

Bristol Leader's conversations on community cohesion

Introduction

From Autumn 2025 to Spring 2026, senior political leaders and officers from Bristol City Council hosted a series of five “Leader’s Conversations” in Lockleaze, Lawrence Weston, Easton, Bedminster, and Hartcliffe. These sessions asked members of those communities to consider their personal experience and observations in relation to the five themes identified in the report [“Reflections on Community Cohesion in Bristol”](#), which are:

1. Voices and spaces
2. Equity, identity and belonging
3. Equality of Access to opportunity, services and resources
4. Engagement and communication
5. Trust, participation and leadership

We asked those present to feed back to senior leaders how they felt about each of the themes, and what they felt Bristol City Council, other organisations, and communities themselves needed to do to promote cohesion in their local area, and across Bristol as a whole. Below is a summary of what we heard, what is happening in response, and what still needs to happen.

Voices and Spaces

There was great appetite for communities to have the space and skills to have open but respectful conversations around difficult topics. People in Lockleaze wanted space where opposing views could be heard, while ensuring respect and safety for all taking part. In Easton, attendees felt they could not always speak their mind, leading to feelings of isolation, while in Lawrence Weston, attendees raised immigration, housing, and crime as the sort topics that would benefit from open discussion.

Communities want their physical spaces to be accessible, safe and welcoming. In Hartcliffe, people said this would provide opportunities to meet new people, and to feel supported and invested in.

Attendees agreed in Bedminster, saying the spaces that bring people together have reduced when communities need them to thrive, while in Easton attendees asked for existing community spaces to be open on evenings and at weekends.

What is happening and what needs to happen?

The Leader's Conversations were intended as a space where people can begin to have open discussions about important but challenging issues.

Bristol City Council (BCC) have also worked with Bridges for Communities (BfC) to facilitate a number of "Listening Spaces" across the city, where people with differing views on important issues, such as homelessness and the meaning of flags, can meet and discuss such topics in a safe space.

BfC have also created and delivered training on how to manage difficult conversations in a way that promotes understanding in an era of increased polarisation.

BCC is funding community-led action through multiple grant programmes such as Bristol Impact 3, Community Infrastructure Levy and Community Sanctuary Support Grants, Community Recovery Fund.

Find out more about these [funding programmes and what kind of projects they are funding](#).

Equity, identity and belonging

Communities agree that shared events and shared spaces help build cohesion. People in Lockleaze described food, culture, music, and art as "tools" to unite. In Lawrence Weston, a community-led festival was proposed to celebrate diversity.

Communities say particular attention must be paid to young people. In Lockleaze, people noted this needs to include connecting in person. In Hartcliffe, attendees discussed the need to inspire young people to lead, and to educate them on the value of diversity.

Attendees in Hartcliffe said a positive community spirit would foster togetherness, and asked for help to spread positive messages. In Lawrence Weston, people proposed creating positivity through actions and events.

What is happening and what needs to happen?

[Bristol Community Festival](#) ran from 6 to 13 June and focused on shining a light on positive activity taking place in communities around the city.

One of Bristol's strengths is the ability to bring people together through festivals and events such as the [Bristol Refugee Festival](#), [Bristol Harbour Festival](#), [Party in the Ponds](#) and [Bristol Pride](#) to name a few. We'll be working with communities to promote events across the city to ensure people are aware of what's going on in their area.

As well as the Leader's Conversations, a separate series of Young People's Conversations took place in April and May 2026 to hear directly from children and young people on what the main challenges and opportunities they face on a daily basis are, such as safety, need

for safe spaces, trusted adults and access to travel. Read the full summary here. We will continue to work with the Youth Council and youth organisations to ensure we meaningfully involve young people in this work.

We're working closely with other organisations and community representatives on how we communicate about cohesion in the city, paying special attention to the need to promote positive stories and help people get involved.

We are sending a weekly newsletter to community organisations, with updates on the good work and community building activities taking place across the city, as well as work to manage tensions. You can sign up to receive the newsletter here.

The BCC Communities Service also sends regular e-newsletters with updates on activities, opportunities and stories from across the city. [Sign up to the mailing list](#).

Across Bristol, communities come together to bring positive change locally and across the city. [Find out what's going on in Bristol and how you can get involved](#). Find different volunteering opportunities to suit the amount of time you have and your interests on [Can Do Bristol](#).

Equality of Access to opportunity, services and resources

During the Leader's Conversations, we heard how transport challenges have wide ranging negative effects on people. In Easton, attendees said the outskirts of the city are not supported by transport. In Lawrence Weston, people said this cuts residents off from opportunity, while attendees in Hartcliffe said it harms inclusion, as people from different parts of the city are not able to meet each other.

What is happening and what needs to happen?

We know there is work to be done where transport is concerned. In particular, there is a need for further engagement with the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, as well as the Department for Transport to address these issues.

Engagement and communication

Communities are concerned online misinformation is stoking division and feel they need voices they can trust to give them accurate information. People in Hartcliffe mentioned misinformation frequently, its damaging effects and the need to "myth bust" to fight them.

In Easton, attendees felt information needed to inform discussions locally to be meaningful to residents. Meanwhile, in Lockleaze discussions focused on where people hear incorrect information and the need for leaders to challenge robustly.

What is happening and what needs to happen?

As well as the work we at Bristol City Council are doing with partners on how we communicate about cohesion as a city, we are working with community hubs on how they can use trust they have earned in communities to share accurate information.

We know we need accurate data to be able to combat misinformation and disinformation, and will continue to work across the council and with partners to gain the accurate data needed for myth busting.

Trust, participation and leadership

We frequently heard that people want to see and hear from political leaders and those who run the council. People in Bedminster focused on the need to see leaders not only listening, but acting on what they hear, while in Easton they felt that the Council needs to communicate more plainly with communities. In Hartcliffe attendees noted that leadership takes many forms and local leaders need to be visible just as the council does.

Communities want to be making decisions, as well as influencing leaders who do so. In Easton, attendees felt decisions about important issues such as housing were not transparent enough. In Bedminster people said moving decision making from within the Council to the community would ensure those people affected by decisions were also the ones making them.

Communities requested support to host events and activities. In Lockleaze it was suggested that the Council needs to cut “red tape” that slows down attempts to run community initiatives. For example, lengthy process to get a street party permit.

What is happening and what needs to happen?

The Conversations themselves were intended as an opportunity for decision makers to meet directly with communities and hear how they are feeling. We will host further Conversations in future so leaders can tell people what they heard and what they are doing, as well as hearing from more people.

We will continue to talk to residents to understand where barriers are to create community initiatives and what we can do to enable community action.

Bristol’s Area Committees are groups of councillors who meet throughout the year to consider how money from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is spent, and is one way local residents can be involved in decisions that affect them directly. Find out more about the process [funding for local projects page](#).

Residents can attend committee meetings, such as Full Council, Policy Committees, Development Control (planning meetings) and submit questions or statements on issues

that matter to them. Residents can have their voice heard, share their views and influence change by [getting involved in local democracy](#).

[Pride in Place](#) is a government programme that will see Hartcliffe receive up to £20m of funding over the next 10 years, with the local community deciding how these funds should be spent. We will think carefully about how lessons learned through this programme can inform our approach to community decision making across the city.

We're also seeing communities self-organising to create spaces where residents can come together to share local news, organise meetups, report issues, and discuss community initiatives, such as [Love Stapleton Road](#), [Love Lockleaze](#), and [Bristol Urban Forum](#).

If you want to get involved in your local community, we encourage you to get in touch with a member of [BCC's Community Development team](#), or your local community centre.