



Community Cohesion Strategy



Foreword: Our Vision of a United City

Stoke-on-Trent is a city renowned for its friendliness and strong community spirit, and we are immensely proud of this reputation. We care deeply about communities and we are committed to continuing to support communities to be safe and friendly places for everyone.

This strategy sets out how partners across Stoke-on-Trent will continue to work together towards a city where everyone feels like they belong and where trust between residents and the institutions that serve them is strong and visible. Our vision is for a city where the everyday kindness and friendliness that we're known for is celebrated, where people continue to support each other when things get tough and where residents have a real say in the decisions that shape their lives.

To achieve this, we will work to ensure that opportunities and resources are shared fairly, in ways people see and feel and where communities have the support they need to come together, with trusted community-based organisations playing a central role. We will work actively for a city where young people not only imagine a positive future but play a central role in creating it and where no one can create fear, grievance, or division based on our differences.

We know that there are challenges for the city. This strategy is a commitment from public services, businesses, education settings, sports clubs, and community groups to work together to ensure that people feel heard, involved, supported, and connected. Together we will continue our work towards a confident, ambitious and united city.





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Introduction

In August 2024, Stoke-on-Trent was among several locations across the country affected by public disorder following the tragic events in Southport. The city, like many others, experienced heightened community tensions, amplified by the spread of misinformation on social media, which created fear and division. These events reflected wider pressures being felt across the country, as national and international issues have increasingly shaped how communities relate to one another.

In response, Stoke-on-Trent City Council brought partners together to coordinate a better understanding of the underlying causes of tension and mistrust and take steps to strengthen community cohesion. The One Stoke Board was established to lead this work, bringing together statutory agencies, civil society, and community representatives to listen, learn, and develop shared solutions.

This Community Cohesion Strategy has been developed as part of that process. It reflects extensive engagement with residents, stakeholders, and organisations across the city. The strategy seeks to address the issues that affect how people in Stoke-on-Trent live together, identify what builds connection and belonging, and set out practical steps to strengthen trust between communities and institutions.

The aim is for Stoke-on-Trent to be a city where everyone feels safe, valued, and able to take part in community life; where diversity is recognised as a strength; and where every resident, regardless of background, has the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the city's future.

Community Engagement

To shape this strategy, an extensive city-wide listening event was carried out between June and September 2025. The process was designed to hear directly from people across Stoke-on-Trent about what brings communities together, what divides them and what kind of future they want for the city.

The listening event followed a mixed-method approach combining in-person engagement, stakeholder interviews, and an online survey. Thirteen guiding questions informed the process, exploring issues such as trust, belonging, fairness, and opportunity.¹ Rather than using a single questionnaire, these questions shaped how workshops, listening events, and conversations were facilitated, ensuring that people could share their views in their own words and settings.

Engagement was led by the charity Protection Approaches² and took place through a wide range of community activities, events and meetings across the whole of Stoke-on-Trent. The team joined existing gatherings, ran market stalls, and visited places where people already meet, from cafés and parks to sports clubs and places of worship, as well as hosting their own focus groups and discussions.³ This approach helped reach a diverse cross-section of residents in familiar and trusted settings.

A total of 1,337 people took part through questionnaires, events, interviews, and workshops. Equalities monitoring was carried out to help ensure representation across age, gender, ethnicity, geography, and experience.⁴

Together, these conversations provided a strong picture of how people feel in Stoke-on-Trent. They highlight both the challenges facing the city and the many strengths that already exist - the starting point for the priorities and actions set out in this strategy.

¹ See appendix 1 for the thirteen core questions

² See <https://protectionapproaches.org/>

³ See appendix 2 for a list of activities and events

⁴ See Appendix 3 for consultation demographic data

Findings

Challenges

This section outlines the main challenges identified throughout the listening event. They reflect what residents, community groups, and stakeholders said are the key barriers to cohesion in Stoke-on-Trent today.⁵

Confidence and trust in institutions

A consistent theme from the listening exercise was the low level of confidence people feel towards institutions and decision-makers in the city. Residents described a lack of trust in both what public bodies say, and in whether they act in the interests of the community. Many said they do not believe services listen or act fairly, with one participant remarking that “even if the council had more money, I wouldn’t trust them to spend it properly.” In the survey carried out, 64% of respondents said that local services such as the council, police, health, or schools understand their community’s needs “not very well” or “not at all”, one in five (21%) said “not at all.” Around one third of people believe that services understand their needs “very well” (4%) or “fairly well” (27%).

This lack of trust is compounded by people’s perception that services are getting worse rather than better, with some reporting experiences of delays in services, poor communication, or interactions that feel impersonal. These perceptions persist even when factual evidence shows that service outcomes are getting better. Rebuilding confidence will therefore require more than better messaging. It means bringing people into decision making, and demonstrating fairness and responsiveness in visible, tangible ways, through the decisions made and the small acts of everyday service. It also means making the effort to understand the reasons for negative perceptions and lack of trust which may ultimately not be about a specific service but rather a wider and deeper set of concerns.

The expected local government reorganisation over the next three years⁶ will offer both risk and opportunity for building trust in the local authority in particular. A process that focuses on openness and genuine community involvement could help to demonstrate a new culture of transparency. One that feels distant or top-down could deepen existing frustrations.

⁵ See Appendix 4 for breakdown of how often each theme was mentioned

⁶ See details on the Stoke-on-Trent City Council website: https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20003/your_council_your_city/780/local_government_reorganisation_lgr_and_devolution

Agency and voice

Many people described feeling powerless, both in influencing local decisions and in shaping the direction of their own lives. A recurring phrase was that people felt “stuck.” For some, this meant being trapped in unemployment or in low-paid or insecure work; for others, it was about housing, health, or a sense of being left behind. People said they rarely see routes to change their circumstances, and even when opportunities exist, they can feel inaccessible.

This lack of personal and collective agency is interlinked with declining trust. When people feel they have no influence, disengagement often follows. Some participants said they were tired of consultations that seemed tokenistic and to go nowhere, and community activists spoke about burnout. However, people also said they want to be involved in decision making if they can see genuine impact. Restoring agency means both giving residents influence over local decisions and helping people feel equipped, supported, and confident to shape their own futures.

Duplication and complexity

Throughout the listening event, stakeholders described a crowded local landscape of plans, projects, and partnerships. Many organisations or individuals are working hard on similar issues, from cohesion and strong communities, to health, safety, and regeneration, but often in siloes. This can create duplication and limit the impact of different initiatives.

Participants said the city would benefit from stronger coordination, shared objectives, and clearer communication between partners (e.g. city council, NHS, police, local organisations, education providers, and businesses).

The Future 100 plan launched in February 2025 and drawn up by a coalition including the city council, business leaders, academics, and figures from the health and voluntary sectors is already working to solve this challenge. The single shared plan, based around five missions to transform the city’s economy and unlock prosperity is governed by a cross-sectoral partnership board. While this represents an important step towards greater alignment for many the benefits of this joined-up approach will not yet be widely felt or visible.

¹ See appendix 1 for the thirteen core questions

² See <https://protectionapproaches.org/>

Fairness and grievance

Perceptions of unfairness and grievance were among the strongest emotions voiced. Many people believe that resources, housing, and services are not distributed fairly across Stoke-on-Trent. Some spoke about particular neighbourhoods being “always left behind,” while others felt that migrants or certain groups were given priority. These perceptions often grew from lived frustration rather than hard evidence. Participants cited personal experiences of waiting for housing, struggling to access GPs, or seeing amenities in decline.

This sense of unfairness was also reflected in the survey, where only around one in four respondents (26%) said that people in Stoke-on-Trent are treated fairly “always” or “most of the time.” Almost two-thirds (66%) said that people are not treated fairly, at least some of the time, and nearly one in five (18%) said “rarely or never.”

Particularly prevalent is the belief that migrants have pushed up the cost of housing in the city, where there has been a sharp and above-average increase in rental prices over the past two years.⁷ In reality, the reasons are much more complex than migration alone, including wider inflationary pressures, low construction levels and increased mortgage costs. The impact is however felt most acutely by those already struggling financially. As a result some inequalities are real and visible. A cohesion strategy must tackle both perception and reality.

⁷ Office for National Statistics, ‘Housing prices in Stoke-on-Trent’ fact sheet, accessed October 2025
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E06000021/>

Pride

Pride in Stoke-on-Trent's history, creativity, and sporting culture is strong. Participants often speak passionately about the city's industrial heritage, particularly the potteries and the city's tradition of hard work and community spirit. For many, this legacy remains a source of deep pride and identity. Yet people also said that this pride feels stuck in the past. The decline of the pottery industry, once the heart of the city's prosperity and global reputation, has left a lasting sense of loss. Some said it feels as though the city "has not really recovered," while others reflected that its creative energy has not yet found a modern equivalent.

People want a positive, forward-looking identity to believe in, an identity that expresses pride in what the city can become. Several said they felt embarrassed by the condition of their high streets, describing litter, graffiti, and empty shops as daily reminders of decline.

Stakeholders emphasised that civic pride cannot be manufactured through messaging or slogans alone. Residents said pride grows when the city looks cared for, when the basics are right: clean streets, well-maintained public spaces, and visible improvement. Leaders can help by "talking the city up," celebrating achievements, and using simple language to talk about the city's future.



Connection

The expected local government reorganisation over the next three years⁶ will offer both risk and opportunity for building trust in the local authority in particular. A process that focuses on openness and genuine community involvement could help to demonstrate a new culture of transparency. One that feels distant or top-down could deepen existing frustrations.

People across communities spoke of feeling more isolated or disconnected than they used to. Many people feel lonely⁸ and said they rarely meet others outside their immediate social or cultural circle. This loss of connection was felt both between and within groups, and several participants said that “people keep to themselves now.” There is a sense from some of living parallel lives, communities existing side by side with little meaningful contact. In the survey when asked whether people from different backgrounds get on well together in Stoke-on-Trent, 48% of participants answered “No, not at all” (17.3%) or “No, not really” (30.4%).

Feedback showed how much people value spaces and moments that bring them together, whether through sports, arts, or shared neighbourhood projects. However, many felt these opportunities have dwindled due to cuts or closures.

The challenge for cohesion is not simply to create new events, but to foster the conditions where relationships can form naturally. It was found that while plenty of activities already exist, awareness is sometimes low and confidence to attend or get involved is limited. The survey found that nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents had not taken part in any community-based activities or events in the past 12 months with a further 21% only having taken part once or twice. This matches data from the Stoke-on-Trent Wellbeing Survey 2025 which found that half of residents had not taken part in any cultural events in the previous year. Helping people cross that threshold through outreach or local champions could make a big difference.

⁸ The Stoke-on-Trent Wellbeing Survey 2025 found a quarter (24%) of residents reported feeling lonely often, always or some of the time

Culture and belonging

Experiences of belonging in Stoke-on-Trent were mixed. Some participants from minority ethnic communities said they have experienced prejudice or discrimination, including racial slurs, suspicion, and unequal treatment. These experiences were painful, isolating, and made those who are targeted feel like they are unwanted in the wider community, outside of their immediate social and cultural circle. Others, however, said the opposite describing the city as friendly and welcoming, with neighbours who look out for one another.

Several conversations also explored the challenges of integration, both real and perceived. Some long-term residents said they felt that newer migrant communities don't mix and that "integration between different demographics isn't always happening". But some migrants told us that they want to integrate more fully and want to understand local customs, social norms, and what one person described as "the unwritten rules" of Stoke-on-Trent. They said they often fear unintentionally offending others or being misunderstood, but lack clear opportunities learn what is expected and to connect.

Some residents expressed fear of immigration and cultural change, which was often driven by mis/disinformation and prejudice, fears are grounded in real anxiety about resources and identity. Stakeholders warned that if economic and social grievances are not addressed, racialised explanations will continue to fill the gap.

Deprivation and hardship

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.⁹ Hardship was one of the most frequently discussed issues. People described struggling with food insecurity, rising bills, poor housing, and long waiting lists for health and social care. Many said they were "just surviving." These pressures drain time, energy, and confidence, leaving little capacity for wider engagement in the local community.

⁹ The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019)

Stakeholders and participants alike recognised that deprivation also feeds division. 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 psychology¹⁰ which shows how group violence and exclusion often emerge from prolonged deprivation or crisis. Tackling hardship is therefore fundamental to building cohesion; without addressing people's material conditions, attempts at inclusion will struggle to take root.

Infrastructure and opportunity gaps

Infrastructure and opportunity gaps was the most mentioned theme throughout the exercise.¹¹ Many participants said the city's infrastructure limits opportunity. One of the most common complaints was about transport. People repeatedly said that public transport was lacking, unreliable, and/or expensive. For some, this means being cut off from work, education, or social life. Others mentioned the loss of youth clubs, safe community spaces, and mentoring schemes that once supported young people's aspirations.

Participants linked these gaps directly to low aspiration. They said that when young people cannot easily travel, find jobs, or see positive role models, ambition shrinks. These findings match those of YMCA North Staffordshire's city-wide consultation with 2,838 children and young people, aged between 10 and 24 which found that a lack of local opportunities in work, training, and creative industries drives aspirations to leave the city and that unreliable, expensive transport limits access to education, work, and social life.¹²

Support for small businesses and local entrepreneurship was seen as key to rebuilding opportunity, but residents also called for better information, guidance, and mentoring so they know how to start.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ See Appendix 4 for breakdown of how often each theme was mentioned

¹² YMCA North Staffordshire Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire City Wide Youth Consultation Report <https://ymcans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Consultation-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Safety

Concerns about safety ran through many responses. Participants from marginalised groups, including ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ residents, described experiences of harassment and hate that left them feeling unsafe in certain areas. Others worried about antisocial behaviour, drug use, and crime in public spaces. “You don’t go out after dark anymore,” one person said, “you just don’t.”

These perceptions of decline and disorder erode public confidence and fuel withdrawal from shared spaces. People said they want to see more visible enforcement and faster responses to low-level issues such as vandalism, litter, broken lights as signs that the city is cared for. Visible action on the small things was described as important for restoring trust and a sense of safety.



Assets

This section outlines the main assets which were identified from feedback. They reflect what residents, community groups, and stakeholders said are the key areas that can be built on to help build cohesion in Stoke-on-Trent today.

Trusted community organisations

Grassroots, faith, sports and voluntary groups are among the most trusted parts of life in Stoke-on-Trent. People describe them as approachable, consistent and rooted in their communities. Many turn to these groups first for help and advice long before approaching official services. They are seen as fair, human and in touch with everyday realities.

These organisations often bridge the gap between residents and public services, helping people navigate systems and find support. But stakeholders from community-based organisations said that their resources are stretched, and some areas have less community infrastructure than others. Strengthening the capacity of these trusted groups, especially where support is thin, can support building stronger, more connected communities across the city.

Community events, activities, and spaces

From community lounges and gardening projects to arts workshops and football sessions, there are already many ways for people to come together and get involved in their local communities. These activities are important social glue, giving people a reason to get out of the house, to meet others, and to feel a sense of belonging.

Those who do take part in community events and activities are significantly more likely to view local services positively, to believe that people from different backgrounds get along well, and to believe that people in the city are treated fairly. For example, 64% of people who said that they “often” take part in community activities believe that people from different backgrounds get along, whereas only 32% of those who “never” take part in local activities feel the same way. 47% of people who “often” take part in community activities said they believe that local services understand their needs versus only 21% who “never” take part.

Community centres, libraries, markets, community gardens and faith spaces are all seen as valuable spaces. They are safe, welcoming places where people meet, learn and support each other. In some neighbourhoods these hubs are thriving, but other neighbourhoods lack these spaces. Understanding where these spaces are missing, and finding creative ways to repurpose underused buildings could help ensure that opportunities for community connection are spread more evenly.

Arts, culture and heritage

Arts, culture and heritage was the most mentioned asset in Stoke-on-Trent during the exercise¹⁴ and play a big role in civic pride. Festivals, sport, creative projects and Stoke's industrial story all bring people together. Many residents spoke about wanting to celebrate these aspects of the city and to use creativity as a bridge between communities and generations.

Cultural activity could help to shape a new, forward-looking identity that honours the past but that also builds pride in the city's future. Supporting creative projects that involve diverse groups, and linking this to wider regeneration and inclusion goals, can help the city build an identity that looks towards a positive future.

Strong community spirit

After arts, culture and heritage; friendliness and community spirit was the next most mentioned positive about the city. Stoke-on-Trent is known as a friendly, down-to-earth city where neighbours look out for one another. Helping others and stepping up in a crisis is part of the city's character and history and is the source of great pride.

This finding was echoed in YMCA North Staffordshire's youth consultation when young people told them that they "deeply value the strong sense of community in Stoke-on-Trent. They describe the city as a place where people look out for one another and where informal support networks, especially among friends and family, play a vital role in making everyday life feel manageable."¹⁵

This spirit of care is one of Stoke's greatest strengths and should be celebrated and built on.

¹⁴ See Appendix 4 for breakdown of how often each theme was mentioned

¹⁵ YMCA North Staffordshire Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire City Wide Youth Consultation Report <https://ymcans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Consultation-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Willingness to engage

Many residents want to take part in decisions about their city and local community, such as planning, budgeting, or deciding on local projects, but only if the process feels genuine. There is frustration when people are asked for views and nothing changes, yet a clear appetite for involvement when participation is meaningful.

Engagement needs to be simple, open and respectful of people's time. Clear communication, co-production, and visible feedback loops (you said/we did) will help show that involvement leads to real outcomes. Strengthening participation should also mean co-delivery, with residents and community-based organisations helping to put ideas into action.

Stakeholders supported greater devolution of decision-making powers to "natural neighbourhoods," reflecting the strong sense of local identity that exist across the city. Enabling these communities to have a more direct role in setting priorities and shaping the delivery of local initiatives could help people to feel a greater sense of agency, and decisions feel more relevant and grounded in local experience.

Green Spaces and Nature

Parks, canals, allotments and gardens are some of Stoke-on-Trent's most valued public spaces. People said they improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and make it easy to connect with others. In many areas, volunteers already maintain local green spaces and see them as a source of pride.

Keeping these places well cared for and accessible brings wide benefits for health, cohesion and the environment. Supporting volunteer groups and neighbourhood partnerships to take a lead in maintaining and improving green spaces could multiply these benefits.

Anchor Institutions

Education settings, GP surgeries, sports clubs, and cultural venues all play an important part in daily life, they reach across communities and have the potential to help address many of the challenges set out in this paper. When they work with local groups they can have an even greater impact. Encouraging these institutions to collaborate more closely with community partners, and to make building trust, agency, and connection part of their everyday practice, can help to strengthen relationships across the city.

Young People's Energy

Young people in Stoke-on-Trent are full of ideas, creativity and a desire to make a difference. When they are trusted and given real opportunities through engaging in policy-making, sport, the arts, or community projects, they respond with energy and enthusiasm. Many adults described them as the hope for the city's future.

Harnessing that energy will mean making young people central to achieving the priorities of this cohesion strategy by supporting youth leadership, linking schools and other education settings to local projects, and creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage in shaping the city's future.



Strategic Priorities:

These 10 priorities set out a shared plan for how partners across Stoke-on-Trent can work together to strengthen cohesion. They focus on what can be done with the resources that already exist by joining up efforts and making the most of local strengths. These priorities will inform the work of the city council, civil society organisations, services such as the NHS and Police, and other stakeholders in business, education, sports, and faith. These are a shared set of priorities across all sectors which together, they aim to make Stoke-on-Trent a place where everyone feels they belong, have a voice, a stake and a reason to be proud of the city's future.

1. Create a shared plan for a cohesive city

There are many organisations, institutions and community groups already working to strengthen inclusion and belonging across Stoke-on-Trent. At the same time there are plans and strategies that are overlapping and themselves address many of the challenges set out in this paper.¹⁶ However what is needed is a shared action plan that brings this work together towards a shared set of outcomes and simple shared measurements of success. Coordination and collaboration will help make sure efforts are joined up, resources are used wisely and everyone knows how they contribute to the city's wider goals.

Key actions

- Co-develop a city-wide cohesion action plan that brings together the city council, NHS, police, local organisations, education providers, and businesses
- Agree shared goals and measures of success so that everyone works toward the same outcomes
- Secure dedicated capacity to coordinate delivery, ideally through a partnership between the council and voluntary sector
- Review progress together each year and update the plan based on what is working
- Develop a outcomes measurement framework making use of the annual survey to measure perceptions of trust, agency, belonging, safety and whether people from different backgrounds get along.

Intended outcomes

- Shared understanding of priorities and responsibilities
- Better coordination across partners and communities
- More consistent and visible progress towards cohesion

2. Help more people take part in community life

There are many opportunities for people to join local activities or connect with their neighbours, but not everyone knows about them or feels confident enough to get involved. People often said they wanted to take part but they don't know about the opportunities that already exist, or they face barriers such as confidence, time, resource, or accessibility. Increasing awareness of activities and opportunities alongside making participation easier can help people feel part of their community and can bring people from different backgrounds together in positive ways.

At the same time there is a desire for increased, and more varied, volunteering opportunities. Volunteering can help people build skills, confidence and connections. At the same time, many local challenges could be addressed through stronger volunteer participation. Making volunteering easier, more tailored to people's different skills and expertise, and more inclusive would benefit both residents and the city.

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, local networks, faith venues, schools and trusted spaces
- Develop a city-wide volunteering plan that brings together the city council, voluntary organisations, schools and businesses

Intended outcomes

- More people, including those who have felt isolated, taking part in community activities
- Stronger confidence and connection between residents and local institutions
- More residents involved in volunteering
- Improved public spaces

¹⁶ E.g. Strengthening Communities Project, Economic Development Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Stoke NHS Locality Improvement Framework

3. Embed cohesion across the council and partners

Cohesion is not the job of one agency, department or team. Every part of the city council and every partner organisation has a role to play. Embedding cohesion across planning, transport, housing and customer services can help make sure decisions build trust and a sense of fairness across the city. This includes ensuring that different departments and teams in both the city council, and across other statutory partners see building trust, or increasing local voice in decision making as key objectives of their roles. It also includes making sure that all staff members understand how to make each contact they have with community members count towards this goal.

Key actions

- Train staff and partners to understand how their work affects community cohesion (e.g. through building trust, agency, and a sense of fairness) and to make every contact count
- Include cohesion impacts in decision-making processes
- Share learning across departments to build a consistent approach to trust and engagement
- Celebrate and reward examples of good partnership working that improve relationships with residents

Intended outcomes

- Cohesion embedded in everyday practice and policy
- More consistent communication and decision-making
- Improved trust and confidence in local institutions

4. Take services to where people are

People trust services when they see them, know them and can reach them easily. Many residents said they value services that come into their communities, such as the community lounges, because they are more accessible and demonstrate that those services want to engage. Taking services to familiar places can build relationships, trust, and make it easier for people to get the help they need.

Key actions

- Build on the success of community lounges by increasing utilisation and expanding outreach in local spaces such as markets, libraries, sports clubs and faith venues
- Work with partners to offer regular pop-up sessions for advice, information and local engagement in trusted settings
- Make sure digital services are easy to use but never a substitute for face-to-face contact
- Support outreach that brings together different services so that residents can get answers in one place
- Encourage frontline staff to use each interaction as a chance to listen and build understanding

Intended outcomes

- Stronger trust between services and residents
- Easier access to support for those who need it most
- Increased visibility and responsiveness of local services

5. Tackle disinformation and misinformation

Disinformation and misinformation spread by local, national and international actors is creating divisions in the city and contributing to a widespread sense of unfairness, grievance, and prejudice towards some migrants and asylum seekers. The best way to counter this is through open communication, transparency and trusted local voices

Key actions

- Support trusted community figures, local media and neighbourhood groups to share clear and accurate information
- Support community-led storytelling or citizen journalism that highlights positive local experiences
- Develop a coordinated approach across local partners to respond to and address mis/disinformation on social media
- Train staff and partners , including community leaders, on how to respond constructively to rumours or misinformation in their day-to-day roles
- Make transparency and openness part of every service's approach, showing residents how and why decisions are made
- Strengthen the ability and capacity of schools, education providers, and organisations providing youth provision to help young people recognise, question, and navigate misinformation and disinformation.

Intended outcomes

- Stronger public confidence in local institutions
- Fewer people believe harmful mis/disinformation
- Better communication between communities and services



6. Give people a real say in decisions and take ownership

Many residents said they feel unheard or unsure how decisions are made. Ensuring that people have a genuine say in shaping their local communities and the city helps build fairness, understanding, and confidence in how things are run. A proactive approach is required to properly engaging and responding to communities in a meaningful way. At the same time ownership of spaces and projects helps residents look after their area and one another, it increases people's sense of agency and makes local change more likely and sustainable. Across the UK, community-led initiatives have shown that when residents take the lead, places thrive. This is a core aim of the city council's Strengthening Communities Project.

Key actions

- Give local neighbourhoods a more direct role in setting priorities and shaping the delivery of local initiatives
- Expand participatory budgeting and citizen juries so residents can more widely influence spending and priorities
- Coordinate consultation activity across the council and partners to reduce duplication, make engagement easier for residents, and ensure community feedback is shared and used consistently to inform decisions
- Ensure feedback loops are built in so people can see what changed because of their input
- Support young people to have a voice in decision-making through youth boards, school programmes and creative projects
- Prioritise securing resources for community connectors and organisers who can link services and support residents to become more involved in their local communities
- Support small resident-led projects that meet local needs and build skills in leadership and collaboration understanding

Intended outcomes

- More transparent and inclusive decision-making across the city
- Stronger trust and understanding between residents and institutions
- Increased civic confidence, especially among young people and underrepresented groups
- Increased capacity for communities to shape and sustain change

7. Spot and respond to community tensions early

Preventing problems is always better than reacting to them once they escalate. Local groups and frontline workers are often the first to see when tensions are rising. By joining up information and acting early, partners can reduce harm and keep communities feeling safe and supported. At the same time, it is important to build community resilience ensuring that communities are prepared for, and have the capacity and support needed to manage and respond to, potential issues.

Key actions

- Strengthen coordination between the council, police, health and community partners to recognise and share early signs of tension or division
- Develop clear local processes for responding quickly and appropriately when issues arise
- Support training for staff and community representatives to recognise and report emerging concerns
- Build capacity and support for community groups to be able to respond to issues as they arise
- Jointly review incidents openly to learn what worked and improve responses in future
- Ensure that appropriate support services are in place for victims of hate crime
- Act as strong partners in the wider West Midlands network tackling threats to cohesion

Intended outcomes

- Faster, more coordinated responses to local tensions
- Greater sense of safety and trust within communities
- Reduced risk of division or conflict
- Better support for those who experience hate

8. Celebrate and reimagine Stoke-on-Trent's identity

Stoke-on-Trent has a proud history but much of what shaped the city's global identity has been lost as potteries have closed or relocated. There is a need to create a new, modern identity for the city celebrating what makes it unique while imagining what the next hundred years could hold. Stoke-on-Trent is known for its friendliness, community spirit and mutual aid. A shared campaign celebrating kindness, respect and inclusion can show what the city stands for and how people support one another in good times and bad. This should go hand in hand with a clear commitment to stand up for any group or person who faces hate or prejudice.

Key actions

- Build on the momentum of the Centenary celebrations to undertake a city-wide conversation about the city's next chapter
- Involve schools, young people and community groups in shaping how the city's story is told and celebrated
- Develop a joint campaign by the council, police, local organisations to show that pride in the city comes from its people, kindness and creativity, celebrating what unites us
- Create a shared plan for how partners respond together when individuals or organisations promoting inclusion are targeted

Intended outcomes

- Renewed civic pride and optimism about the city's future
- Stronger connections between communities through shared celebration
- A modern, inclusive identity that residents recognise and feel part of



9. Support local enterprise and opportunity

Economic opportunity and community wellbeing go hand in hand. Many residents said they want to see more chances to learn, earn and build something for themselves. Supporting small business and enterprise, alongside supporting individuals to build the skills they need, can increase confidence and local pride, strengthen people's sense of agency, and keep value within the city

Key actions

- Work with education providers and business networks to offer training and support for people who want to start or grow small businesses
- Focus on reaching people in areas of high deprivation who may not currently see enterprise as an option
- Encourage partnerships between schools, colleges and local employers to raise awareness of routes into work and entrepreneurship
- Promote social and community enterprises that reinvest locally and strengthen neighbourhoods

Intended outcomes

- More local people supported to start or grow small businesses
- Increased confidence, ambition and employment opportunities
- Stronger local economy rooted in community benefit



10. Invest in spaces that bring people together

Places where people meet and connect are vital for cohesion. These can be parks, community centres, schools, faith spaces, cafés and football clubs and more. It is important that all neighbourhoods have such spaces. In a time of limited budgets, investment can mean opening up existing spaces and helping communities make the assets that are already there.

Key actions

- Map where social infrastructure is strongest and weakest across the city to understand where support is needed most
- Work with housing associations, health providers, private businesses, schools, and faith groups to identify spaces that could be opened up for wider community use
- Support community partners to manage and maintain local spaces where possible

Intended outcomes

- Renewed civic pride and optimism about the city's future
- Stronger connections between communities through shared celebration
- A modern, inclusive identity that residents recognise and feel part of



Delivery

This strategy will continue delivered through the collective efforts of the partnership established by the One Stoke programme. A new One Stoke Delivery Group will report to the Future 100 Mission Board (Communities, Education and Skills) to support our wider partnership ambitions for the city.

To ensure that the work we do makes a real difference to communities we will establish a robust delivery framework and measurable impacts. We will therefore complete an annual review of the Strategy and update the Delivery Plan to ensure we continue to focus on the issues that matter to communities. We will measure progress through the following indicators:

- Extent to which people feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together and the extent to which respondents agree or disagree that people in this local area pull together to improve the local area (Annual Wellbeing Survey).
- Number of Hate Crime Incidents reported and percentage change from previous year (Police Data).
- Percentage of people who feel they can influence local decisions and percentage of people satisfied with local area as a place to live (Local Government Outcomes Framework).



Appendix 1 – Guiding questions

Thirteen core questions guided the overall exercise. Throughout, the team sought insights into each of these questions to better understand both the risks to cohesion in Stoke-on-Trent and the potential solutions.

These questions were not asked directly or uniformly in every conversation but instead shaped how activities were designed, facilitated, and analysed. Different elements of the exercise, from youth sessions and community conversations to workshops, interviews, and surveys, provided insights into different combinations of these themes.

Rather than serving as a checklist, the questions formed the analytical backbone of the overall exercise, helping to structure both the inquiry and the interpretation of findings.

1. What do people value most and feel most proud of in their communities and in Stoke-on-Trent as a whole?
2. What do people think is working well in the city socially, culturally, and/or economically?
3. What are the biggest concerns, pressures, or challenges affecting people's lives?
4. What grievances do people hold - where do they feel things are unfair, unequal, or not working as they should?
5. Where and how do people experience discrimination, exclusion, or marginalisation as individuals or as communities?
6. How do people feel about their own futures and their opportunities and ability to thrive?
7. How do people feel about the future of Stoke-on-Trent and what kind of future do they want to see?
8. To what extent do people feel heard, represented, and able to shape decisions that affect them?
9. Who do people trust in their communities, in public life, and across different groups and where is that trust breaking down?
10. To what extent do people feel that different communities in Stoke-on-Trent mix, interact, and get along?
11. How well do people feel their communities can cope during times of crisis, hardship, or sudden change?
12. What is already working well to build strong and cohesive communities in Stoke-on-Trent and what more is needed or could be done?
13. Who do people believe has the power, ability, or the responsibility to create positive change in Stoke-on-Trent?

Appendix 2 - Engagement and Listening activities and events

Protection Approaches and their partners, held conversations and consultations with 909 Stoke-on-Trent community members 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

Additionally, 428 individuals who live, work or study in Stoke-on-Trent contributed to the consultation through an online questionnaire.

Appendix 3 - Demographics

Not all engagement took place in formal settings, and many activities took the form of informal conversations at activities and events. To monitor reach without placing unnecessary burden on participants, a combination of methods was used:

- For structured engagement activities such as workshops and questionnaire, participants completed a monitoring form capturing key demographic information
- For informal engagement, such as at community activities, facilitators completed simple facilitator observation logs to record estimated demographic characteristics based on observation, including age range, gender, ethnicity, and location or setting. While not a perfect measure, this approach provided an indicative sense of whether engagement was reaching a broad demographic.

Postcode district:

ST1 = 27.4%
ST4 = 21.2%
ST3 = 19.3%
ST6 = 18.2%
ST2 = 12.3%
ST7 = 1.1%
Remainder (<1%) unknown

Gender:

Man/boy = 43.2%
Woman/girl = 54.3%
Trans/Non-binary 1.6%
Remainder (<1%) unknown

Age:

Under 25 = 10.9%
25-65 = 69.9%
65+ = 19.1%

Ethnicity:

Asian or Asian British = 4.5%
Black/Black British/
African/Caribbean = 5.5%
Mixed/Multiple/
Other ethnic group = 3%
White/White British = 86.5%

Disabled:

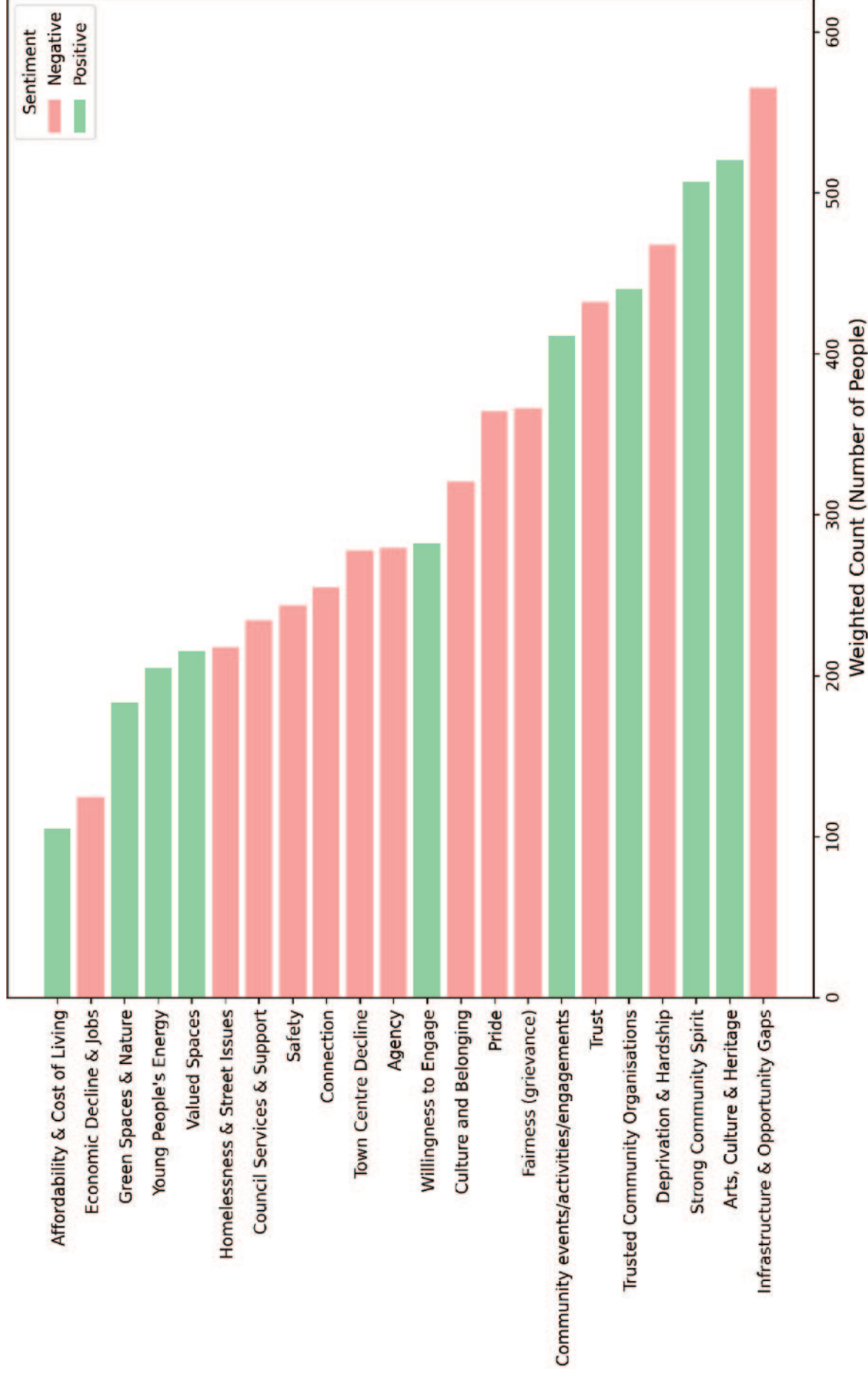
At least 23.8% of those consulted consider themselves to be disabled

LGBTQ+:

At least 7.6% of those consulted consider themselves to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer

Appendix 4 - Theme distribution

Number of mentions of each theme (red = negative mention green = positive mention)



Theme distribution by postcode district (weighted by participant count)

