

June 2026



Equalities Strategy and Action Plan 2026-2030



Equalities Strategy and Action Plan 2026 – 2030

Foreword

As a council, we are proud to serve a diverse and vibrant borough. Our Equality Strategy is more than a statutory requirement, it is a reflection of our values and our commitment to fairness, respect and opportunity for all. Equality is not simply something we comply with; it is something we champion, because an inclusive borough is a stronger, healthier and more resilient one.

This strategy sets out how we will meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. But our ambition goes further. We want equality and inclusion to be embedded in every decision we make, every service we design and every interaction we have with residents. Achieving this requires us to continually challenge ourselves, to learn, and to recognise the barriers that prevent people from reaching their full potential.

In developing this strategy, we have drawn on the insight and experience of colleagues across the organisation, including our Equalities Focus Group, whose ongoing reflections help us stay alert to emerging issues and opportunities. Their continued involvement will support us as we put this strategy into practice and monitor our progress.

We know that inequality can take many forms, from access to services and employment to health, housing and representation. Addressing these issues demands persistence, honesty and a willingness to evolve. As a council, we are committed to leading by example and creating an environment where inclusion is not an aspiration but an everyday reality.

Together, we can build a borough where everyone feels seen, heard and valued, and where equality is not just a principle, but a lived experience for all.

Tonia Craig, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Contents

Foreword.....	2
Introduction.....	6
Background	6
Strategy.....	8
Objectives.....	9
Action Plan	10
Appendix A – Local data and insight.....	13

Term	Definition
Age	Refers to a person belonging to a particular age group (e.g. 32-year-olds) or a range of ages (e.g. 18–30-year-olds).
Armed Forces Community	Includes serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families. While not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, this group is recognised under the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces Act 2021 as potentially facing disadvantage in accessing services. The Council therefore considers Armed Forces status as a supplementary equality characteristic.
Disability	A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
Diversity	Recognising, valuing, and respecting the differences in people's backgrounds, experiences, and identities, enabling everyone to contribute fully and thrive.
Equality	Ensuring individuals or groups are treated fairly and equitably, with consideration of their different needs, especially in relation to the protected characteristics.
Gender Reassignment	A person is protected if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex. This applies regardless of whether medical treatment is involved.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	This characteristic protects individuals who are married or in a civil partnership. Discrimination against individuals based on their marital status is prohibited, although this protection does not extend to single individuals.
Pregnancy and Maternity	Pregnancy is the condition of expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after birth, including maternity leave. In non-work contexts, protection lasts for 26 weeks after giving birth and includes breastfeeding.
Race	Includes colour, nationality (including citizenship), and ethnic or national origins.
Religion or Belief	Religion includes any religion with a clear structure and belief system. Belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs, and lack of belief (e.g. atheism). A belief must be genuinely held and affect life choices or behaviour.
Sex	This refers to a person's gender, protecting individuals from discrimination based on being male or female.

Sexual Orientation	A person's sexual attraction towards people of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes.
Social Deprivation	Refers to the extent to which individuals or communities lack access to resources and opportunities necessary for a decent standard of living, including education, employment, housing, health, safety, and services.
Unconscious Bias	The automatic and unintentional associations or attitudes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions about others, often based on stereotypes. Everyone has unconscious biases; awareness is key to mitigating their impact.

Introduction

1. Eastleigh Borough Council (the Council) is committed to achieving diversity and equality of opportunity, both as an employer and as a provider of services. This means working to ensure that Eastleigh Borough is free from discrimination but also doing what we can to positively promote equality and diversity across the delivery of services, and within our workforce.
2. Inequalities in our society have long been present, and recent national and local evidence continues to show how factors such as race, gender, disability, socio-economic status and geography intersect to shape people's life chances. These inequalities influence health, wellbeing, access to services and wider opportunities. It remains vital that the Council drives forward programmes that reduce inequality, prevent poor outcomes and improve opportunities for all residents.
3. This Equality Strategy sets out how the Council will not only fulfil its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 but will work towards embedding an inclusive mindset within all its services, processes, and culture in order to create an approach that values every individual regardless of their background and characteristics.
4. This strategy aligns with the Council's mission of 'enabling and healthier Eastleigh. The Council's values of 'Fairness, Empowerment and Ambition' underpin the actions in this Strategy and will help to shape the Council's inclusive culture.

Background

5. The Council has a general duty under the Equality Act 2010 requiring public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
6. Having due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making and carrying out our functions and day to day activities. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence how public bodies, like the Council, act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policy; how they design, deliver and evaluate services; how they commission and procure from others, and how they work with communities and respond to customers.
7. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves considering the need to:
 - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics;

- (b) meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
 - (c) encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
8. Fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
9. Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people differently to others and providing a more suitable service as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve making use of an exception or the positive action provisions in order to provide a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic – such as providing computer training for those older people who need help to access information and services.
10. Under the Equality Act all public sector bodies also have a specific duty to:
- (a) Publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general Equality Duty annually. This information must include, information relating to people who share a protected characteristic who are:
 - (i) its employees, and
 - (ii) people affected by its policies and practices.
 - (b) Prepare and publish, at least every four years, one or more objectives that it thinks it needs to achieve to further any of the aims of the general Equality Duty. The objectives must be specific and measurable.
11. The following characteristics are protected in the Equality Act 2010
- (a) age
 - (b) disability, including hidden disabilities, autism, learning disabilities, mental illness
 - (c) gender reassignment
 - (d) pregnancy and maternity
 - (e) race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality, including Gypsy, Romany and Traveller communities
 - (f) religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
 - (g) sex
 - (h) sexual orientation
 - (i) marriage and civil partnership (in respect to the need to eliminate employment discrimination).
12. The Council recognises that socioeconomic deprivation is also a characteristic which often leads to exclusion and inequalities. Socioeconomic factors play a large part in determining health and other outcomes.
13. Digital exclusion is not itself a protected characteristic although it has a correlation with age, socio-economic deprivation, disability, and race. Given the reliance on digital tools during the pandemic, and the trend towards

accessing public services through digital means, the Council believes that reducing digital exclusion is an important part of meeting our equality duty.

14. Although service in the Armed Forces is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, the Council recognises the unique circumstances faced by members of the Armed Forces community — including serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families.
15. Eastleigh Borough's residents have a range of diverse and different characteristics. Some of these differences are more apparent than others. Many protected characteristics such as disabilities, however, are not always visible, which means the level of diversity is not apparent.
16. Some protected characteristics are shared by relatively small numbers of people; the Equality Act affords protection to certain groups regardless of their size in the population. Further information about outcomes, forms of exclusion and how the Council can address them will be gathered and shared with staff in the Council to assist in assessing equalities impacts.

Strategy

17. Factors that create and perpetuate inequalities are complex and no single organisation is able, on its own, to eliminate those inequalities. The Council carries out a number of functions, where it has the opportunity to address inequalities:
 - a) As a community leader, representing and serving the local population
 - b) In delivering services that benefit some or all residents
 - c) In delivering short-term projects
 - d) In shaping the places where people live, work, visit and take recreation
 - e) In regulating certain activities and enforcing rules to protect people and businesses
 - f) In the information and data it collects, analyses and shares with partners
 - g) In communicating with residents, businesses and organisations
 - h) In its work in partnerships with other agencies.
18. The approach to achieving equalities objectives in the short and long term is therefore to increase awareness within the Council and improve processes so that there are positive outcomes for all residents. In some cases, this may involve enhancing a service or project, or going the extra mile, in order to achieve a truly inclusive benefit for residents.
19. Being responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics means listening to the voices of those people or groups. By achieving this objective, we will have a better sense of issues and areas where the Council can focus its equalities actions and efforts in the future.

20. Equalities issues are sometimes contentious and complex. The Council will promote a supportive environment where it is safe for people to discuss equalities issues, in order to help people to learn, understand the issues and agree a positive shared way forward.
21. To deliver this strategy, the Council will embed equalities considerations into all stages of policy development, service design, and decision-making. This includes using data more effectively, strengthening community engagement, and ensuring that staff have the skills and confidence to identify and address inequalities.

Objectives

22. To realise our vision of a fair, inclusive and equitable borough, the Council will focus its efforts on five core objectives. These objectives are not simply administrative commitments — they represent the values we want to embed across every part of our organisation. They reflect our belief that equality is not a standalone task but a continuous, collective responsibility that shapes how we design services, support our workforce, and engage with our communities.
23. These objectives also recognise that Eastleigh is a changing borough. As our population grows and becomes more diverse, the Council must remain responsive, curious, and proactive. By committing to these goals, we aim not only to meet our statutory duties but to demonstrate leadership — setting a standard for fairness, transparency, and inclusion across the public sector.

Action Plan

Objective	How we get there?	What will we do?	What will success look like?
Carry out duties under the Equality Act 2010	Continue to improve consideration of equalities issues in service design, project planning and for key decisions.	Support and challenge EqlAs including equalities considerations when planning our processes and documentation, through the annual planning cycle.	Improved quality and consideration of equalities implications in EqlAs.
	Ensure EqlAs are considered during the planning stages of our projects, strategies and policies.	Develop and embed more guidance on how to complete EqlAs and when an EqlA is required.	More guidance available online and reviewed regularly to ensure the Council consider equalities implications at the beginning of a project and not the end.
	Carry out annual reviews of Equality Impact Assessments and make recommendations for improvement.	Equalities Focus Group will review EqlAs on an annual basis. Publish the strategy on the Council website and monitor and review actions annually.	Better EqlAs, produced by staff that have the knowledge and support to carry out meaningful assessments.
	Publish objectives and provide an annual equality review of the objectives and action plan.	publish equality objectives and provide an annual review assessing progress against the objectives and associated action plan, ensuring transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.	An annual review of review actions, through the Equalities Focus Group, to identify gaps and meet needs.
Build better links with people with protected characteristics and be more responsive	Continue to build better relationships with groups and organisations representing people with protected characteristics.	Ensure we are involving the right people at the right time, through engagements and consultation.	Engagement with groups on specific key issues will inform EqlAs.
	Build up resources and material to help inform EqlAs and the	Ensure that the Council is up-to-date with legislation and current	Regular review of legislation and best practice, at least once

Objective	How we get there?	What will we do?	What will success look like?
	Council's understanding of Equalities issues.	practices in terms of equalities to ensure consistent awareness.	a year, will inform our service planning and delivery.
	Use data and evidence to better understand Eastleigh residents.	Use 2021 Census data to update the strategy once published.	Gathering and publication of demographic and profile data will inform positive initiatives.
	Strengthen awareness of Armed Forces Covenant commitments across the Council.	Include Armed Forces status as a consideration within Equality Impact Assessments.	Improved access to services for serving personnel, veterans, reservists, and their families, with evidence of their needs being considered in policy and service design.
Recognise and value the diversity of the workforce	Improve monitoring of applicants and staff characteristics (ensuring compliance with GDPR).	Produce an annual report for Corporate Leadership Board on staff and applicant profile to measure diversity and inclusiveness in recruitment and retention.	Production of a report annually for CLB.
	Review existing Equality and Diversity policy.	Clarify separation of Equality issues relating to staff and residents by ensuring our policy is up to date.	Publication of an updated policy.
	Commit to encouraging inclusive and accessible recruitment.	Support the Disability Confident scheme.	More people with a registered disability interviewed.
	Build supportive employment practices for the Armed Forces Community and strengthen awareness, policies, and recruitment pathways that align with Silver Award standards.	Review policies, improve support for reservists and veterans, promote Armed Forces-friendly recruitment, and track progress against the Silver Award criteria.	Achieve the Silver Award and demonstrate that Armed Forces personnel, veterans, reservists, and families feel recognised, supported, and able to thrive in our organisation.

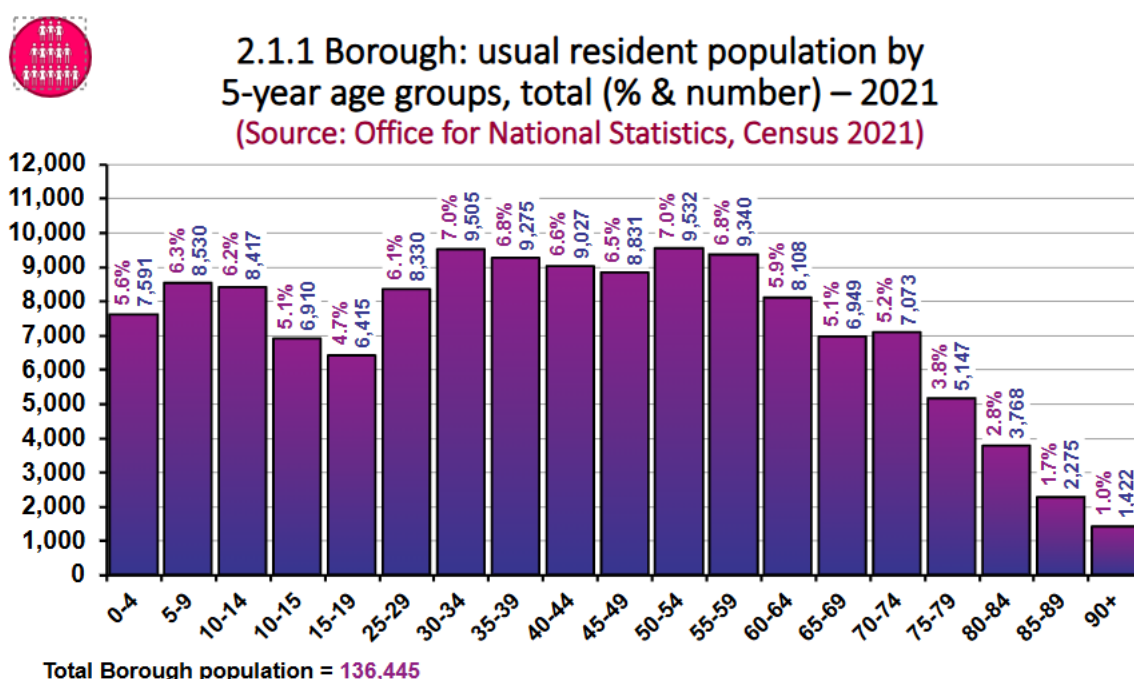
Objective	How we get there?	What will we do?	What will success look like?
Embed an inclusive mindset across the Council	Equalities Focus Group to continue to meet to consider and champion equalities issues across the Council.	Hold meetings when required to track implementation of this Action Plan, chaired by member of Corporate Leadership Board.	Attendance at the Equalities Focus Group by a member of Corporate Leadership Board and relevant officers responsible for championing equalities and implementing the action plan.
	Continue to provide up-to-date training for staff and Councillors in relation to the Equality Act and awareness of protected characteristics.	Ensure all training materials are kept up-to-date and made available on the staff training portal.	Number of people taking mandatory training every year.
	Ensure there is guidance and information on equalities, and this is accessible and up to date.	Review and update the Council equality page on Staff Hub ensuring that this accessible to people who may be visually impaired.	Equality information on the Council website reviewed and updated at least annually.
Ensure council services are accessible	Ensure communications are accessible and translation and interpretation is available when needed.	Work with finance to track use of translations and interpreters across services areas to understand who uses them the most.	Data collected by services about accessibility to inform equality analyses.
	Consider ways to address digital exclusion.	Explore opportunities to work with partner agencies to address digital exclusion.	Raise awareness of existing support services for digital exclusion.
	Protect communications and customer service channels for people who are digitally excluded.	Continue to produce paper format communications where appropriate and respond by letter and phone.	Services supporting groups that have accessibility issues as a result of a protected characteristic or digital and/ or physical barriers.

Appendix A – Local data and insight

24. In achieving diversity and equal opportunity, it is important for the Council to understand its residents and service users and to what extent this evidence highlights a need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; a need to foster good relations; or a need to advance equality of opportunity.
25. This section looks at key statistical information to help understand Eastleigh Borough residents and whether they share a protected characteristic. Data has been sourced from the 2021 Census.

Age

26. The table below from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) shows a breakdown of age ranges in the Borough by 5-year age groups. The largest age group is those in the 50 – 54 range with approximately 9532 people make up this age group living in the borough.



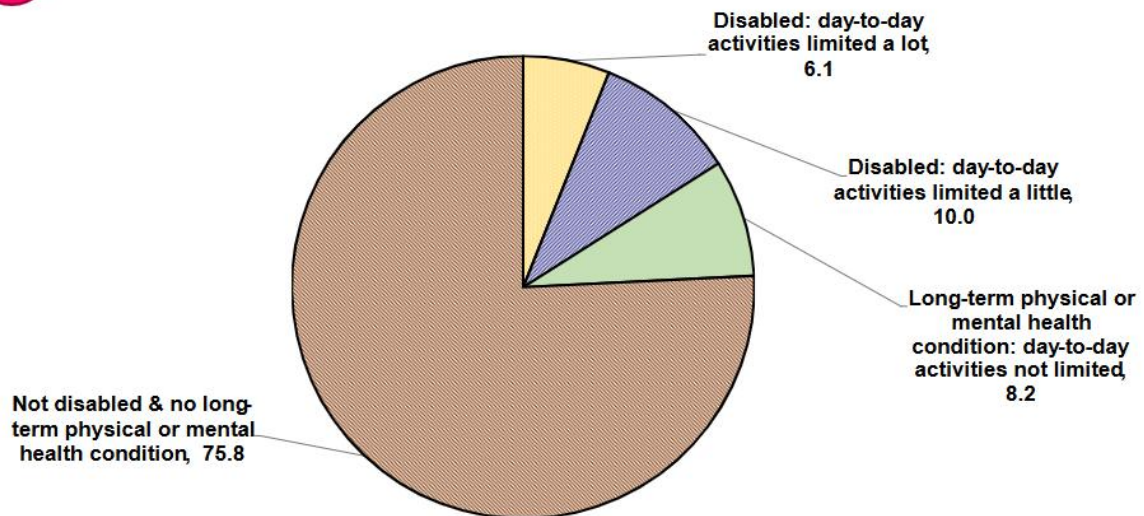
Disability

27. The 2021 Census data shows that around three-quarters (75.8%) of Eastleigh residents reported no disability or long-term health condition. The remaining quarter reflects varying levels of limitation: 10.0% said their day-to-day activities were limited a little, 6.1% were limited a lot, and 8.2% had a long-term condition that did not limit daily activities.



2.13a Borough: disability status of usual residents (%)

(Source: Office for National Statistics, March 2021)



Pregnancy and maternity

28. Pregnancy and maternity data are not captured through the Census, so local insight relies on health datasets and maternity service indicators. Eastleigh's profile is broadly consistent with national and Hampshire-level trends: annual ONS birth statistics show a stable number of live births each year, with most mothers aged 30–39, reflecting the demographic pattern of the borough.

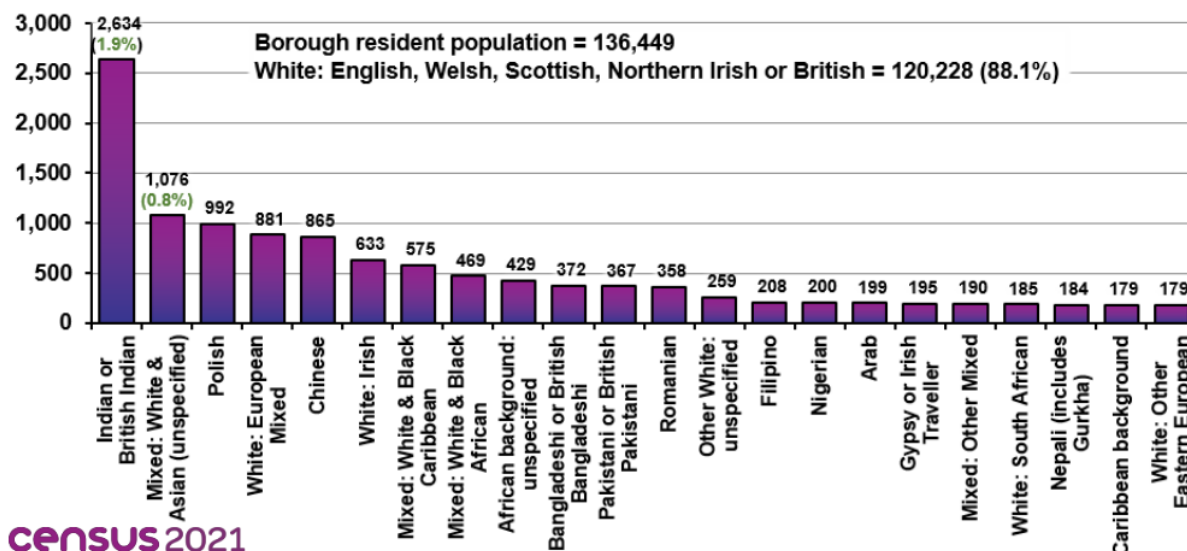
Race

29. The 2021 Census shows that Eastleigh Borough remains a predominantly White British borough, with 88.1% of residents identifying as White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. However, the detailed breakdown highlights a growing and increasingly diverse population, with a range of smaller but significant communities represented across the borough.
30. Among minority ethnic groups, the largest are Indian or British Indian (1.9%), followed by Mixed: White and Asian, Polish, European Mixed, and Chinese communities. A number of other groups, such as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African, Filipino, Nigerian, Arab, and Gypsy or Irish Traveller residents, are present in smaller numbers but contribute to the borough's cultural and demographic diversity.



2.18c Borough: usual residents by ethnic group- detailed (number)

(Source: Office for National Statistics, March 2021)



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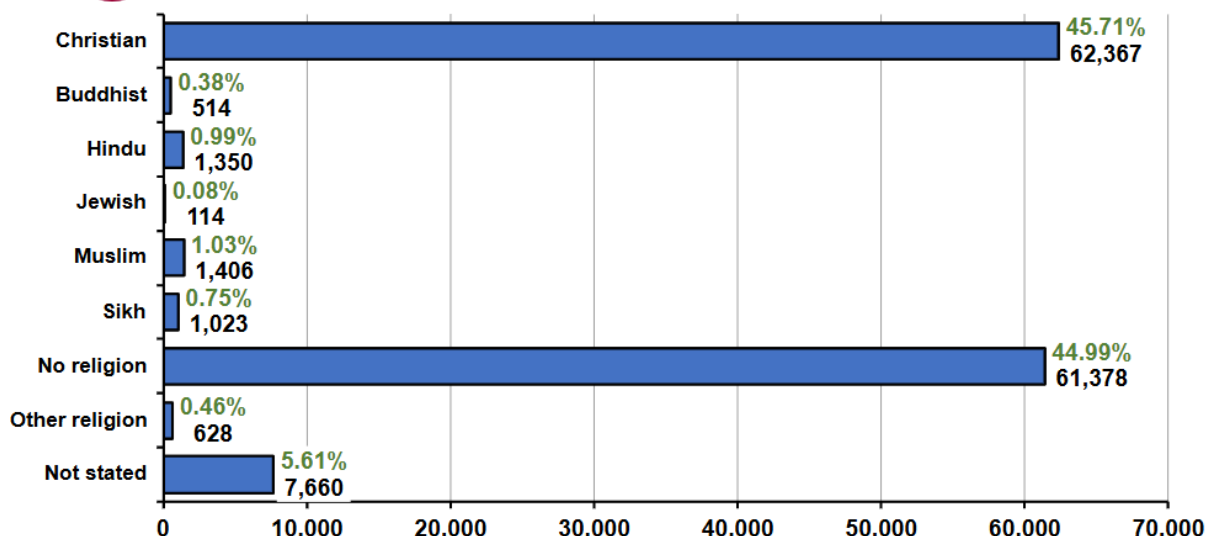
Religion or belief

31. The 2021 Census shows that Eastleigh has a broadly even split between residents identifying as Christian (45.7%) and those reporting no religion (44.9%), reflecting national trends towards declining religious affiliation. Smaller faith communities are present across the borough, including Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish residents, each representing under 2% of the population but contributing to the area's cultural and religious diversity. Around 5.6% of residents chose not to state their religion.



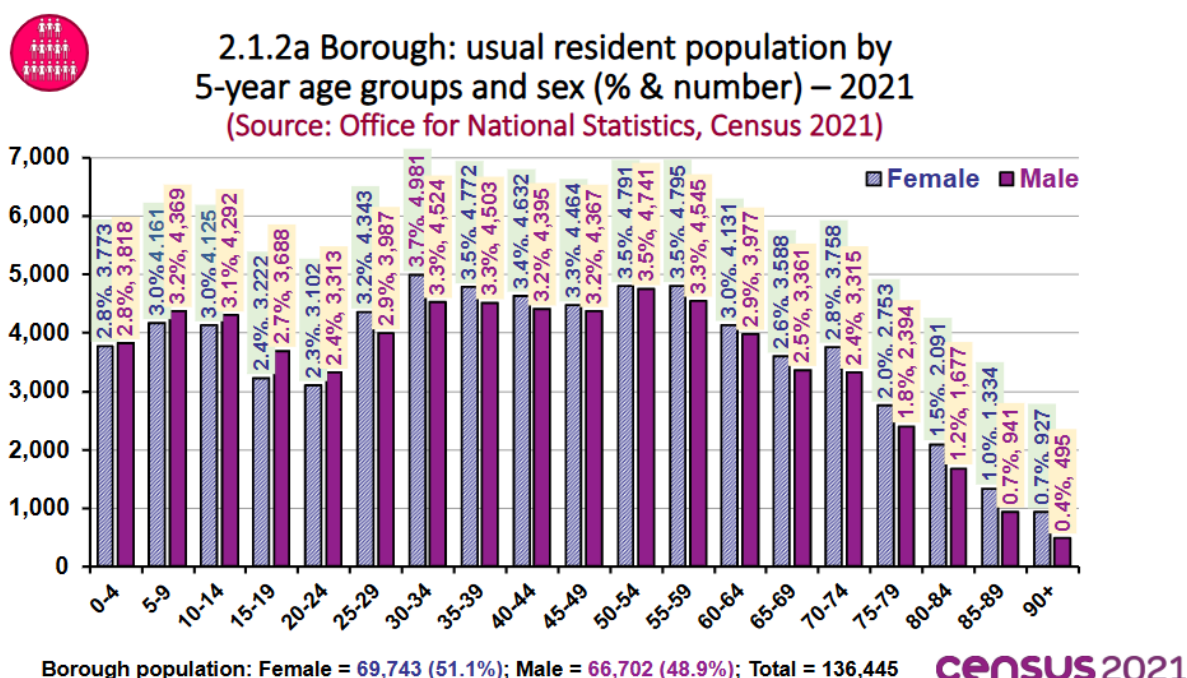
2.21 Borough: usual residents by religion

(number & %) (Source: Office for National Statistics, March 2021)



Sex

32. The 2021 Census shows that Eastleigh borough has a balanced population by sex, with females making up 51.1% of residents and males 48.9%. The age structure is broadly typical of a stable, family-oriented borough: there are sizeable cohorts of children and young people, strong working age populations, and a gradual increase in the proportion of females in older age groups due to longer life expectancy.
33. The largest age bands sit between 40 and 59, reflecting a mature working age population, while the presence of substantial numbers of children and young adults indicates ongoing demand for education, family and youth services. The older population grows steadily from age 70 onwards, with women outnumbering men in the 80+ groups, highlighting the importance of accessible services, health support and age friendly community planning.

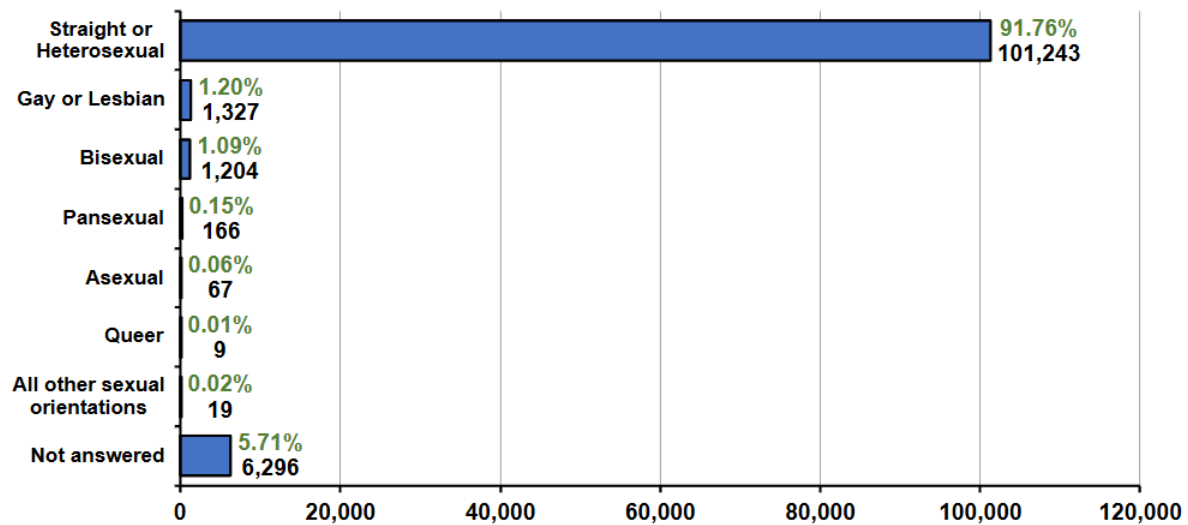


Sexual orientation

34. The 2021 Census shows that the vast majority of Eastleigh residents aged 16 and over identify as straight or heterosexual (91.8%), with a small but meaningful proportion identifying as gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or other minority sexual orientations. Although each LGBTQ+ group represents a relatively small share of the population individually, together they form a visible community whose experiences and needs should be recognised in service design and engagement. Around 5.7% of residents chose not to answer the question, reflecting the sensitivity of the topic and the importance of creating safe, inclusive environments where people feel comfortable sharing personal information.



2.23 Borough: usual residents (aged 16+) by sexual orientation (number & %) (Source: Office for National Statistics, March 2021)



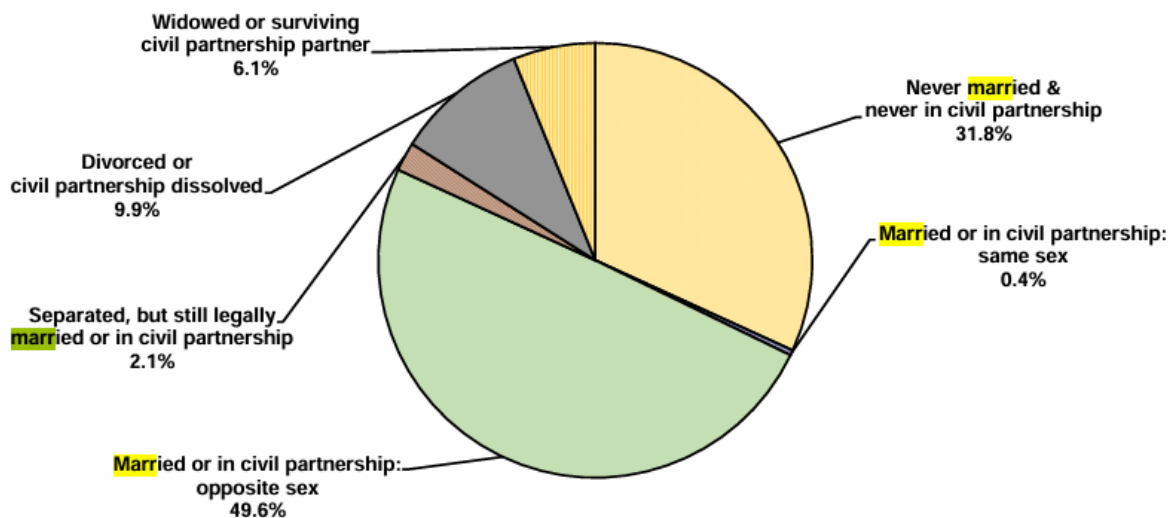
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Marriage and civil partnership

35. The 2021 Census shows that almost half of Eastleigh borough's adult population (49.6%) are married or in an opposite sex civil partnership. A further 31.8% of residents have never married or entered a civil partnership, forming the second-largest group. Smaller but important proportions of the population are divorced or have had a civil partnership dissolved (9.9%), widowed (6.1%), or separated but still legally married (2.1%), each of which may have distinct social and economic implications. Same-sex marriages and civil partnerships account for 0.4% of adults, consistent with national patterns for areas of similar size.

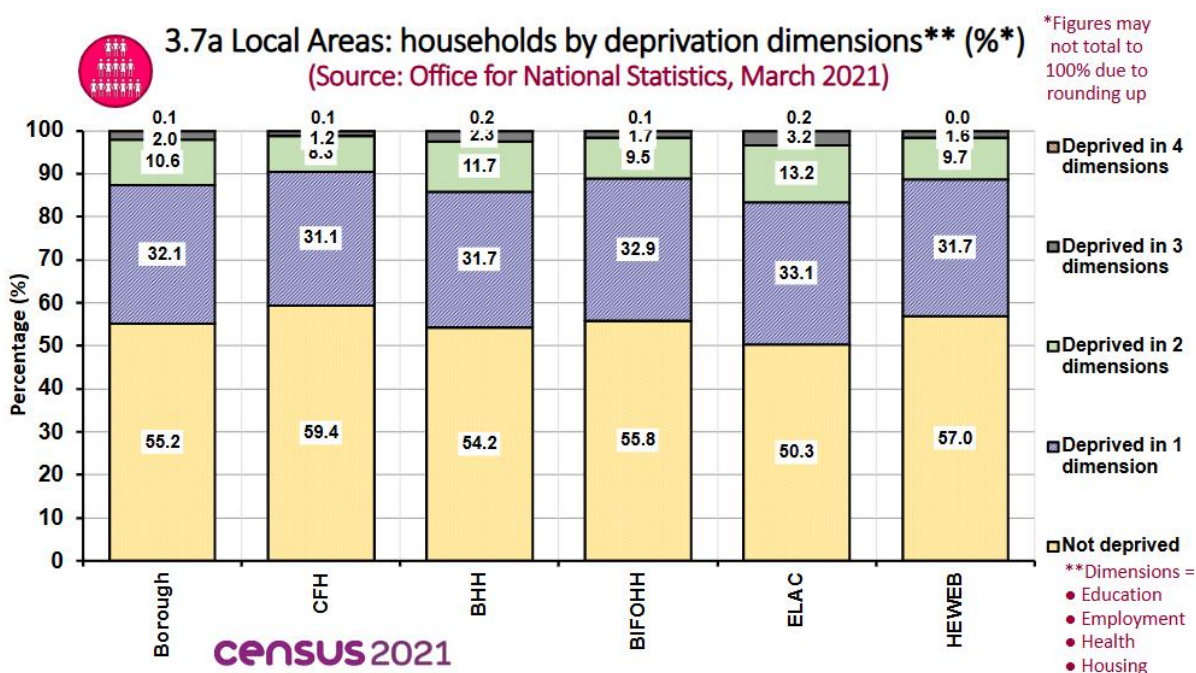
Social deprivation

2.6a Borough: usual residents (aged 16+) by legal partnership status (%) (Source: Office for National Statistics, March 2021)



census2021

36. The 2021 Census shows that just over half of Eastleigh borough households (55.2%) are not deprived in any of the four measured dimensions - education, employment, health and housing. Around one-third (32.1%) experience deprivation in one dimension, while smaller proportions face multiple disadvantages: 10.6% in two dimensions, 2.0% in three, and 0.1% in all four.
37. Across local areas, patterns are broadly consistent, though Eastleigh Local Area Committee (ELAC) records the highest proportion of households deprived in two or more dimensions (16.6%), reflecting greater concentrations of socio-economic need. In contrast, Chandler's Ford and Hilingbury (CFH) shows the lowest overall deprivation, with nearly 60% of households not deprived.
38. This distribution highlights that while deprivation is relatively low compared with national averages, pockets of multi-dimensional disadvantage persist, particularly in areas with higher health and housing challenges.



Armed Forces

39. Eastleigh borough has a modest but significant Armed Forces community, reflecting both long standing veteran populations and a smaller number of current service personnel. The majority of residents with an Armed Forces connection are veterans with 3.5% of Eastleigh Boroughs population being veteran and 0.3% actively serving.