

# COMMUNITY SAFETY: COMMUNITY COHESION BRIEFING

Community Connections (Community Safety)



## 1. Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of community cohesion and hate crime in Plymouth from a Community Safety perspective. It summarises recent trends and emerging risks, and outlines the Council's partnership-led response through Safer Plymouth. The paper also details activity supported by the Community Recovery Fund, including engagement with communities most affected by hate crime and the reassurance work undertaken during periods of heightened tension. In addition, it highlights early learning from community engagement activity and the Appreciative Enquiry, setting out how this insight will shape future priorities and support the longer-term sustainability of cohesion and hate crime prevention work beyond the current funding period.

## 2. Current Context

Over the past year, Plymouth, in common with many cities, has experienced periods of heightened community tension. These have been influenced by a combination of local incidents alongside national and global events. The combined impact of these factors, alongside the spread of misinformation, disinformation and divisive narratives, has contributed to some communities feeling less safe, less visible and less confident in public spaces. These experiences can also have a wider effect on perceptions of safety and belonging across the city. During this period, there has been an increase in recorded hate crime reported to Devon and Cornwall Police.

This context reinforces the importance of a strong, partnership led approach to tackling hate crime and supporting community cohesion, ensuring that activity is preventative, responsive and shaped by engagement with affected communities.

## 3. The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 extended statutory protection across nine 'protected characteristics'. The Act recognised new forms of discrimination and introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). As an organisation, Plymouth City Council are expected to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation** and other conduct prohibited by the act.
- advance **equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The Council also made a commitment to treat **care experience** as a protected characteristic in March 2023. The Equality Act says that Councils must exercise due regard to equality when they make decisions, in a way that is reasonable and proportionate to the decision being taken. To discharge this duty, the Council remain firmly committed to conducting **Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)** on

all member decisions taken in the context of the Leader's scheme of delegation. This is done to ensure decisions do not adversely impact our different communities.

#### 4. Plymouth City Council's Equality Objectives

The Council is committed to treating everyone with respect and dignity and working towards creating a fairer city. Under the PSED, the Council must publish one or more equality objectives every four years. The most recent **equality objectives were set in 2024**. These equality objectives correspond to the three main strands of the general equality duty. This provides a strong link and solid evidence to demonstrate that the Council is discharging its duty and making progress towards the aims of the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, the Council have chosen equality objectives to reflect the concerns of a broad spectrum of protected characteristics to avoid establishing a hierarchy of discrimination, whilst also reflecting the particular challenges faced by the city's local diverse communities.

1. Plymouth is a **Welcoming City** where we will work in partnership to:
  - promote equality, diversity and inclusion
  - facilitate community cohesion
  - support people with different backgrounds and lived experiences to get on well together
2. Plymouth City Council will give specific consideration to **care experienced people** in our decision-making to raise aspirations, increase opportunities and seek to improve their life outcomes, including access to training, employment and housing, and will encourage other organisations to do the same.
3. Plymouth City Council will continue to **build and develop a diverse workforce** that represents the community and citizens it serves. We will learn from our communities and other organisations so that we get this right and we will encourage other employers to do the same.
4. Plymouth will **support diverse communities** so they feel confident to seek support and advice, **report crime and anti-social behaviour**, including hate crime and hate incidents, and work with partners to ensure Plymouth is a city where everybody feels safe and welcome.

A 3-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2025 – 2028 has been developed to demonstrate how the Council will work towards the delivery of the current equality objectives up to 2028.

#### 5. Safer Plymouth

**Hate crime and community cohesion** are established **priorities for Safer Plymouth** and will continue to be core areas of focus over the coming year. A recent MoRiLE workshop identified hate crime as a **high-harm area**, reflecting its significant and lasting impact on individuals, families, communities and wider perceptions of safety and belonging. The impact of hate crime is felt disproportionately by people with protected characteristics, reinforcing the need for an inclusive, community led and preventative response.

The Safer Plymouth sub-group, **Safer Communities**, meets on a bi-monthly basis and provides a structured forum for partners to share data, intelligence and insight relating to hate crime and community cohesion. This enables emerging themes and trends to be identified at an early stage and supports the timely development of mitigation actions or coordinated responses where required.

## 6. Community Recovery Funding (CRF)

Following the violent disorder in August 2024, the Government awarded Plymouth City Council **£600,000 Community Recovery Funding** to support communities affected. Plymouth City Council invited applications from individuals and community groups, with funding subsequently awarded to **42 projects**. This included over £80,000 allocated to six projects working collaboratively to deliver a range of activities for children, young people and schools. A **learning event** is being planned for 2026 to share learning and outcomes from funded activity and to maintain and strengthen partnerships between funding recipients and statutory services.

### 6.1 Community Engagement Officer

CRF funding was used to create a **Community Engagement Officer (CEO)** post for 2 years, delivered collaboratively by Plymouth City Council's Community Safety team and Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council (PDREC). The purpose of the role is to build stronger relationships with the city's ethnically diverse communities, increase understanding of community tensions, and identify actions that can strengthen community cohesion.

The CEO has been in post since April 2025 and has undertaken a range of activity, including:

- Working with the Police Diverse Community Team and **third-party reporting centres** to build relationships, improve reporting processes and explore opportunities to expand the number of reporting locations.
- Delivering two **listening events** with ethnically diverse communities focused on anti-social behaviour and hate crime, with reports produced to summarise key themes to inform future work
- Delivering **Refugee Awareness training** within the Council and to external partners
- Supporting the organisation of the **Respect Festival**, a key city centre event celebrating equality, diversity and community cohesion.
- Providing **operational support** to the Community Safety team in relation to hate crime and incident based casework.
- **Supporting ethnically diverse communities**, including in response to recent city centre protests and marches, ensuring signposting to appropriate support services.

Over the past year, the primary focus of the role has been on building trust, understanding and relationships with ethnically diverse communities. Over the next 12 months, the CEO will support the Council's response to learning emerging from the listening events and the Appreciative Enquiry.

### 6.2 Appreciative Enquiry

The Appreciative Enquiry, commissioned through Community Recovery Funding, is examining the impact of the August 2024 riots across a range of communities. Initial findings have been presented in an interim report; however, the enquiry is still ongoing and will now progress into its second phase. The Council will review and apply learning from the findings once the final report for both phases has been completed.

## 7. City Survey

City survey data show that **community cohesion is declining further** compared to national levels. Views differ significantly between the majority white and ethnic minority communities, indicating that ethnicity is a key factor in perceptions of 'other backgrounds.' Geographic and economic disparities may also contribute. The strong link between cohesion and local trust suggests **extreme political narratives are influencing public sentiment**. Addressing this issue is challenging for the local authority alone, as we lack sufficient resources and influence to make a large-scale impact.

The fourth City Survey took place between March and April 2025. 1,403 responses were received overall. We benchmarked the results where possible against an appropriate national data set, e.g. the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Community Life Survey (CLS) (December 2024).

The standard cohesion question, which has been in wide use for many years requires respondents to indicate whether they agree, strongly agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree with the statement, **“My local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together”**. Alternatively, they can say don't know or decline to answer at all.

In the 2025 City Survey: -

- 39% agreed their local area is welcoming to people from different backgrounds; 19% disagreed.
- Disagreement was higher among 'Any other ethnic group' respondents (30%) than 'White' respondents (18%).
- Agreement was lower among Armed Forces veterans (32%) compared to non-veterans (40%).
- Agreement ranged by ward from 26% in Ham to 51% in Peverell, which was the only ward where more than half agreed.
- Eggbuckland, Ham, and St Budeaux had significantly lower agreement than most other wards.

In addition to straightforward analysis the responses are used to create a **cohesion rate**, following a formula that has been in consistent use since 2005. This is the ratio between all those who express a positive view to those who express a view at all whether positive or negative. Plymouth has always lagged well behind the national average on this measure. **This year we scored 67%, which represents a 10% fall from the 77% we scored in 2022**. It leaves us **14% below the national average** figure of 81% recorded in December 2024 which itself had fallen by 3% since 2021/22.

Comparing cohesion data with data about trust between people in local areas there is a strong correlation across most demographic and geographic data sets suggesting common factors are driving these results.

## 8. Responses to recent city events

During 2025, a range of events across the city had an adverse effect on ethnically diverse communities. This was reflected in increased reports of people feeling unsafe, unwelcome or excluded, linked to issues such as the display of **flags** on lampposts, incidents of **flyposting**, **criminal damage** to street furniture and roundabouts, and a number of **protests** taking place in the city centre.

During these periods, Plymouth City Council's Community Safety team worked in collaboration with partner agencies and local communities to understand both the emerging intelligence and the impact on affected communities. The team undertook **reassurance activity** and provided advice on accessing support, including visiting businesses along march routes to offer reassurance and practical support.

Written communications were also distributed to provide contact details and information on how further support could be accessed.

## **9. Looking Ahead**

Looking ahead, Safer Plymouth will reflect on how hate crime prevention and community cohesion activity can be sustained and strengthened beyond the current funding period. This will include a review of governance and delivery arrangements for the next financial year, ensuring that partnership structures and priorities remain aligned to emerging risks and community need.

Learning arising from the Appreciative Enquiry and community listening events will be reviewed and considered in line with the Council's current capacity and available resources. The Community Engagement Officer role will be used to support the delivery of agreed actions where appropriate.