



## Building social cohesion locally: Lessons from Stoke-on-Trent

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Cover photo: Ian Knight, 7th June 2025. Revelers pose with Kelvin  
the Kiln, Stoke-on-Trent's Centenary Mascot during the city's  
centenary parade to mark the 100th anniversary of Stoke-on-Trent  
being granted city status by King George V in 1925.

## About Protection Approaches

Protection Approaches is a national charity working to prevent and protect people from identity-based violence. Through a combination of community-led initiatives, cutting-edge research, technical advice, and policy advocacy, our work focusses on identifying and redressing the root causes of prejudice, division, and discrimination in society. We support and facilitate community-led solutions to these challenges. For a decade, our work has contributed to building social cohesion and societal resilience, rooted in an understanding that building strong, resilient, and inclusive societies requires collective action.

## Acknowledgements

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## Forward

### **Jon Rouse CBE, Chief Executive, Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

Stoke-on-Trent is a city with a strong sense of identity, deep-rooted community spirit, and a long history of resilience in the face of change. It is also a place that, like many towns and cities across the UK, has experienced significant social, economic, and political pressures in recent years. These pressures have tested trust, strained relationships, and, at times, exposed deep feelings of frustration, unfairness, and disconnection.

The events of summer 2024 were a stark reminder that social cohesion cannot be taken for granted. They highlighted how national and global shocks, misinformation, and long-standing local inequalities can intersect at the neighbourhood level, with real consequences for people's sense of safety, belonging, and confidence in the future.

This report represents an important step in understanding and responding to those challenges honestly and constructively. We have heard the voices of more than 1,300 residents who took time to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas for change. What emerges is not a simplistic picture of division, but a nuanced account of a city that cares deeply about fairness, dignity, and opportunity, with local people who want an active role in shaping their future.

The findings are both challenging and hopeful. They underline the scale of mistrust and grievance that exists, but they also highlight the strength of our local assets: trusted community organisations, cultural and creative energy, strong informal support networks, and a clear willingness among residents to engage when they believe their voices matter.

In order to move forward in a way which is positive and impactful it is imperative that we celebrate our city by recognising and embracing the unique history, heritage, and communities. By incorporating and honouring what makes us unique, we can foster a greater sense of pride and togetherness among all residents. Strong civic leadership that is visible, values-driven, and grounded in everyday experience is vital to delivering sustained change. As local institutions we need to be prepared to be honest about difficult choices, open when things are not working, and the confident to share power and responsibility with communities, partners, and frontline staff. By modelling respectful dialogue, inclusive decision-making, and consistent follow through, civic leaders can help rebuild trust and create the conditions in which cohesion can grow and endure.

For Stoke-on-Trent City Council, this work is not an academic exercise or a standalone strategy. It is a call to embed cohesion into everyday governance and service delivery and to work alongside communities as equal partners in change. The practical actions set out in this report provide a clear framework for doing so, not only in Stoke-on-Trent, but in places across the country facing similar challenges.

I am grateful to all the residents, community organisations, partners, and colleagues who contributed their time, honesty, and insight to this work. Rebuilding and sustaining cohesion is not quick or easy, but it is essential to the future of our city. Our task now is to turn listening into action, and commitment into lasting change.

## Executive summary

Across the United Kingdom, social cohesion is under increasing strain. The cost of living, declining trust in institutions, and the spread of disinformation are reshaping how people relate to one another and to the state. These pressures are intensified by global instability, democratic backsliding, and the deliberate weaponisation of grievance-based and exclusionary political narratives by both domestic and international actors. While many drivers of division are national and international, their impacts are experienced most acutely at the local level.

With resources stretched, cohesion building efforts have too often been piecemeal, focusing primarily on managing visible tensions and encouraging connection between communities. While these approaches are important, they are not sufficient on their own if deeper conditions such as mistrust, grievance, lack of agency, and perceptions of unfairness remain unaddressed. Many of these underlying conditions can nevertheless be shaped locally.

This report draws on place-based research and community engagement undertaken in Stoke-on-Trent during the second half of 2025 to develop a new city-wide cohesion strategy. Commissioned by the One Stoke-on-Trent Board following the disorder experienced in the city in summer 2024, the work centred on a large-scale community listening exercise involving more than 1,300 residents to understand the root causes of division and identify practical actions that could strengthen cohesion.

Rather than relying solely on formal consultations, the research team embedded engagement into everyday community life. They joined existing activities and gatherings, ran stalls in local markets, visited cafés, shops, parks, pubs, sports clubs, community centres, and places of worship, and hosted dedicated focus groups and discussions.

The findings were tested against nationally representative polling and Protection Approaches' wider work convening civil society, local authorities, funders, and community-focused businesses from more than 300 organisations across 14 towns and cities. While rooted in one place, the challenges identified are widely recognisable across the UK, particularly in towns and cities experiencing long-term economic pressure and post-industrial transition.

The work highlighted several interconnected pressures on cohesion in Stoke-on-Trent. These include persistently low confidence in public institutions; strong perceptions of unfairness in how housing, services, and resources are allocated; a sense of powerlessness and limited opportunities to contribute to visible change; fragmented local systems with overlapping strategies but limited coordination; growing exposure to mis/disinformation and identity-based scapegoating; declining civic pride linked to visible neglect of public spaces; and increasing isolation, both between and within communities.

Crucially, the work also identified practical and achievable responses such as creating a shared local cohesion action plan bringing together statutory partners, civil society, business, education settings, sports clubs and others; embedding trust, fairness, and participation into everyday service delivery rather than treating cohesion

as a standalone programme; taking services into community settings to rebuild relationships; strengthening the role of trusted community-based organisations; improving transparency and local communication to counter dis/misinformation; devolving decision-making power and resources closer to neighbourhood level; and acting earlier to recognise and respond to emerging tensions before they escalate.

Social cohesion is shaped not only by how different groups within communities interact with one another, but also by how communities interact with institutions, decision-makers, and those who control resources. How decisions are made, how they are explained, and whether institutions are experienced as fair, consistent, and responsive all play a decisive role in shaping trust, belonging, and social confidence. Cohesion is therefore inseparable from governance, service design, accountability, and institutional culture.

At the same time, most places already possess significant assets on which to build. Trusted community-based organisations, informal networks of support, cultural and creative activity, shared spaces, and the energy of young people all represent strong foundations. Where these assets are recognised, connected, and supported, and where communities are given a genuine stake in shaping local decisions, confidence and resilience can grow even in challenging circumstances.

This report aims to translate lessons from Stoke-on-Trent into a practical blueprint for action that can be applied by any local authority. While some challenges require long-term investment, many of the actions identified are achievable without significant new budgets, relying instead on clearer purpose, stronger coordination, and a consistent commitment to fairness and inclusion.

In an era of increasing division and instability, cohesion is not an optional or “soft” concern. It is the foundation of democratic resilience, community safety, and social stability and must be strengthened as we enter this period of intensifying global uncertainty.

## Introduction

In August 2024, Stoke-on-Trent was among several towns and cities across the country affected by racist and anti-immigrant public disorder following the tragic killing of three young girls at a dance class in Southport. As elsewhere, tensions in the city were amplified by the rapid circulation of misinformation and disinformation on social media. These events did not emerge in isolation. They were a flashpoint in a longer and sustained erosion of cohesion and rising prejudice against minority communities. They also illustrated how moments of national shock and grief can be exploited by malicious actors seeking to mobilise grievance and division. More broadly, the disorder reflected pressures that had been building over time, including economic hardship, perceptions of unfairness, declining confidence in institutions, and anxieties about change. It exposed both the fragility of local cohesion and the risks of addressing such pressures only after they surface in visible or disruptive ways.

In response, Stoke-on-Trent City Council convened partners from across the city to coordinate recovery efforts, better understand the underlying causes of tension and mistrust, and identify what practical action could strengthen cohesion over the longer term. This work was supported in part through funding from the UK Government's Community Recovery Fund<sup>1</sup>, established to help areas affected by the 2024 disorder rebuild trust and community resilience. The One Stoke-on-Trent Board was established to lead this work, bringing together statutory agencies, civil society organisations, community representatives, and other local stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> Central to this approach was a shared recognition that rebuilding cohesion would require more than reassurance or enforcement alone. It would require listening carefully to residents, understanding lived experience, and addressing the conditions that shape cohesion in the city.

The Community Cohesion Strategy developed through this process<sup>3</sup> was grounded in an extensive programme of community engagement and listening carried out between June and September 2025. This report draws directly on that work, translating the findings and priorities developed for Stoke-on-Trent into a form that can inform local authorities, funders, and national decision-makers across the UK.

### **A place-based approach with national relevance**

Stoke-on-Trent, like many towns and cities across the country, has been shaped by post-industrial transition, long-term economic pressure, and uneven access to opportunity. It is also a city with strong sense of community spirit and kindness, deep cultural heritage, and a long-established ecosystem of community organisations that support residents through tough times alongside providing opportunities for people to come together and engage in their neighbourhoods. These characteristics make it a powerful case study for understanding both the risks to cohesion facing many places, and the assets that can be mobilised in response.

The purpose of this report is not to present Stoke-on-Trent as exceptional, but as illustrative. The challenges identified in the city — low confidence in institutions, perceptions of unfairness, fragmented local systems, declining civic pride, isolation, and vulnerability to mis- and disinformation — are widely recognisable across the UK. Equally, the solutions developed in Stoke-on-Trent are practical, deliverable actions that other places can adapt and apply.

This conclusion is strengthened by Protection Approaches' wider place-based work across the UK. Over several years, we have convened workshops bringing together civil society, local authorities, local funders and community-focused businesses, with participants from more than 300 organisations across Bristol, Walsall, Southend, Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield, Birmingham, Norwich, Sunderland, Brighton, Southampton and London. While each place has its own context and history, these discussions repeatedly similar underlying dynamics to those identified in Stoke-on-Trent. A further workshop in Caerphilly in November 2025 again confirmed that these patterns are widely recognisable beyond a single city.

### **Listening at scale: understanding cohesion from the ground up**

To shape the Stoke-on-Trent Community Cohesion Strategy, a city-wide listening exercise was undertaken, designed to hear directly from residents about how they experience their communities and institutions, and how they feel about their futures. Rather than relying on a single consultation mechanism, the engagement followed a mixed-method approach combining in-person conversations, facilitated workshops, stakeholder interviews, and an online survey. This approach was chosen to reach people in settings that felt familiar and trusted, and to ensure that voices often excluded from formal consultations were heard.

Engagement was led by Protection Approaches and embedded into everyday community life. The team joined existing activities and gatherings, ran stalls in local markets, visited cafés, shops, parks, pubs, sports clubs, community centres, and places of worship, and hosted dedicated focus groups and discussions.<sup>4</sup> We spoke with a wide cross-section of residents, including many people who do not usually engage with consultations or community projects, and people with a range of views about how the city has changed and the challenges it faces. This included engagement with young people, older residents, disabled people, LGBTQ+ communities, people experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers and refugees, trade union members, small business owners, and victims of hate crime.

In total, 1,337 people contributed through questionnaires, interviews, workshops, and informal conversations. Facilitator observation logs were used to ensure engagement reached across age, gender, ethnicity, geography, and lived experience while minimising barriers to participation. The result was a rich, textured picture of how people in the city experience cohesion — not as an abstract concept, but as something shaped by everyday interactions with neighbours, services, spaces, and systems.

# A framework for analysing and measuring social cohesion

## Understanding social cohesion and risk

In this report, social cohesion is understood as a condition shaped by equity, inclusion, participation, transparency, and justice. Cohesive societies are not those without disagreement or conflict, but those in which differences can be expressed, negotiated, and addressed without exclusion, discrimination, dehumanisation, or violence. Social cohesion must not be reduced to “good relations”, “tolerance”, or the simple absence of tension. Nor should responsibility for cohesion ever fall on those who experience the greatest harm when cohesion breaks down.

It is important to recognise that inequality, exclusion, and lack of power are experienced differently across society. Some groups, including ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, disabled people, and women and girls, have experienced long histories of structural inequality, discrimination, exclusion, and violence, and these inequalities continue to shape people’s safety, opportunities, and participation in public life today.

At the same time, many communities experience economic insecurity, lack of opportunity, declining local economies, and a sense that decisions are made without them and that they have little influence over the direction of their communities or the country. Where people feel ignored, powerless, and treated unfairly, frustration and grievance can grow. When cohesion is weak, this frustration can be directed between communities rather than towards the structural and economic conditions that affect many people. Building cohesion therefore requires addressing structural inequality and discrimination experienced by minoritised communities, while also addressing economic insecurity, lack of opportunity, and lack of voice across society. Cohesion cannot be built by addressing one form of inequality while ignoring another; it requires creating a society in which people feel that opportunities, resources, and decision-making are fair and that everyone has a stake in the future.

Protection Approaches’ work bridges social cohesion and the prevention of identity-based violence. Across this field, a consistent finding emerges: identity-based violence is rarely spontaneous. While incidents are often triggered by specific events, rumours, crimes, political moments, or local tensions, the conditions that allow violence to occur develop over time. These conditions are shaped by social, economic, political, and institutional factors, including inequality, lack of trust, grievance, disinformation, and dehumanising narratives. The task of prevention is therefore to identify and address these conditions early, before trigger events can escalate into acute crisis.

International prevention frameworks, such as the United Nations’ Framework of Analysis for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes, and its guidance on Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, emphasise that violence is preceded by histories, precursors, and risk factors that can be identified and mitigated. While local cohesion challenges differ in scale and context, the underlying prevention logic is the same: risks accumulate gradually, and early action is both possible and necessary.

For this reason, Protection Approaches uses a set of well-evidenced risk factors for identity-based violence to understand where social cohesion is under strain and where the likelihood of harm is increasing.<sup>5</sup> These risk factors are not predictive in a deterministic sense, nor are they exhaustive. They are a diagnostic tool to support analysis, guide engagement, and inform preventative action. These risk factors are set out in the following pages.

### **Investigating cohesion through community listening**

The community engagement in Stoke-on-Trent was designed explicitly to explore how these risks manifest in everyday life. Rather than relying solely on conventional consultation methods, the listening exercise was guided by a series of investigation questions exploring how residents experience trust, fairness, opportunity, belonging, voice, and security in their communities.

These questions shaped how conversations were facilitated and analysed across the listening exercise. They enabled patterns to emerge across different communities and settings while avoiding overly narrow or predefined categories. In doing so, the engagement revealed how cohesion is deeply intertwined with governance, service delivery, opportunity, and perceptions of fairness.

### **Linking risk, listening, and measurement**

The same framework can also guide how cohesion is monitored over time. The risk factors identify the conditions associated with weakening cohesion and increased risk of harm. The investigation questions translate these conditions into a practical tool for community listening and local diagnosis. Measurement indicators then allow local authorities and partners to track whether these conditions are improving or deteriorating over time.

### **A framework for analysing and measuring social cohesion**

The framework set out in the following pages brings these elements together across five interconnected dimensions of social cohesion: trust and institutional legitimacy; perceptions of fairness and grievance; belonging, relationships, and social connection; agency, opportunity, and confidence in the future; and safety, protection, and escalation risks. Each section outlines the relevant risk factors used by Protection Approaches, the investigation questions used during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise, and examples of indicators that can be used to monitor cohesion over time.

Taken together, these elements provide a structured approach for understanding risks to cohesion, listening to communities, and tracking how conditions evolve within a place.

Theme 1: Trust and institutional legitimacy
Risk factors shaping cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Widespread lack of trust in government and public institutions</li> <li>■ Widespread lack of trust in the media</li> <li>■ Widespread delegitimisation of expertise and intellectual authority</li> <li>■ Widespread belief that democratic processes cannot lead to meaningful change</li> </ul>
Investigation questions during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ To what extent do people feel heard, represented, and able to shape decisions that affect them?</li> <li>■ Who do people trust in their communities, in public life, and across different groups and where is that trust breaking down?</li> <li>■ Who do people believe has the power, ability, or responsibility to create positive change?</li> </ul>
Example indicators for monitoring cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Levels of trust in local and national government, public services, and police</li> <li>■ Perceptions of whether services understand local needs</li> <li>■ Whether people feel decisions are made fairly and transparently</li> <li>■ Whether people feel listened to and able to influence decisions</li> </ul>

Theme 2: Perceptions of fairness and grievance
Risk factors shaping cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Widespread perceptions of grievance, threat, or inequality</li> <li>■ Revival of historic grievances and myths of collective victimhood</li> <li>■ Disinformation and misleading narratives amplifying perceptions of unfairness</li> <li>■ Increasing belief in conspiracy theories or grievance-based explanations of complex challenges</li> </ul>
Investigation questions during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What grievances do people hold – where do they feel things are unfair, unequal, or not working as they should?</li> </ul>
Example indicators for monitoring cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Perceptions of fairness in how services, housing, and resources are allocated</li> <li>■ Confidence that institutions treat communities fairly</li> <li>■ Belief that some groups are unfairly prioritised over others</li> <li>■ Belief that some groups pose a threat to safety, culture, or way of life</li> </ul>

<b>Theme 3: Belonging, relationships, and social connection</b>
<b>Risk factors shaping cohesion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inter-group tensions or patterns of discrimination between communities</li> <li>▪ Increasing hostility towards identity groups based on characteristics such as migration status, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender identity, or sexual orientation</li> <li>▪ Increasing narratives that blame, stigmatise, or dehumanise identity groups for societal problems</li> <li>▪ Hardening exclusionary social or political norms</li> <li>▪ Increasing social isolation and weakening community networks</li> <li>▪ Widespread perceptions of social marginalisation or lack of belonging</li> </ul>
<b>Investigation questions during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do people value most and feel most proud of in their communities and in Stoke-on-Trent as a whole?</li> <li>▪ What do people think is working well in the city socially, culturally, and/or economically?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do people feel that different communities mix, interact, and get along?</li> <li>▪ What is already working well to build strong and cohesive communities in Stoke-on-Trent and what more is needed or could be done?</li> <li>▪ Where and how do people experience discrimination, exclusion, or marginalisation as individuals or communities?</li> </ul>
<b>Example indicators for monitoring cohesion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation in community groups, events, or local activities</li> <li>▪ Levels of loneliness or social isolation</li> <li>▪ Perceptions of whether people from different backgrounds get along well</li> <li>▪ Sense of belonging to the local area</li> <li>▪ Reported experiences of discrimination or exclusion</li> </ul>

Theme 4: Agency, opportunity, and confidence in the future
Risk factors shaping cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Widespread perceptions that decision-makers do not represent community interests</li> <li>■ Widespread feelings of powerlessness or lack of personal agency</li> <li>■ Economic insecurity or limited access to opportunity</li> <li>■ Widespread perceptions of decline in the status, prosperity, or future prospects of place</li> </ul>
Investigation questions during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What are the biggest concerns, pressures, or challenges affecting people’s lives?</li> <li>■ How do people feel about their own futures and their opportunities and ability to thrive?</li> <li>■ How do people feel about the future of Stoke-on-Trent and what kind of future they want to see?</li> </ul>
Example indicators for monitoring cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Confidence in local economic opportunity</li> <li>■ Perceptions of personal agency and ability to influence decisions</li> <li>■ Participation in civic engagement or local decision-making</li> <li>■ Views on whether the area has a positive future</li> </ul>

Theme 5: Safety, protection, and escalation risks
Risk factors shaping cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Local or national-level political, economic, public health, climate, or resource crises</li> <li>■ Impunity for those who commit, incite, or threaten violence</li> <li>■ Legislative curtailment of the rights and freedoms of identity groups</li> <li>■ Increases in identity-based violence, including hate crime, harassment, or intimidation targeting identity groups</li> <li>■ Increases in domestic or gender-based violence</li> <li>■ Growth in the number or legitimacy of groups promoting exclusionary or violent narratives</li> </ul>
Investigation questions during the Stoke-on-Trent listening exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Where and how do people experience discrimination, exclusion, or marginalisation as individuals or communities?</li> <li>■ How well do people feel their communities can cope during times of crisis, hardship, or sudden change?</li> </ul>
Example indicators for monitoring cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Hate crime and hate incident trends</li> <li>■ Perceptions of safety in neighbourhoods and shared public spaces</li> <li>■ Use of support services by victims of hate or harassment</li> <li>■ Early warning indicators of community tensions or flashpoints</li> </ul>

## Challenges to cohesion

The challenges set out in this section were identified through the detailed work in Stoke-on-Trent and describe the key conditions undermining social cohesion in the city. While grounded in one place, they reflect issues experienced by towns and cities across the UK.

### Confidence and trust in institutions

Low confidence and trust in institutions emerged as a significant challenge in Stoke-on-Trent. Many residents expressed scepticism about whether public bodies understand their needs or act in the interests of the community. This lack of trust was rarely directed at a single organisation, instead reflecting a broader erosion of confidence across local government, policing, health services, education providers, and other statutory systems. Survey findings illustrate the scale of this challenge: 64% of respondents in Stoke-on-Trent said that local services understand their community's needs “not very well” or “not at all”, including 21% who said “not at all”.<sup>6</sup>

National evidence strongly echoes this picture. The British Social Attitudes Survey and Office for National Statistics data show trust in government and political institutions at historic lows. 45% would ‘almost never’ trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests<sup>7</sup> and only around one third of people express trust in local government.<sup>8</sup> Trust cannot be shaped by messaging or service outputs alone, but by whether institutions are experienced as fair, transparent, and responsive in everyday decision-making.

### Lack of agency, powerlessness, and disconnection from decision-making

Alongside declining trust, many people in Stoke-on-Trent described a sense of powerlessness. Residents spoke about feeling unable to influence decisions affecting their lives, neighbourhoods, or futures, with decisions perceived as being made elsewhere and imposed locally. This sense of being “stuck” was linked to limited employment opportunities, constrained housing options, poor transport connectivity, and a lack of visible routes to effect change.

Engagement and consultation processes were often seen as reinforcing this disconnection rather than alleviating it. People described being asked for their views without seeing tangible outcomes, leading to cynicism and withdrawal. National data reflects a similar pattern. Office for National Statistics data, for example, shows that most people (around two thirds) have little or no confidence that they have a say in what the government does.<sup>9</sup>

### Fragmentation, duplication, and system complexity

Another challenge undermining cohesion is the fragmentation of local systems. In Stoke-on-Trent, residents and community organisations described a crowded landscape of strategies, initiatives, and partnerships, often with overlapping aims but limited coordination. For residents, this creates confusion about who is responsible for what and where to turn for support, reinforcing perceptions that systems are disjointed and unaccountable.

For community organisations, fragmentation leads to duplication, competition for limited resources, and engagement fatigue, with the same organisations repeatedly asked to contribute to multiple processes without clarity on how insights will be used. These dynamics are widely recognised across the UK, shaped by overlapping policy agendas, funding streams, and governance arrangements. From a cohesion perspective, complexity without coordination weakens trust and reduces impact, making shared frameworks and clearer accountability essential.

### **Perceptions of unfairness, grievance, and inequality**

Perceptions of unfairness and grievance were among the strongest challenges identified in Stoke-on-Trent. Many residents felt that housing, services, and opportunities were distributed unevenly, with some neighbourhoods described as being “always left behind”. Survey findings reflected this strongly: only 26% of respondents said people are treated fairly “always” or “most of the time”, while 66% said fairness is lacking at least some of the time and 18% said “rarely or never”. These perceptions were often grounded in lived experience, including long waits for housing, difficulty accessing GP appointments, and rising living costs.

Immigration was a particularly prevalent focus for grievance. Many residents believed that migrants receive preferential treatment or that immigration has increased pressure on housing and public services. A widely held belief was that asylum seekers are being placed in social housing, forcing local residents onto long waiting lists. This belief is incorrect: asylum seekers are not allocated social housing. However, Stoke-on-Trent has received a relatively high number of asylum seekers through national dispersal arrangements,<sup>10</sup> and many are housed in private rented accommodation funded through national government contracts. In areas where rents have increased and many residents are already experiencing cost of living pressures, this can contribute to perceptions that housing and resources are being allocated unfairly. These conditions can make grievance narratives appear more credible and easier to exploit.

Residents frequently linked grievance based beliefs to misinformation and disinformation circulating online, in local and national media, and through political discourse. While the pressures people described such as rising costs of housing and stretched services are real, their causes are far more complex than migration alone and include limited housing supply, inflation, and long-term constraints on public services.

Nationally, immigration continues to be identified by the public as one of the most important issues facing the country, but this concern exists alongside wider economic insecurity and declining trust in institutions. The February 2026 Ipsos Issues Index found that immigration was the issue most commonly identified as one of the most important issues facing Britain with 41% of the public citing it. However, the economy (32%), the NHS (26%), inflation (21%), and lack of faith in politicians and politics (17%) were also among the top issues identified.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that concern about immigration sits within a broader context of economic pressure, pressure on public services, and declining trust in political institutions.

Evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey also shows that public perceptions of migration have become more sceptical in recent years, with fewer people believing that migration benefits the economy or enriches cultural life, and increasing numbers believing migration has negative economic impacts.<sup>12</sup> This further supports the view that attitudes towards immigration are closely linked to economic conditions and perceptions of pressure on services and resources.

For this reason, responses focused solely on reducing migration, or ‘myth busting’ are unlikely to address the underlying drivers of grievance and tension. Public concern is often shaped less by migration itself and more by perceptions of economic insecurity, pressure on housing and public services, and whether resources and opportunities are distributed fairly. Where people feel that decisions are unfair, that services are overstretched, or that their concerns are ignored, migration can become a visible symbol of wider frustration, regardless of the actual causes. Strengthening cohesion therefore requires addressing the conditions that fuel grievance, including improving perceptions of fairness, expanding opportunity, strengthening local services, and increasing transparency in how decisions and resources are allocated.

### **Civic pride, decline, and confidence in place**

In Stoke-on-Trent, strong pride in local identity and history coexisted with a profound sense of loss. The city’s global reputation and economic strength were closely tied to the pottery industry, which provided not only jobs but a shared sense of purpose, identity, and pride. Many residents spoke about the decline of that industry as more than an economic loss: it represented the erosion of status, opportunity, community, and a clear story about what the city is and what it is for. For many residents, visible signs of decline such as empty shops, neglected public spaces, and deteriorating infrastructure, reinforced pessimism about the city’s future.

This pattern is recognised across post-industrial towns and cities in the UK, where the decline of major industries did not only affect local economies but also the identity and status of places. In many areas, industry was central to how places understood themselves and how they were recognised nationally. When these industries declined, many places experienced not just economic change but a loss of status and purpose. Memories of former prosperity or importance can become a benchmark against which current decline is judged. Abandoned industrial sites and declining high streets can act as powerful symbols of lost status and former glories.<sup>13</sup>

Where places experience a loss of status and a narrative of decline, some look for explanations for why their place has changed and why opportunities feel more limited than in the past. In this context, political and media narratives that attribute economic pressure, housing shortages, or pressure on public services to migration or demographic change can find a receptive audience, particularly where there is already a perception that resources are limited and distributed unfairly.

### **Disconnection, isolation, and withdrawal from shared life**

In Stoke-on-Trent, many people described feeling more isolated and disconnected

than in the past. Nearly half of survey respondents (48%) felt that people from different backgrounds do not get on well together, including 17.3% who said “not at all”. While participants valued activities that bring people together, many said they rarely met others outside their immediate social or cultural circles and that “people keep to themselves now”.

Crucially, the challenge identified was not simply a lack of opportunities. While some provision has been lost, there are many opportunities for people to engage with others through local clubs and initiatives, but confidence, awareness, and willingness to take the first step were significant barriers. In Stoke-on-Trent, 24% of respondents had not taken part in any community-based activities in the previous 12 months, with a further 21% participating only once or twice. National polling shows a similar pattern: only 6% of people take part in local activities often, while 23% never participate at all and 36% do so only rarely.<sup>14</sup>

This suggests a broader withdrawal from shared local life that cannot be explained simply by a lack of opportunities. Instead, it appears linked to confidence, habit, and the perceived social risk of engaging with unfamiliar people. Some participants also reflected that the widespread availability of digital communication and social media may have reduced the need to seek connection beyond the home, making it easier to maintain relationships remotely while reducing the incentive to step out and engage with others in local community life. These are challenges that cohesion strategies must address directly

### **Belonging, identity, and integration**

Experiences of belonging varied sharply across different communities. Some residents described their neighbourhoods as welcoming and supportive, while others, particularly those from marginalised groups, reported discrimination, harassment, and feeling unsafe or unwelcome in public spaces.

At the same time, anxieties about the pace and nature of change in local communities were frequently expressed by long-standing residents. Some described feeling that the city was changing faster than they were comfortable with, or that local identity and character were being altered against their will. In a small number of conversations, these concerns were expressed in stark terms, including references to an “invasion”.

At the same time, some residents from migrant communities described wanting to follow local social norms and expectations but not always knowing what they were. In a few cases, behaviours that were perceived as rude or dismissive by others were explained as cultural misunderstandings rather than intentional disrespect, for example, where linguistic or cultural differences meant that certain social conventions, such as the routine use of “please”, were unfamiliar and had to be learned over time.

While demographic change and migration are real features of many towns and cities, the scale and impact of these changes are influenced by disinformation and divisive

political rhetoric. This can deepen mistrust between communities and contribute to environments in which prejudice and hostility become more normalised.

These dynamics are not unique to Stoke-on-Trent and are evident across many parts of the UK. Some debates about integration frame responsibility primarily in terms of the behaviour of newcomers. In practice, integration is a shared process shaped by institutions, services, and the wider social environment. Effective cohesion strategies must therefore address both the experiences of exclusion faced by marginalised communities and the conditions that allow fear, grievance, and othering narratives to take hold.

### **Deprivation, opportunity gaps, and safety**

Economic hardship underpins many of the challenges described above. Stoke-on-Trent is the 13th most deprived local authority area in England, with a third of neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally.<sup>15</sup> Rising living costs, insecure work, poor housing, and long waits for services were repeatedly linked to stress, frustration, and reduced capacity to engage meaningfully in community life.

Across the UK, economic insecurity, rising living costs, and pressure on public services have increased the number of people experiencing hardship and financial stress. When people are experiencing hardship they are more vulnerable to accepting scapegoating narratives that blame others for their difficulties. This pattern is well evidenced in social psychology<sup>16</sup> which shows how group violence and exclusion often emerge from prolonged deprivation or crisis.

Tackling hardship (real and perceived) is therefore fundamental to building cohesion. However, the economic conditions that shape people's lives are often influenced far more by national and global decisions than by local ones. Inflation, energy prices, national economic policy, and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and international conflict have significantly increased living costs and economic insecurity in recent years. Local authorities are often trying to respond to these challenges with shrinking budgets and limited powers. This does not mean that cohesion cannot be strengthened locally. Increasing access to opportunity, skills, and pathways into work or enterprise can strengthen people's sense of agency and confidence in the future, which is critical for sustaining cohesion even during difficult economic periods.

## Assets to building cohesion

Alongside the challenges set out in previous pages, the work in Stoke-on-Trent identified a range of significant assets that provide a strong foundation for strengthening social cohesion. Similar strengths exist in many towns and cities across the UK, including those experiencing economic pressure or social strain. What varies is not the presence of assets, but the extent to which they are recognised, supported, and connected through local systems.

### Trusted community-based organisations

Grassroots, faith, sports, and voluntary organisations emerged as some of the most trusted institutions in Stoke-on-Trent. Residents consistently described these organisations as approachable, consistent, and rooted in their communities. Many people turn to these groups first for advice, support, or connection, often long before engaging with statutory services. They are widely seen as fair, human, and closely attuned to everyday realities.

These organisations frequently act as bridges between residents and public services, helping people navigate complex systems and access support. However, stakeholders also highlighted that capacity is uneven and often stretched, with some neighbourhoods benefiting from strong community infrastructure while others have very little. Strengthening and sustaining trusted community organisations, particularly in under-resourced areas, represents a critical asset for cohesion nationally as well as locally.

### Community activities, events, and shared spaces

Stoke-on-Trent has a wide range of existing community activities and spaces, including community lounges, gardening projects, arts workshops, sports clubs, libraries, markets, community centres, and faith spaces. These provide the everyday infrastructure of connection, giving people opportunities to meet others, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging.

Participation in these activities is strongly correlated with positive perceptions of cohesion. Survey data showed that 64% of people who “often” take part in community activities believe that people from different backgrounds get along well, compared with just 32% of those who “never” take part. Similarly, 47% of frequent participants felt that local services understand their needs, compared with only 21% of those who never participate. These patterns reflect national evidence showing that participation is closely linked to trust, fairness, and confidence. For example a nationally representative poll of 1,027 adults conducted by Protection Approaches in November 2025 found that 74% of people who “often” or “occasionally” take part in community activities felt that local services understand their needs, versus just 45% who never take part.

### Arts, culture, and heritage

Arts, culture, and heritage were the most frequently cited assets in Stoke-on-Trent and play a central role in civic pride. Festivals, sport, creative projects, and the city’s industrial history were repeatedly identified as sources of connection across age,

background, and identity.

Cultural activity offers particular value for cohesion because it allows people to connect through creativity and shared stories rather than formal dialogue alone. Supporting inclusive cultural projects that involve diverse communities, and linking these to wider regeneration and inclusion efforts, can help shape forward-looking local identities that honour the past while building confidence in the future. This is a transferable asset for many post-industrial towns and cities across the UK.

### **Strong community spirit and informal support networks**

A strong sense of community spirit emerged as one of the most consistently identified assets. In Stoke-on-Trent, residents spoke about a strong history of neighbours looking out for one another, stepping in during times of difficulty, and offering informal support through family, friendship, and local networks. This mutual care is a source of pride and plays an important role in helping people cope with hardship and uncertainty.

However, people do not always define “community” in the same way. For many residents it includes anyone living locally or anyone in need of support, while for others it refers more to people they know, long-standing residents, or those who share similar experiences.

This instinct is not unique to Stoke-on-Trent. Across the UK, communities have repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to support others in times of need, from local mutual aid during the pandemic to public solidarity with people displaced by conflict.<sup>17</sup> In some places, this has been actively embraced as part of local identity, a story that the place tells about itself as open, kind, and welcoming. Where this narrative is visible and reinforced by institutions, it can strengthen belonging, confidence, and cohesion. Recognising and celebrating kindness and openness as civic strengths, rather than treating them as incidental or temporary, represents an important and often underused asset for cohesion.

### **Willingness to engage and shape change**

A strong willingness to engage in shaping local decisions was evident across Stoke-on-Trent. Many residents expressed interest in contributing to planning, budgeting, and local projects, provided participation felt genuine and led to visible outcomes. Frustration was directed not at engagement itself, but at processes perceived as tokenistic or extractive.

Where participation is meaningful, confidence and trust increase. Strengthening this asset requires simple, transparent engagement processes, clear feedback loops, and opportunities for co-production and co-delivery. Stakeholders also supported devolving meaningful decision-making to neighbourhood level, reflecting strong local identities and a desire for decisions to feel grounded in lived experience.

### **Young people's energy and creativity**

Young people were identified as a powerful but underutilised asset. Many expressed strong ideas about how to improve their communities and a desire to contribute through sport, the arts, and civic action. When trusted and given real responsibility, they respond with energy and commitment.

Making young people central to cohesion efforts, through youth leadership, connections between schools and local projects, and meaningful involvement in decision-making, strengthens cohesion both now and over the longer term.

### **Anchor institutions**

Schools, colleges, GP practices, sports clubs, housing providers, and cultural venues all shape everyday experience and reach across communities. When these anchor institutions work closely with community organisations and embed trust, fairness, and participation into their everyday practice, their impact on cohesion is significantly amplified.

Encouraging stronger collaboration between anchor institutions and community partners represents a major opportunity to strengthen cohesion without creating new structures or programmes.

## Solutions: practical actions for strengthening cohesion

The challenges identified in this report are systemic, cumulative, and deeply rooted in how local systems operate. Experience from Stoke-on-Trent shows that strengthening cohesion does not depend on isolated projects or short-term initiatives. Instead, it requires coordinated, consistent action that builds trust, agency, fairness, and connection over time.

The priorities below set out practical, deliverable actions that local authorities and their partners can take, drawing on existing assets and capabilities. While contexts differ, the underlying principles and approaches are transferable across towns and cities facing similar pressures.

### 1. Create a shared local plan for cohesion

In many places, there are multiple organisations, institutions, and community groups already working to strengthen inclusion, belonging, and safety. At the same time, there are often a number of overlapping plans and strategies that address many of the same challenges. Without a shared framework, this can reduce impact and make it difficult for residents and partners to understand how different efforts connect or contribute to common goals.

A shared local cohesion action plan can bring this work together around agreed priorities, outcomes, and measures of success. This helps ensure activity is coordinated, resources are used effectively, and progress is visible.

Key actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Co-develop a local cohesion action plan bringing together the local authority, health services, police, community organisations, education providers, and businesses</li> <li>■ Agree shared goals and measures of success so all partners are working towards the same outcomes</li> <li>■ Secure dedicated capacity to coordinate delivery, ideally through partnership between the local authority and the voluntary sector</li> <li>■ Review progress together each year and update the plan based on what is working</li> <li>■ Develop an outcomes measurement framework, including regular surveys to track perceptions of trust, agency, belonging, safety, and whether people from different backgrounds get along</li> </ul>

### 2. Help more people take part in community life

In most places, there are many opportunities for people to join local activities or connect with their neighbours. However, not everyone knows about these opportunities or feels confident enough to take part. Barriers such as confidence, time, cost, accessibility, or lack of information can prevent people from getting involved, even where activities already exist.

At the same time, there is often strong interest in volunteering. Volunteering can help people build skills, confidence, and connections, while also helping address local challenges.

#### Key actions

- Support community-based outreach and local champions to help people take their first steps into community life
- Improve how events and opportunities are shared and promoted, including through local media, schools, faith venues, community networks, and trusted spaces
- Develop a local volunteering plan bringing together the local authority, voluntary organisations, schools, and businesses

### 3. Embed cohesion across local authority and partners

Cohesion is not the responsibility of a single team or organisation. Decisions made across housing, planning, transport, customer services, health, and policing all shape how people experience fairness, trust, and belonging. Embedding cohesion across all areas of work helps ensure that everyday decisions and interactions strengthen, rather than undermine, relationships with communities. This requires shared understanding and consistent practice across departments and partner organisations.

#### Key actions

- Train staff and partners to understand how their work affects community cohesion, including trust, agency, and perceptions of fairness, and how to make every contact count
- Include cohesion considerations in decision-making and policy development processes
- Share learning and good practice across departments and organisations
- Celebrate and reward examples of effective partnership working that improve relationships with residents

### 4. Take services to where people are

People are more likely to trust and engage with services when they can see them, know them, and access them easily. Many residents value services that are delivered in familiar community settings because they feel more approachable and demonstrate a willingness to engage.

Taking services into neighbourhood spaces can help build relationships, improve access, and make it easier for people to get the support they need.

### Key actions

- Build on existing community-based service models by increasing outreach in local spaces such as libraries, markets, sports clubs, and faith venues
- Work with partners to offer regular pop-up sessions for advice, information, and engagement in trusted settings
- Ensure digital services are accessible but do not replace face-to-face contact
- Support joined-up outreach so residents can access multiple services in one place
- Encourage frontline staff to use interactions as opportunities to listen and build understanding

## 5. Tackle misinformation and disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation spread by local, national, and international actors contribute to division, grievance, and prejudice. They undermine trust in institutions and fuel misunderstandings, particularly around migration, public services, and entitlement. Countering this requires openness, transparency, and trusted local voices.

### Key actions

- Support trusted community figures, neighbourhood groups, and local media to share clear and accurate information
- Support community-led storytelling and citizen journalism that reflects lived experience
- Develop a coordinated approach across local partners to respond to misinformation and disinformation, including online
- Train staff, partners, and community leaders to respond constructively to rumours and misinformation in their day-to-day roles
- Embed transparency in service delivery, showing clearly how and why decisions are made
- Strengthen the ability of schools, education providers, and youth organisations to help young people recognise and navigate misinformation and disinformation

## 6. Give people a real say in decisions and support local ownership

Many people across the country feel unheard or unclear about how decisions are made. When people do not feel they have a genuine say in shaping their communities, trust and confidence in institutions are weakened. Conversely, where people are involved meaningfully and can see how their input shapes outcomes, perceptions of fairness, agency, and belonging increase.

Supporting local ownership of spaces and projects can also strengthen cohesion. When residents help shape and deliver local change, they are more likely to care for their area and for one another, making change more sustainable over time.

#### Key actions

- Give neighbourhoods a more direct role in setting priorities and shaping the delivery of local initiatives
- Expand participatory budgeting, citizen juries, or similar mechanisms so residents can influence spending and priorities
- Coordinate consultation and engagement activity across councils and partners to reduce duplication and make participation easier
- Build clear feedback loops so people can see what changed as a result of their input
- Support young people to have a voice in decision-making through youth boards, school programmes, and creative projects
- Secure resources for community connectors and organisers who can link services and support local involvement
- Support small, resident-led projects that build leadership skills and collaboration

## 7. Spot and respond to community tensions early

Preventing harm is more effective than responding after tensions escalate. Local groups, frontline workers, and community organisations are often the first to notice when concerns are emerging. By improving coordination and acting early, partners can reduce risk, prevent escalation, and help communities feel safer and supported.

Early intervention also requires ensuring that communities and services have the capacity and support needed to respond appropriately when issues arise.

#### Key actions

- Strengthen coordination between councils, police, health services, and community partners to recognise and share early signs of tension
- Develop clear local processes for responding quickly and proportionately when concerns arise
- Support training for staff and community representatives to recognise and report emerging issues
- Build capacity within community organisations to respond locally to tensions
- Review incidents jointly and openly to improve future responses
- Ensure appropriate support services are available for victims of hate crime
- Work in partnership with regional and national networks addressing threats to cohesion

## 8. Celebrate and reimagine local identity

Many towns and cities have strong histories and identities, but economic and social change has often weakened shared narratives about what places are for and what they stand for. Rebuilding cohesion requires creating inclusive, forward-looking identities that reflect contemporary realities while valuing local heritage.

Celebrating kindness, creativity, and mutual care as defining features of place can help strengthen pride, belonging, and shared purpose.

### Key actions

- Facilitate conversations about the future identity of place, building on local history and values
- Involve schools, young people, and community groups in shaping how local stories are told and celebrated
- Develop joint campaigns led by councils, police, and community organisations that celebrate openness, respect, and shared values
- Agree shared approaches for responding collectively when individuals or organisations promoting inclusion are targeted

## 9. Support local enterprise and opportunity

Economic opportunity and cohesion are closely linked. Where people feel they have limited chances to learn, earn, or build something for themselves, confidence and agency decline. Supporting local enterprise and skills development can strengthen pride, keep value within communities, and contribute to long-term wellbeing.

### Key actions

- Work with education providers and business networks to offer training and support for people starting or growing small businesses
- Focus outreach on communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, colleges, and local employers to raise awareness of routes into work and enterprise
- Promote social and community enterprises that reinvest locally

## 10. Invest in spaces that bring people together

Places where people meet and connect are vital for cohesion. These include parks, community centres, schools, faith spaces, cafés, sports clubs, libraries, and other shared venues. They provide the settings for everyday interaction and help reduce isolation. It is important that all neighbourhoods have access to such spaces.

In a time of limited budgets, investment often means making better use of existing assets, opening up underused buildings, and supporting communities to shape and care for the spaces they already have.

#### Key actions

- Map where social infrastructure is strongest and weakest to identify gaps
- Work with housing associations, health providers, schools, faith groups, and private organisations to open up existing spaces for wider community use
- Support community partners to manage and maintain local spaces where appropriate

## Measuring social cohesion: tracking progress and risk over time

If social cohesion is to be treated as a core priority rather than a one-off response to crisis, it must be monitored consistently and transparently over time. Measurement plays a critical role in understanding whether conditions are improving or deteriorating, where risks are emerging, and whether actions are having the intended impact.

Drawing on the framework set out earlier in this report, and on wider national and international evidence,<sup>18</sup> a practical approach to measuring cohesion can be structured around the same five dimensions identified in the framework: trust and institutional legitimacy; perceptions of fairness and grievance; belonging, relationships, and social connection; agency, opportunity, and confidence in the future; and safety, protection, and escalation risks. Together, these provide a rounded picture of lived experience, institutional trust, emerging risks, and the broader conditions shaping community relations.<sup>19</sup>

### 1. Trust and institutional legitimacy

The first area focuses on how people experience institutions and decision-making, recognising that cohesion is shaped as much by governance as by community relationships.

#### Example indicators include:

- Levels of trust in local and national government, public services, and the police
- Perceptions of whether services understand local needs
- Whether people feel decisions are made fairly and transparently
- Whether people feel listened to and able to influence decisions that affect their lives

### 2. Perceptions of fairness and grievance

The second area focuses on whether people feel that systems, opportunities, and resources are distributed fairly, and whether grievance-based narratives are emerging or spreading.

#### Example indicators include:

- Perceptions of fairness in how services, housing, and resources are allocated
- Confidence that institutions treat communities fairly
- Belief that some groups are unfairly prioritised over others
- Belief that some groups pose a threat to safety, culture, or way of life

### 3. Belonging, relationships, and social connection

The third area focuses on how people experience their communities in everyday life. This includes measures of connection, participation, and belonging.

Example indicators include:

- Participation in community groups, events, or local activities
- Levels of loneliness or social isolation
- Perceptions of whether people from different backgrounds get along well
- Sense of belonging to the local area
- Reported experiences of discrimination or exclusion

### 4. Agency, opportunity, and confidence in the future

The fourth area relates to people's sense of agency and whether they feel able to influence their lives, shape decisions affecting their communities, and access meaningful opportunities.

Example indicators include:

- Confidence in local economic opportunity
- Perceptions of personal agency and ability to influence decisions
- Participation in civic engagement or local decision-making
- Views on whether the area has a positive future

### 5. Safety, protection, and escalation risks

The fifth area relates to safety and the presence of risks that can undermine cohesion or escalate into harm. This draws primarily on administrative and intelligence data rather than public surveys.

Example indicators include:

- Hate crime and hate incident trends
- Perceptions of safety in neighbourhoods and shared public spaces
- Use of support services by victims of hate or harassment
- Early warning indicators of community tensions or flashpoints

### Making measurement work in practice

A practical starting point for any local authority is to review existing surveys and datasets, such as wellbeing surveys, resident perception surveys, or community safety data, to identify where cohesion-related questions are already being asked. These can then be aligned with questions used in national surveys, including the

Community Life Survey and the Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework, allowing for meaningful local-to-national comparison.

Rather than attempting to measure everything, the priority should be to agree a small number of core indicators across these areas, track them consistently, and use them to inform decisions. Measurement should not be an end in itself, but a tool for learning, accountability, and early action.

Used in this way, regular monitoring can help local authorities and partners move from reactive responses to preventative, evidence-led approaches, strengthening cohesion not only after moments of crisis, but as part of everyday governance.

## Endnotes

1. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-recovery-fund-guidance/community-recovery-fund-guidance>

2. See: [https://www.stoke.gov.uk/news/article/1712/city\\_leaders\\_join\\_as\\_one\\_stoke-on-trent\\_following\\_august\\_protests](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/news/article/1712/city_leaders_join_as_one_stoke-on-trent_following_august_protests)

3. Download the strategy: <https://www.moderngov.stoke.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=177512>

4. Protection Approaches and their partners, held conversations and consultations across more than 57 activities. These included:

- Consultation with staff of the North Staffordshire YMCA
- Conversations with residents at five Community Lounges (Abbey Hulton, Bethal church, Baddeley Working Men's Club, Temple Street Methodist Church, The Angel at Austins)
- Middleport Matters - quiz night
- Conversations with attendees at Asha community lunch for asylum seekers and refugees
- Consultation with taxi drivers
- Conversations at Middleport Matters Men's social group
- Running a market stall to engage shoppers at three different markets (Longton, Tunstall, Stoke)
- Five sessions visiting shops, cafes, and markets and other businesses to speak with business owners and customers
- Consultation with Unison trade union staff/members
- Conversations at two events to as part of the Big Centenary Tea party
- Consultation with staff at Project 93 - LGBTQ+ and HIV support service
- Conversations with participants in community gardening at Roots n Fruits
- Consultation with staff and community members at Disability Solutions West Midlands employability skills training for young people with learning disabilities.
- Consultation with Staffordshire County Cricket Club (young people and staff)
- Conversations during Saltbox Breakfast club for homeless and substance users
- Birches Head Get Growing Breakfast Club and community activities
- Conversations at North Staff Pensioners Convention
- Consultation meeting with staff at Uniting Staffordshire Against Hate
- Abbey Hulton Community Fun Day
- Two community builder trainings with staff and volunteers form community based organisations
- Council Roundtable with National Youth Agency

assessors

- Coalfield Regeneration Trust Welcoming Group
- Expert Citizens coffee morning
- Civil Society Consulting film workshop at the YMCA
- Port Vale Community Foundation and Community Kitchen
- Rowan Village sheltered Housing (arts activities)
- Redemption Hub quiz and bingo
- Community Fun Day Stansmore Park
- YMCA North Staffs Youth Forum Meeting
- Ball Green Community Fun Day
- Stoke City FC community youth football tournament
- Fan zone stall at Vale Park before Port Vale vs Doncaster
- Cobridge Community Multicultural Association Weekly Luncheon
- Raising Voices Steering Group meeting
- Consultation at Camoys Court Retirement home
- Headway North Staffordshire
- Centre Space Arts community
- Birches Head Get Growing Tea Dance to commemorate VJ day
- Meir Matters - Friday Place of Welcome Cafe Day
- Consultation with Meir Social Prescribing Team - Primary Care Network
- Consultation at OLGBT (Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) regular meeting
- Conversations with attendees of Stoke-on-Trent College Fresher Fair
- Consultation with staff and volunteers of Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent
- Evening arts activity for LGBTQIA+ people, run by Project 93
- Portland Inn Project neighbour roundtable
- Consultation with eight victims of hate crime conducted by Uniting Staffordshire Against Hate

5. These indicators are drawn from Protection Approaches' own risk analysis framework and global best practice, including the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, and Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, United Nations Development Programme, June 1, 2016.

6. Alongside conversations and consultations activities across Stoke-on-Trent, 428 individuals who live, work or study in the city contributed to the consultation through an online survey

7. NatCen Social Research (2024). British Social Attitudes 41: Damaged politics? See: <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/british-social-attitudes-41-damaged-politics>

## Endnotes

8. Office for National Statistics (2023). Trust in government, UK: 2023. See: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/trustinggovernmentuk/2023>
9. Ibid
10. Home Office (2025). Immigration System Statistics: Regional and local authority data on immigration groups, year ending September 2025. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-regional-and-local-authority-data>
11. Ipsos UK (2026). Ipsos Issues Index: February 2026. Accessed via: [https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/immigration-continues-be-seen-most-important-issue-facing-britain?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/immigration-continues-be-seen-most-important-issue-facing-britain?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
12. Curtice, J., Scholes, A., Morton, G. and Thake, M. (2025) British Social Attitudes 43: A First Look. London: National Centre for Social Research
13. Shaw, J., Garling, O., Kenny, M. and Coyle, D. (2022) Townscapes: Pride in Place. Cambridge: Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.
14. Protection Approaches conducted a nationally representative poll of 1,027 UK adults using the Prolific platform. Fieldwork was conducted between 10 and 17 November.
15. The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019)
16. E.g. see Allport, Gordon W. 1954. The Nature of Prejudice. Cambridge, MA Addison-Wesley | Staub, E. 1999. The origins and prevention of genocide, mass killing, and other collective violence. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 5(4), 303–336. | Hinterleitner, Markus & Kammermeier, Valentina & Moffitt, Benjamin. (2023). How the populist radical right exploits crisis: comparing the role of proximity in the COVID-19 and refugee crises in Germany. *West European Politics*. early view. 1-26 | Bursztyn, Leonardo, Georgy Egorov, Ingar Haaland, Aakaash Rao, and Christopher Roth. 2022. “Scapegoating during Crises.” *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 112: 151–55.
17. See for example: Puddle, J., Rutter, J. and Rolfe, H. (2025) The State of Us: Community strength and cohesion in the UK. A foundational report by British Future and the Belong Network to the Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion. London: British Future and the Belong Network.
18. See Abrams, Dominic and Davies, Ben and Horsham, Zoe (2023) Rapid Review: Measuring Social Cohesion. Project report. University of Kent and Belong Network
19. With thanks to Dr Bert Provan (London School of Economics), whose work on measuring the success of the Stoke-on-Trent cohesion strategy informed much of the “Measuring Social Cohesion” section.

