

Community Cohesion conversations with young people

Introduction

From Autumn 2025 to Spring 2026, senior political leaders and officers from Bristol City Council hosted five “Leader’s Conversations” across the city, focused on community cohesion. One of the issues key raised was the importance of listening to the voices of young people. Between April and May 2026, senior political leaders and officers held three additional conversations, focused specifically on hearing how young people in Hartcliffe, Easton, and Southmead felt about community cohesion.

Using the [“Reflections on Community Cohesion in Bristol”](#) report as a basis for discussions as in previous conversations, young people co-designed the sessions with local youth organisations to reflect the specific questions and topics that meant the most to them.

In Southmead, young people considered what sets them apart in the community, and what brings them together. In Easton, the young people preferred a thematic approach that considered activities, youth centres, parks, safety, and communities. In Hartcliffe, young people considered safety, community resources and postcode wars.

While young people across the Bristol talked about a wide variety of concerns, questions and aspirations, two broad themes were clear and present in all three conversations: that young people need to feel safe, and that they need to have opportunities.

Safety

Young people reported major concerns about their safety. This is affecting their happiness, wellbeing, and how they choose to spend their free time.

In Hartcliffe, young people talked about feeling unsafe as a result of long running and deeply embedded “ward rivalries” or “postcode wars”. These are generational, and most young people do not know what caused them.

Some believe they are encouraged by people with ulterior motives, including adults, and that tensions can be made worse by social media. Nevertheless, they consider “postcode wars” a genuine and persistent threat that makes them feel it is not safe to visit other parts of the city.

These fears have only heightened following the tragic deaths of Max and Mason in Knowle West in 2024, and have left some young people in South Bristol afraid to leave their houses. Some believe education and spaces to bring people together are vitals tool to cool these longstanding tensions.

Concerns for safety are not limited to South Bristol. In Easton, for instance, young people felt their streets were unsafe and noted particular worries about knife crime.

Young people feel physical spaces are important but lacking.

In Southmead, young people felt there were not places they could go that were safe and accessible.

This was echoed in Easton, where young people talked about the importance of parks as a place to spend time, but said they were unsafe outside of daylight hours.

Young people in South Bristol also have outdoor spaces they want to use, but feel they are often dirty, filled with hazardous waste, and need to be better cared for to feel safe.

Opportunity

Young people feel there are gaps in the opportunities available to spend time enjoying themselves safely, expressing themselves creatively, and socialising with other young people from across the city. In Easton, young people discussed feeling that there are not enough activities for them, and that reduces the opportunities they have to be with other young people.

However, they expressed interest in organising activities themselves. There was particular focus on doing shared activities as a way to bring people together. In Hartcliffe, young people said that presentable, clean and safe spaces where they can spend time are valuable opportunities to spend time with people from elsewhere in the city.

In Southmead, there were discussions of how creative and sporting activities can build cohesion by bringing young people from different cultures and backgrounds together.

Where these places and activities do exist, young people keenly feel the challenge in accessing them. In Hartcliffe, young people felt a lack of affordable transport prevented them from being where they wanted to be.

There were also feelings that, while there were spaces in Bristol that catered to young people, these are not necessarily in locations that are accessible for everyone, and they fear they will be judged by those from other areas if they go to them.

As well as missing opportunities to build relationships, young people also worry that lack of access will impact their long-term wellbeing. In Southmead, discussions focused on lack of access leading to inequality. In Easton, young people raised particular concerns about the effects of challenges around access to employment and to mental health services.

There is also a concern that the discussions about access do not involve young people. In Southmead, young people want opportunities to be heard by those making decisions

and be involved in those processes themselves.

What young people need

Young people in both South and North Bristol want to see more trusted adults who know them, care for them and who they feel that they can talk to. Young people want support from both professionals such as youth workers, as well as wanting non-professionals to take responsibility for making young people feel protected.

There is a need for investment in places and programmes that feel safe to young people, where they can build friendships and spend time doing things that matter to them. In Hartcliffe, young people talked about the value of physically secure, quiet spaces, with activities to take part in, and clear rules that make them feel like they are safe and can be themselves.

In North Bristol, young people suggested accessible and affordable activities focused on food, music, and sport as opportunities to meet others from different cultures and backgrounds and discover shared interests. Citywide events such as Bristol Harbour Festival, along with schools, are also seen as places where these kinds of cross-community bonds can be forged.

Young people need to be able to get to the spaces and events where they feel safe and happy, as well as accessing employment opportunities. In Southmead, young people discussed the need for better and more accessible transport. In Hartcliffe, there was particular enthusiasm for existing schemes such as free bus passes for certain groups and cycle lanes, and a desire for these schemes to be extended and available for a larger age group.

Agency and meaningful involvement are important to young people. In Southmead there was a desire for more young people's voices to be intentionally included in decision making, while in Easton, young people do not feel Bristol City Council and service providers communicate in a way that is meaningful to them.

Bristol City Council is committed to involving young people in addressing issues that matter to them. We will continue to work closely with the [Youth Council](#) and organisations that work with young people. We will also engage with WECA to tackle region-wide issues.