Why is this important?

Health and wellbeing are about people living longer, healthier, and happier lives, regardless of their social circumstances, which has often placed a limit on their prospects for a healthy life.

Health is more than the healthcare system: it is not just about NHS hospitals, doctors, or nurses. Health is about people's lives. People's health is often determined by their social and economic circumstances, such as their communities – access to a good network of family and friends; prospects – access to good jobs and education; and housing and environment – living in a good neighbourhood and with access to good quality green spaces.

What are the current conditions?

Currently, the regional picture for health and wellbeing exposes large inequalities between areas, with residents in some areas expected to have healthy lifespans that are eight years shorter than those elsewhere in the WMCA area. On average, these residents are less physically active, more likely to smoke, and more likely suffer from health complications linked to air pollution. These differences in health are entirely avoidable and preventable. People's lives are being cut needlessly short. Failure to address these pressing issues will stain any growth enjoyed by affluent pockets of our region in the future and puts a flat ceiling on our potential to thrive.

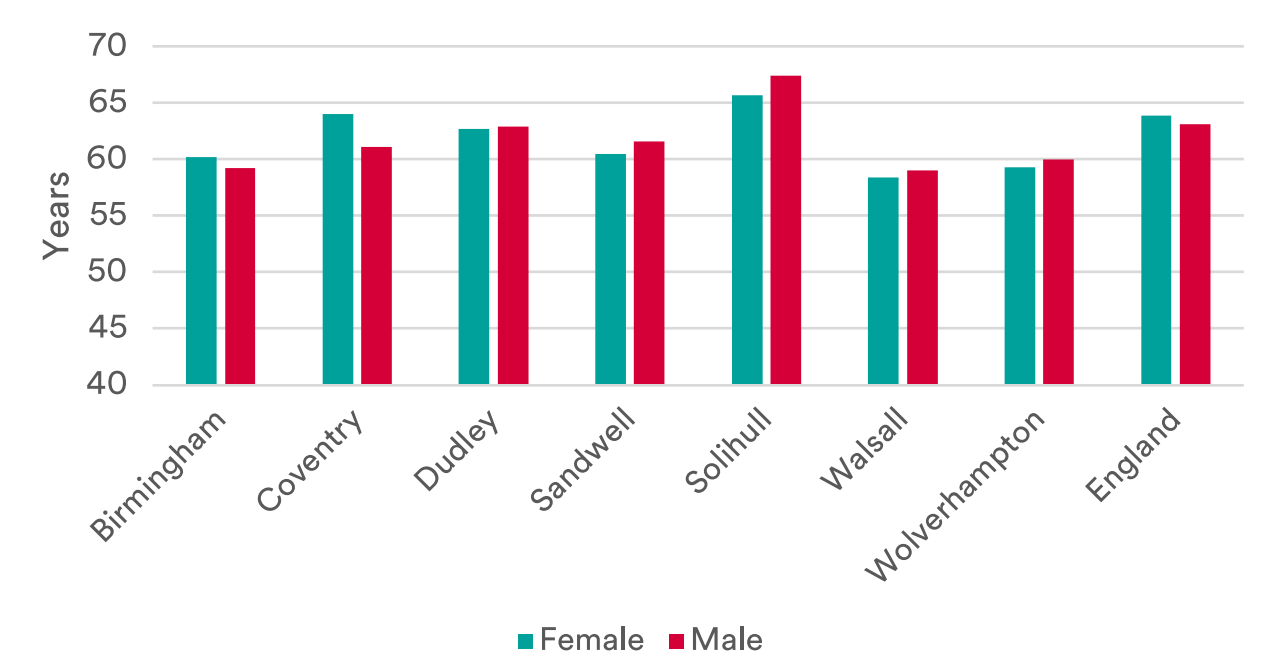
People in the WMCA region continue to have shorter life expectancies at birth than the England average (women by 1.2 years and men by 1.8 years on average).⁷³ Aligning with national trends, life expectancy in the WMCA is declining (albeit very slightly).

	2016 - 18		2018 - 20	
				
WMCA	82.2 years	78.0 years	81.9 years	77.6 years
England	83.2 years	79.6 years	83.1 years	79.4 years

The impact of poor health extends beyond individuals and families, affecting the ability of our region’s economy to thrive and generate value for reinvestment in our communities. The Health of the Region report estimates the cost of lost output in England due to avoidable deaths has risen by over 20% since the Covid-19 pandemic - from £6.3bn in 2019 to £7.7bn in 2021, equivalent to over £250,000 per person who died in 2019 rising to almost £290,000 in 2021.⁷⁴

Over the last decade, people’s healthy life expectancy has also stagnated nationwide. The WMCA area is almost universally below the national average, with only residents in Solihull enjoying a higher healthy life expectancy than the England average. This data sheds light on startling disparities between parts of our region, with the deficit between the highest and lowest healthy life expectancy in the WMCA area standing at eight years in 2020.⁷⁵

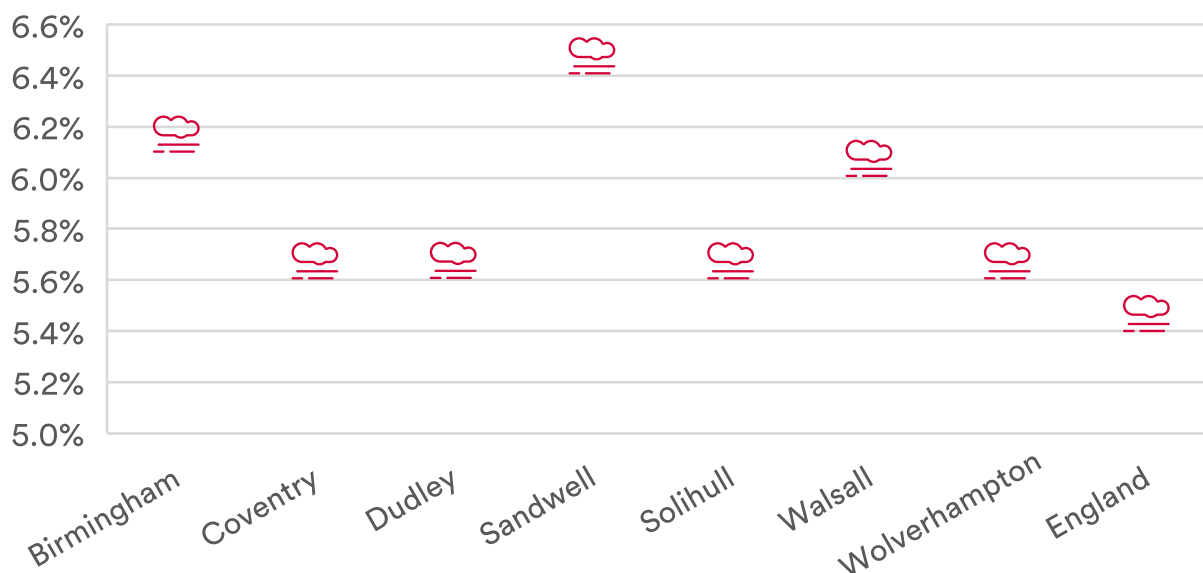
There are disparities in healthy life expectancy for men and women across the seven constituent local authorities.



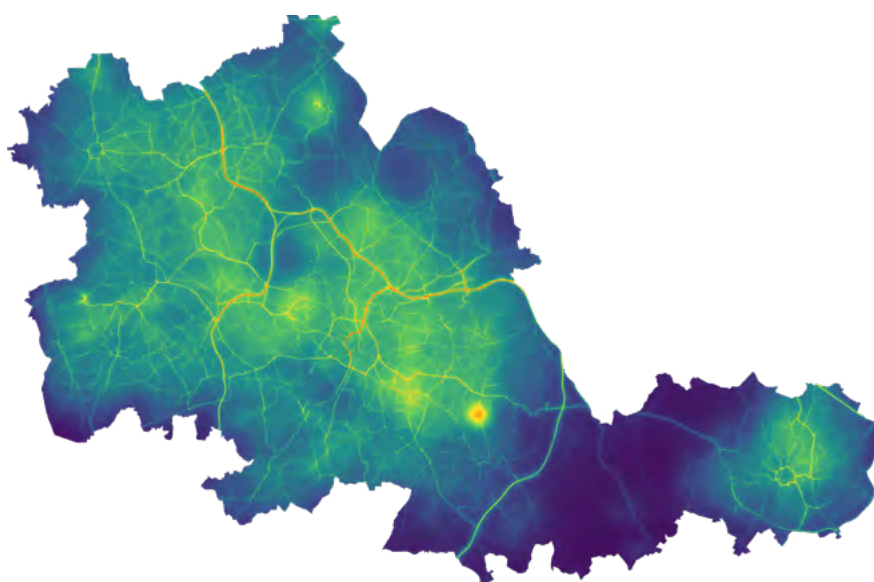
Key elements that impact life expectancy are personal wealth, lifestyle choices, behaviours, and the local environment.⁷⁶ Poor air quality is a sure-fire indicator of poor public health, for example. It leads to premature deaths and exacerbates people’s pre-existing health conditions. One way in which we can measure poor air quality is through the presence of particulate matter – small particles and droplets in the air that are produced by vehicles and other sources. Particulate matter can cause harm to humans when it enters the lungs and bloodstream, making it critical to track. Given the link between vehicles and particulate matter, it is not surprising that the highest concentration of it in the WMCA area was uncovered along the M6 and Aston Expressway in 2021.

Deaths attributed to particulate air pollution have declined in recent years along the region's improving air quality⁷⁷ – from 6.8% of deaths in 2018 to 5.5% in 2021. Nevertheless, there is still significant progress to be made, not least because each part of the WMCA area endures a higher proportion of deaths because of particulate air pollution than the England average.⁷⁸

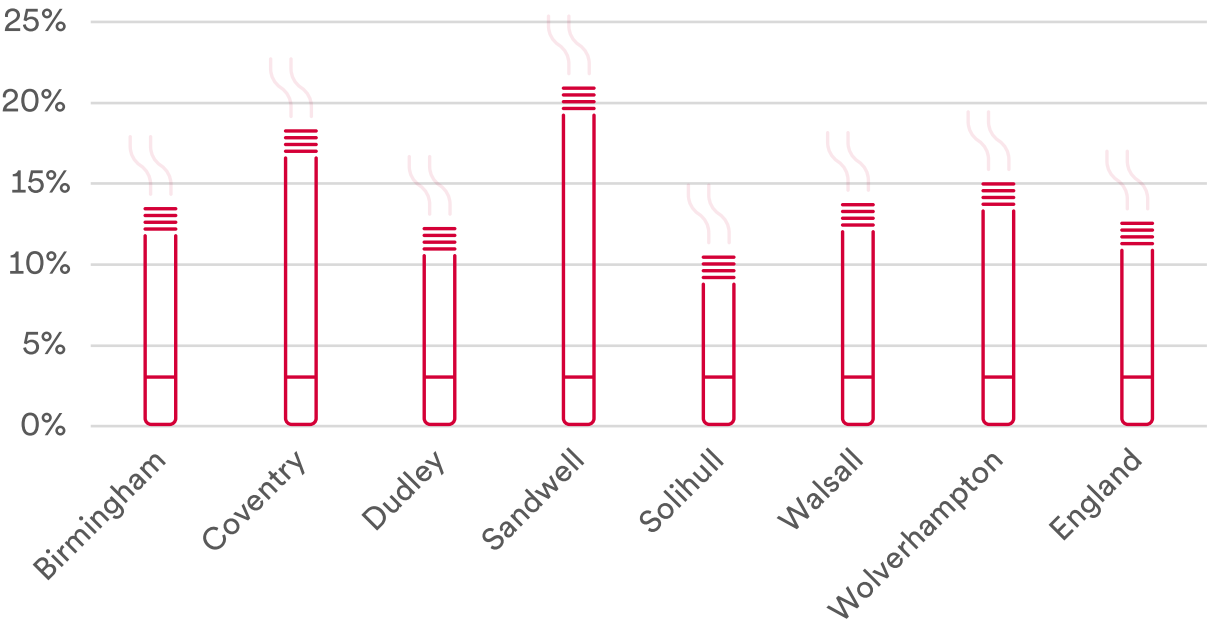
The proportion of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution in all of the seven districts remains higher than the England average.



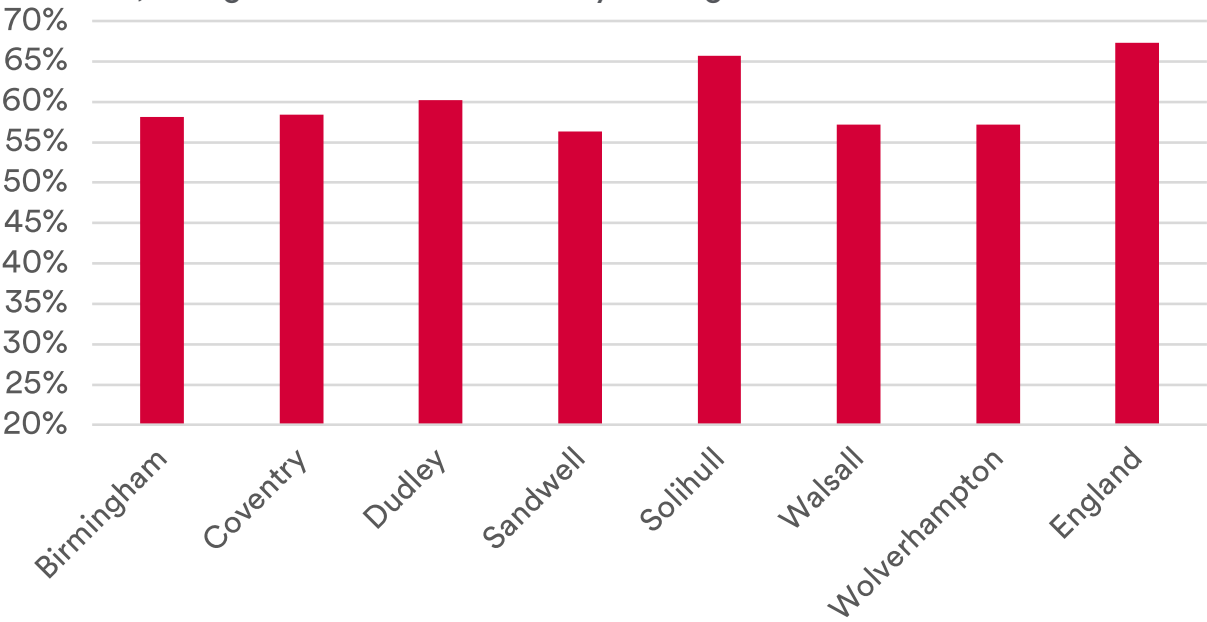
The annual mean particulate matter PM_{2.5} concentration across much of the WMCA area remains higher than the World Health Organisation recommended maximum of 10 µg/m³.⁷⁹



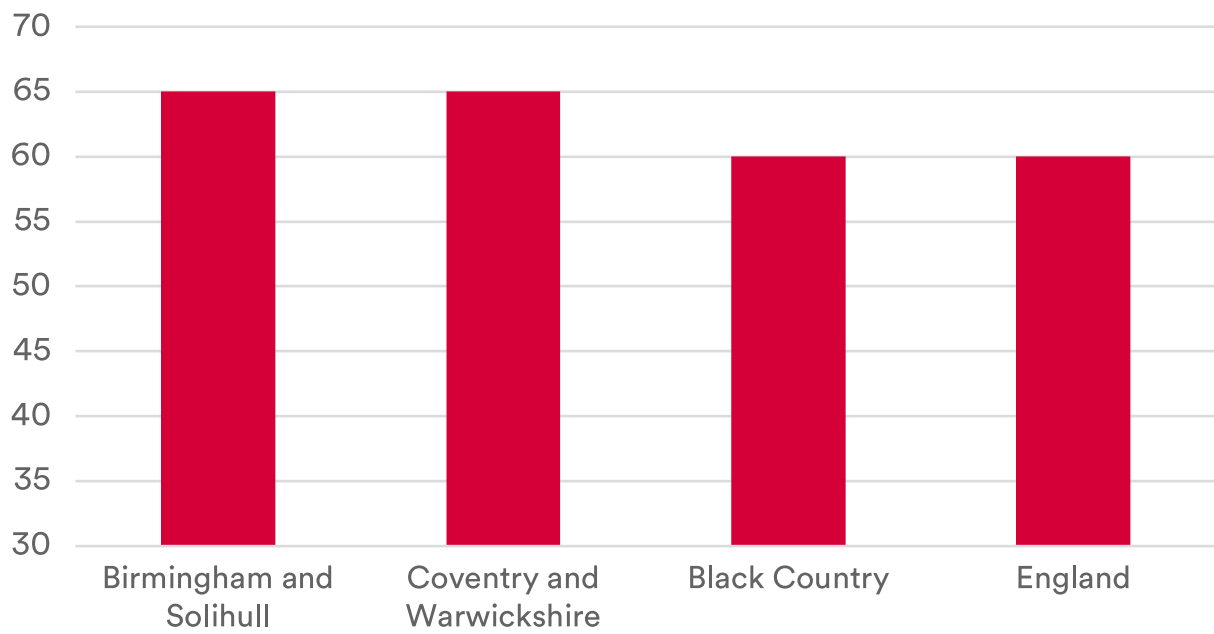
The vast majority of people in the WMCA area do not smoke. And rates are declining slowly too, from 15.7% in 2015 to 13.4% in 2022.⁸⁰



One third of adults in the WMCA area are not physically active in 2021/22 - a greater proportion than the England average.⁸¹ Since 2015/16 activity levels have varied little, being estimated at 63.8% 6 years ago and 63.4% in 2021/22.



The number of GPs per 100,000 people in the West Midlands region is **relatively high**, with two of the three regional NHS Integrated Care Board areas having more than the average number for England.⁸² While this may be the case, it should be remembered that the number of GPs does not reflect how easy it is to get an appointment.



The overwhelming majority of residents in the West Midlands region are **satisfied with their lives**, with 95% indicating moderate to high levels of life satisfaction.⁸³ This is consistent with the proportions reported elsewhere in the UK in 2023 and the same as 2022. Having fallen away as the country emerged from the shadow of the pandemic, anxiety is on the rise once more. The West Midlands region is no exception to this, with the ONS estimating that 22% of the population deal with high levels of anxiety every day (no change since 2022) – with some evidence suggesting that this particularly impacts young people, especially girls and young women.

What can be, and is being done?

By influencing and shaping the kinds of homes we live in, the way we get around, the air we breathe, and the types of employment opportunities available to us, the WMCA can positively impact residents' health. The Health of the Region 2023 report notes that while there has been a collective focus on addressing health inequalities in our region, the reality is that despite some improvements, significant progress in health outcomes remains elusive. The conditions that contribute to ill health and premature deaths persist, and in certain cases, they are worsening. Understanding the intricate causal chain influencing health outcomes is crucial, as change in this realm often takes a protracted period to manifest in data. For instance, the multifaceted nature of health disparities involves a myriad of interconnected factors, including social determinants, lifestyle choices, and healthcare access.

These factors collectively contribute to the complex landscape of health outcomes, making it a challenge to witness immediate and transformative changes. The Health of the Region report identifies four primary ways in which the WMCA can play a role in transforming health and wellbeing in a more consistent, measured, and purposeful way by embedding a Health in All Policies approach across all of its work.

As a convenor, galvanizing regional focus on racialised groups, shedding light on the impact of structural racism on health outcomes. An annual Health of the Region roundtable was chaired by Mayor Andy Street to drive forward actions in this area. The West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce was launched in 2022, an independent body, created by the WMCA Board to take action that will improve equality of opportunity for all our communities. Its five-year strategy identifies priority actions to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for racialised communities.

As an advocate, seeking to amplify citizen voice and work towards distributive leadership as a means to reduce health inequalities, ensuring that those most impacted by unfair health and wellbeing outcomes are able to direct policy and interventions to improve health equity. This work ranges from our Disabled Citizens Panel, the Mental Health Commission, the Young Combined Authority, to smaller pilot projects like WayMap.

As a deliverer and commissioner of services, for instance, by implementing the Thrive into Work programme, a comprehensive employment support service grounded in the principles of Individual Placement and Support (IPS). This personalised approach is designed to assist individuals aged 18 and above who face health challenges or have disabilities in maintaining employment or securing new opportunities.

By leveraging investment, to address key health inequalities in the region, for instance, through the £70 million Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund, where underspend from the Games have been repurposed to invest in the legacy of the Games and the future of the region, with two of the core themes in grant allocations dedicated to improving physical activity and mental health and wellbeing.

Equality

Why is this important?

Equality means that people have the opportunity to thrive and flourish regardless of their characteristics and backgrounds.

Under the Equality Act, people's protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. In addition, intersectionality ensures that we understand how people's characteristics shape their experiences and identities. Therefore, the characteristics that make us who we are will not be considered in isolation from one another by this approach.

The public sector equality duty places a duty on public bodies to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Considerations in addressing inequalities require an understanding of the drivers behind persistent inequalities. One of the drivers of inequality between people of different ethnicities in our region is employment. Our citizens should be in 'good work' which pays the real living wage, promotes good health and wellbeing, and provides security for themselves and their families. This then intersects with sex/gender, in that the impact of the cost of childcare is significant on inequality in gender employment.

What are the current conditions? What can, and is being done?

Education inequality

People of an Asian or Black ethnicity in the WMCA area outperform people of a White or Mixed ethnicity and girls also outperform boys on the progress 8 benchmark, a measure of the progress made between the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) and the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11). However, performance across all groups remain below the national average.

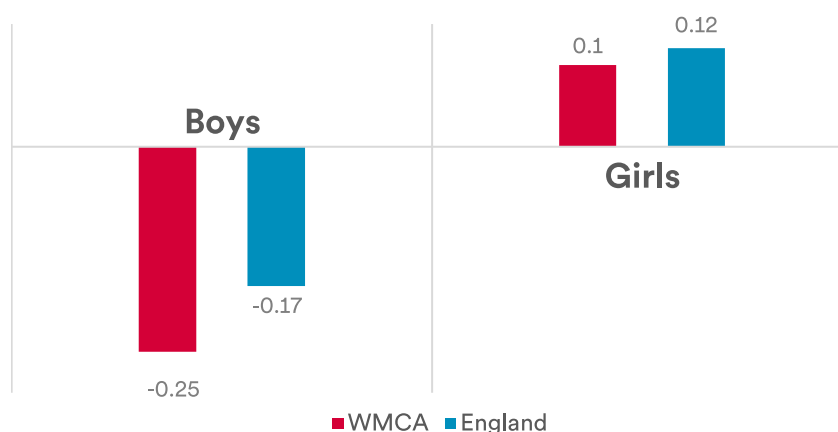
In the WMCA area, the average progress 8 score for boys is -0.25, for girls it is 0.10.⁸⁴ Across the seven districts, Walsall was the only district that had a progress 8 benchmark for girls that is below the national average. For boys, every district has a progress 8 benchmark that is below the national average. Girls are doing better than boys in our region, which falls in line with the English national picture.

However, both boys and girls perform worse in the WMCA area than nationally.

Boys perform 0.8 worse at -0.25 than the national score of -0.17. Girls show a smaller gap between the WMCA area and the England national average, with a 0.02 gap between 0.10 in the WMCA area and 0.12 nationally.

The average progress 8 benchmark in the WMCA area for boys has increased by 1.2 percentage points from -0.37 in 2017/18 to -0.25 in 2022/23. The average Progress 8 benchmark in the West Midlands for girls has shown a much smaller increase of 0.01 percentage points from 0.09 in 2017/18 to 0.10 in 2022/23.

Progress 8 score in WMCA vs England for boys and girls in 2022/23.



In the WMCA area, the average progress 8 score was below average for White and Mixed ethnicities but higher than the national average for Asian and Black. This pattern is also reflected in the national picture. However, the progress 8 benchmark in the WMCA area is not as high as those seen nationally (0.53 nationally compared to 0.41 in the WMCA area).⁸⁵ Black pupils in the WMCA area also see a lower progress 8 benchmark than nationally (0.22 nationally compared to 0.15 regionally). White pupils have a lower progress 8 benchmark in the WMCA area than nationally (-0.28 and -0.14 respectively). Mixed ethnicity pupils also perform worse in the WMCA area than nationally (-0.3 and -0.04 respectively).

Progress 8 benchmark for broad ethnic groups in the WMCA vs England in 2022/23.



Skills inequality

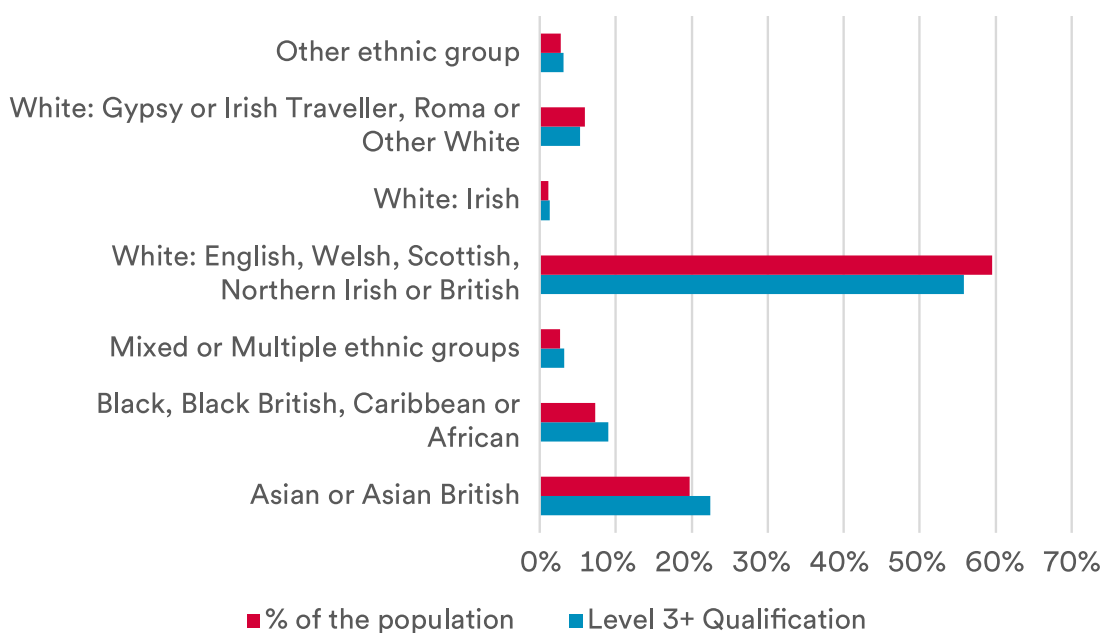
There is a skills gap for females, White and Other ethnic minorities, and disabled people, achieving lower-level qualifications than their counterparts. When looking at skill levels it is also important to consider the broader context of the West Midlands whose wider population are lower qualified than nationally. The following compares qualification levels for the working aged population in the WMCA area.

Disabled people are more likely to have a Level 1 and entry level qualifications and Level 2 qualifications as their highest level of qualification.⁸⁶ This differs to that of not disabled people who are more likely to hold a level 3, level 4, or higher qualification. This highlights inequalities in access for disabled people to obtain higher level qualifications. Of disabled people of the working age population in the WMCA area, there is a lower proportion of those with a level 4+ qualification than nationally, with a difference of 5.3 percentage points with a WMCA figure of 33.6% and an England national figure of 38.9%.

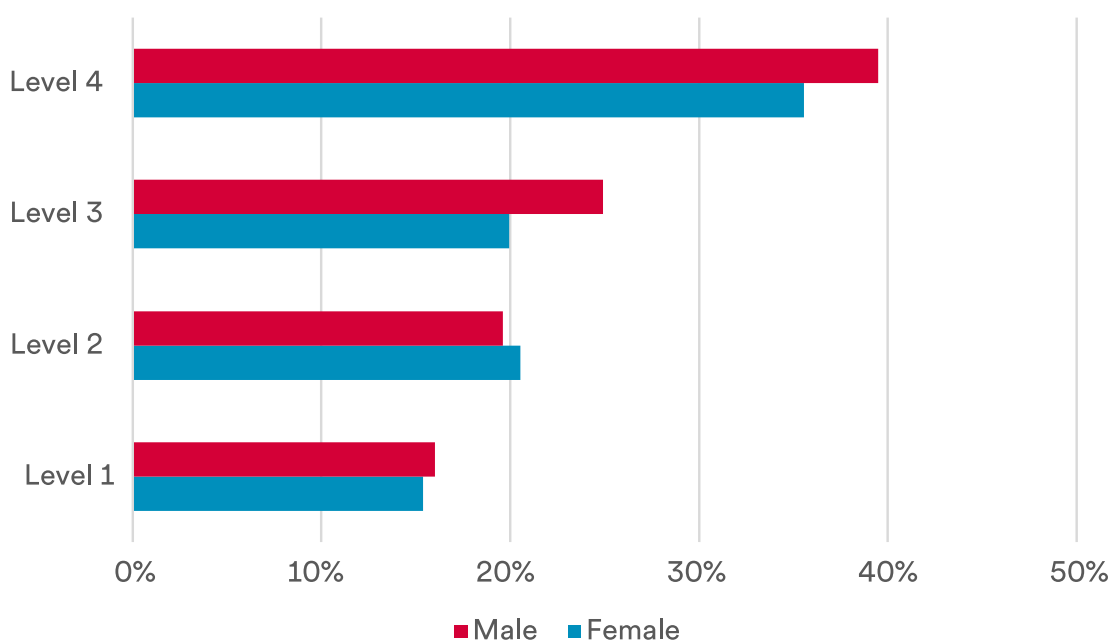


Asian, Black, and Mixed ethnic groups are more likely to be qualified to level 3 or above. However, White, and Other ethnicity groups are underqualified.⁸⁷

The WMCA area falls in line with England regarding Asian, Black, and Mixed ethnicities more likely to be qualified to level 3+. The WMCA area also follows the national picture for White British and other ethnicities which are underqualified. However, the WMCA area differs to the England national picture, as Irish and Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, or other White ethnicities are more likely to be qualified in England however are underqualified in the WMCA area.

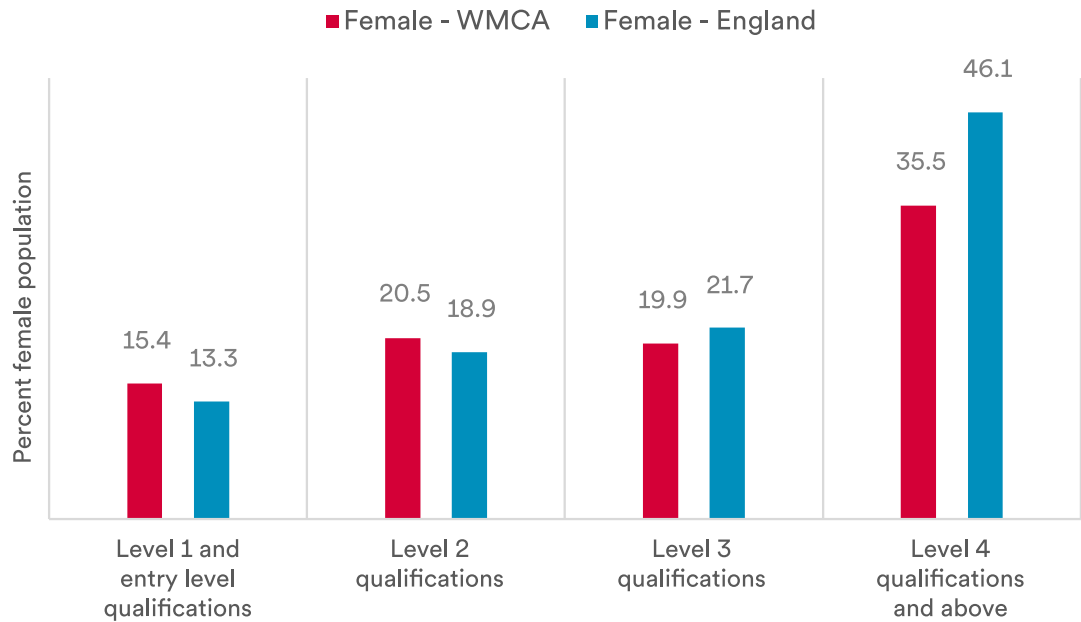


Females are less likely to hold higher level qualifications than males. More males than females have a qualification at all levels except level 2.⁸⁸ The gap between males and females sits at five percentage points at level 3 and four percentage points at level 4+.



When comparing nationally, females in the WMCA area have lower skill qualifications. In the WMCA area, a higher proportion have qualifications that are level 1 and below and level 2 than nationally. However, for level 3 and level 4+ qualifications, females in the WMCA are less likely to be qualified to this level.

| Qualification levels of females in the WMCA area vs England in 2021.



Males in the WMCA area also have lower skill qualifications than nationally. In the WMCA area, a higher proportion have qualifications that are level 1 and below, level 2 and level 3 than nationally. However, for level 4+ qualifications, males in the WMCA have a lower than national proportion qualified to this level, at 39.5% and 45.7% respectively.

| Qualification levels of males in the WMCA area vs England in 2021.



Employment inequality

Women, in particular, women from an ethnic minority group have lower employment rates compared to men. Within the WMCA area, the total 16-64 employment rate in 2023 was 74.1% for White and 63.0% for ethnic minorities.⁸⁹ This is lower for both White and ethnic minorities than the England national figure of 77.5% and 68.5% respectively. The difference at the total level is driven by a difference in the female employment rate, which is 71.7% for white females and 54.6% for Ethnic minority females. This is lower than the England average 16- 64 employment rate of 62.9% for ethnic minority females.

In the WMCA area, the total 16-64 employment rates has increased since 2019, by 1.2 percentage points from 72.9% for White and by 2.6 percentage points from 60.4% for ethnic minorities. The WMCA area economic inactivity rate is 3.7% higher than in England, 30.3% and 26.6% respectively.

Disabled people in the WMCA area are less likely to be in employment and more likely to be economically inactive, when comparing to not disabled people. Disabled people in the WMCA area have higher rate of economic inactivity than nationally. In the WMCA area, 49.0% of people with a disability are in employment, this consists of 52.5% male and 46.2% female.⁹⁰ In the WMCA area, 46.1% of disabled people are inactive, this is higher than that of people who are not disabled which sits at 18.9%. The proportion of economically inactive disabled people is 3.8 percentage points higher in the WMCA area than in England, at 46.1% and 42.3% respectively.⁹¹

The 16–64 economically active rate in the WMCA area was 12.3% lower for women than for men, at 68.7% and 81.0% respectively.⁹² The WMCA area female economic activity rate is 6.2% lower than in England, at 68.7% and 74.9% respectively.

Pay gaps

Women, ethnic minorities, and disabled people are on average paid less than their counterparts in the West Midlands Region.

In 2022, the ethnicity pay gap ranged from -1.7% to 25.1%. In the West Midlands region, Black, Mixed, and other ethnic groups earnt less than their White counterparts in 2022.⁹³

In the West Midlands region, Mixed ethnicities earnt the least when compared to their White counterparts, earning £9.82 and £13.11 per hour respectively, representing a 25.1% gap. Asian employees earnt more than their White counterparts, at £13.33 and £13.11 respectively, representing a 1.7% gap.

Broad ethnic group	Median pay (West Midlands region)	Median pay (England)	Pay gap (West Midlands Region)	Pay gap (England)
White	13.11	14.43		
Asian	13.33	14.83	-1.7	-2.8
Black	11.55	13.66	11.9	5.3
Mixed	9.82	15.42	25.1	-6.9
Other	12.50	15.04	4.7	-4.2

Compared to the England average, the West Midlands region has a smaller pay gap between Asian and White employees, meaning Asian employees still earn more than their White counterparts however by a smaller proportion.

Compared to the England average, the West Midlands region has a bigger pay gap between Black, Mixed and Other ethnicities compared to their White counterparts. The biggest difference between the national figure and the West Midlands region was for Mixed, which showed a 25.1% gap in the West Midlands region and a 6.9% nationally. This highlights an important area to target when reducing the ethnic pay gap.

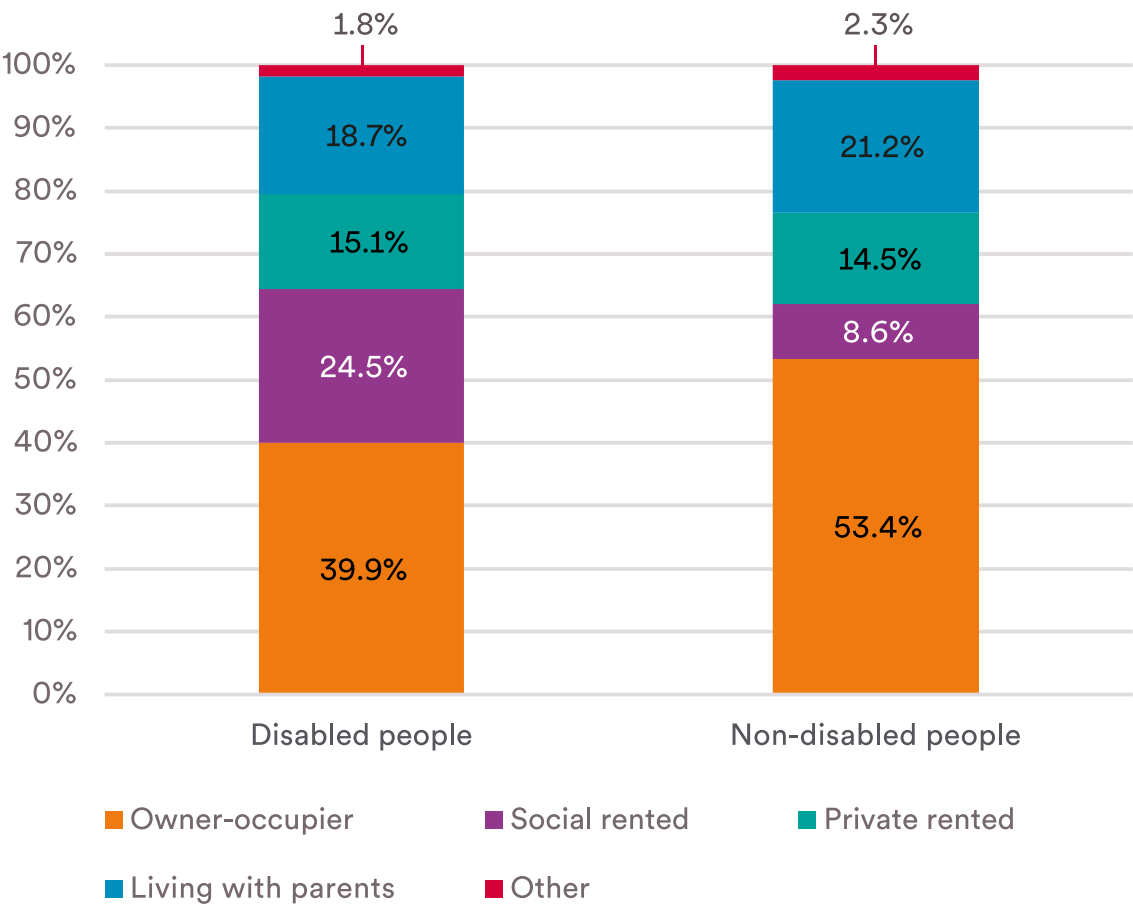
To tackle these persistent ethnic inequalities the West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce was developed. Launched in 2022 the West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce is an independent group of leaders who have come together to tackle race inequality and make the region fairer.⁹⁴ In 2023, the Taskforce launched 'Race Forward 2023-2028', its independent strategy. The strategy sets out a number of priorities are outlined, including: jobs, living standards, skills, and education; transport and connectivity; housing and homelessness; health and wellbeing; criminal justice; and improving data, leadership diversity and cultural intelligence.

The gender pay gap between women and men was 10.8% in the West Midlands region in 2022. This means that women earn less than their male counterparts in the West Midlands region. In 2022, the median pay gap was lower for full-time employees at 8.6% compared to 14.5% for all employees.⁹⁵ The gender pay gap is higher among all employees than full-time employees because women fill more part-time jobs, which tend to be lower paid per hour in comparison to full-time jobs.⁹⁶ This presents an important opportunity to target the gender pay gap for part-time employees to decrease the overall pay gap. The pay gap for all employees was lower in the West Midlands region than the English national average, at 14.5% and 15.3% respectively. The median pay gap in the West Midlands region was the same as the England national average for full time employees, at 8.6%.

The disability pay gap between disabled people and non-disabled people was 14.7% in the West Midlands region in 2021. The median pay of disabled employees is £11.16 per hour, 14.7% lower than of non-disabled employees who have a median pay of £13.09 per hour.⁹⁷ The wider West Midlands has shown a 3.7 percentage point increase in the disability pay gap from 2014, however a 0.3 percentage point decrease between 2020 and 2021. The West Midlands region had a disability pay gap that is 0.6% higher than the English national average, at 14.7% and 14.1% respectively. The median pay of disabled employees in England in 201 was £12.17, this is £1.01 more than in the West Midlands.

Housing inequality

Ethnic minorities are more likely to live in social rented or private rented housing than to be a home owner-occupier. Disabled people are more likely to live in socially rented housing than to be a home owner-occupier. Nearly a quarter of disabled people occupy a socially rented property. In the West Midlands region, disabled people are more likely to rent social housing, with 24.5% of disabled people aged 16 to 64 years occupying a socially rented property, compared with 8.6% of non-disabled people aged 16-64, a difference of 15.9 percentage points.⁹⁸ This falls closely in line with the English national figures of 24.0% for disabled and 7.7% for non-disabled.



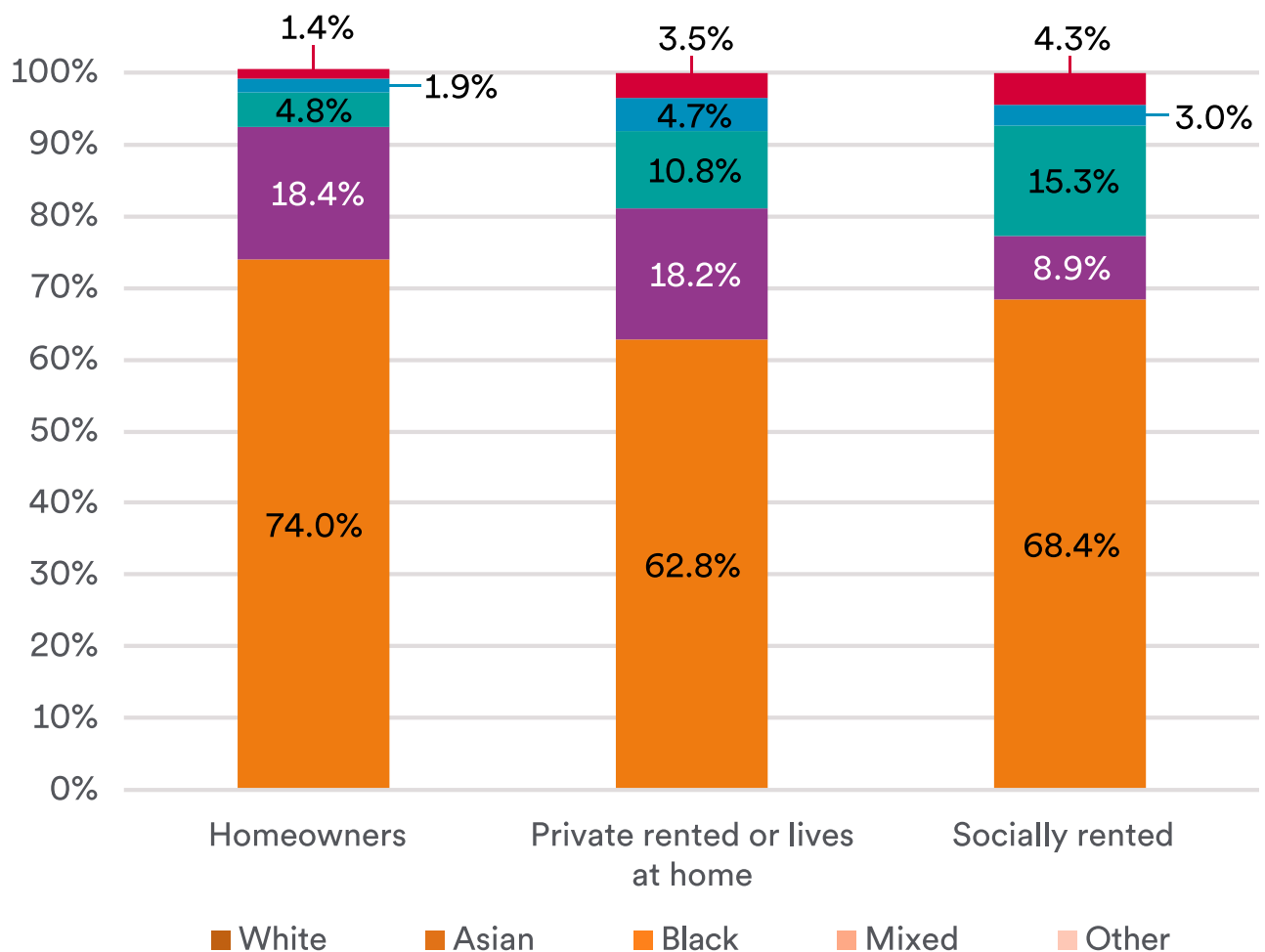
Conversely, disabled people are less likely to be owner-occupiers, with 39.9% of disabled people aged 16 to 64 years being owner-occupiers, compared to 53.4% of non-disabled people aged 16 to 64, a difference of 13.5 percentage points. This falls closely in line with the English national figures of 40.1% for disabled people and 52.7% for non-disabled people.

Lower skill level coupled with lower employment opportunities and less high-paid employment opportunities means disabled people are more likely to live in social housing and less likely to be able to afford to own their home. The West Midlands region has a higher proportion of disabled people living in social rented accommodation or living with parents, than the English national. The West Midlands region has a lower proportion has a lower proportion of disabled people living in owner occupier and private rented accommodation, than the English national.

Disabled people in accommodation that is:	West Midlands region (%)	England (%)
Owner occupied	39.9	40.1
Social rented	24.5	24.0
Private rented	15.1	17.4
Living with parents	18.7	16.3

People from an ethnic minority background are disproportionately likely to face housing deprivation, homelessness, poor housing conditions and overcrowded accommodation. In the WMCA area, 68% of White British households were homeowners compared to 50% for non-White British households. Overcrowding in the region and nationally is four times higher for ethnic minority communities (10%) than White British (2%).

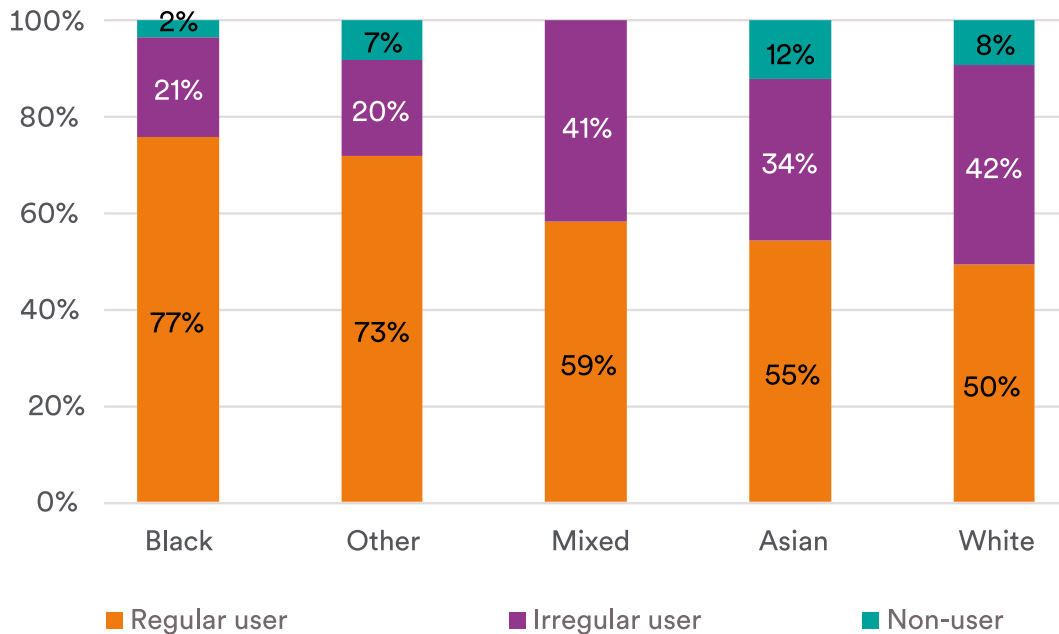
This falls in line with the national picture, which shows that White ethnicities are more likely than ethnic minorities to be homeowners. Ethnic minorities are also more likely to live in private rented accommodation both nationally and in the WMCA area. Social rented housing is more likely to be accommodated by Black and Other ethnicities in England; this is a similar pattern to seen in the WMCA area.



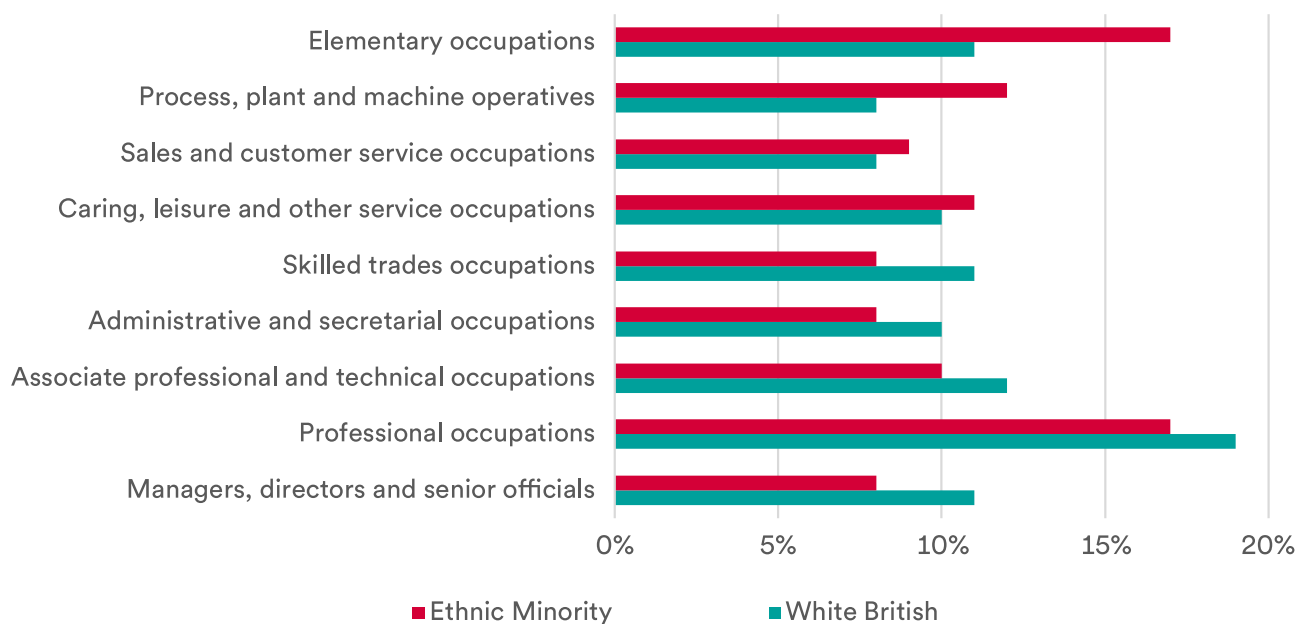
Lower employment opportunities and less high-paid employment opportunities means ethnic minorities are more likely to live in social housing or private rented accommodation and are less likely to be able to afford to own their home. Ethnic minorities earn less than their White counterparts which means that there are more likely to live in deprived housing and face overcrowding.

Transport inequality

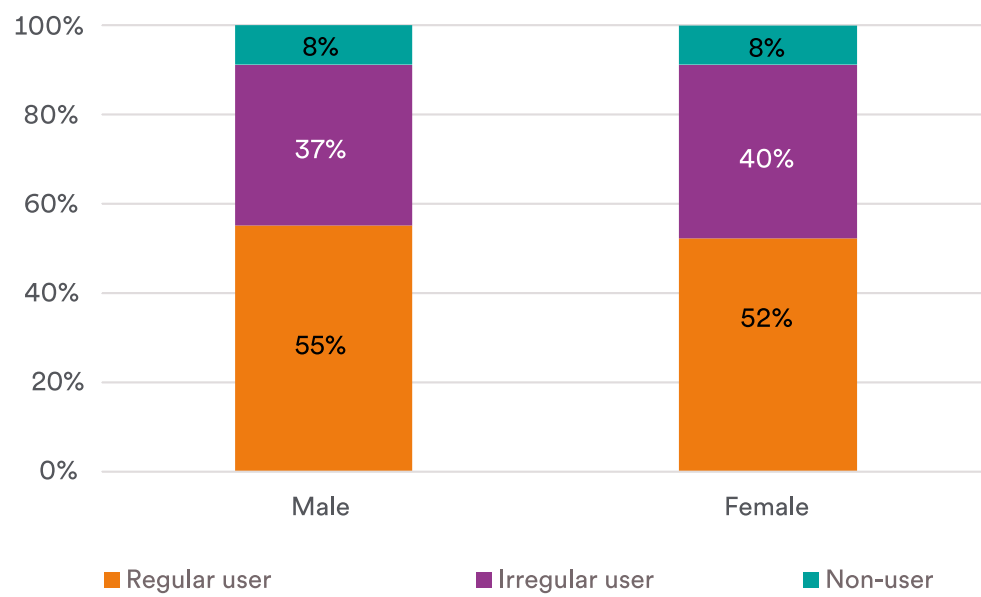
Regular transport users are more likely to be from Black (77%) ethnic groups than any other ethnic groups.⁹⁹ Mixed, Asian, and Black ethnic groups have a higher likelihood than White to travel frequently by public transport. Regular public transport users are defined as those travelling by either bus, rail or tram once a week or more.



Ethnic minorities tend to predominately be in the lowest five paid occupation categories, while White British groups have a greater proportion working in the top five highest paid occupations. While these factors do not necessarily relate directly to poor transport availability and accessibility, economic status and income are a determining factor in transport choices and access.



Both males and females have similar likelihood to travel frequently by public transport at 55% and 52% respectively.



Further information

Included as part of the West Midlands State of the Region 2023/24 report is a metrics dashboard, data downloads, and an immersive virtual reality experience.

This can be found at wmca.org.uk/research.

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