

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>8th NOVEMBER 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY COHESION ANNUAL REPORT</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>REGIONAL COMMUNITY COHESION CO-ORDINATOR</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As of March 2023, the Community Cohesion Programme has been funded for a further three years with the possibility of another two years extension.</li> <li>• The Cohesion Officer has been on secondment to Swansea Council as the Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator since September 2022</li> <li>• For the purpose of this report, progress updates are based on the work plan covering March 2022-September 2023. A new National Community Cohesion Work Plan is in place from October 2023, included in the appendix.</li> <li>• Hate Crime figures have been provided by Victim Support and South Wales Police are included as background documents.</li> </ul>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide an annual update to Cabinet Committee Equalities on the work of the Welsh Government funded Community Cohesion Officer and the community cohesion work of Bridgend Community Safety Partnership.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 In December 2018 Welsh Government issued their 'intention to fund' email to all Regional Community Cohesion Co-coordinators in Wales. Welsh Government indicated that each region would be allocated £140,000 to:
- Identify and mitigate community tensions (hate crime, extremism, anxiety, anti-social behaviour) relating to Brexit;
  - Improve community cohesion communications;
  - Organise events / activities to promote social inclusion; and

- Deliver non-Brexit activities as outlined in the National Community Cohesion Plan (2019)

2.2. At that time Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC), Swansea Council and Neath Port Talbot (NPT) County Borough Council made up the Western Bay Community Cohesion Region, led by a Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator based in Swansea Council. An application for £140,000 for the Western Bay Community Cohesion Region was submitted and accepted.

2.3 BCBC appointed a Community Cohesion Officer in September 2019. The post was originally funded until 31 March 2021 and subsequently until 30 June 2021 closely aligned with the Brexit deadline towards the European Union (EU) settlement scheme.

2.3.1 In April 2021 Welsh Government extended the funding for the Community Cohesion Officer until March 2022 and a further extension until March this year.

2.3.2 In March 2023 the funding was extended until March 2026, with the possibility of another two year extension.

2.4 The role of the community cohesion officer up until September 2023 was:

- **Engagement and Awareness Raising:** engagement with minority communities, involving them in developing initiatives to promote community cohesion based on the needs of that community, the wider community, and mitigate tensions. Fostering good relations by developing events to bring people from across different communities together, whether virtually or in person.
- **Training and capacity building:** support public bodies and others in the region to build their awareness and capacity to effectively implement the Public Sector Equality Duty. Support wider Welsh Government training programmes and policy development (as required), bringing in community engagement expertise. Build capacity within groups supporting minority communities to improve engagement, understanding of cohesion issues and routes to support.
- **Tension Monitoring and mitigation:** understand ongoing and emerging community tensions and put in place processes and procedures to address them as required. Engagement with relevant networks including the Police to address tensions / hot spots. This may involve a multi-agency response to reduce tensions and/or undertake preventative work.
- **Inclusive policy and decision-making:** ensure community cohesion issues are considered in the development of Well-being Plans, Strategic Equality Plans, Equality Impact Assessments, Community Safety planning. Ensure Public Bodies are reaching out to and hearing from minority groups when developing policies or taking decisions which are likely to affect them.
- **Prevention of hate, exploitation and extremism:** have an understanding of the likelihood and prevalence of exploitation and extremism in the community and take action to ensure that vulnerable communities are aware of it, are supported and avoid it escalating.

- 2.5 The Community Cohesion Officer is based within the Bridgend Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The work of the CSP is embedded into that of the Public Services Board. The CSP brings together public, private and voluntary agencies to reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime. They do this by tackling the needs of both individuals and communities. More information on Bridgend CSP can be found at <https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/community-safety-partnership/>.
- 2.6 As of September 2022, the Community Cohesion Officer has been on secondment to Swansea Council as the Community Cohesion Co-ordinator for the region. Attempts to fill the vacancy in Bridgend have been unsuccessful.
- 2.7 The workload is being managed by Bridgend CSP with support from the regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator. This avoids duplication and ensures collaboration across all aspects of community safety and cohesion.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 From October 2023, Community Cohesion will use the new Welsh Government 'National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan' (included as a background document). This is a result of a rapid review of the Cohesion Delivery Plan, conducted by Diverse Cymru in October 2021.

The objectives of the new work plan include:

- **Mainstreaming Community Cohesion;**
- **Community Engagement**
- **Building Resilient Communities**
- **Bespoke Actions**

- 3.2 Recent years have seen unprecedented changes locally, nationally and internationally due to the impacts of the Covid pandemic, cost of living crisis and global events.

- 3.3 This makes it difficult to understand the underlying causes of community tensions. The data included in the appendix has been provided by South Wales Police and Victim Support.

- 3.4 At a local and force level there has been an increase in the reports of hate crime, notably the racially motivated hate crime.

- 3.5 The below provides an update on work undertaken to deliver the Objectives of the last Community Cohesion Work Plan spanning March 2022 – September 2023.

#### **Engagement and Awareness Raising:**

- Ongoing support for the Resettlement Schemes supporting the Afghan and Ukrainian communities.
- Delivered Hate Crime Awareness Week 2023 events, sessions and messaging around this year's theme of 'Faith Based Hate Crime'. This included a workshop held in partnership with Bridgend CSP, the youth club at Coleg Cymunedol Y

Dderwen and 'Another Day Another Spray' street artist to encourage the young people to create positive art designs. The young people engaged well and were able to take their art work home with them.

- Refugee Week 2023 was promoted with a social media campaign on this years theme of 'Finding Freedom'.
- Worked as sub-chair of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Heritage working group, creating engagement opportunities in Neath Port Talbot for the GRT community in learning and promoting their heritage. Bridgend will be looking to replicate this progress.
- Ongoing support for Welsh Government's Anti-Hate social media campaign. The 'Hate Hurts Waes' campaign, including a bi-lingual social media package, has been shared across various platforms. This content features videos on the different forms of hate and discrimination.
- Undertaken a 'Positive Messages' project in Bridgend, working with the CSP on community street art projects. Cohesion have funded two community murals in Brackla and Bridgend (Merthyr Mawr subway) to spread a message of 'Hope' and complement the work being done through the Home Office 'Safer Streets' fund to target graffiti hot spot areas.
- Whilst on secondment, the Cohesion Officer is a member of BAVO's Ukraine Support Group to remain informed of local developments and continue engagement with the community and key partners.

#### **Training and Capacity Building:**

- For Refugee Week the Cohesion Officer co-ordinated delivery of an information session on the 'Experience of a Refugee and Asylum Seeker'. This session was delivered by Displaced People in Action to staff and key partners.
- 'Safe Online Spaces' training was co-ordinated for partners. This session was delivered with Victim Support to help residents create safe spaces online and identify and report hateful language.
- Hate Crime Awareness week saw the regional Community Cohesion team deliver an online support session to staff and partners on 'Hate Crime and Support Available' in partnership with Victim Support.
- Co-ordination of an information session, delivered by Camau, of an information session for colleagues in education on the topic of 'Controversial Language: Misogyny and Sexism'.

#### **Inclusive Policy and Decision Making:**

- Supporting the Welsh Government consultation and responding to the feedback opportunities on the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP). The Cohesion Officer and CSP Manager have also been taking part in monthly seminars hosted by the ARWAP team at Welsh Government to consider progress on the plan and future arrangements for the local authorities.
- Participation in the Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equalities Forum.
- Membership of the Wales Community Volunteer Association Grant Panel, ensuring inclusive decision making throughout the grant allocation process, and the Comic Relief Organisational Growth panel, ensuring cohesion priorities are considered in the decision-making process.
- The Cohesion Officer has worked with the regional voluntary sector and cohesion officers in establishing a Small Grant Fund in December 2022 and

October 2023. The purpose of this fund is to engage with and help to develop grass-root community groups that face barriers to funding. The most recent grant fund was launched during Hate Crime Awareness week (14 – 21 October) 2023 and the focus is on creating inclusive spaces. Information on how to apply and the criteria has been shared across our networks. Previous recipients include Cornelly Development Trust for their LGBTQ+ Support Initiative and we hope to award more grants to the Bridgend region.

- There is also input into the Bridgend Equality Focus Group to support the objectives of the Strategic Equality Plan 2024 – 2028.

### **Tension Monitoring and Mitigation**

- Alongside community and stakeholder engagement, work continues on tension monitoring within local communities.
- Tensions identified by partners are reported via the tension monitoring system to the 'Safer Bridgend' inbox.
- Monthly updates are sent to Welsh Government on community tensions and hate crime incidents. The Cohesion Officer attends monthly meetings with Welsh Government to discuss local community tensions, and attends the All Wales Cohesion meeting on a bi-monthly basis. Regions share updates and best practice to help identify and mitigate community tensions.
- Updates are all fed in to Bridgend CSP through the quarterly strategic meetings, with a specific cohesion update. Two CSP meetings have taken place during this reporting period, and street graffiti has featured in both updates.
- Hate crime is also discussed at the regional Contest meetings covering Cwm Taf Morgannwg, giving insight and understanding to the picture in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil, too.

### **Prevention of Hate, Exploitation and Extremism**

- The Cohesion Officer is a member of the National Prevent Extremism Forum, the Forum for Anti-Asylum Hate and Crime.
- CSP and the Cohesion Officer took part in this years' Anti-Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking conference with Cardiff University.
- Bridgend Channel Panel is chaired by the Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships Manager, with updates given at the Bridgend CSP meetings and at the regional Contest meeting.
- The Cohesion Officer has also been involved in securing the funding and developing the 'StreetSnap' App which is being piloted in Bridgend. This App will help identify and report hateful graffiti, stickering and images in the county borough and collect accurate data on hot spot areas and graffiti trends.

## **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies,

strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

## **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 The Community Cohesion project demonstrates the sustainable development principle by ensuring that by meeting the needs of the present we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is evidenced through the five ways of working:

- **Long term** – community cohesion work seeks to understand and mitigate the long term implications on Bridgend residents and its diverse communities, as a result of ongoing changes to the social and political climate.
- **Prevention** – working with partners to map and understand community tensions will help prevent serious problems occurring and mitigate existing tensions.
- **Integration** – the project contributes to the national well-being goals: an Equal Wales, a Resilient Wales, and a Wales of Cohesive Communities and to the Well-being objectives of ‘Protecting our most vulnerable’, ‘Creating thriving valleys communities’, and ‘Making people feel valued, heard and part of their community’.
- **Collaboration** – the success of the role of the Co-ordinator relies on collaboration with partners across Bridgend County and the wider partnerships, such as Western Bay Community Cohesion and Bridgend Community Safety Partnership.
- **Involvement** – the consultation with partners, stakeholders, local residents, communities and elected members will inform the decision of whether to extend the PSPOs.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no Climate Change implications linked to this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 In considering how we support community cohesion, Bridgend County Borough Council is ensuring that all people living in the county borough are safe and protected.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications resulting from this information report.

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

9.1 That Cabinet Committee Equalities note the content of this update report

## **Background documents**



National Community  
Cohesion Work Plan

- National Community Cohesion Work Plan



Hate crime figures

- Hate Crime figures, supplied by South Wales Police and Victim Support