

The logo for 'belong' is written in a white, lowercase, rounded sans-serif font. The letter 'o' is replaced by a solid red circle. The background is a dark blue circle on the left and a white area on the right with a red curved shape.

THE COHESION AND
INTEGRATION NETWORK

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Launching the social cohesion guidance

2019



Building cohesive communities

An LGA guide

March 2019

2026



Common ground

Building cohesive communities

Guidance

Supported by:



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

What we did

Literature & evidence review

7 Expert Reference group members

150+ organisations consulted

71 case studies researched

LGA Cross-party sign off

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*



Jake Puddle, Jill Rutter and Heather Rolfe

July 2025

**British
Future...**

belong
THE COHESION AND
INTEGRATION NETWORK

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Common ground

Building cohesive communities

Guidance

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All sections includes case studies which describe programmes of work, their impact and learning.

Section One - Introduction

Councils told us they needed help; defining the scope of social cohesion work, understanding statutory duties and making the business case for investment.

Contents:

- Why social cohesion strategies are needed
- What is social cohesion?
- The case for investing in social cohesion
- The key role of councils as place-leaders
- Central government responsibilities
- Legislation and statutory duties

Legislation and statutory duties

1. Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is set out in **section 149 of the Equality Act 2010**. It requires public authorities, in exercising their functions to “have due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.” This legislation clarifies what good relations involve. The PSED is not just about preventing discrimination, but also about actively tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between different groups.

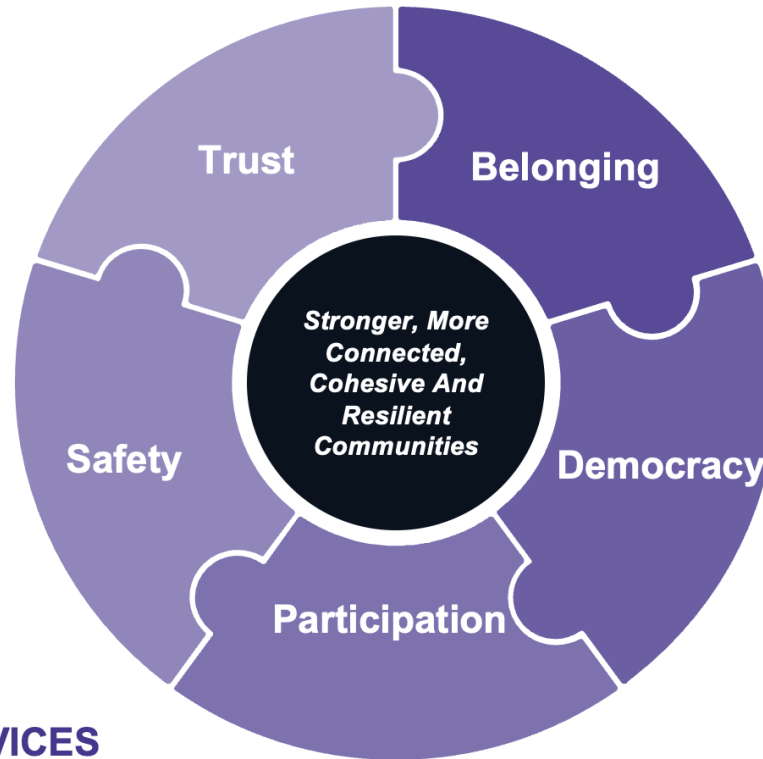
Policy priorities that relate to social cohesion

Several Government policy priorities are directly relevant to social cohesion. They include:

- **Pride in Place**¹², the UK-wide regeneration programme, has stronger communities as one of its explicit aims. It builds on many of the policy priorities outlined in the 2021 Levelling Up White Paper.
- **Build stronger communities** – Activities will aim to strengthen relationships, a sense of safety, civic pride and belonging.
- **Create thriving places** – Activities will aim to improve local amenities and physical infrastructure, focusing on town centres and high streets.
- **Empower people to take back control** – Communities are being given new powers to take over local assets for residents’ use, with funding available to achieve this.

The Belong Model of Social Cohesion

INFLUENCING FACTORS



LOCAL POLICIES AND SERVICES



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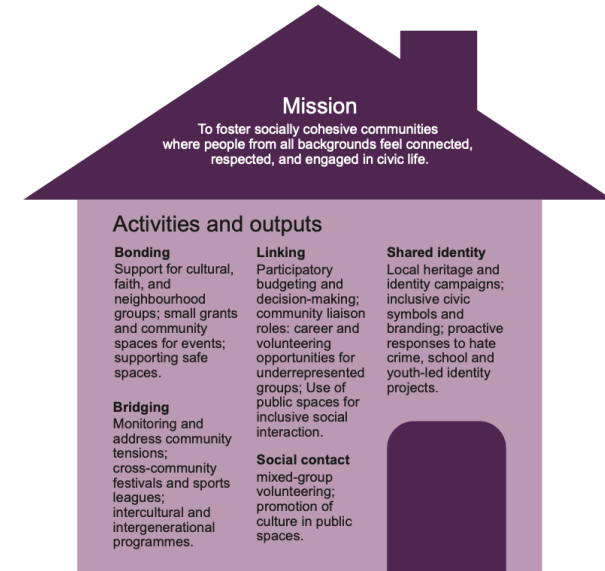
Section Two – Developing a social cohesion strategy

Councils told us they needed help; in strategy development, data, community engagement, service design and evaluation.

Contents:

- Principles underpinning strategies
- Stages in developing a strategy
- Local leadership and governance models
- Sources of data to inform strategy
- Community engagement
- Co-production
- A theory of change
- Delivery: mainstreaming and targeted services (also Section 4)
- Launch and dissemination
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Figure 2.1 – A Narrative House for Social Cohesion



Outcome	
Strengthened Internal Community Ties (Bonding Social Capital)	<p>Increased trust safety, and solidarity within cultural, faith, and neighbourhood groups.</p> <p>Greater participation in local group activities and mutual support networks.</p> <p>Enhanced resilience through stronger informal safety nets and shared identity within groups.</p>
Enhanced Cross-Community Collaboration (Bridging Social Capital)	<p>Increased interaction and cooperation between diverse groups.</p> <p>Reduction in stereotypes and social distance.</p> <p>Improved partnership response to community tensions.</p>

Belong's Place Based Programme – A Four Stage Approach

Stage 1: Inception and assessment

PURPOSE

Identifying key lines of enquiry & agreeing scope.

DELIVERABLES:

Literature review;
Community engagement
plan; governance

METHODS:

Literature & data review,
internal key stakeholder
interviews

Stage 2: Engagement and analysis

Purpose

Delivery of community
engagement programme

Deliverables:

Focus groups; 1-1
interviews; ethnographic
research; polling (if
relevant); findings report

Methods:

Community consultations
engagement, and narrative
analysis

Stage 3: Strategy & launch

Purpose

Coproduce a strategy and
delivery framework for
adoption by the Council.

Deliverables:

Strategy, delivery & MEL*
framework; delivery &
capacity investments
identified; public launch

Methods:

Co-production strategy
session with internal/ external
sessions; sharing of drafts;
menu of projects & MEL;
launch events

Stage 4: Implementation & evaluation

Purpose

Strategy and delivery
commences with
continued support.

Deliverables:

Governance, MEL &
project delivery
commences; technical
assistance & training, peer
support/learning

Methods:

Commissioning; training;
baseline monitoring; capacity
building

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MEL * = Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

Section 3 – Partnerships and partners

Councils told us they needed help in understanding the role and contributions of other partners, models for partnerships and commissioning opportunities.

Contents:

- Why? Value of partnership working on social cohesion
- Principles underpinning partnership working
- Different types of partnership
- Local partnerships, (eg. local resilience forums, community safety partnerships)
- Key partner organisations: police, colleges, schools, combined authorities, social landlords, civil society, faith, sport and culture, employers' organisations, funders.
- Commissioning and procurement.

Principles underpinning partnership working

Local authorities will need to make sure that partnership working to promote social cohesion is effective, accountable and sustainable. The following principles will help local authorities achieve this aim.

1. Shared vision and values

Partner organisations should agree on common goals, such as fostering trust and belonging across diverse communities.

2. Clear mutual understandings of remits and responsibilities

Each organisation should know the roles and remits of other members of the partnership to avoid duplication or gaps in services.

3. Mutual support

Partner organisations need to be sensitive to each other's strengths and limitations. For example, a small, civil society organisation may struggle to attend frequent meetings due to other pressures on their work. Sometimes members of partnerships will need support to build their skills and confidence to contribute effectively to decision-making and governance.

Section Four – Councillors and council services

Councils told us they needed help in setting; members roles, governance options, related areas of work and how to embed social cohesion across portfolios

Contents:

- Role of elected members
- Leadership and oversight
- Accountability mechanisms
- Related areas of council work, eg. Prevent, community development.
- Embedding social cohesion in different council service areas, eg. community safety, public health, housing, regeneration, adult education and skills, libraries, leisure and culture.

Local government service areas

Social cohesion is relevant to almost all local authority service areas, summarised in Table 4.1 and discussed in more detail below. Local authorities will need to make sure that the leads in each service area have the opportunity to input into social cohesion strategies and also receive training on this issue.

Table 4.1 Council service areas that relate to social cohesion

Service area	Relevance to social cohesion
Adult, community education and skills	These services receive funding to provide ESOL and other basic skills provision. Adult and community education services also provide leisure courses which can address loneliness and social isolation.
Arts, culture and heritage	See below.
Community safety	See below.
Democratic services	See Section One on duties and Section Five.
Emergency planning and resilience	See Section Three .
Housing	See below.
Inclusive growth and regeneration	See below.
Library and information services	See below.

Example – embedding social cohesion in library services

- ❖ Shared spaces that foster social connection
- ❖ Deliver activities supporting literacy, ESOL, & digital skills
- ❖ Co-located with community hubs (e.g. Hartlepool) to support employment & skills
- ❖ Support civic engagement, including volunteering & voting campaigns
- ❖ Help counter misinformation and disinformation (e.g. Torbay)
- ❖ Eight libraries act as UK Visa and Citizenship Application Service (UKVCAS) centres

Section 5 – Addressing challenges

Councils told us they needed help navigating their response to an array of increasingly complex challenges.

Contents:

- Poverty and inequality
- Residential and educational segregation
- Managing impacts of international migration
- Social cohesion in rural areas
- Modern slavery
- Mis- and disinformation
- Challenges to democratic resilience
- Community tensions
- Hate crime
- Impact of international events on UK communities

Impact of international events on communities in the UK

Conflicts and high-profile events outside the UK can impact on social cohesion in local communities. The Israel-Hamas conflict has triggered an increase in antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crime. This conflict has been exploited by extremists and the counter-terrorism police⁷⁸ have warned it risks radicalising individuals in the UK. The Israel-Hamas conflict has also strained interfaith relations and raised important questions about online mis/dis/malinformation, free speech and the policing of protests.

Other international conflicts can impact on communities in the UK, particularly where diaspora communities of from opposing sides of the conflict live in proximity to each other. In some parts of the UK, people of Pakistani and Indian heritage live close to each other, and tensions have increased after the recent conflict in Kashmir, often stoked online.

Case Study – Responding to community tensions in Oldham

Practice Approach

- **Tension Monitoring:** A robust system combining police data, social media analysis, community intelligence and frontline reporting.
- **Escalation and Governance:** A local command structure involving the Director of Communities, Deputy CEO, CEO and Chief Inspector.
- **Community Engagement:** Trusted relationships with local leaders
- **Legal and Ethical Frameworks:** Partnership **Coordination:** Daily collaboration with Greater Manchester's Gold and Silver Command (including Police, Fire, GMCA, and Counter Terrorism) ensures alignment across agencies.

Case study: Oldham Council – monitoring and responding to community tensions

Context

Oldham Council has emerged as a leading example of how local authorities can proactively manage community tensions in an era marked by misinformation, political scrutiny, and social division. In 2024, Oldham faced a volatile mix of challenges: the national grooming gangs inquiry, rising online abuse targeting council leaders, and heightened community anxiety. These tensions were further exacerbated by international conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas situation, which had local reverberations.

Despite limited resources and a fragile infrastructure for misinformation management, Oldham successfully prevented potential unrest through a coordinated, intelligence-led approach. This case illustrates the critical role of community safety functions in upholding cohesion and public trust during periods of heightened tension.

Practice approach

Oldham's community safety response is rooted in a multi-agency, place-based model that integrates:

Section 6 – Sustaining strategies

Councils told us they needed help in making their strategies sustainable and in ensuring continuous learning.

Contents:

- Sustainability in delivery plans
- Responding to new cohesion challenges
- Institutional learning
- Workforce support and development

Equipping staff for civic leadership

Councils should prepare staff and elected members to lead inclusive conversations and challenge discriminatory practices. Training should support councillors in facilitation, conflict resolution, and community leadership, as recommended in the LGA's councillor workbooks and leadership essentials courses.

Case study: Manchester City Council – Harnessing Learning and Development for Social Cohesion

Context

Manchester City Council's Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023–2026⁸⁹ demonstrates how learning and development (L&D) can be strategically used to embed social cohesion across the organisation.

The Council prioritised:

- building a shared understanding of social cohesion and how it is described, providing a definition and an understanding of bridging, bonding and linking social connections.
- embedding inclusive behaviours such as empathy, openness, and curiosity
- equipping staff to manage difficult conversations and navigate conflict

What next

Training and support package

- **Training and awareness webinars** for elected members, exec/ strategic directors and lead officers to run across February and March (12)
- **New Community of Practice** for Executive Leaders
 - Exec Leaders

Support

- Commitment to taking policy and practice leadership in tackling new challenges

Implementation

- Belongs work with local authorities growing with Lottery funding – 20 places over next 4 years

Thank you

Sign up to **Belong Network mailing list** to receive monthly updates on social cohesion work plus information on events, training and news from Belong and the wider sector.

Visit the website: **www.belongnetwork.co.uk**

LinkedIn: **belong-the cohesion and integration network**

X: **@BelongNetwork**