

## Equality & Diversity Profile – Sexual Orientation

**This profile presents the current information available. We would like your feedback. Does it reflect your understanding of key issues for sexual orientation? If not, what would you change or add?**

### **The Population at Risk of Disadvantage & Their Experiences**

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) groups can experience a range of disadvantages largely in terms of societal disadvantage, including feelings of stigma and discrimination, lack of respect and social isolation. A consequence of these issues is that some individuals in these groups may have difficulty in terms of both access to, and benefiting from, facilities, services and solutions designed to support the city's population.

The Office of National Statistics 2010 Household Survey reported 1.0% of the adult population considered themselves to be homosexual, with 0.5% bisexual, although around 3% of the population refused to answer. Previous national studies indicated 6% of the population are gay or bisexual. This is consistent with the figures for Sunderland, where it is estimated that there are circa 17,250 (1) people who identify as LGBT. Figures recorded in the 2010 MORI Survey are lower than these levels however this may be due to some people being reluctant to report their sexuality for a variety of personal reasons - around 4% of the sample refused to disclose their sexuality.

Since the Civil Partnership Act came into force in December 2005, there were over 46,000 civil partnerships formed in the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics, and 97 in Sunderland. The number of civil partnerships in the UK peaked in 2006, with many same-sex couples in longstanding relationships formalizing their status as soon as the law was introduced. However since this time figures have shown a steady decline. Although the national trend is consistent with that of Sunderland, the decrease in civil partnerships has been less substantial, at around 30-35%.

It is likely the proportions of LGB people within the overall population will remain around the same over the next few years, but figures may appear to increase because of higher self-reporting, as trust and tolerance increases in Sunderland. Currently there is very limited availability to Sunderland specific information and data however, the key issues reported to be facing people within these groups include:

- Some, particularly young, people in these groups struggle to come to terms with their sexual identity and experience self-generated, family and/or societal pressure to conform to traditional societal stereotypes. This can lead to difficulties and confusion for individuals, including in terms of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and social isolation. It is estimated that 65% of young LGB people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools and seven out of ten of these state that it has an impact on their school work (2). What many people might value is advice, information and

practical support in coming to terms with their identity, including in terms of peer support networks;

- Experience of prejudice in many public and private sector services and in society as a whole, can lead to physical or psychological harm,. This can lead to clear examples of harassment. However, people from these groups report they often experience and/or expect more subtle prejudice regularly in terms of lack of access to, and being unable to benefit from, services and solutions designed to support the population as a whole. This includes perceptions of prejudices in employment, access to health and Council services and public protection (e.g. police) and social, leisure and cultural opportunities. There is therefore a need to better promote how public and private services can support individuals in these groups to their respective communities and to provide meaningful equality and diversity training to front-line staff to help shape these services to best meet the needs of these groups;
- In 2011 (April onwards), there were 275 hate incidents reported to the ARCH partnership, 31 of which were classified as homophobic incidents. It should be recognised however that the number of incidents that actually take place are likely to be under reported;
- In regards to Housing it is reported that nationally, one in five LGB people expect to be treated worse than heterosexuals when applying for social housing (3) and 40% of homeless youths identify as LGBT, compared to 6% in the population as a whole(4);
- LGB individuals are also estimated to use mental health services more often than the heterosexual population, with 25% of LGB people report experiencing negative attitudes from healthcare staff (1);
- When considering Adoption & Fostering, nationally nine in ten lesbian and gay people expected to face barriers if they applied to become foster parents (3);
- Within the workplace, one in six people in Great Britain have witnessed homophobic bullying (5). A third of lesbian and gay people think those that are open about their sexual orientation are more productive in the workplace (3);
- Recognition people in these groups may suffer from social isolation in their communities because of their sexual orientation, and the need to develop or maintain familial and social networks. Furthermore, some people in these groups may want to celebrate and promote their self- and group identity, partly to challenge the expectations of societal norms of sexual orientation and its associated prejudices.

(1)Mental and emotional needs assessment of the LGBT populations of NHS South of Tyne & Wear; (2)The School Report, Stonewall; (3)Serves You Right, Stonewall; (4) [www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/widerneeds/lgbtmodule/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/widerneeds/lgbtmodule/); (5)Living Together, Stonewall;