

A summary picture of childhood vulnerability in Birmingham

This document provides a summary of the key facts and figures on childhood vulnerability in Birmingham. For detailed information and a wider range of data (including sources), please see the JSNA children and young people chapter: vulnerability dashboard. Throughout this summary, 'children' refers to the 287,463 children and young people who are under the age of 18 years unless stated.

Click this [link](#) to access the dashboard.

A child can be vulnerable to risks and poor outcomes for many reasons. These may include their physical and social environment, their relationships with other people, the actions of others or failure to act, or their own individual characteristics¹.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner categorised groups of vulnerable children into 9 domains based on the type of vulnerability² and these domains lead the themes in the dashboard and this summary.

Family Experience

Many children in the city live in families where they are exposed to potentially harmful parental behaviour stemming from parental severe mental health problem (41,000 children), parental drug or alcohol dependency (13,000), domestic abuse (19,000) or all three (4,000). In addition, nearly 4,000 children are unpaid carers who are looking after family members.

The Trio of Vulnerability

An estimated 41,000 children in the city live in households where a parent has a severe mental health problem, 13,000 live with a parent with drug or alcohol dependency and 19,000, where a parent is experiencing domestic abuse. Some 56,000 children live in households with at least one of the three and 4,000 children live in households where they are exposed to all three.

Young Carers

In 2021, there were around 3,900 unpaid young carers aged up to 19 years, which is four in every 1,000 in this age group. Of these, 900 provide 20-49 hours of care a week, and 500 provide 50 or more hours.

¹ Public Health England. No child left behind: Understanding and quantifying vulnerability; 2020.

² Defining child vulnerability: Definitions, frameworks and groups: Technical Paper 2 in Children's Commissioner project on vulnerable children. London; 2017

Deprivation

There are several different indicators of poverty and deprivation but all of them show that children in Birmingham are seriously affected by poverty.

Deprivation Affecting Children

- Birmingham is ranked the 7th most deprived local authority in England with 43% of the total population, and half (51%) of children under 16, living in LSOAs in the 10% most deprived in England.
- 27.6% of children live in income deprived households which is significantly worse than the England average (17.1%).
- Twice as many households (couples and lone parents) with dependent children have fewer bedrooms than they need in Birmingham than the national average.
- 80,000 children (38.4%) in the City are eligible for free school meals, significantly higher than England (23.8%). This is increasing as it is regionally and nationally.

Safeguarding and Local Authority Care

Overall, in Birmingham, rates of children who are supported or looked after by children's social care are similar or slightly lower than national and regional averages. The impact of COVID is seen in the increase in children in care locally, regionally and nationally between 2021 and 2022. Domestic and emotional abuse are the most commonly identified factors in both assessments and child protection plans. Children who are supported in Birmingham do well in some aspects of their lives (e.g. fewer children in care known to be misusing substances, or with emotional wellbeing as a cause for concern, fewer fixed term exclusions) but there are areas where Birmingham is below regional or national averages (e.g. dental checks, immunisations).

Referrals and Assessments

In 2021/22 a total of 15,682 referrals were made to Birmingham Childrens Trust (BCT) with the highest numbers of referrals from police, schools and health services. A total of 14,185 assessments were carried out by BCT in 2021/22, of which domestic abuse, emotional abuse and mental health of parent were the most frequently identified risk factors. Not all referrals result in assessment and multiple risk factors may be identified during the assessment. The Safeguarding Partnership publish Right Help Right Time a document that sets out levels of need and the help and support available to children and their families at each level of need.

Child Protection

In 2021/22, 1,524 children became subject to child protection plans during the year, a rate of 53 per 10,000 children. This is similar to the national average (53.2), but lower than the West Midlands (56.1) and Statistical Neighbours (61.2). Emotional abuse (which includes harm from domestic abuse) was recorded as the most common category of abuse (58%) at the initial child protection conference.

Children in Care (Looked After Children)

In 2022, there were 2,094 children in care at any point during the year, which is 73 per 10,000 children. This is not significantly different from the England average (70 per 10,000) and lower

than the West Midlands and Core Cities averages. Locally, regionally and nationally the number children in care per 10,000 has increased between 2021 and 2022.

Fewer children in care in Birmingham (1%) are known to be using alcohol and drugs compared to the national (3%) and regional average (2%). Around 45% received dental checks and 74% were up to date with their immunisations, both of which are lower than national and regional averages. In 2021/22, emotional wellbeing was a cause for concern for 32% of children in care in Birmingham: lower than the national and regional average.

Children in care in Birmingham perform better than national and regional averages for attainment KS4 attainment 8 (average score 20.6).

Children in Need (CIN)

A 'child in need' is a child who needs additional support to meet their potential; a child who needs to be protected from harm; or a child that needs accommodation. As of 31 March 2023, 9,333 children were assessed as needing support services. The primary need was abuse and neglect (65%) which is higher than West Midland (58%) and England (57%) averages.

In 2021 almost two thirds (65%) of CIN were eligible for free school meals which is higher than the general pupil population (38%). A quarter (25.5%) have an EHCP statement and 20.2% have SEN support, and as expected by the definition of CIN, both are higher than the general pupil population.

In 2020, Birmingham had lower levels of CIN with at least one fixed term period exclusion (7.75%). This has been lower than regional and national averages for the previous 5 years. The average attainment 8 score at KS4 for CIN in Birmingham is 21.2 which is slightly lower than regional and national and lower than the average score for children in care.

Risk Behaviours

Generally, data suggest that risk behaviours in Birmingham children are similar or lower than England averages: this is seen for substance hospital admissions (lower), alcohol hospital admissions (lower) and teenage conceptions (similar).

Substance Misuse

In the period 2018/19 to 2020/21, the rate of alcohol-specific hospital admissions in under 18s in Birmingham was 17.4 per 100,000 population, equivalent to 150 admissions. This was significantly lower than the England rate of 29.3 per 100,000. For the same period, the rate of hospital admissions due to substance misuse in 15-24 year olds was 51.0 per 100,000 population, equivalent to 280 admissions. This was significantly lower than the England rate (81.2 per 100,000).

Sexual health

In 2022, there were 1,943 cases of Chlamydia detected in Birmingham 15-24 year olds (1,092 per 100,000 of this age group). This was lower than both the West Midlands (1,337) and England (1,680) rates, however a higher detection rate is indicative of increased control activity (detection, treatment and contact tracing) and not a measure of morbidity.

Teenage Conceptions

In 2021, 316 young women aged under 18 living in Birmingham became pregnant (13.5 conceptions per 1,000 young women aged 15-17). This not significantly different to England average (13.1). Almost half (45%) of under 18s conceptions in Birmingham led to abortions which is significantly lower than national average. In 2021/22, 95 babies were born to mothers under the age of 18: 0.70% of all births and is significantly higher than the England average (0.56%).

Physical and Mental Health

There is considerable health need arising from unintentional and deliberate injuries (over 2000 hospital admissions per year) and mental health (180 inpatient admissions). Nearly 30,000 pupils in the city are identified as having SEN, with over 9,000 identified as having moderate learning disabilities. For those that need the additional support of an EHCP, the most common primary reason is for autistic spectrum disorder (over 3000 pupils).

Unintentional and Deliberate Injuries

In 2021/22, there were 2,065 hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children (aged 0 -14 years) in Birmingham (86.6 per 10,000 and similar to England 84.3). Admission rates were higher in younger children (102.3 per 10,000 in 0-4 year olds, 760 admissions) and older children and young people (92.4 per 10,000 in 15-24), 1,645 admissions). Rates in older children and young people are consistently lower than England average.

Mental Health and Emotional Needs

In 2020/21, there were 180 inpatient admissions for mental health disorders in Birmingham, 62.8 per 100,000 0-17 year olds, which was significantly lower than the England average 87.5.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In 2022/23 14.3% of all pupils up to the age of 18 received Special Educational Needs (SEN) support which is almost 30,000 pupils. This is higher than England (12.9%) and the West Midlands (13.7%). The most commonly identified primary care need for children on SEN were Moderate Learning Disability (4.4% - 9,040 pupils), Speech, language and communication needs (3.8% - 7,953 pupils), Social, Emotional and Mental Health (2.4% - 5,063 pupils), and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (1.5% - 3,101 pupils).

Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans are for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. In 2022/23 the total number of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan pupils in Birmingham for pupils up to the age of 18 was 7,607. The highest primary care need for children on EHC plans was Autistic Spectrum Disorder (1.6% - 3,257 pupils).

Disengagement with Education

COVID-19 has impacted on persistent absence and exclusions data, and it is not yet possible to see the lasting impact on these indicators, for example whether persistence absence rates will remain almost twice as high as they were pre-pandemic.

Persistent Absence

During 2021/22, 21,215 (21.8%) pupils were persistently absent (missed 10% or more of possible sessions) in Birmingham primary schools, and 21,881 pupils (27.7%) were persistently absent from secondary schools. Nationally there has been a huge increase in persistent absence impacted by the pandemic.

Exclusions

In 2020/21, there were 1322 fixed period exclusions in Birmingham primary schools which is 118 children in every 10,000, higher than the England rate of 99 per 10,000 children. In secondary schools there were 5570 fixed period exclusions, which is 655 per 10,000 children, lower than the England rate of 848. There were 24 permanent exclusions in Birmingham primary schools, or 2.1 per 10,000 pupils, higher than the England rate of 0.8. There were 98 permanent exclusions in secondary schools, 11.5 per 10,000 children, higher than the England rate of 10.

Crime and Exploitation

There are hundreds of children in Birmingham who are victims of exploitation. Males make up majority of victims and the type of exploitation varies by gender. Ethnicity data are available for county lines and show half of victims were from Black ethnic groups. Due to increased awareness raising and training, numbers identified and referred to services have risen over the past 4 years. However the current numbers for both criminal and sexual exploitation are low given the crime profile of the City in particular the extent of organised crime.

Exploitation

In 2022/23 there were 148 referrals made to the National Referral Mechanism (framework for identifying and referring victims of modern slavery and known to undercount) regarding children under 18 in the city. Just under 70% of those children were UK nationals. Over three quarters of children (76%) were male and most between the ages of 15 and 17. The majority of boys (81%) were victims of criminal exploitation, including county lines, acquisitive crime and cannabis cultivation, while almost two thirds (61%) of girls were victims of sexual exploitation. Data on county lines (January 2019 to September 2022) identified 762 Birmingham children as being entrenched county lines. The age and gender profile is reflective of the national picture. The majority are male (96%) and between the ages of 15 and 17 (80%), and, while victims come from a wide range of ethnicities, half are from Black ethnic groups.

First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System

In 2022, the rate of first-time entrants (aged 10-17 years) to the youth justice system in Birmingham was 110.4 per 100,000 population, equivalent to 145 children. This was significantly lower than the England rate of 148.9/100,000. It was not possible to calculate trends for Birmingham but in England, the rate is significantly increasing.

Missing and absent children and minority populations

There are some groups of children who are particularly vulnerable. These include those who are without the protection of a safe adult, including children who go missing (2,365 in 2022/23) and unaccompanied asylum seekers (106 at March 2022). Also children who are face additional inequalities including more than a thousand Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in Birmingham who registered for school in 2021/22. Child migrants who arrived in 2021 make up about 2.5% of the population of children.

Missing Children

In 2022/23 2,365 children under 18 went missing and there were 5,148 episodes. Similar to the exploitation and county lines data, the numbers increase in the early teens, peaking at 15 years old.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

On 31st March 2021 there were 68 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in Care, but by March 2022 this had risen to 106. Nationally and locally we are seeing increasing numbers of asylum seeking children and young people resulting in and increasing numbers of UASC children in care. Most of those presenting have a claimed age of 17+ having initially being placed as adults in Home Office contracted dispersal accommodation in Birmingham thus creating increasing demands on services including single tenancy housing, given they will soon be 18 years of age.

Gypsy, Traveller and Roma Children

Roma was included as an ethnic category for the first time in the 2021 Census. It counted 664 Gypsy, Traveller and Roma dependent children with highest numbers (per 1,000 dependent children) in Alum Rock, Ward End, Holyhead and Heartlands. The Census however is likely to under-estimate the population both locally and nationally. School roll data show higher numbers albeit still an underestimate, with 1,084 Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma Children registered for the 2021/22 academic year in Birmingham. Only 333 were registered for secondary school in 2021/22 compared to 731 for nursery and primary school.

Child Migrants

A total of 7,726 child migrants arrived in Birmingham in 2021, with around one third (2,546) travelling from countries on the Asian continent, most arriving from Pakistan (743) and China (698). Around 28% of child migrants (2,158) arrived from European countries, with the highest numbers travelling from Romania (634), Italy (374) and Spain (326). Child migrants from Africa accounted for 13% (1,023), with 473 travelling from Nigeria, and 2% (117) travelled from America. Almost a fifth (18%, 1,427) of child migrants arrived from all other countries, and for 455 children (6%), their country of origin was unknown.