

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES AND EMPLOYER RELATIONS</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>5 NOVEMBER 2025</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY COHESION ANNUAL REPORT</b>
<b>Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member</b>	<b>REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE CABINET MEMBER – REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>LARA ROWLANDS REGIONAL COMMUNITY COHESION CO-ORDINATOR  KIRSTY WILLIAMS COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>THERE IS NO IMPACT ON POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURE RULES</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Annual Report outlines work undertaken in relation to community cohesion between October 2024 and September 2025.</li> <li>• Funding has been confirmed for the Community Cohesion Programme from March 2026 to March 2029, with the possibility of another three-year extension.</li> <li>• The Cohesion Officer role for Bridgend has been vacant following the previous role holder accepting a position as Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator.</li> <li>• The progress updates for this report are based on the National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan, noting that there has been a change in work plan since April 2025.</li> <li>• Hate Crime figures have been provided by South Wales Police and are included as Appendix i.</li> <li>• The Evaluation Report from training and awareness sessions carried out by Small Steps Organisation is included as Appendix ii.</li> <li>• An end of project evaluation report for the Western Bay Community Cohesion Small Grant Fund (2024-2025) is included as Appendix iii.</li> </ul>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update to Cabinet Committee Equalities and Employer Relations 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, extended to 30 June 2021 closely aligned with the Brexit deadline towards the European Union (EU) settlement scheme.
- 2.4 Subsequent extensions extended the Officer role, with the latest confirmation setting out that the funding will be extended to March 2029, with the potential for another three years of funding. In addition, funding for each region has increased to £497,500 over the contracted period and at least £20,000 is awarded for a community small grant fund scheme.
- 2.5 The Community Cohesion workplan to March 2025 was delivered by Western Bay Community Cohesion team and covered the below outlined work:

### **Mainstreaming Cohesion**

- Mainstream 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, 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 in development.

- Act as conduits between communities and public bodies to promote participation in policymaking and equality of opportunity for communities.
- Improve visibility and awareness of the Community Cohesion Programme.

### **Community Engagement**

- Deliver 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. Eliminate 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
- Support the inclusion of marginalised communities across Wales.

### **Building Resilient Communities**

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

2.6 Western Bay Community Cohesion team have a workplan based on the new Delivery Plan, spanning April 2025 – March 2026. This includes:

- Advancing equality of opportunity between people with and without Protected Characteristics. Include a focus on the involvement of communities in policy making.
- Fostering good relations and cohesion between people with and without Protected Characteristics and being able to evidence the approach and impact.
- Tackling forms segregation and socio-economic disadvantage.
- Seeking to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment.
- Monitoring tensions and interventions to prevent harmful outcomes and victimisation.
- Building grassroots capacity to drive cohesion and mitigate tensions through delivery of a small grants third sector funding scheme.

- Promoting consistency and continuous learning in building cohesion across Wales through collaboration with other cohesion regions and Welsh Government.
- 2.7 The Community Cohesion role 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 Cohesion Co-Ordinator. This avoids duplication and ensures collaboration across all aspects of community safety and cohesion.

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

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 This combination and uncertainty makes it difficult to identify the underlying root causes of community tensions.
- 3.3 The data included in Appendix i has been provided by South Wales Police based on reports made to them of hate crime. At a local and force level there has been an increase in the reports of hate crime, notably the racially motivated hate crime.
- 3.4 The information below provides an update on work undertaken between October 2024 and October 2025 to deliver the Objectives of the Community Cohesion Work Plan.

### **3.5 Mainstream Community Cohesion**

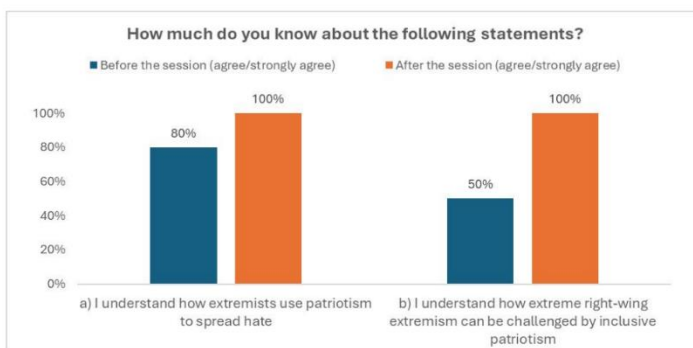
The Community Cohesion Team organised PREVENT training and awareness-raising sessions, which were delivered by the Small Steps Organisation to Council staff and key partners across the Western Bay region on:

- Extreme Right-Wing Awareness
- Antisemitism and Islamophobia Awareness
- Patriotism and Identity
- Debate Not Hate
- Misogyny, Incels and the Manosphere and its connection to extremism

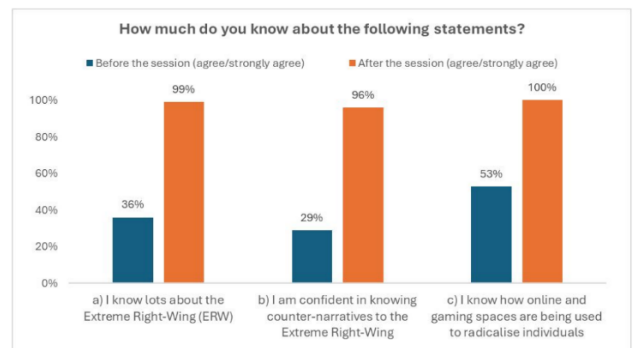
The purpose of these sessions was to raise awareness about the topics covered, explore why individuals may be drawn to extremism, and identify the vulnerabilities and signs of radicalisation. The sessions provided alternative viewpoints to empower those attending to challenge hate and extremism at both the local and national levels.

Below is a sample of data from the Feedback Report from Small Steps (appendix ii).

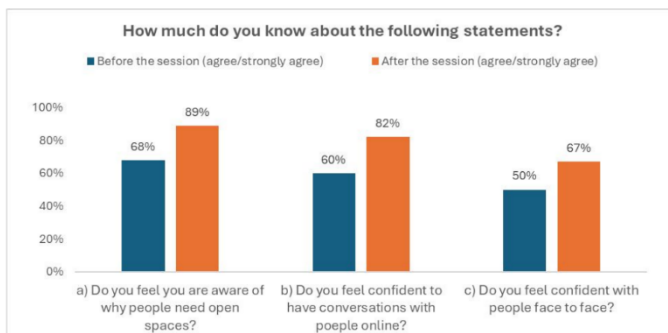
**Identity and Patriotism Before x After Session Results**



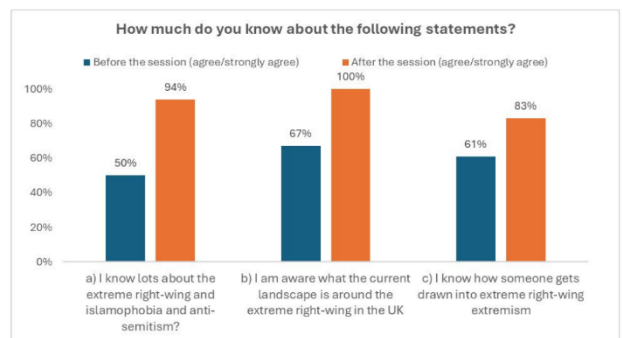
**Radicalisation Explained Before x After Session Results**



**Debate not Hate Before x After Session Results**



**Antisemitism and Islamophobia Before x After Session Results**



A total of 181 staff members and key partners across the region received training on critical issues such as extremism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, misogyny and the manosphere. As shown above, feedback from all sessions showed improved levels of awareness and understanding of topics discussed.

All attendees were granted access to the Small Steps Support Hub ([www.supporthub.uk](http://www.supporthub.uk)) for ongoing support following the training, enabling continued education and assistance for attendees beyond the training sessions.

The Community Cohesion Team commissioned two training sessions for Council staff across the Western Bay region on 'Unconscious Bias' and 'Cultural Competence'.

- **Cultural Competence:** The purpose of this session was to enhance staff members' ability to communicate and interact effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. The training aimed to increase awareness of one's own cultural values and the impact these values may have on making respectful, reasoned decisions and choices. Cultural competence provides a framework for ensuring the needs of all individuals and communities are met in a responsive and respectful manner.
- **Unconscious Bias:** As communities become more diverse, it is crucial for organisations to explore various forms of unconscious bias and their impact on decision-making processes and organisational culture. The session encouraged professionals to reflect on their own biases and understand how they might affect their actions and decisions. Participants were prompted to identify actions that could help address barriers created by unconscious bias and commit to personal steps that would help mitigate its impact.

Sixty Council staff members participated in training and gained skills such as:

- Improved communication skills through the ability to interact more effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds, ensuring respectful and reasonable decisions are made.
- Increased awareness of unconscious bias, with participants reflecting on their own biases and identifying actionable steps to address them in their professional practice.
- Strengthened organisational culture, with staff better equipped to navigate cultural differences and contribute to a more inclusive environment for all community members.

### **3.6 Community Engagement**

The Community Cohesion Team delivered three awareness sessions to staff during 2024 Hate Crime Awareness in collaboration with Victim Support's Wales Hate Support Centre, covering the following topics:

- Online Hate
- LGBTQIA+ Hate Crime
- 'It Starts with Us' Allyship Event – How to be an ally and safely intervene when witnessing a hateful incident or crime.

Forty staff members across the Western Bay region participated in these sessions, hearing about hate crime and its impact on communities, while equipping staff with knowledge and tools to address online hate, LGBTQIA+ hate crime, and how to safely intervene in hate incidents.

Additionally, Hate Crime Week drop-in session for Councillors and staff took place in Bridgend, providing an opportunity for communities to express concerns, raise awareness of hate crimes and incidents, and discuss the support services available.

As mentioned above, the small grants scheme was also launched during Hate Crime Awareness week.

The Community Cohesion Team collaborated with the Interfaith Network and Swansea University to launch a creative competition across the region, centered on the theme of 'Home' with the aim of fostering interfaith dialogue and cultural understanding through creative expression and experiential learning, while promoting inclusivity within the community.

Community Cohesion collaborated with Bridgend College Art and Design team, to support students in completing their module on 'Culture'. Students submitted artwork based on this theme, expressing what culture means to them as individuals. The artwork is displayed in Bridgend Town Centre, making use of vacant shop windows to showcase the work of the students and improve the vibrancy of the area.

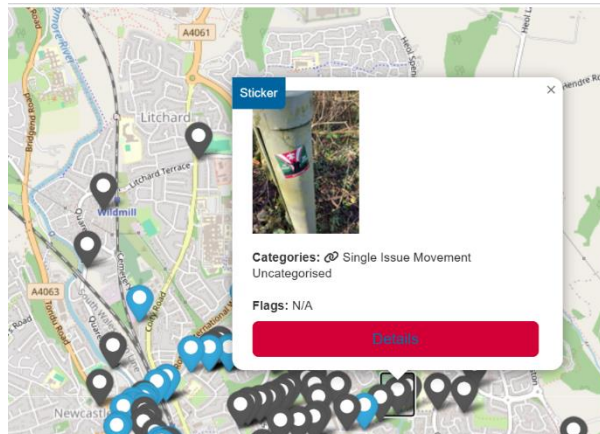
The artwork is varied, inclusive and celebratory of local artists.



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

### 3.7 Building Resilient Communities

StreetSnap continues to be used by frontline practitioners to support the recording and removal hateful graffiti and visual representations of hate throughout the county borough.



The image above shows how information is documented. This aids officers to build an understanding of patterns, trends and areas of concern and inform where interventions should be targeted.

The Co-Ordinator and Community Safety Manager are also involved in the newly established Community Cohesion structures established and chaired by South Wales Police. There is a Strategic Working Group with sub-groups covering communications, data and insight and operational delivery. This all feeds into a Chief Executive Tactical Meeting which meets every six weeks which receives a highlight product from the working groups that covers tensions across South Wales, escalations and a picture of current cohesion.

A tension monitoring form has been recently reviewed and re-developed. A previous version was issued on a weekly basis to the wider cohesion and staff network which played a key role in supporting South Wales Police's regional weekly Community Tension Indicator (CTI) report. The cohesion team are looking to replicate this across the Western Bay region. The form is intended solely for information gathering and not a mechanism for reporting crime, providing data, safeguarding issues, or Prevent-related concerns.

The Community Cohesion Team have developed a 2025 - 26 calendar of events to mark social and cultural times of year, to help inform and plan engagement work. Monthly tension monitoring reports are submitted to Welsh Government, providing updates on behalf of the region.

The Co-Ordinator attends a range of meetings and forums to understand and promote community cohesion. This includes:

- The Croeso Bridgend Network chaired and coordinated by Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO) and recently delivered a presentation to member on the work of the Cohesion Team. The network initially started as a Ukraine Support Working Group but has now expanded to support all refugees and asylum seekers.
- The Forum for Tackling Anti-Asylum Activity.
- The Special Interest Group in Counter Emerging Threats (SIGCE) roundtables, including specific roundtables on community tensions arising



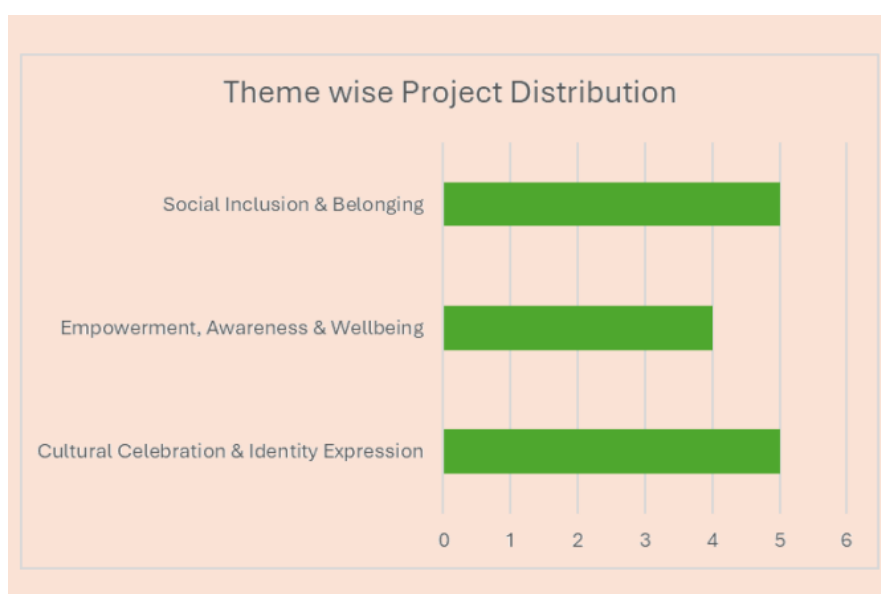
from the Israel Gaza conflict, anti-asylum hotel activity and its impact on ‘the extremism landscape’.

The Community Cohesion Small Grant Fund was launched during Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024 to support initiatives that revolve around activities related to supporting ethnic minority communities and activities that bring together people from diverse communities.

A total of £28,099.95 was awarded across 14 community groups, funding a range of projects that align with the specific objectives:

- To support initiatives that promote social integration, tackle community tensions, and foster a sense of belonging through activities that bring together diverse communities, with a focus on ethnic minorities, refugees, and marginalised groups.
- To deliver activities that support ethnic minority communities, including Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, refugees and asylum seekers, and actions to address antisemitism and Islamophobia. These activities aim to address community tensions and build community cohesion.
- To organise events and activities that bring together people from diverse communities, fostering a broader sense of community and belonging. Proposals were required to consider how activities support integration, combat loneliness and isolation, identify common ground through shared interests and experiences, and celebrate the culture and heritage of the area.

The graph below shows the thematic distribution of the small grants.



The funding directly benefitted ethnic minority communities, refugees, asylum seekers, and other marginalised groups. Activities increased community cohesion,

with activities fostering integration, shared experiences, and cultural celebration across diverse communities. Many projects focused on combating loneliness and creating opportunities for social engagement.

The October 2024 cycle was followed by two further rounds of funding in 2025. The priorities for the April 2025 round were to support community groups and third sector organisations to:

- Deliver events or activities which bring together those with minority Protected Characteristics and those from the majority, to increase social contact and foster good relations. Proposals should consider how projects can support integration, tackle loneliness and isolation, or tackle segregation. Projects should aim to identify commonality through shared interests, experiences, or values.
- Deliver activities which seek to mitigate or eliminate community tensions arising from misconceptions or stereotypes of minority communities.

The end of grant fund report will be available in the new year, following the completion of all funded projects.

#### **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 and Nature Implications**

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change and nature 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 and Employee Relations note the content of this update report.

## **Background Documents**

- i: Hate Crime figures, supplied by South Wales Police
- ii: Feedback report from Small Steps Organisation
- iii: End of Project Evaluation Report for the 2024 Small Grant Fund