

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES
Date of Meeting:	6 NOVEMBER 2024
Report Title:	COMMUNITY COHESION ANNUAL REPORT
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	LARA ROWLANDS REGIONAL COMMUNITY COHESION CO-ORDINATOR KIRSTY WILLIAMS COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	THERE IS NO IMPACT ON POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURE RULES
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding has been confirmed for the Community Cohesion Programme up to March 2026 with the possibility of another two years extension. • The Cohesion Officer role for Bridgend has been vacant following the previous role holder accepting a position as Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator. • The progress updates for this report are based on the National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan for October 2023 – March 2026. • Hate Crime figures have been provided by South Wales Police and are included as background documents.

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 Western Bay Community Cohesion Team 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 (the 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.
- 2.4 Subsequent extensions extended the Officer role to March 2022, then to March 2023, with the latest confirmation setting out the funding being extended to March 2026. In addition to the £140,000 for each region, £17,500 is awarded for a community small grant fund scheme.
- 2.5 There is a possibility of another two-year extension to March 2028.
- 2.6 Western Bay Community Cohesion team have a workplan based on the new delivery plan (2023 – 2026). The areas of work cover:

Mainstream Community Cohesion

- Mainstreaming community cohesion in public bodies and wider community through training and awareness raising, dovetailing with other Welsh Government legislation and policies, including Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Socio-Economic Duty, Nation of Sanctuary, Cymraeg 2050, the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, and the LGBTQ+ action plan, and any others that are developed during the lifespan of the funding such as the Disability Rights Action Plan, due in 2024.
- Acting as conduits between communities and public bodies to promote participation in policymaking and equality of opportunity for communities.
- Improving visibility and awareness of the Community Cohesion Programme

Community Engagement

- Delivering accessible and inclusive outreach and engagement events, activities, and initiatives which foster good relations between groups through reducing segregation and increasing empathy and understanding. This should include intersectional and intergenerational experiences, involving individuals and communities in a co-productive way.
- Eliminating barriers to participation, taking into consideration the language, cultural and accessibility needs of communities, as well as other factors such as digital exclusion.
- Delivery of activities for schools and other educational setting, with a focus on celebrating diversity.
- Supporting the inclusion of marginalised communities across Wales.

Building Resilient Communities

- Continually monitoring emerging community tensions and work with key partners, including police and community members, as part of the response to mitigate them.
- Delivering a small grant scheme to provide opportunities for grassroots community groups and those closest to the issues to deliver work to promote cohesion and address community tensions.
- Working with community-based organisations to identify and secure additional sources of funding to support community cohesion projects.

Bespoke Priorities

- To be decided based on meeting local need and emerging issues.

- 2.7 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/>
- 2.8 In September 2022, the Community Cohesion Officer started a secondment to Swansea Council as the Community Cohesion Co-ordinator for the region. This secondment became permanent in spring 2024.
- 2.9 Attempts to fill the vacancy in Bridgend have been previously unsuccessful but the role is currently in the process of going out to advert again.
- 2.10 The workload is being managed by Bridgend CSP with support from the Co-Ordinator. This avoids duplication and ensures collaboration across all aspects of community safety and cohesion.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 Since October 2023, Community Cohesion have been using Welsh Government's 'National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan' (included as Appendix One). 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 were covered in paragraph 2.6.

- 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 identify the underlying causes of community tensions. The data included in Appendix Two 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 between September 2023 and October 2024 to deliver the Objectives of the Community Cohesion Work Plan.

Mainstream Community Cohesion

- Awareness Session for the Muslim Community.
In response to rising tensions due to the Palestine/Israel Conflict, as well as community feedback from the Muslim student population who felt unable to ask lecturers for accepted religious exemptions, the Cohesion Team commissioned the Wales Hate Support Centre to deliver a Hate Crime and Support Awareness Webinar to community members, to help raise awareness of support pathways and increase confidence in reporting.
- Training and Awareness Raising.
Small Steps Organisation have delivered training/awareness sessions on
 - Extreme Right-Wing Awareness
 - Antisemitism & Islamophobia Awareness
 - Patriotism & Identity Session
 - Debate Not Hate115 members of staff and key partners across the region took part in the sessions.
- 'Cultural Competence' and 'Understanding Unconscious Bias Training' delivered by University College London to staff across the region.
60 members of staff across the region took part in the sessions.
- The Experience of a Refugee and People Seeking Asylum.
A training session for World Refugee Week in June 2024, delivered by Displaced People in Action.
50 members of staff across the region took part in the session.
- An online session on EU Citizens Rights and the EU Settlement Scheme took place in April 2024 for EU Citizens and key partners across the region. This

session was delivered in partnership with Settled Organisation and provided an overview of the below topics:

- Overview of the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS).
- Situations where applications to the EUSS can still be made.
- Rights and entitlements for EEA citizens with pre-settled status comparatively with settled status.
- Settled's service and the referral process.

Building Resilient Communities

- StreetSnap App
The App launched in Bridgend on the 24th January 2024. The Co-Ordinator continues to support the data analyst in the roll out of the App and there has been good buy-in from across council departments as well as partners such as South Wales Police. The app will continue to be promoted and embedded into work and will benefit from an e-learning training module being developed.
- The Co-Ordinator attends monthly tension monitoring meetings with Welsh Government and regional cohesion teams.
- The Community Cohesion Team have developed a 2024 calendar of events to mark social and cultural times of year.
- Croeso Bridgend Network
The Co-Ordinator supported the Croeso Bridgend Network chaired by BAVO. The network initially started as a Ukraine Support Working Group but has now expanded to support all refugees and asylum seekers.
- The Co-Ordinator attends all Community Safety Partnership Board meetings across the region to provide cohesion updates.
- Monthly tension monitoring reports are submitted to Welsh Government, providing updates on behalf of the region.
- The Co-Ordinator attends the Special Interest Group in Counter Extremism (SIGCE) roundtables, including specific roundtables on community tensions arising from Israel/Gaza and its impact on 'the extremism landscape'.
- The Co-Ordinator attends the Forum for Tackling Anti-Asylum Activity.
- The Western Bay Community Cohesion Team Small Grant Fund 2024 launched in September. The objective of the grant is to award funding to community groups based on projects that promote and support integration and welcome initiatives.

Community Engagement

- Hate Crime Awareness Week 2023 – Youth Engagement Street Art Event
In partnership with Bridgend Community Safety Team and local artist, 'Another Day Another Spray', a spray-painting workshop was held at a local youth centre. All young people involved engaged with the artist to create positive art on canvas, which they then took home with them. A social media campaign on Hate Crime Awareness also took place throughout the week.
- Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024

Two training and awareness raising sessions were delivered to staff and key partners for Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024. The sessions included Online Hate, the role of a bystander and how to be an ally. The sessions were delivered by the Community Cohesion Team in partnership with Victim Support. In addition to this, a drop-in session for councilors was held at Bridgend Civic Offices during Hate Crime Awareness Week.

- **Interfaith Week 2023**

A Creative Competition was launched across the region for Interfaith Week. Submissions could include any form of creative outlet (poem, photography, short story, art etc.) which expressed what faith means to the individual. This competition was in partnership with the Interfaith Forum. A social media campaign also took place throughout the week.

- In partnership with Bridgend Community Safety Team and Youth Services, the Cohesion Team delivered an engagement day at Wildmill Community Centre to celebrate International Youth Day. Young people had the chance to take part in music and art workshops, outdoor activities and held discussions on topics such as community, safety and issues that are important to them. The young people discussed ideas for a future community art project.

- **Bridgend College Diversity Project**

In partnership with Bridgend Community Safety Partnership Team and the Rhiw Shopping Centre, a window exhibition was created by the College's Art and Design department, on the theme of 'Bridgend Celebrates Diversity'. The artwork has been installed in empty shop windows of the center and has received very positive feedback from the community.

- The Co-Ordinator continues to support Bridgend Equality Focus Group and Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Network.

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

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet Committee Equalities note the content of this update report.

Background documents

- National Community Cohesion Work Plan
- Hate Crime figures, supplied by South Wales Police
- Feedback report from Small Steps Organisation