

# Corporate Equality Scheme

2024 - 2028

Policy

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## Foreword



We view equality, human rights and good relations between people as something that affects us all, regardless of our backgrounds, and we are committed to working closely with all those who are interested in, or affected by, our work. We see this as an ongoing process enabling individuals and organisations to influence and shape our work.

In developing our Corporate Equality Scheme 2024-2028, we have carefully considered all of the evidence and data that is available to us. We have also held workshops with different groups of people in the community to seek their feedback on any barriers people with any of the protected characteristics may experience when accessing our services.

In March 2023 a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge took place and an action plan was developed. Some of the actions supported eliminating discrimination and are further captured in our equality objectives. The LGA report and SBC action plan can be viewed [here](#).

This is the fourth scheme we have developed since 2007, and we have decided to publish comprehensive data on the key equality and diversity characteristics of the borough and of our residents.

The purpose of the scheme is to describe how we will fulfil our moral, social and legal obligations to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.

Our overarching vision is learning from the past, focusing on the future. We have put in place a three year Corporate Plan with five priorities:

- **Community** - to enable our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough and to support community resilience.
- **Economy** - working with our businesses and community organisations to work towards a sustainable economy which delivers for local people.
- **Environment** - to provide a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable and enjoyable environment, and to prepare our borough for the challenges ahead.
- **Health & Housing** - to aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.
- **Running the Council** - working within our resources to proactively engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver in a transparent and efficient way.

## The Corporate Plan and priorities are further underpinned by our core values:

- **Fairness** - being objective to balance the needs of all those in our community;
- **Integrity** - being open, honest and taking responsibility;
- **Respect** - embracing and valuing the diversity of others;
- **Service** - delivering high quality, cost effective public service; and
- **Trust** - delivering on our promises to each other, customers and our partners.

We have tried through this scheme to focus more on what is important to Swale's community than on our internal processes, although these are still important as reflected in the scheme's objectives.

Our first equality objective - **Supporting integration and cohesion in our local communities** - is designed to foster good relations between different groups.

The second equality objective - **Supporting our vulnerable residents** - is about supporting Swale's more vulnerable residents, particularly those with a disability.

The third equality objective - **Ensuring easy, clear and convenient access to our services** - is about improving our customer care and working with our communities to make our services more responsive to the needs of local residents.

The fourth equality objective - **Promoting equality as a local employer** - is about ensuring that those policies and practices that affect our staff are fair and promote equality of outcome.

Taken together, these objectives are designed to underpin the objectives of our Corporate Plan.

Looking ahead, this equality scheme sets out how we aim to make Swale a fairer place. The borough of Swale is becoming an increasingly diverse place, and we need to tailor our services to meet those changing needs whilst providing value for money for local residents.

We also need to take a leading role in making Swale a place where everyone has equal life chances – regardless of age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender, marital status, gender identity, pregnancy or maternity leave rights.

## Councillor Tim Gibson

Leader of the Council

## Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions. The Duty places a legal requirement on us when carrying out our functions to have regard for the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- foster good relations between different groups.

### **The Duty covers people with the following protected characteristics:**

- age;
- race;
- disability;
- sexual orientation;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- gender reassignment; and
- pregnancy and maternity.

The eliminating discrimination aim also covers marriage and civil partnership.

Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and persons who do not, includes:

- removing or minimising disadvantage suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and
- encouraging persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such a person is disproportionately low.

Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not includes tackling prejudice, promoting understanding, and may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

Our four year equality scheme sets out how we will meet these legal requirements.

We view equality, human rights and good relations between people as something that affects us all, regardless of our backgrounds, and we are committed to working closely with all those who are interested in, or affected by, our work. We see this as an ongoing process enabling individuals and organisations to influence and shape our work.

## The Scheme

This four-year equality scheme covers the period 2024 to 2028, is closely linked to our Corporate Plan and describes how we will fulfil our moral, social and legal obligations to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.

## Council Services

We are one of 12 districts, which together with Kent County Council and Medway Unitary Authority comprise the local authorities within Kent. Local authorities are created by Acts of Parliament and their powers are determined by Parliament.

### Councils provide three types of service to their communities:

- **statutory services** - these are services that councils must provide as set out in legislation such as refuse collection;
- **regulatory services** - this is the name given to a group of services which exist to ensure public, consumer, environmental and worker protection and includes services such as development control and licensing; and
- **discretionary services** - these are services that councils may choose to provide such as leisure and tourism.

## Profile of Swale Borough Council

The council is made up of 47 elected councillors, who represent 24 wards. The last local elections were held in May 2023. The all-out election resulted in a change to the coalition administration and as a result, the following three groups formed a coalition administration of the council: Labour; Swale Independents Alliance and Green Party.

The whole council comes together to decide on the most important issues, and in May 2022 the council changed from a cabinet system to a committee system form of governance. This means that decisions are made by full council or delegated to committees, subcommittees and officers.

With an annual net revenue budget of £22 million of public money, we need to be absolutely sure that the money we spend is going to achieve the maximum possible benefit for the borough. To help us do this, we have set ourselves five corporate priorities which were developed to ensure that we focused on what really matters to local people.

Following a thorough analysis of all the relevant evidence available, including what our residents told us was important to them, we set priority themes and objectives in our Corporate Plan for the period 2023-2027 which can be viewed via our website or through this [link](#).

## Profile of Swale

The Borough of Swale enjoys a great location on the North Kent coast, within easy reach of London but set in rolling Kentish countryside, less than 25 miles (40km) from the Channel Tunnel. With an area of 139 square miles (360 square kilometres), roughly one-tenth of Kent and a population of 152,200, Swale includes the towns of Sittingbourne and Faversham, the Isle of Sheppey, and an extensive rural landscape. The borough is proud of the quality of its natural environment, and contains a large number of protected sites of scientific interest and outstanding natural beauty.

Much of the borough's traditional employment has been low-skilled, which has left a legacy in some areas of low ambitions and relatively high deprivation. Swale has a growing population, with increasing demand for new homes, jobs and services, which needs to be managed in a fair and sustainable way. Along with many of our partners, this is a key role for the borough council.

## Our evidence base

In developing our equality scheme we have gathered evidence from a number of sources to determine the key characteristics of our equality and diversity of Swale's population. The key evidence has been drawn from the following sources:

- Kent County Council Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletins:
  - [2021 Mid-year population estimates: Total population in Kent](#)
  - [2021 Mid-year population estimates: Age and sex profile \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)
- Office for National Statistics:
  - Marital and Civil Partnership Status, local authorities in England and Wales – February 2023
- Department for Work and Pensions:
  - NOMIS – labour market statistics.

Unless otherwise stated, the data for Kent incorporates the twelve district councils of Kent but excludes Medway which is a unitary authority. Data for the South East and England does incorporate Medway.

The detailed data which has informed this strategy can be found in Appendix I.

## Our Equality Priorities

**We have identified the following four key priorities for our equality scheme:**

- Equality Objective One: Supporting integration and cohesion in our local communities
- Equality Objective Two: Supporting our vulnerable residents
- Equality Objective Three: Ensuring easy, clear and convenient access to our services
- Equality Objective Four: Promoting equality as a local employer

### Equality Objective 1: Supporting integration and cohesion in our local communities

This objective is about fostering good relations between different groups.

#### Background

Swale has a growing population with more and more people coming to live here from other areas of the UK. The data also shows that people of other ethnic backgrounds are part of this population growth.

As a council, we need to ensure that all communities feel safe, have equal access to our services, and that our services are designed to avoid any discrimination on people with a protected characteristic. Furthermore, we want to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding. This is best served by incorporating a specific equality objective aimed at tackling these issues.

#### Key actions

**We will aim to achieve this objective over the next four years by:**

- fulfilling our community leadership role;
- consulting, involving and engaging representative networks covering equality areas to help inform our future activities;
- continuing to tackle crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour through the Swale Community Safety Partnership including ongoing work to tackle the PREVENT agenda;
- to engage with schools to inform young people about democracy and the work of the council, dependant on our resources and the time available within the schools' curriculum;
- continue to encourage the number of people giving their time to help others in Swale by supporting the voluntary and community sector when possible;
- continuing to work closely with Swale's parish and town councils;
- continuing to support and actively promote community-led initiatives (eg. Neighbourhood Planning) which encourage communities themselves to work together to solve issues locally;
- continuing to use the Local Health and Care Partnership to influence the local health and public health agendas; and
- continuing to enable healthier lifestyles and physical activity through the implementation of relevant strategies.

<sup>1</sup>See Appendix I for detailed information

## Equality Objective 2: Supporting our vulnerable residents

This objective is about supporting Swale’s more vulnerable residents, including those with either a physical or mental health disability, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged.

### Background

A major area where Swale’s equality and diversity profile is different is disability. There is no single measure of the number of people with a disability. The definitions of disability vary and often rely on an individual’s perception of their own health; a condition that one person considers disabling is not necessarily considered in the same way by another with the same condition.

At the time of the 2021 Census, Swale was among the highest district in Kent where people live with a long term health problem or disability. Swale is above the average for all Kent districts in this respect, and higher than the average for the South East and England and Wales.

Variations in lifestyle choices and in access to opportunities to improve health mean that average life expectancy is up to ten years lower in the Borough’s worst-off neighbourhoods than in its more affluent.

As a result of Swale having a higher percentage of residents either with a long term health problem or disability, and more claiming disability benefits than the average for Kent, South East and national averages, we have decided to set a specific equality objective to support this section of our population.

### Key actions

#### We will aim to achieve this objective over the next four years by:

- continuing to support our vulnerable and disabled residents, regardless of age, through the Home Improvement Agency and Disabled Facilities Grants;
- working in partnership to improve health and reduce hospital admissions through effective home adaptations and by improving conditions in privately rented homes;
- supporting eligible households with the greatest housing needs to access affordable housing;
- providing assistance to households where no one living at the property is able to physically move their refuse or recycling to the boundary for collection;
- championing views of people with protected characteristics, including learning disabilities and neurodivergence, with our key partners; and
- through the work of the Community Safety Partnership, seeking to identify and support vulnerable victims of crime and anti-social behaviour, focusing on those issues and vulnerable groups as identified in the annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment.



## Equality Objective 3: Ensuring easy, clear and convenient access to our services

This objective is about improving our customer care and working with our communities to make our services more responsive to the needs of all of Swale’s residents.

### Background

The provision of excellent customer care is very important to us and is something that we are working to improve further. One of our priority themes, stated in our Corporate Plan, is “Running the Council” and this describes our aim to develop and implement our Customer Access Strategy, ensuring customers can access our services in the most efficient and effective way.

We will continue to provide a choice of access to our services through a balance of cost-effective and convenient options, and pursue initiatives to improve customer service at reduced cost, including self-service options where appropriate. For many years we have offered to provide documents in alternative formats and, for example, our Staying Put Team provide leaflets in large print as a matter of course as the primary audience for the services they offer are generally elderly and vulnerable.

Although our equality and diversity profile is broadly similar to other local authorities in Kent and the South East, we recognise that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to service delivery is not the right approach. Therefore, when designing services we will focus on the diverse needs of residents by consulting service users and through the use of tools such as Equality Impact Assessments.

### Key actions

#### We will aim to achieve this objective over the next four years by:

- providing a choice of access to our services and pursue initiatives to improve customer service at reduced cost (eg. electronic, phone or written letter depending on customer need or face-to-face);
- making sure our services meet the needs and requirements of our customers;
- improving information gathering about our customers to ensure no groups or individuals with protected characteristics are disadvantaged when accessing our services;
- developing and implementing effective engagement methods with a variety of groups so that we can monitor and measure our services where resources allow;
- treating all of our customers with respect by being polite, welcoming and making reasonable adjustments when providing services to neurodiverse people;
- continuing to improve accessibility of our working practices and buildings;
- providing Council information in accessible formats, i.e. accessible website content, large print, audio, different language and printed on different coloured paper;
- continuing webcasting of Council meetings;
- promoting opportunities to bid for Council contracts among local voluntary/ community organisations, and using social value criteria when assessing tenders to ensure fair competition;
- maintaining our procurement framework to continue to ensure that suppliers can demonstrate fairly their commitment to equality; and
- having greater consideration of people with any protected characteristic when commissioning new services.

## **Equality Objective 4: Promoting equality as a local employer**

This objective is about ensuring that those policies and practices that affect our staff are fair and promote equality of outcome.

### **Background**

Members of staff have rights in their capacity as employees. We want to enable all our staff to be fully involved in our work, to protect them from unfair treatment, to uphold our obligations to provide job descriptions, work plans and related performance and monitoring systems, and to give the support, development opportunities and training.

When hiring new staff, we make sure that the best applicant for the job is hired, and make sure that fair and open recruitment practices are followed.

To inform our key actions we have gathered evidence from our equality monitoring data, equality impact assessments, and consultation with staff, including our staff survey. The key equality and diversity characteristics for our employees are at Appendix II.

### **Key actions**

#### **We will aim to achieve this objective over the next four years by:**

- promoting a workplace environment where all of our staff are treated with dignity and respect;
- providing training in neurodivergence to assist with everyone having a better understanding of individuals different ways of working, learning, communicating, and perceiving the environment;
- encouraging the diversity of our staff to reflect the communities we serve across all the equality characteristics, and will continue to monitor our workforce profile;
- ensuring continuing compliance non-discriminatory practices; and
- continuing to provide our staff and councillors with relevant on-going training and development on equality and diversity issues.

## Equality Impact Assessments

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how we have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in decision-making.

The Equality Act requires due regard should be given to individuals with any of the 9 protected characteristics. The Swale Borough Council EIA goes further by requiring officers to consider other socially excluded groups - including those with literacy issues, people living in poverty, on low incomes, people who are geographically isolated from services, affected by rural deprivation or poor health.

We carry out EIAs whenever we are changing, removing or introducing a new service, policy or function.

## Responsibility and Accountability

We are ultimately responsible for delivering the General and Specific Duties set out in the Equality Scheme.

Our Chief Executive has overall accountability for making sure that we carry out the actions in this scheme. However, actions have been allocated to the relevant directors and heads of service across the council, and they are responsible for carrying these out and reporting on progress.

The scheme will be monitored, and regular progress reports will be made to the executive management team.

## Publication

This 2024-2028 scheme will be available on our website. A summary of this document will be made available in alternative formats on request.

## How to give us feedback about the scheme

We welcome feedback on any aspect of our Equality Scheme and more generally on our approach to equality and inclusion. You can contact us at [policyteam@swale.gov.uk](mailto:policyteam@swale.gov.uk)

We value what residents think about us. We would therefore be very grateful if you would provide us with feedback about our services and in fact anything relating to the council, be it good or bad.

Members of the public who feel that they have experienced unlawful discrimination in the way they have been treated by us may make a complaint through the corporate complaints procedure. We promise to take all complaints seriously and will not accept discrimination of any kind. We also monitor complaints to see whether we are meeting our equality duties.

The Members' Code of Conduct deals with complaints about the conduct of elected Members. Members who experience unlawful discrimination can alert the council through the grievance procedure.

If you believe we have not delivered our services to your satisfaction and would like to complain, there is a four step complaints process which is free to use and details can be found on the website at: [www.swale.gov.uk/compliments-and-complaints](http://www.swale.gov.uk/compliments-and-complaints)

## Swale – Equality and diversity key characteristics

### Age and Gender<sup>2</sup>

#### Key observations

- The 55-59 age group is the highest proportion of Swale’s population (7.1%)
- The 90+ age group is the smallest proportion of the population (0.8%)
- 50.4% of the population in Swale are female and 49.6% are male

The source of data for these observations is Kent County Council’s Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin: 2021 Mid-Year Population Estimates – Age and gender profile: January 2023. This is in turn based on information published by the Office for National Statistics compiled from the 2021 Census.

#### Total population<sup>3</sup>

Swale is the third most populous district in Kent. Swale’s population has been growing for over 25 years due to more people moving to the borough than leaving it, and with an increase in life expectancy with people living longer lives and an increase in the number of births. Swale is no different from most other Kent districts in this respect.

	Swale		Kent districts	
<b>Population</b>	152,200		1,578,500	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
<b>Number</b>	75,600	76,700	768,680	809,720
<b>Percentage</b>	49.6%	50.4%	48.7%	51.3%

#### Population growth

In the early 1990s, all areas of Kent including Swale experienced net outward migration (i.e. more people were leaving the county than entering it), and so all population growth was attributed to positive natural change (i.e. more births than deaths). From mid-1993 onwards, Swale and the other Kent districts began to experience net inward migration (more people entering the county than leaving), and the rate of this net migration has been the predominant factor in Swale’s population growth ever since.

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Swale increased by 11.7%, from around 135,800 in 2011 to around 152,200 in 2021.

<sup>2</sup>2021 mid-year population estimates – ONS, January 2023

<sup>3</sup>Kent County Council interactive populations estimates toolkit

The population here increased by a greater percentage than the overall population of the South East (7.5%), and by a greater percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).

In 2021, Swale was home to around 2.9 people per football pitch-sized piece of land, compared with 2.6 in 2011. This area was among the lowest 40% for population density across English local authority areas at the last census.

Swale population growth since 1994	
1994	116,800
2004	125,900
2014	140,800
2021	152,200

Swale population forecasts 2021 - 2041 (KCC Housing led forecasts (2021) Kent Analytics)	
2021	152,200
2024	160,400
2034	173,300
2039	179,300

## Mean age

There are more females than males in Swale, but this pattern is seen across Kent. Swale has the least percentage difference between females and males in Kent. Similarly, the male/female ratio changes with age. On the whole, there are more males compared with females in the younger age groups, but as age increases there become more females to males.

Between the last two censuses, the average (median) age of Swale increased by one year, from 40 to 41 years of age.

This area had a similar average (median) age to the South East as a whole in 2021 (41 years) but a slightly higher average (median) age than England (40 years).

The median age is the age of the person in the middle of the group, meaning that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by just over 4,000 (an increase of 15.4%), while the number of residents between 16 and 19 years fell by just under 550 (7.7% decrease).

The share of residents aged between 50 and 64 years increased by 0.7 percentage points between 2011 and 2021

	Swale			Kent districts		
	Total persons	Males	Females	Total persons	Males	Females
Mean age	40.8	40.0	41.6	41.6	40.6	42.5



**Swale 2021 Mid-year Population Estimates by five-year Group and Sex**

	Total persons		Males		Females	
	No.	% of total population	No.	%	No.	%
<b>All ages</b>	<b>152,200</b>	-	<b>75,600</b>	<b>49.6%</b>	<b>76,700</b>	<b>50.4%</b>
0-4	8,800	5.8%	4,500	50.8%	4,400	49.2%
5-9	9,500	6.2%	4,900	51.7%	4,600	48.3%
10-14	9,600	6.3%	4,900	51.3%	4,700	48.7%
15-19	8,300	5.5%	4,300	51.9%	4,000	48.1%
20-24	7,900	5.2%	4,000	51.2%	3,900	48.8%
25-29	9,400	6.2%	4,800	50.7%	4,600	49.3%
30-34	10,500	6.9%	5,200	49.5%	5,300	50.5%
35-39	10,100	6.6%	5,000	49.7%	5,100	50.3%
40-44	9,300	6.1%	4,700	50.0%	4,700	50.0%
45-49	9,400	6.1%	4,600	49.5%	4,700	50.2%
50-54	10,500	6.9%	5,200	49.3%	5,300	50.7%
55-59	10,800	7.1%	5,400	49.8%	5,400	50.2%
60-64	9,000	5.9%	4,500	49.9%	4,500	50.1%
65-69	7,600	5.0%	3,800	49.5%	3,900	50.5%
70-74	8,300	5.5%	4,000	47.6%	4,400	52.4%
75-79	6,000	3.9%	2,800	47.6%	3,100	52.4%
80-84	3,900	2.5%	1,700	44.8%	2,100	55.2%
85-89	2,100	1.4%	900	41.1%	1,300	58.9%
90+	1,200	0.8%	400	30.6%	800	69.4%

## Kent districts 2021 Mid-year Population Estimates by five-year Group and Sex

	Total persons		Males		Females	
	No.	% of total population	No.	%	No.	%
<b>All ages</b>	<b>1,578,500</b>	-	<b>769,500</b>	<b>48.7%</b>	<b>809,000</b>	<b>51.3%</b>
0-4	87,100	5.5%	44,800	51.5%	42,200	48.5%
5-9	94,900	6.0%	48,800	51.4%	46,100	48.6%
10-14	98,500	6.2%	50,500	51.2%	48,000	48.8%
15-19	89,100	5.6%	46,100	51.8%	43,000	48.2%
20-24	83,100	5.3%	41,800	50.4%	41,200	49.6%
25-29	90,100	5.7%	43,800	48.6%	46,300	51.4%
30-34	100,700	6.4%	47,900	47.6%	52,700	52.4%
35-39	99,700	6.3%	47,700	47.8%	52,000	52.2%
40-44	98,200	6.2%	47,800	48.6%	50,500	51.4%
45-49	100,300	6.4%	48,800	48.7%	50,500	51.3%
50-54	111,300	7.1%	54,400	48.8%	57,000	51.2%
55-59	110,300	7.0%	54,400	49.3%	55,900	50.7%
60-64	93,900	5.9%	46,000	49.0%	47,900	51.0%
65-69	81,500	5.2%	39,200	48.2%	42,300	51.8%
70-74	87,300	5.5%	41,300	47.4%	45,900	52.6%
75-79	65,900	4.2%	30,600	46.5%	35,300	53.5%
80-84	43,800	2.8%	19,400	44.3%	24,400	55.7%
85-89	27,000	1.7%	11,000	40.6%	16,000	59.4%
90+	15,800	1.0%	5,000	31.8%	10,800	68.2%

## Ethnicity

### Key observations

- The white ethnic group is the largest group within Swale (89%)
- Of these, 93.8% are White English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish; 0.6% are Irish, 0.6% are Gypsy or Irish Traveller; and 4% are from other white ethnic groups
- Residents from ethnic minority groups account for 11% of Swale residents, and the Borough has the second lowest number and proportion of residents from an ethnic minority group in Kent
- Ethnic minority groups in Swale consist of mixed/ multiple ethnic groups (1.8%), Asian/ British Asian (1.5%), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (2.3%); and other ethnic groups (0.5%)

The source for these observations is Kent County Council’s Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin, Census 2021: Cultural Diversity in Kent – January 2023, and the Office for National Statistics 2021 Mid-Year Populations Estimates.

In 2021, 2.3% of Swale residents identified their ethnic group within the “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” category, up from 1.0% in 2011. The 1.3 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area.

Across the South East, the percentage of people from the “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” ethnic group increased from 1.6% to 2.4%, while across England the percentage increased from 3.5% to 4.2%.

In 2021, 89% of people in Swale identified their ethnic group within the “White” category (compared with 96.6% in 2011), while 1.8% identified their ethnic group within the “Mixed or Multiple” category (compared with 1.2% the previous decade).

The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” category increased from 1.1% in 2011 to 1.5% in 2021.

There are many factors that may be contributing to the changing ethnic composition of England and Wales, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses.

Swale ethnic minority groups population 1991 to 2021 <sup>4</sup>	
1991	1,166
2001	2,285
2011	4,680
2021	17,289

With the exception of disabled people (see Objective 2), Swale has a similar equality and diversity profile to other Kent districts in respect of the other protected characteristics of age and sex, religion or belief, and marital status.

## Percentage of population by detailed ethnic category in Kent districts, the South East and England<sup>4</sup>

	Swale	Kent districts	South East	England
<b>White</b>				
English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British	89.0%	83.2%	78.8%	74.4%
Irish	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
Other white	4.0%	5.0%	6.3%	6.2%
<b>Mixed/multiple ethnic groups</b>				
White and black Caribbean	0.5%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%
White and black African	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
White and Asian	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%
Other mixed	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%
<b>Asian/Asian British</b>				
Indian	0.5%	1.7%	2.6%	3.1%
Pakistani	0.1%	0.3%	1.6%	2.7%
Bangladeshi	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	1.1%
Chinese	0.2%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%
Other Asian	0.4%	1.6%	1.7%	1.6%
<b>Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British</b>				
African	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	2.5%
Caribbean	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	1.0%
Other black	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
<b>Other ethnic group</b>				
Arab	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%
Any other ethnic group	0.4%	1.0%	1.1%	1.6%

<sup>4</sup>Kent County Council Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin – 2021 Census: Cultural diversity in Kent

### National identity in Swale

In 2021, 4.7% of Swale residents did not identify with any national identity associated with the UK. This figure increased from 3.4% in 2011.

In 2021, 1.0% of residents identified with a UK and non-UK national identity, compared with 0.5% in 2011. The percentage of residents in Swale that identified as “British only” increased from 13.5% to 55.8%.

The increase in the percentage of people who did not identify with any national identity associated with the UK in Swale (1.4 percentage points) was similar to the increase across the South East (1.6 percentage points, from 7.1% to 8.7%). Across England, the percentage increased by 1.7 percentage points, from 8.2% to 10.0%.

In Census 2021, “British” was moved to the top response option and this may have influenced how people described their national identity.

## Disability

### Key observations

- 19.5% of residents in Swale have a limiting long term illness - this is above the Kent average (17.9%), the South East (16.1%), and England and Wales (17.5%) averages
- 6.4% of people claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP) a benefit for people with a health condition or disability in Swale - this is above the Kent (5.1%), South East (3.9%), and England and Wales (5.5%) averages

The sources for these observations are Kent County Council's Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin, Disability in Kent - 2021, and the Department for Work and Pensions Disability Benefit Claimant data - April 2022.

There is no single measure of the number of people with a disability. The definitions of disability vary and often rely on an individual's perception of their own health. The data provided here relates to the number of people with a disability or a disabling condition.

In 2021, 8.5% of Swale residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot. This figure decreased from 9.4% in 2011. These are age-standardised proportions.

Age-standardised proportions are used throughout this section. They enable comparisons between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure.

In 2021, just over one in nine people (11.3%) were identified as being disabled and limited a little, compared with 10.7% in 2011. The proportion of Swale residents who were not disabled increased from 79.9% to 80.1%.

The decrease in the proportion of residents who were identified as being disabled and limited a lot in Swale (0.9 percentage points) was similar to the decrease across the South East (1.0 percentage points, from 7.2% to 6.2%). Across England, the proportion fell by 1.6 percentage points, from 9.1% to 7.5%.

Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived their health status and activity limitations, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

Caution should be taken when making comparisons between 2011 and 2021 because of changes in question wording and response options.

At the time of the 2021 Census, Swale was the third highest district in Kent for having the most people with a long term health problem or disability. Swale is a percentage point above the average for all Kent districts in this respect, and higher than the average for the South East and England and Wales.

The percentage of people in Swale claiming a disability benefit (Disability Living Allowance/ Personal Independence Payments or Attendance Allowance) as at November 2022 equates to 16,737 claimants.



**People with a disability<sup>5</sup>**

	Swale	Kent districts	South East	England and Wales
<b>Total</b>	151,677	1,576,069	9,278,065	56,490,048
<b>% of all people classified as disabled and limited a lot</b>	8.5%	7%	6%	7%
<b>% of all people classified as disabled and limited a little</b>	11.3%	10%	10%	10%
<b>% of all people classified without a disability</b>	80.1%	82%	84%	83%

**People aged 50+ with a long term health problem or disability - by ward<sup>6</sup>**

Ward	% of ward population with long term health problems or disability
Abbey	20.3%
Bobbing, Iwade and Lower Halstow	14.3%
Borden and Grove Park	19.4%
Boughton and Courtenay	18.0%
Chalkwell	15.7%
East Downs	18.8%
Hartlip, Newington and Upchurch	17.4%
Homewood	18.5%
Kemsley	16.3%
Milton Regis	21.3%
Minster Cliffs	21.7%
Murston	17.0%
Priory	21.7%
Queenborough and Halfway	19.6%
Roman	20.5%
St Ann's	18.6%
Sheerness	24.9%
Sheppey Central	19.9%
Sheppey East	28.0%
Teynham and Lynsted	18.1%
The Meads	12.5%
Watling	19.9%
West Downs	14.6%
Woodstock	16.9%

**Total disability benefits claimants, November 2022<sup>7</sup>**

	Swale	Kent districts	South East	England and Wales
% of total population	11.0%	9.3%	7.6%	9.2%

<sup>7</sup>NOMIS – Department for Work and Pensions

**Religion or belief****Key observations**

- In Swale, the highest proportion of people (47.2%) state their religion as Christianity
- A slightly higher proportion of people in Swale say they are Christian than the average for Kent
- After no religion (45.3%), a greater proportion of people in Swale state they are Muslims (1.0%) than any other religion, although this figure is lower than the average for Kent (1.6%), the South East (3.3%), and England and Wales (6.5%)
- The number of people in Swale say they have no religion has increased from 28.3% in 2011 to 45.3% in 2021

The source for these observations is Kent County Council’s Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin, Census 2021: Cultural Diversity in Kent.

In 2021, Christianity remains the largest religion in Swale, and this is a similar picture to the average for Kent, the South East, and England and Wales. There are significantly fewer people in Swale who stated their religion as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh or other non-Christian religion than in the South East region or England and Wales.

**Religion in Swale, Kent districts, South East and England – Census 2021**

	Swale	Kent districts	South East	England and Wales
<b>Christian</b>	47.2%	48.5%	46.6%	46.5%
<b>Buddhist</b>	0.2%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%
<b>Hindu</b>	0.4%	1.2%	1.7%	1.8%
<b>Jewish</b>	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.5%
<b>Muslim</b>	1.0%	1.6%	3.3%	6.8%
<b>Sikh</b>	0.1%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%
<b>Other religion</b>	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
<b>No religion</b>	45.6%	41.0%	40.3%	36.7%
<b>Religion not stated</b>	5.0%	5.6%	5.8%	5.8%

<sup>7</sup>NOMIS datasets, Office for National Statistics

## Marriage and civil partnerships

### Key observations

- 38.6% of residents in Swale are single
- 44.3% of residents are married
- 6.6% of Swale residents are divorced
- 5.8% are widowed
- 2.0% are separated
- 0.3% are in a registered same sex partnership.

The source for these observations are the 2021 Census: Key Statistics for local authorities, published by the Office for National Statistics.

Swale has a similar profile to Kent, the South East and nationally in terms of marital and civil partnership status.

### Marital and civil partnership status – Census 2021

	Swale	Kent districts	South East	England
<b>Single</b>	38.6%	39.0%	38.9%	42.2%
<b>Married</b>	44.3%	46.2%	47.0%	43.7%
<b>In a registered same sex partnership</b>	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%
<b>Separated</b>	2.0%	1.8%	1.7%	1.9%
<b>Divorced</b>	6.6%	6.8%	6.7%	6.6%
<b>Widowed</b>	5.8%	5.8%	5.6%	5.6%

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

For the first time, the 2021 census included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. Only people aged 16 and over were asked these questions (please note the percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth).

## Sexual orientation

	Swale		Kent	
	Count	%	Count	%
<b>All usual residents aged 16 and over</b>	122,000	100.0	1,276,568	100.0
<b>Straight or heterosexual</b>	111,489	91.4	1,156,388	90.6
<b>Gay or lesbian</b>	1,687	1.4	16,912	1.3
<b>Bisexual</b>	1,219	1.0	14,521	1.1
<b>Pansexual</b>	105	0.1	1,180	0.1
<b>Asexual</b>	62	0.1	700	0.1
<b>Queer</b>	14	0.0	235	0.0
<b>All other sexual orientations</b>	145	0.1	1,485	0.1
<b>Not answered</b>	7,279	6.0	85,147	6.7

## Gender identity

	Swale		Kent	
	Count	%	Count	%
<b>All usual residents aged 16 and over</b>	122,000	100.0	1,276,568	100.0
<b>Gender identity the same as sex registered at birth</b>	115,750	94.9	1,205,716	94.4
<b>Gender identity different from sex registered at birth but no specific identity given</b>	208	0.2	2,380	0.2
<b>Trans woman</b>	92	0.1	1,070	0.1
<b>Trans man</b>	95	0.1	1,052	0.1
<b>Non-binary</b>	40	0.0	657	0.1
<b>All other gender identities</b>	47	0.0	399	0.0
<b>Not answered</b>	5,768	4.7	65,294	5.1

## Appendix II

### Swale Borough Council workforce – Equality and diversity key characteristics

- 74% of the Swale Borough Council workforce are female. The proportion of economically active people in the Swale workforce as a whole is around 55.7%.
- 7.7% of our workforce describe themselves as having a disability, compared with 8.5% of the economically active Swale population who describe themselves as having a disability.
- 3.5% of our workforce are from black and minority ethnic groups compared with 6.1% of the economically active Swale population from black and minority ethnic groups.
- Just over 30% of staff are aged 50 to 59, with 0.7% aged 16 to 19, 9.8% aged 20 to 29, 17.5% aged 30 to 39, 24.5% aged 40 to 49 and 17.1% of staff are over 60.
- 21.3% of staff did not wish to give details of their sexual orientation, but 75.5% stated that they were heterosexual, 1.7% as gay or lesbian, and 1.0% as bisexual.
- 19.6% of staff did not wish to give details of their religion or belief. 44.1% of staff gave their religion as Christian, 33.2% stated they had no religion or belief, 0.7% stated they were Muslim, 0.3% stated they were Sikh, and 1.4% stated their religion or belief was not any of these, nor Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish.

### Swale Borough Council councillors – equality and diversity key characteristics

A voluntary equality and diversity key characteristics survey for councillors was carried out in April and May 2024 and out of the 47 members, 18 responses were received. These are summarised below:

- 61.5% of responders described themselves as male, 33% as female and 5.5% preferred not to say.
- 11% of responders were aged between 18-24 years old, 11% between 25-34, 16.5% between 35-44, 22.5% between 45-54, 22.5% between 55-64, 11% between 65-74 years old and 5.5% preferred not to say.
- 94.5% of responders described their ethnicity as White which included White British, White Canadian and White European, and 5.5% from a minority ethnic group.
- 44.5% of responders considered themselves to have a disability, 50% did not consider they had a disability and 5.5% preferred not to say.
- 72.5% of responders described themselves as heterosexual, 11% as bisexual, 11% as gay man or lesbian and 5.5% as pansexual.
- 44.5% of responders stated they had no religion, 44.5% as Christian, 5.5% as Buddhist and 5.5% as Pagan.

<sup>8</sup>Swale Borough Council People Performance Management report: 1 October 2022



## Contacting Swale Borough Council

The Customer Service Centre deals with all enquiries across the Council; it should be your first stop when contacting us.

Copies of this booklet are available on the council website [www.swale.gov.uk](http://www.swale.gov.uk).

If you would like further hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request. Please contact the council at:

Swale Borough Council  
Swale House, East Street  
Sittingbourne  
Kent, ME10 3HT

**Customer Service Centre**  **01795 417850**