

Community Strength and Leadership

Where we are now

Our communities are growing, changing and becoming more culturally diverse at a faster pace than during previous generations. The total population of East Sussex is forecast to increase by 3% to 519,000 by 2026. Almost all of this increase is projected to occur within the post-retirement age groups, with the very elderly projected to increase by over 60% by 2028. Some parts of the county are attracting high levels of new residents every year – some to retire, others in search of work or a better quality of life for them or their children. Some of our new residents move here from London and other parts of the country. Others move here from abroad including countries such as Poland and Croatia, and settle in towns such as Eastbourne and Hastings. Hastings and Eastbourne also provide accommodation for refugees seeking asylum in the UK. Whilst more people move into the county than out of it, some, mainly young people do leave for example to study or work.

Our population is predominantly white with an estimated 3.9% from Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BME) - significantly lower than England and the South East. However, our BME population has grown by 10,300 since 2001. Residents from BME communities live across the county with the highest proportion in Hastings and Eastbourne. East Sussex has a high proportion of disabled people. 19.8% of our working age residents are disabled compared to a regional figure of 16.4% and a national figure of 18.6%. Over the next 20 years, the number of people living alone is likely to increase and could represent around 42% of all households by 2026. This is due to more people living longer, separating, getting divorced or choosing to live alone.

Community leadership takes many forms from elected representatives such as local councillors and youth parliament members to others such as faith leaders and local ‘champions’, whose knowledge give them a real “feel” for local areas and issues. Strong community leadership and resident involvement gives a voice to local people’s concerns and is crucial in helping to secure the resources needed for new or improved services and facilities. Structures at area or parish level to support those who volunteer their time, energy and expertise are hugely important.

Public agencies, such as Police, Primary Care Trusts and local authorities provide services that reflect and meet different and changing needs such as translation services for people needing language support. The voluntary and community sector has also played a central role: providing community-based facilities, helping communities to get involved in designing and delivering services, supporting community empowerment networks and volunteers, and providing flexible or unique solutions which are difficult for large institutions to reproduce.

The Challenges Ahead

Whilst social and cultural change can bring many benefits, it can also create concern, conflict and division. Strong and sustainable communities need to be able to adapt to social, economic and environmental changes whilst retaining a sense of place and belonging. We need to ensure that people are not excluded from the services and opportunities on offer, and that people respect and value each other’s differences. More needs to be done to develop and support local leadership, and to increase the capacity and capability of communities to solve problems, and get involved in planning services and making decisions that affect their lives and their neighbourhood. More could also be done to engage others, such as business and employers, in this area of work.

Our strategic priority for 2026 is to build strong, sustainable communities with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

Our key tasks will be to:

- Plan for and meet the needs of changing and new communities
- Promote fair access to inclusive services and assist those on lower incomes to gain better access to financial support and benefits
- Tackle social, financial and environmental inequalities
- Empower local people of all ages to have a greater voice and influence over local decisions that affect their lives and neighbourhoods
- Develop and strengthen the local Voluntary and Community Sector
- Promote community ownership or control of buildings, spaces and local community service delivery
- Support and encourage volunteering
- Encourage greater voter participation in local and national elections.