

Wales Safer Communities Network Response to Senedd Cymru's call for evidence on Social Cohesion

Closed 14 February - permitted extension until 28 February 2025

Please find the Wales Safer Communities Network response to the Equality and Inclusion Committees call for evidence on Social Cohesion. This response has been drawn from information supplied by Community Safety Partnerships across Wales. With significant input from Mid and South West Wales and the North East Wales Community Cohesion Team (Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire).

The Wales Safer Communities Network was established in January 2021 following the recommendations of the Welsh Government's Working Together for Safer Communities Review. The Network aims to become the strategic voice for community safety in Wales, working collaboratively to champion and support community safety partnership working, and influence the shaping and development of national policy and local practice.

The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales

Isolation & Service Accessibility: Many rural communities face challenges in accessing services, which can lead to social exclusion and isolation, particularly for ethnic minority communities, LGBTQ+ communities, asylum seekers, and older people.

The dispersal of asylum seekers to rural areas presents integration challenges, where infrastructure and support networks are limited. Although Councils are working hard to look to offer support, transport links and access to amenities such as youth clubs, GP services or day centres are examples of challenges faced.

However, isolation and disconnection can happen in any community and there are potential risks for individuals who withdraw from society and look to other influences, such as online chatrooms or websites. Current extremist views driven by far-right or far-left ideologies are monitored closely. Other areas of extremism with growing concern include individuals who self-proclaim as Incels (or Involuntarily Celibate), who perceive a crisis for men and oppose feminism. Often holding views that accept, even condone violence against women.

There is no one cause of isolation, radicalisation or holding extremist views. However, there is a growing amount of research showing a connection between individuals in the criminal justice system and those with extreme ideologies as having neuro divergence. Neurodivergence can often manifest as making one feel

different, unaccepted and at odds with the world around them and may lead to isolation. Promoting greater awareness and understanding of Neurodivergence in order that people feel understood and sufficient needs are met, may help to reduce isolation and feelings of unacceptance.

Hate Crime & Discrimination: Whilst official Home Office Statistics for 2023-2024 showed a small 2% decrease in recorded Hate Crime in Wales compared to the previous year. Partners working in the community have noted an increase of hate crime and hate speech (not all recorded) particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals, religious minorities, and asylum seekers. Local authorities and regional cohesion teams work closely with police and third-sector partners to raise awareness of how to report.

As a result of the rioting and disorder seen across parts of England following the Stockport murders last summer, there is a need for relevant programmes of work to ensure partners strengthen their working relationships with the Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities in their areas. Whilst Wales did not see the level of race related hate that many communities across the UK witnessed following the tragic Southport attacks, our communities have certainly felt the impact. Many community members across Wales have reported incidents of discrimination and noted feeling the need to justify their sense of belonging within their education setting, workplace or just as part of their community.

Challenges in Engaging Diverse Communities: Communities across Wales are becoming more diverse, in part due to the roll out of full asylum dispersal across all UK local authorities alongside the various resettlement schemes. And as such it is imperative that any new commissioned services and programmes of work must reflect changes in demography, particularly in rural areas. Real and perceived pressures on existing services and the polarising nature of public discourse means that the need for community cohesion interventions is greater than ever.

Our diverse communities in Wales have varying needs, languages, and levels of trust in authorities. Reaching marginalised or reluctant audiences can be particularly challenging, especially during times of heightened tension. Ineffective engagement with these communities can lead to misunderstandings, increased resistance, and the risk of escalation during protests or unrest.

Youth Anti-Social Behaviour: Across the partnership landscape there has been an increased challenge in responding to Youth ASB that relates to noted cohesion issues. An increased gang culture with associated violence and weapons can be intimidating, isolating and confrontational. Dangerous or inconsiderate use of e-bikes and e-scooters can cause frustration and anger whilst linked to organised crime such as drugs county lines that creates fear and concern. Partners have shared that they themselves feel unsupported. Courts and Youth Justice are seen as being reluctant to pursue cases of minors; however, by not offering more severe penalties (when all other interventions have been unsuccessful) it creates a feeling within the wider community that Councils and Police are falling to take action. With limited perceived

deterrents, communities feel the authorities are letting them down and indeed the youths involved, leading to anger and mistrust directed at all public bodies.

The Home Office are committed to the idea of introducing Youth Futures Hubs and Prevention Partnerships in an attempt to address the concerns above. However, there are ongoing discussions in Wales around how best this can and should be delivered given the existing structures in place. Welsh partners are keen for the UK Government to use current governance/meeting infrastructure to avoid duplication of resources and effort. Discussions continue in this space.

Schools: Our partners have shared concerns over a lack of coordinated approach to address racial, inter racial, discriminatory hate and ASB incidents in schools. With inconsistency around messages and reporting.

Following the withdrawal of Welsh Government funding for the All Wales School Liaison Programme, which provided a national framework and programme of delivery for primary and secondary schools in Wales, the Police and Crime Commissioners have committed to continue providing support to schools but this will no longer be a coordinated programme and will be driven by local need.

Given the increasing external influences on children there is a strong desire by all partners to build and maintain positive relationships with young people. Key to this is working alongside education settings to help identify and address issues at source. As such, the decision for WG to pull away from funding the School Liaison programme seems at odds with the Future Generations Act and a missed opportunity to ensure a national approach to educate young people on social cohesion issues.

Influence of online narrative: Whilst this enquiry may not explicitly look to address online influences, the impact and challenges faced by local authorities and partners to respond to misinformation is significant. The rise of misinformation, particularly online, has contributed to an increasing negative narrative around migration, LGBTQ+, misogyny and antisemitism leading to growing tensions and hostility.

Online influences are recognised to significantly contribute to community tensions and community cohesion more broadly.

Specific platforms such as Facebook, Discord, X (formerly Twitter) and many others are used to share, encourage or perpetuate negative narratives. There is often an echo chamber leading to internalisation of messaging and focusing on people's fears and bias' and can be used in different ways to identify opportunity, encourage a specific narrative for a prolonged period or act to inflame reactions and emotions.

Misinformation spreads quickly, posts uploaded on social media are often within legal parameters and likely to be posed as facts. Local communities are impacted and influenced by online narratives both locally and worldwide. Negative narratives spread fear, distrust and foster hatred. All partners shared with us deep concerns around how the unregulated nature of social media and other media outlets impact

on local lives and behaviours, some events are listed where social media has enabled or supported actions:

- In areas where there are sustained challenges such as poverty and unemployment, social media often acts as background noise supporting the feelings of injustice around social inequality. Misinformation and other complex issues bubble slowly until there is a trigger-event such as the deaths of two boys killed in an e-bike collision in Ely, Cardiff or the vigil of local teenager in Mayhill, Swansea where both events led to unplanned riots and disorder.
- Organised far right groups are known to instigate collective action and protests by using social media to spread details of planned activity to like-minded individuals, who may not even be connected to the local area. Rallying support to oppose Home Office resettlement was seen in Llanelli and Penally following the settlement of asylum seekers without due community engagement.
- Groups or chatrooms use open-source information which has been collated and shared with the intention of encouraging vigilantism. For example, naming and sharing the address of known or suspected sex offenders. Whilst groups may not openly advocate violence by its nature, it is intended to encourage local activism.

Wider Community: There is an increasing need to understand the impact of wider community concerns in relations to wider global/political issues. Understanding the possible impacts on local communities and services. Some current issues:

- Russia-Ukraine
- Israel-Iran
- Anti-Asylum message
- Tommy Robinson / Donald Trump / Elon Musk
- Andrew Tate / Misogyny
- Rise in Prevent referrals

Balancing Regular Services with Crisis Response: During periods of unrest, public services must balance the need to deliver regular services with the demands of crisis response. However, managing public safety can divert resources from routine operations, such as social services, waste management, and other essential functions which can result in disruptions to everyday services. This disruption may lead to, or fuel public dissatisfaction, and a longer-term impact on community trust and council reputation.

It is pertinent at this point to highlight the need to take into account the advice and guidance of Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCO) when new building developments (including retail, domestic and educational establishments) are under consideration. This advice will consider the layout of the proposals and will look to avoid issues such as poorly lit alleyways or open receptions at schools. By considering building safety into the planning, it can reduce risks at a later stage. Regrettably, due to weak legislation in this area private building companies only needs to consider DOCO

advice, and do not necessarily need to adhere to it, which leaves an element of vulnerability for local authorities and police to manage locally.

Communication: Whilst many CSPs report clear escalation routes and excellent working relationships between partner agencies at times of crisis. It is recognised by partners (including Councils, Fire Services and Police) that maintaining clear and consistent communication, both internally and with external partners can be challenging and is often relationship led. This fragmented approach can lead to delays in sharing critical information with the public and other agencies.

Sharing information with communities is essential to help them understand why certain actions have been taken and manage public expectations. Miscommunication or no communication can exacerbate public anxiety which inadvertently can encourage the spread of misinformation and hinder coordinated responses.

Drawing on feedback noted at the time of the 2024 summer unrest, some councils noted that despite reassurance that intelligence suggested there was no threat to businesses in their area, some organisations still decided to close buildings. Leading to strain on local transport, loss in revenue and impacts to business reputation. It has been self-identified that partners need to ensure they build on business confidence to counter misinformed messages that can cause significant disruption.

Capacity and Resource Limitations: Most public services are working with lean staff teams and with scaled back budgets. Due to staff shortages, especially in key areas such as community engagement or emergency planning, there are huge strains on council operations. Limited capacity can result in a lack of specific expertise, slower response times, reduced ability to provide on-the-ground support, reassurance or intel gathering, and difficulty in sustaining prolonged efforts during extended periods of unrest.

Funding: Much of the limitation associated with resourcing and capacity outlined above falls to adequate funding. The committee will be very familiar with the significant pressures faced by all public services and grant funded commissioned services particularly.

Equality and community cohesion activities delivered in partnership with local authorities, are heavily reliant on government funding. There is increased concern around the lack of clarity regarding Welsh and central government plans to allocate funds to support the continuation of various projects including Welsh Government funding streams for Anti-racist Wales action plan heritage, culture, and sports funds; BAWSO and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Teams Wales (EYST) core funded grant for youth and family support. There is also uncertainty around the future of some Home Office funds including the former Safer Streets funding, Serious Violence fund and the unknown impacts of forthcoming initiatives such as Prevention Partnerships.



In the absence of core local government finance, there has been a reliance on central government shared prosperity and levelling up funding over the past few years. Much of this funding came to an end in December 2024.

Projects financed by other work streams such as the National Lottery and Sports Wales (via Actif North Wales) have seen a reduction in funding that will inevitably have a direct impact on communities in Wales. The inclusive emphasis of the activities delivered by these funds has a meaningful impact on alleviating tension and encouraging cohesion within our communities.

Expectations on local authorities to support and comply with responsibilities relating to equality are increasing but, capacity to act is often limited.

Examples of best practice

Social Cohesion monitoring: Regular meetings across the partnership take place on a formal and informal basis.

Whilst the frequency of meetings may vary across CSPs, the below will provide a flavour of the ongoing activity in this space. Note this is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

- Weekly local multi agency meeting - review community tensions.
- Weekly Housing meeting - police, Registered Social Landlords and Councils.
- Monthly (more frequently if needed) resettlement monitoring of tension.
- Monthly meeting between Council Officers, Council Leader and local Mosque Leaders.
- Quarterly CSP meetings - Community Cohesion is a standing agenda item.
- Quarterly Hate Crime and Community Tensions meeting, Welsh Government.
- Quarterly Wales Prevent Network Group, Welsh Government.
- Channel Panels
- WLGA representation at Home Office, Asylum and Resettlement Council Senior Engagement Group (ARCSEG). There are currently discussions looking to establish a new sub-group focussing on Community Cohesion.

Online Challenges and Awareness: Local Authorities actively work to develop the public's critical thinking skills through awareness raising of online hate through public engagement events, training and social media.

Hate Crime Awareness & Reporting: Collaboration between Police, Local Authorities, schools, and community groups help to increase awareness and reporting of hate crimes.

Training provision: CSPs have facilitated training for a variety of audiences on numerous topics, for example Cohesion in Our Communities, providing information

about successful projects; Power of Language – how the words we use can be harmful.

The Wales Safer Communities Network website collates upcoming Events and Training opportunities that may be relevant for practitioners working in this space. The Network also host webinars and workshops throughout the year supporting practitioners to understand current hot topic issues impacting community safety. The annual Safer Communities Awards recognises the incredible projects and people across Wales, who work to connect communities and make them safer. See [our website](#) for more information.

Awareness of key campaigns and initiatives:

Public services promote and get involved to a greater / lesser degree in:

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- LGBT History Month
- Refugee Week
- Roma Traveller History Month
- Hate Crime Awareness Week
- ASB Awareness Week
- Community Safety Week

Policy: Embedding Community Cohesion within Policy e.g. Equalities Plan and practices across Local authority areas with the support of the Regional Cohesion Teams.

North East Wales Multi Cultural Hub (MCH): The MCH established in 2022, with 3 years funding allocated via the Welsh Government Anti-Racist Action Plan (AWRAP) Heritage, and Sports fund, to address the needs of local Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities. The collaborative approach led by noted partners, has created the required strategic structure to empower Ethnic Minority Communities of North East Wales to lead on making the change they wish to see - [Multicultural Hub 2025 Overview](#).



Multi-cultural Hub
Aug24.pdf

Safer Streets/ Serious Violence Project: Please see attached reports, noted project and similar project have provided the required engagement with young people who are risk of being influence by extreme narrative.



Serious Violence
Funding, Outreach Pa



Safer Streets5 ASB
Project.Wrexham. Jani



Safer Streets 5. ASB
Wrexham. July 24.pdf



Safer Streets
ASB.Holywell, Outreac

Case study: Walsall for All

Following a series of challenging events in the Walsall, England (Bescot murder, mosque stabbings, bomb threats etc.) partner organisations adopted the Resilient

Communities Model. This approach focusses on a collaborative method that fosters ownership and pride in the community. For more information see: [Walsall for All | England](#)

What support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and identify whether there are any opportunities to provide additional support.

Funding & Sustainability: The community cohesion programme can be vulnerable to short term funding. Any less than three years makes it difficult to maintain long-term impact. To build trust, it's important to focus less on superficial, short-term interactions with community groups, and instead, invest in developing long-term relationships with the most important communities. Greater funding stability is essential to support this.

Projects and programmes of work supported directly by WG or indirectly, such as the below, alongside other community/social focused projects, are of significant value as they provide the opportunities to create sustainable and meaningful relationships with communities who require support.

- Welsh Government Anti-Racist Action Plan (AWRAP)
- North East Wales Multi Cultural Hub (MCH)
- Community to School programmes
- Actif North Wales

Support for Rural Areas: Most funding and resources/services tend to focus on urban areas, whereas rural communities need tailored support to address unique challenges.

Stronger Welsh Government leadership and UK Government Collaboration:

Issues such as online hate, immigration policy, and policing fall under UK Government powers. More collaboration is needed to address these challenges at a national level.

We would welcome a stronger Welsh Government Cohesion Framework which would ensure effective links between the two administrations and provide clear, process driven oversight and leadership across Wales. A strong framework would limit silo working and ensuring information and risks are shared, learned from and managed in a more joined up way.

Capacity Building for Community Groups: Many grassroots organisations lack resources to apply for funding or expand their work. Training and simplified funding processes could help.



Summary

The Network would like to recognise the significant investment of resources, policy and energy into communities from all partners across Wales. Many individuals go above and beyond to build relationships, support projects and make areas safer and better places to live and work. However, social cohesion is an area of risk that requires connected leadership, financial investment with clear nationally aligned policies to strengthen a partnership approach and discourage silo working.

As a Network we would like to see a Welsh Government Framework, with supporting communication strategies and strengthened guidance for local delivery that ensures local and national working is aligned.

This response has been written by the Business and Network Development Manager of the Wales Safer Communities Network on behalf of Network members. The Network is made up of partners involved in delivering community safety from across Wales, including Police and Crime Commissioners, Police Services, Fire and Rescue Services, Councils, Welsh Local Government Association, Probation and the Third Sector (including Registered Social Landlords)

Response submitted 27 February 2025

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Links of possible interest

[The Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion](#)

Prevent training for sectors with a statutory duty - [Awareness course](#) (Prevent the risk of people becoming terrorists or from supporting terrorism).

Prevent refresher training for people who have previously completed the Awareness course - [Refresher awareness course](#)

Prevent training for private businesses - [Prevent GOV.UK training](#) and [ACT Early](#)

Prevent - explainer animation [here](#) (what Prevent is and where to get help about radicalisation concerns)

[HOPE not hate](#) - Researching, Campaigning, and Supporting Communities to build hope and oppose far-right extremism.

Children, Young People and Education Committee report looking at increased concern over exploitation of children by gangs - [‘When no one’s interested in us, the gangs take their chance’](#).

NEETS and Neurodivergence are common with those being exploited as well as those who may be drawn to extreme views/ conspiracy theories. Helping to promote an understanding of Neurodivergence may assist people to get appropriate support and feel less isolated - [eLearning - Niwrowahaniaeth Cymru | Neurodivergence Wales | National Neurodivergence Team](#)

Stop Hate UK - [Community and Local Support Groups](#)

Hate Hurts Wales - [Hate hurts Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

Research by University of York looking at resources needed for school teachers to address challenges of online misogyny - [University of York](#)

The impact of sustained poverty, on individuals and on areas can not be ignored when considering social cohesion- [UK Poverty 2025: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

Impact of International influence on social media and the direct impact on services and communities in Wales- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c78xdxzyxm2o>