

# Co-operation over Conflict: Wales must Act

## Welsh Government response

November 2025

In 2025 the Equality and Social Justice Committee carried out an Inquiry into Social Cohesion.

On 9 October the Committee published its report '**Co-operation over conflict: Wales must Act**' making four recommendations for Welsh Government.

This document sets out the Welsh Government's response to those recommendations

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# 1. Introduction

I thank the members of the Senedd Equality and Social Justice committee for their work to explore the key issues which will impact social cohesion in Wales, and the opportunities and barriers to support social cohesion.

In my *Hate Hurts Wales* oral statement on 14 October I updated the Senedd on my immediate action to take forward Recommendation 1 and appoint a chair for the Expert Group on Social Cohesion. Further details of our response to this recommendation is set out below.

I was pleased that your Committee highlighted the solid foundations of cohesion Welsh Government, public and third sector partners have built. The Committee's recommendation for long-term funding of our Community Cohesion Programme is welcome recognition of the important work this initiative undertakes and the value of our partnership with local government on this issue.

Our cohesion approach relies on effectively leveraging the insights and resources of all partners so I very much appreciate the recommendation to intensify that partnership working.

The emerging threats to cohesion are not entirely in our gift to address but we are committed to showing leadership to help communities demonstrate solidarity and reject division and hate.

## 2. Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

*“The Welsh Government should establish an Expert Group on Social Cohesion to devise a set of immediate, medium- and long-term actions. The group should bring together representatives from local government, police, cohesion teams, the third sector, Strategic Migration Partnership and those with a lived experience to develop those actions. We suggest this work mirrors the urgent approach the Welsh Government took to the cost-of-living crisis. It is hard to overstate the urgency of this work, and we expect the government to move with unprecedented speed to implement this recommendation. The Expert Group should be established by mid-November and report before the end of the year. The work of the Expert Group on Social Cohesion should include:*

- Developing a national overarching social cohesion guiding principles document, similar to the Nation of Sanctuary ‘10 principles’.*
- Adopting a framework for measuring social cohesion and monitoring the work of the community cohesion programme, considering the work of Oldham Council.*
- Reviewing funding for the cohesion teams, agreeing what is needed beyond March 2026.*
- Enabling new and improved opportunities for sharing best practice nationally across the public, private and third sectors. This could include the development of a best practice guide.”*

### Response: Accept

An Expert Group on Social Cohesion has been established, independently chaired by Gaynor Legall CBE. Welsh Government officials will provide secretariat functions for the Group. With the agreement of the First Minister, the Wales Centre for Public Policy will support the work of the Group to draw on the best available evidence and expertise. The Expert Group will first meet in November and meet regularly until March 2026. The Group will be asked to devise medium- and long-term cohesion actions, including improved measurement and monitoring, which the next Welsh Government can consider.

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In the short-term, the Group will be asked to review and advise on the draft cohesion principles which the Welsh Government has been developing in conjunction with Regional Cohesion teams.

As part of the draft Budget 2026/27 process we have reviewed the funding for the Community Cohesion Programme. An extension to the funding until March 2029 has been agreed by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice.

Finally, the Expert Group will be asked to consider the best ways of sharing and embedding best practice across sectors to support cohesion.

## **Financial Implications**

The costs of providing the secretariat for the Expert Group and developing the required actions will be able to be accommodated within existing budgets. The financial implications of the actions suggested by the group will need to be considered by the next Welsh Government.

The cost of continuing the Community Cohesion Programme is approximately £1.63m per annum, which has already been allocated within the 2026/27.

## Recommendation 2

*“The Welsh Government must move forward at pace and take action to protect community spaces. The Committee’s findings support the introduction of a Community Right to Buy and should be considered together with the Community Assets Commission’s report expected in the Autumn. The Welsh Government should update the Committee on the next steps by the end of 2025.”*

### Response: Accept

Welsh Government has committed to exploring a Community Right to Buy. A Bill is being prepared for consideration in the next Senedd term, informed by the Community Asset Commission’s recommendations and aligned with UK developments, together with this Committee’s recommendation and the Future Generations Report 2025. The current expectation is that the Community Assets Commission’s report will be published before the end of the year.

### Financial Implications

No financial implications.

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## Recommendation 3

*“The Welsh Government should assume a leadership role for dealing with misinformation and disinformation. This should include:*

- working in collaboration with local authorities, community cohesion teams and the third sector, ensuring greater awareness of resources and guidance available and co-ordinate consistent messages.*
- commissioning the HateLab Dashboard or a similar monitoring service to highlight flashpoints or concerns which require action and resources.*
- exploring the work undertaken by Oldham Council to address misinformation and disinformation.”*

### Response: Accept

We will continue our collaborative work with Ofcom, local authorities, the third sector and others, to identify and appropriately address misinformation and disinformation. This includes sharing good practice with communications teams and co-production of resources.

We recognise more can be done to raise awareness of resources and tools to assist people in identifying false or harmful information. We will continue to work with our partners. Where appropriate, and in compliance with Government Communication Service best practice, we will continue to provide consistent messaging to tackle false information, as we have in relation to Welsh Government policies with our fact check blog, For the Record.

We are exploring whether an online monitoring system can provide us with insights to improve our response. Any system would need to comply with our data protection and public procurement obligations, as well as providing value for money for the public.

We work closely with local authorities, Police and the third sector on emerging local tensions or flashpoints. However, we recognise a current gap in ensuring the Welsh public and fearful community members can quickly find accurate information from reputable sources.

Following the Committee's report officials have met with Oldham Council to discuss their work to address misinformation and disinformation, and we will continue this engagement to feed into our wider work.

Welsh Government does not have the powers to regulate harmful content online, which may be mis- or disinformation. The UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, Ofcom, and Police Forces have substantial powers and responsibilities address these issues.

## **Financial Implications**

Much of this recommendation could be delivered through the strengthening and formalisation of existing partnerships and structures. However, the cost of procuring an online monitoring system is currently unknown. We accept the need for improved monitoring of how misinformation and harmful information is spreading but costs and impact will need to be fully understood before a final decision is reached. We would also need to consider the long-term delivery and management costs of the system

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## Recommendation 4

*“In response to the increasing threats to social cohesion from the rise of extremist views and activities, the Expert Group on Social Cohesion should pinpoint the challenges this poses for Wales and identify best ways to tackle far-right activities which can create division and ultimately lead to community disturbances which we saw in Llanelli.”*

### Response: Accept

The Expert Group has been asked to consider the best ways of tackling extremist views and activities in Wales, informed by analysis undertaken by the Wales Centre for Public Policy and the expertise of Expert Group members.

We have recently awarded funding to two depolarisation projects across Wales, which will be evaluated to inform decisions in the next Senedd term.

Depolarisation projects are intended to both tackle fractured community cohesion following disturbances, and also as a preventative measure to avoid community tensions where lower levels of social connectiveness have been perceived.

*Healing the Divide* is a locally designed and led project in Llanelli. We are providing funding, leveraging expertise from outside the area, and empowering local multi-agency working – convened by the regional cohesion team - to drive forward positive change. This project has three areas of actions; community recovery and prevention, community mapping, and leadership training for local influencers, and legacy and wider learning.

### Financial Implications

Current depolarisation projects have been funded from the cohesion budget. Scope for future projects for the new Senedd term has been factored into the 2026-27 Welsh Government budget. Potential costs arising from Expert Group recommendations are currently unknown.

### 3. Conclusions

The report identified four conclusions. These focused on the need for urgent collaborative working across the UK; the implementation of the socio-economic duty; declining trust in public institutions and the need for greater community involvement; and improved communication with the public around asylum accommodation.

On conclusion 1 we recognise the importance of a four nations approach and welcome discussion with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Although we are urging an Inter-Ministerial Group on this it has not yet taken place, following Ministerial changes at the UK level.

Investment for our communities across Wales is key, but we remain clear the financial assistance powers should be abolished and have not agreed to direct spending by the UK Government in a devolved area, such as through Pride in Place. We are already investing in communities and towns across Wales through schemes including our Transforming Towns fund and Civic Pride. We will work with local government so the UK Government's plans for communities and towns do not duplicate or conflict with devolved provision.

On conclusion 2, the Welsh Government remains committed to tackling inequality of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage, through its application of the Socio-economic Duty. Prior to commencement of the Duty in Wales in 2021, Welsh Government actively worked with and supported captured public bodies in their preparation for the Duty, providing draft guidance, resource materials, and webinar events.

On commencement of the Duty, Welsh Government published [Statutory Guidance](#) and a suite of resources through a dedicated [Socio-economic Duty webpage](#), including an animation and short films. Welsh Government continues to offer guidance and resources through a dedicated [Socio-economic Duty webpage](#) and is in discussion with EHRC regarding its report.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), as the regulator of the 2010 Equality Act, has powers to promote the Duty, as well as advise public bodies on how to implement the Duty and publish research on the Duty's application. Ultimately, responsibility for complying with the Duty sits with the individual public body captured, subject to its arrangements for internal delegations of functions to cabinets, boards, committees or officers.

On conclusion 3, Welsh Government officials regularly convene cross-government discussions to explore initiatives to improve democratic health. We are also working closely with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner on ways to support public sector involvement of communities.

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Councils have duties under the Local Government and Election Wales Act 2021 to encourage participation in decision making. They are required to publish participation strategies which must include how the council promotes and supports ways for local people to make representations about decisions. Participation strategies aim to make it easier for members of the public to understand how local government works; how it makes decisions, and how local people can follow proceedings, input their views, and most importantly, have them considered.

We work with Councils, through the WLGA, to look at the impact of these strategies and to see whether there are lessons to be shared and implemented to improve their impact. The 2021 Act also set out arrangements for councils to keep their own performance under review via a self-assessment process as well as establishing the Panel Performance Assessment process run by the WLGA – both of which consider their approach to participation and are led by the sector.

To progress our commitment to reduce the democratic deficit we are providing funding of £400,000 a year for 2025-26 to 2027-28 through our Democratic Engagement Grant which supports organisations working with those typically under-represented in our democracy to give them the knowledge and confidence to participate fully. We are looking forward to the publication of research we have commissioned to understand how we can measure democratic health. This report will identify a specific set of measures and indicators to track, monitor and assess different components of democracy in Wales. Ministers will consider the findings of this research when it is published early 2026.

The Innovating Democracy Advisory Group was established earlier this year in response to a set of recommendations from the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales. It met for the first time in May and its task is to provide expert advice on strengthening democratic participation and creating opportunities for democratic innovation.

The group's membership brings together a range of experiences and specialisms, including leaders in democracy, community engagement and policy development - all experts in their fields. Its work programme sets out a strategic and collaborative approach and seeks to understand where practical actions can help build a stronger, more inclusive democracy for Wales.

On conclusion 4, we are continuing to explore ways to improve our communication with the public regarding complex topics which can often give rise to tensions and misinformation. Our For the Record blog and our work with local authority communications teams are ways that we are promoting more accurate, timely and consistent messages for the public. Partners in Wales are also

working with the Home Office to trial more timely Home Office responses to claims relating to asylum in our communities.

We work very closely with Welsh Councils when UK Government accommodation proposals are known. We work hard to encourage timely, accurate information to prevent misinformation and the harm which can be caused by it. This objective can only be achieved through close collaboration between all relevant public bodies.

We encourage multi-agency consultation regarding any forthcoming accommodation proposals so that the likely impacts on communities can be properly understood, considered and mitigated – or for proposals to be rejected if the evidence suggests the harm will outweigh the benefit. We work with Welsh partners and the UK Government to ensure Wales plays a proportionate and appropriate role in resettlement and dispersal schemes.