

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Cabinet

## Agenda Item 9

**Subject:** Development of a Community Cohesion Road Map for Brighton & Hove

**Date of meeting:** 29 June 2026

**Report of:** Cabinet Member Children, Families and Youth

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**For general release**

### **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet agreement to develop a Community Cohesion Road Map for Brighton & Hove. The Road Map will set out a shared definition of community cohesion, a clear framework for action, strengthened governance, and an approach to measurement and accountability.
- 1.2 Brighton & Hove is a city shaped by diversity, creativity and commitment to fairness and belonging, but communities are experiencing increasing pressures linked to polarisation, online misinformation, global conflicts, the cost-of-living crisis and widening inequalities. These pressures are being felt locally through increased tensions, hate incidents and in some areas, declining trust in institutions.
- 1.3 The proposed approach is aligned with national Local Government Associations guidance (Common Ground 2026) and the Government's strategy Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive and resilient United Kingdom (2026), while reflecting the specific strengths, risks and lived experience of Brighton & Hove.
- 1.4 The Community Cohesion Road Map will support the Council Plan mission of a fair and inclusive city, where people feel safe, included and welcome.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees that officers will lead a partnership and community engagement process to develop a Community Cohesion Road Map for Brighton and Hove, using the methodology set out in Section 3 of this report, and approves the proposed scope and structure for its development, including the areas of focus and enquiry set out in this report.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees to request officers to explore partnership opportunities with Belong, a leading national community cohesion network, to support the development and delivery of the Community Cohesion Road Map. Cabinet further agrees to delegate authority to progress any resulting partnership

arrangements to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities, Public Health and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing.

- 2.3 That Cabinet agrees that officers will bring a further report to Cabinet in July 2027, following completion of the engagement and development work. This report will present a draft Community Cohesion Road Map, including proposed delivery priorities, governance arrangements, and the measurement and accountability framework, for Cabinet consideration and approval.

### 3. Context and background information

#### What is Community Cohesion?

- 3.1 Cohesion describes how well people live together, including whether people feel they belong, feel safe, trust each other, and can navigate disagreement without harm. In practice, “community cohesion” is often used in two related ways:
- **Community cohesion (local / neighbourhood level):** the quality of everyday relationships between people and groups, for example whether residents from different backgrounds have positive contact, feel safe and included locally, and experience strong, trusting relationships in their neighbourhoods and communities.
  - **Social cohesion (citywide / civic level):** the wider social and democratic ‘glue’ that helps society function, including trust in public institutions and services, shared commitment to rights and responsibilities, and the ability to handle disagreement peacefully while safeguarding freedoms.
- 3.2 Brighton & Hove’s use of the term community cohesion seeks to encompass both of these elements. In this way community cohesion is understood as referring to the everyday lived reality of a diverse place: whether people from different backgrounds can live well together, build trust, and take part in local life. It is not simply the absence of conflict. It is the presence of positive relationships, inclusion, and shared confidence that everyone can belong and participate safely.
- 3.3 Community cohesion can be seen as having four core “building blocks”:
- **Relationships and trust:** the extent to which people from different groups interact positively and feel able to build trusting relationships locally.
  - **Belonging and inclusion:** whether people feel safe, respected and able to belong, and whether difference is navigated with respect rather than fear or hostility.
  - **Participation and voice:** whether people can access opportunities, influence decisions, and participate in local community and civic life.
  - **Fairness and access:** whether barriers and inequalities undermine people’s ability to participate and feel included (including for marginalised groups).

- 3.4 Where cohesion is weak, this can show up as low trust, heightened fear, growing separation between communities, increased harm (including hate incidents), and reduced confidence in local institutions and services. These pressures may be further intensified by misinformation.

### **National context**

- 3.5 Nationally, cohesion has become an increasingly urgent public policy priority, as local authorities operate in a post-pandemic context marked by rising polarisation, increasingly confrontational “culture war” narratives, widening inequalities and sustained economic pressure, alongside increased vulnerability linked to the cost of living crisis and growing challenges to mental health and wellbeing, all of which place strain on trust, belonging and social stability.
- 3.6 Communities are also exposed to divisive rhetoric and fast-moving online misinformation, which can amplify fear, resentment and distrust and can make local tensions more likely to escalate.
- 3.7 At the same time, local government and public services face decreasing budgets and increasing service demands, including housing, community safety and mental health and wellbeing services. The combination of economic pressure, heightened social tension and digital harms has increased expectations that local places take more proactive, coordinated approaches to strengthening cohesion and resilience.

### **National policy direction and expectations**

- 3.8 The Government’s 2026 strategy *Protecting What Matters* positions cohesion as part of democratic resilience, public safety and national security. It explicitly highlights the role of local authorities as place-based system leaders, responsible for convening partners, responding proportionately to emerging risks and tensions, and strengthening trust between communities and institutions.
- 3.9 Alongside this, Local Government Association’s ‘Common Ground’ guidance emphasises that cohesion is a core responsibility of councils, requiring visible leadership, a shared language and a consistent long-term commitment. It reinforces the importance of acting early, working in partnership, and ensuring cohesion activity is rooted in evidence and lived experience rather than short-term or isolated interventions.
- 3.10 A further national expectation running through the guidance is that modern cohesion work must address the realities of the digital environment, including misinformation, online hate and wider online harms and must strengthen local capability to monitor and respond to emerging issues quickly and sensitively, in partnership with communities.

- 3.11 Taken together, these national expectations signal a clear direction of travel: local areas are increasingly expected to have a coherent approach that is strategic, partnership-led, evidence-informed and measurable, and that can respond to both slow-burn pressures (inequality, segregation, exclusion) and rapid shocks (critical incidents, global events and misinformation spikes).

### **Local context: Brighton & Hove today**

- 3.12 Brighton & Hove is a vibrant, diverse and creative city. It is home to large LGBTQI+ communities, diverse faith, racial and ethnic communities, strong arts and cultural networks, thriving universities, and a significant population of people seeking sanctuary. These strengths provide a powerful foundation for cohesion, but they do not remove risk.
- 3.13 The Council's Corporate Plan, A Better Brighton & Hove for All, sets out the overarching priorities for the city, including a commitment to a safe, healthy and inclusive Brighton & Hove. It emphasises partnership working, prevention and early intervention, and embeds community safety and cohesion within the council's wider ambitions for the city.
- 3.14 Brighton & Hove is experiencing increasing pressures that can affect cohesion and residents' sense of safety, belonging and trust. These pressures include polarisation, online misinformation, the local impacts of global conflicts, cost-of-living pressures and widening inequalities. They can be felt locally through heightened tensions, hate incidents and, in some areas, declining trust in institutions.
- 3.15 Evidence and lived experience shared through communities and partners (including established engagement forums), alongside staff insight, indicate particular concerns about rising community tensions linked to national and international events; increases in Islamophobia, antisemitism, racism, misogyny, ableism and LGBTQI+ hate; and heightened fear and distress reported by some communities at times of increased local or global tension.
- 3.16 Economic pressures, declining mental health and wellbeing for some and high housing costs also drive inequality and instability, with increasing demand on health, housing, social care and safety services. Young people report exposure to online hate, harassment and misinformation. Newcomers and people seeking sanctuary report facing barriers including language needs, digital exclusion and trauma. Disabled residents can face systemic barriers across services, transport and public spaces.
- 3.17 The voluntary and community sector plays a crucial role in supporting cohesion, safety and inclusion, but faces pressure from funding uncertainty and rising demand.

- 3.18 For these reasons, the case for developing a Community Cohesion Road Map now is both preventative and practical: to provide shared language, a partnership approach to risk and resilience, clearer priorities and accountability, and a more consistent approach to addressing misinformation, hate and exclusion as they affect communities locally.

**Proposal: develop a Community Cohesion Road Map through a partnership and community engagement process**

- 3.19 Cabinet is asked to agree a structured engagement and co-production process to develop the Road Map. The intention is that the process of developing the Road Map itself supports cohesion by strengthening relationships, shared understanding and trust across the system and our communities.
- 3.20 This report seeks agreement to the *approach* (definition, principles, governance, measurement and priority enquiry areas), rather than adoption of an action plan at this stage. The action plan will be developed and prioritised with members, partners and communities and then refined through a test-and-learn approach. Cross party input will be supported through engagement with Overview and Scrutiny. A final proposal will be brought back to Cabinet for review and agreement.

Discussions have commenced with Belong, a national community cohesion network that has worked extensively with the Local Government Association, including on the development of the Common Ground guidance, as well as with local authorities on community cohesion strategies. Opportunities for joint working are being explored, which could provide access to National Lottery funding to support the development of the Community Cohesion Road Map.

**Developmental Stages and Outputs**

- 3.21 Development of the Road Map will include the following stages and approach. Dates are estimates:
- **Evidence and insight phase (start September):** assemble the evidence base (national guidance including Common Ground; local demographic and social data; crime and safety trends; hate crime patterns; inequality and housing pressures; and insight from partners and existing strategies).
  - **Engagement with lived experience (October – March):** dialogue with residents across neighbourhoods; including faith communities; LGBTQI+, TNBI, disabled and racially marginalised residents; youth groups; ESOL providers; universities; and VCS networks to understand lived experience and community dynamics.
  - **Co-production of priorities (April - May):** thematic working groups, iterative drafting and structured discussions to shape the Road Map priorities and approaches with communities and partners.

- **Governance, ownership and accountability (June/July):** design strengthened roles, decision-making and accountability arrangements aligned to collective responsibility.

3.22 The intended outputs of the engagement process include:

- An agreed city definition and shared language on cohesion;
- A prioritised Road Map with a set of deliverable actions and clear ownership;
- Strengthened partnership governance and reporting arrangements;
- An approach to measuring impact, including indicators, dashboard and public reporting.

### **Learning – the Cornerstone**

3.23 Cohesion is not a single programme but an evolving system shaped by changing communities, pressures and relationships. Our Community Cohesion Road Map will therefore be learning led and underpinned by a clear theory of change, aligned with the council’s ambition to operate as a Learning Organisation. This sets out an evidence-based pathway from activity to impact, focusing on building trust between communities, tackling inequality and exclusion, strengthening civic participation, delivering joined-up services, and using evidence and lived experience to guide decisions. Learning is also a protective function, helping the city respond early to polarisation, misinformation and emerging tensions, and supporting a more cohesive, welcoming and resilient Brighton & Hove over time.

### **Values and Principles**

3.24 The work will also be guided by the values, behaviours and principals set out in our Corporate Plan and Learning Framework, shaping decisions, partnership working and the Road Map’s responses to change and risk: Inclusion and fairness; equity and anti-discrimination; lived-experience leadership; cooperation and shared responsibility; dialogue and respect for difference; prevention, early intervention and resilience and transparency and accountability

### **Partnership governance and system leadership**

3.25 An oversight governance model to support the delivery of the Road Map will also be consulted on as part of the process. Based on learning from elsewhere this framework could be made up of the following elements:

- A Community Cohesion Oversight Group to oversee delivery, monitor data/tensions, coordinate incident response and publish updates. This could be the EquiP Partnership.
- A revised and strengthened role for the One Voice Partnership, including digital cohesion and misinformation response;
- The creation of thematic working groups across priority areas;

- The creation of defined internal council roles (SRO, lead officer, cohesion champions, data/insight capability);
- The development of formal mechanisms for transparency including an annual reporting and public dashboard.

**Potential areas of focus and enquiry for Road Map development (to be refined with partners and communities)**

3.26 Data and information from our work and communities, supported by research and national best practice, indicates the following priority areas as the starting point for engagement, enquiry and future action planning:

- Young People: Building the Future
- Safe and Inclusive Neighbourhoods
- Tackling Racism including antisemitism and islamophobia
- Restorative Dialogue and Conflict Resolution
- Tackling Misogyny and VAWG
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Celebrating Diversity and Shared Identity
- Strengthening the Community and Voluntary Sector
- Accessibility and Participation for All
- Sports for Cohesion and Inclusion
- Newcomer Integration and Welcome
- Prevent
- LGBTQI+ and TNBI Inclusion
- Disability Inclusion
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Anti-Poverty and Inclusive Growth
- Partnership, System Leadership and Learning
- Incident Response and Misinformation
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Digital Cohesion and Online Safety
- ESOL and English Language Integration

3.27 A key part of the proposed approach is culture change: ensuring that the Council and partners consistently apply a “community cohesion lens” to existing services, activities, plans and decisions, so that we avoid unintended harm to cohesion and, wherever possible, actively strengthen belonging, safety, participation and trust through what we already do. This means embedding cohesion considerations into everyday practice (including how services are designed, communicated and delivered), not treating cohesion as a separate standalone programme. Where the engagement and evidence-gathering process identifies gaps, missed opportunities or areas where current approaches may inadvertently increase tension or exclusion, the Road Map development and action planning stages will seek to identify practical, deliverable improvements and prioritise action within available resources, working with partners and communities to focus effort where it will make the biggest difference.

#### 4 Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- **Option 1 (Recommended):** Agree the proposed engagement and co-production approach to develop the Road Map with partners and communities. This enables shared ownership, reduces the risk of top-down design, and supports a deliverable and measurable plan.
- **Option 2:** Do not proceed with the Road Map development. This risks a fragmented approach to addressing cohesion pressures including polarisation, misinformation and hate incidents, and reduces the ability to coordinate partnership leadership and transparent measurement.
- **Option 3:** Develop the Road Map internally without structured partner/community co-production. This would not align with the draft methodology's emphasis on lived experience leadership, shared responsibility, and inclusive engagement, and may reduce trust and legitimacy.

#### 5 Community engagement and consultation

This report seeks Cabinet agreement to undertake a structured partnership and community engagement process to develop the Community Cohesion Road Map. The approach will align with recognised good practice, including the council's Learning Framework and LGA Belong, Common Ground guidance, which emphasise whole-council leadership, shared language, partnership working and cohesion as a long-term endeavour. The engagement process is intentionally designed so that developing the Road Map also contributes to building cohesion, trust and shared understanding across communities and institutions.

Work to date has focused on developing an initial, evidence-informed framework to shape the proposed engagement. This has drawn on national guidance, local data and learning from community and partner engagement, including One Voice, EquiP, and feedback from faith and Third Sector partners. Subject to Cabinet agreement, the next phase will involve wider and deeper engagement with communities and partners to co-shape priorities, governance and measures, particularly with those most affected by cohesion pressures and those holding key system responsibilities.

Engagement will be delivered through a staged, proportionate approach within available resources, combining evidence and insight, engagement with lived experience, co-production of priorities, and test-and-learn refinement. The scope will include residents across neighbourhoods and communities of interest, with a particular focus on under-represented groups, alongside faith communities, voluntary and community organisations, and statutory partners including police, health, housing and education. Existing engagement frameworks and trusted Third Sector partners will be used wherever possible, and areas where cohesion and safeguarding intersect, including Prevent, will be addressed through appropriate and proportionate partner-led engagement.

## **6 Financial implications**

This report seeks agreement to an engagement and development process. The intention is to develop the approach within existing resources, with partnership support wherever possible, to shape priorities and feasibility. Support from existing investments in engagement and community collaboration, for example as funded through the community grant programmes, will be made.

It is estimated that costs for production of the Road Map would be as follows:

- Staff time (research, engagement consultation, project trials and Road Map production) between £15,000 and £20,000.
- Additional support costs (venue hire, equipment) are estimated at £5,000.

Name of finance officer consulted: David Ellis Date consulted (08/06/2026)

## **7 Legal implications**

The draft Road Map links explicitly to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010), the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Prevent Duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, and sets expectations that approaches are proportionate, non-discriminatory and rooted in community trust.

Recommendation 1 above has the additional advantage of not only completing with good principals of consultation, but also reflects the basic principles of the public sector equality duty as those who will be part of the process will include groups captured by the legislation and who are often community advocates for those with protected characteristics.

Name of lawyer consulted: Simon Court Date consulted (07/05/2026)

## **8 Risk implications**

This paper identifies key risks that cohesion work is intended to mitigate (polarisation, misinformation, escalating tensions, distrust), and it also recognises the need for adaptive learning and clear governance to avoid unintended harm.

Key delivery risks for Cabinet consideration typically include: over-commitment versus resources, inconsistent ownership across partners, and reputational risk if expectations are raised without clear prioritisation; mitigations sit in the proposed staged methodology (co-production, prioritisation, test-and-learn, transparent reporting).

## **9 Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The development of the Community Cohesion Road Map will be undertaken in accordance with the Council’s duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to have due regard to the need to: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; (ii) advance equality of opportunity; and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Cohesion work is directly relevant to all three aims, because it focuses on safety, belonging, participation, fairness and the quality of relationships across difference.
- 9.2 This report is seeking agreement to the engagement and development process rather than a final Road Map at this stage. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will be completed and/or updated to accompany the subsequent report that brings the draft Road Map back to Cabinet for adoption (Recommendation 2.5). The EIA will set out the likely impacts on groups with protected characteristics, identify any disproportionate impacts, and specify mitigations and actions to avoid or reduce harm, in line with BHCC guidance.
- 9.3 The Road Map development will explicitly incorporate current and emerging EDI themes already being taken forward across the organisation, for example, including:
- **Ethnicity / anti-racism and hate prevention**, including work to address antisemitism and Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hate through coordinated learning, communications and community engagement.
  - **Migration / newcomer inclusion**, recognising barriers linked to language, digital exclusion, trauma and access to services, and ensuring lived experience from refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant communities shapes priorities and mitigations.
  - **Implications arising from the Supreme Court judgment on the definition of sex**, ensuring the Council’s approach is legally compliant, clear, and focused on reducing risk and harm. This will include proactive work to support communities affected, to build understanding, to prevent discrimination and hostility, and to ensure service approaches are communicated and implemented in ways that strengthen cohesion rather than undermine it.
- 9.4 Equalities will not be treated as a standalone “EIA add-on”. Considerations will be embedded as design requirements throughout the engagement process, including:
- Targeted and accessible engagement with communities who are more likely to experience exclusion or harm (including disabled residents, faith communities, racially marginalised communities, LGBTQI+ and TNBI residents, women and girls, carers, and newcomers), using accessible formats and trusted routes to participation.
  - Ensuring the developing Road Map addresses barriers to participation (e.g., language needs, digital exclusion, accessibility barriers, caring responsibilities), and that mitigations are specified where barriers are identified.

- Designing a proportionate approach to sensitive and contested issues, with a focus on safety, rights, respect, and preventing escalation of harm, supported by clear guidance and partnership working.

## **10 Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 This report seeks agreement to a development and engagement process. As such, there are no significant direct sustainability implications arising from the decision sought at this stage.

## **11 Other Implications**

### **Social Value and procurement implications**

- 11.1 This report seeks agreement to a development and engagement process only and does not commit the Council to any new services, delivery models or future procurement at this stage.
- 11.2 Consideration of social value outcomes, including any implications for community capacity, participation or the community and voluntary sector, will form part of the engagement and development process. A fuller assessment of social value implications will be included in the Cabinet report seeking approval of the final Community Cohesion Road Map.

### **Crime & disorder implications:**

- 11.3 Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must have due regard to the likely effect of its decisions on crime and disorder. This report proposes a process to develop a Community Cohesion Road Map and does not at this stage introduce new policies or interventions.
- 11.4 The development work will be undertaken in alignment with existing multi-agency community safety arrangements and will consider how cohesion-related issues intersect with community safety priorities, including hate incidents and crime, antisocial behaviour, violence against women and girls and Prevent.
- 11.5 Relevant statutory partners will be engaged as part of the development process to ensure these considerations are appropriately reflected. A full assessment of crime and disorder implications will be set out when Cabinet is asked to approve the final Road Map.

### **Public health implications:**

- 11.6 This report seeks approval to undertake engagement and development work only and does not in itself introduce changes with direct public health impacts. Public health considerations, including the relationship between cohesion, wellbeing, inequality and sense of belonging, will be explored as part of the development process in partnership with Public Health colleagues and other relevant partners.

- 11.7 A fuller assessment of public health implications, including potential impacts on health inequalities and wellbeing, will be brought forward in the Cabinet report seeking approval of the final Community Cohesion Road Map.

## **12 Conclusion**

- 12.1 Brighton & Hove is experiencing increasing pressures linked to polarisation, online misinformation and widening inequalities, which can undermine safety, belonging and trust. This report therefore seeks Cabinet agreement to a structured partnership and community engagement process to develop a Community Cohesion Road Map that provides shared language, clearer governance, agreed priorities and a proportionate approach to measurement and accountability.
- 12.2 The proposed approach will complement existing partnership priorities, including those of the Community Safety Partnership, and strengthen prevention and early intervention across key areas such as hate, VAWG and Prevent, alongside links to public health and wellbeing.
- 12.3 Cabinet is not asked to approve a final Road Map at this stage; Cabinet is asked to approve the development approach and agree that a further report will be brought back presenting a draft Road Map for Cabinet to consider and adopt once the engagement work is complete.

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **1. Background documents**

- Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive and resilient United Kingdom
- Common Ground; Building cohesive communities