



Safer Gateshead

Safer people, safer communities

Gateshead Community Cohesion Strategy (2026–2031)

Working Together for a
Stronger, Safer and
More Connected Gateshead

Foreword

“Gateshead’s greatest strength is its people. This strategy is built on that belief and rooted in our Thrive agenda, which puts people and communities at the heart of everything we do. When communities are strong, inclusive, and connected, everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Over the next five years, we will work together to create neighbourhoods where everyone feels they belong, differences are respected, and opportunities are open to all. We know that real change happens when people come together, so this strategy focuses on building trust, reducing inequalities, and strengthening the social fabric that makes Gateshead such a special place.

Our priorities are clear:

- **Continuing to reduce harm and community tensions** so everyone feels safe and respected.
- **Strengthening connections** between neighbours, services, and communities.
- **Removing barriers** so everyone can access opportunities and support.
- **Engaging young people** as active partners in shaping the future.
- **Supporting local leadership** so communities have the confidence and power to lead change.

This is not something the Council can achieve alone. It depends on partnership – with residents, community groups, voluntary organisations, faith groups, and public services – all working together towards an agreed shared vision. By listening, learning, and acting together, we can strengthen Gateshead, making a place where everyone feels valued, safe, and able to reach their full potential.”

Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sets out Gateshead Council's commitment to building connected, resilient, and cohesive communities over the next five years. It provides a framework for action to:

- Reduce harm and prevent the tensions within communities
- Strengthen relationships and connections between residents
- Identify barriers and promote fair access to opportunities and services
- Engage young people positively and prevent harm
- Enable local leadership and community-led action

It is a public facing document intended for residents, partners, and stakeholders and aligns with wider borough priorities.

Policy & Statutory Context

This strategy is informed by:

- Gateshead Council Corporate Plan 2025 to 2030
- Gateshead Thrive Agenda
- Other relevant local strategies including:
- Safer Gateshead Partnership Plan
- Health and Well-being Strategy
- Good Neighbourhood Policy
- ASB & Hate Crime Policy
- Anti-Poverty Strategy

The strategy aligns with national frameworks including:

- Integrated Communities Strategy (MHCLG, 2018)
- Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)
- Prevent Strategy (part of CONTEST – UK Counter-Terrorism Strategy)
- Pride in Place Strategy (UK Government)
- Belong Network Guidance on Cohesion and Integration

The Strategy is also informed by local data, resident engagement, and guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Belong Network. Best practice from councils such as Manchester and Calderdale demonstrates the value of hyper-local approaches, visible public services, and co-production with residents. These sources stress that cohesion cannot be achieved by institutions alone; it depends on empowering communities to lead

change and fostering pride in place. Insights from the Angelou Centre's *Stories of Colour* project further highlight the importance of intersectionality and cultural representation in creating inclusive spaces.

The Community Cohesion Strategy is a new approach for Gateshead. It brings together our work to strengthen communities, reduce harm, and build belonging in one place. It replaces the previous Hate Crime Strategy (2024-26), recognising that hate crime cannot be addressed in isolation from wider issues such as inequality, division, and community tension.

Gateshead is part of a wider regional and national picture where community cohesion is influenced by economic pressures, social change, global events, and national policy decisions. While these factors inevitably shape how people feel about their communities, this strategy focuses on what is within our gift; the local action, relationships, and systems that can make a tangible difference to people's lives here in Gateshead.

We recognise that cohesion cannot be achieved by the Council alone. It depends on strong partnerships across public services, voluntary and community organisations, faith groups, and residents themselves. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in Northumbria is currently developing a regional Social Cohesion Strategy and this document align closely with that work. Together these strategies aim to strengthen community safety, trust, and belonging across the North East while ensuring Gateshead's local needs and priorities remain at the heart of delivery.

Vision, Principles & Outcomes

Vision

Our vision is a Gateshead where everyone feels they belong, differences are respected, and all communities flourish together.

Principles

Our work is guided by the following principles:

- **Inclusion:** Everyone has an equal voice and can contribute to community life.
- **Equity:** Fair access to opportunities and services for all residents.
- **Participation:** Residents actively shape and influence the places they live.
- **Resilience:** Communities are empowered to respond to change and challenges.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Public services, partners, and residents work together to build stronger, safer, and more connected neighbourhoods.

Desired Outcomes

- Residents feel safe, supported and connected
- Increased participation in local initiatives
- Reduced inequalities in service access and opportunities
- Young people are engaged and supported to reach their potential
- Communities lead local initiatives and decision-making

Current Local Picture

Population & Demographics

- **Population:** Approx 202,760 (mid-2025 estimate)
- **Ethnicity:** 93.5% White (90.3% White British), 2.5% Asian/Asian British, 1.2% Mixed/multiple ethnic groups, 1.1% Black/Black British, 1.6% Other ethnic groups.
- **Religion:** 50.8% Christian, 40.1% No religion, 2.1% Muslim, 1.5% Jewish, 0.3% Hindu, 0.2% Sikh, 0.2% Buddhist. Gateshead is home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the UK where Orthodox Jewish traditions and culture are an important and visible part of local life.
- **Sexual Orientation:** 91% heterosexual population, with a small (3.4%) but significant proportion identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Age:** Gateshead's population is broadly distributed across age groups, with 22.3% aged 0–19, 37.1% aged 20–49, 20.2% aged 50–64, and 20.4% aged 65 and over. Current trends indicate an ageing population, in line with national projections, which is expected to become more pronounced as life expectancy continues to rise.
- **Deprivation:** Gateshead is ranked 42nd out of 296 local authorities in England for overall deprivation (IMD 2025). Almost 1 in 5 (19%) of Gateshead's population live in areas that fall within the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Deprivation is particularly concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the borough.

Hate Crime

Hate crime is a significant barrier to community cohesion, as it undermines trust, safety, and belonging. Including hate crime data in this strategy helps us understand the scale and nature of harm affecting our communities and ensures our actions are informed by evidence.

Hate crime refers to any criminal offence perceived by the victim or others to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a protected characteristic. Under UK law, these characteristics are race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity.

In addition to these five legal categories, Northumbria Police also monitor hate crimes related to sex and age, recognising that prejudice can affect people in multiple ways. Additionally, Gateshead Council acknowledges care-experienced people as a locally protected characteristic, reflecting our commitment to inclusion and ensuring this is embedded in our policies and decision-making.

National Context

- In the year ending March 2024, there were approximately 145,214 hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales. This represents a slight decrease from the previous year, following several years of increases.
- Race-related hate crimes continue to be the most common, accounting for around 70% of all hate crimes.
- Religious hate crimes saw a notable increase in late 2023 and early 2024, particularly in the context of international conflicts and rising community tensions.
- Hate crimes against transgender people have also risen significantly in recent years, though they still represent a smaller proportion of total hate crimes.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) notes that while police-recorded hate crime data is valuable, it may underrepresent the true scale due to underreporting and changes in recording practices.

Local Context

- 468 hate crimes were recorded in 2024, a 13% decrease from 2023.
- Racist hate crimes made up nearly two-thirds of all reports.
- Disability-related hate crimes dropped by 48%, raising concerns about underreporting.
- Age-related hate crimes increased by 300%, though numbers remain low.

What We've Heard

This summary draws on qualitative data collected through a series of community engagement activities across Gateshead, including:

- Residents Voice Workshop
- VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) & Partner Workshop
- Lived Experience Team conversations and Bridgebuilder youth group discussions
- Community cohesion talks at community hubs and local churches

These sessions were designed to explore both the current state of community cohesion and generate ideas for strengthening connections across diverse communities.

1. Barriers to Community Cohesion

Misinformation and Media Influence

Social media and online platforms are widely seen as sources of misinformation, fuelling fear and division. Participants expressed concern that media narratives often exacerbate tensions, particularly around immigration and asylum seekers, contributing to a climate of suspicion and misunderstanding.

"Misinformation is the biggest threat to the community."

Prejudice, Racism, and Fear of the 'Other'

Hostility towards migrants and asylum seekers was reported, often rooted in stereotypes and misinformation. Some residents expressed resentment, believing that migrants receive preferential treatment. Fear of the unknown and cultural differences were frequently cited as barriers to integration and mutual understanding.

"We should be looking after our own people, not putting those people in hotels and giving them bikes and mobile phones."

Lack of Community Infrastructure

The closure of community centres and youth services has significantly reduced opportunities for social interaction and community building. Many residents noted the absence of street wardens and caretakers, who previously played a vital role in maintaining a sense of safety and connection.

2. Opportunities and Solutions

Food and Culture as Connectors

Participants consistently highlighted the power of food and cultural exchange in bringing people together. Shared meals, cooking classes, and multicultural events such as Diwali and "Around the World" days were seen as effective ways to foster understanding and connection. Music, festivals, and storytelling were also recognised as valuable tools for building bridges.

"Food brings people together."

Education and Awareness

There was a strong call for improved education on different faiths, cultures, and the realities of migration. Participants advocated for media literacy initiatives and school-based programs to help tackle misinformation and promote empathy and understanding from a young age.

Community Empowerment and Visibility

Empowering residents to take the lead in community initiatives was seen as essential. Suggestions included providing training for residents to facilitate groups, conducting skills audits to identify local talents, and ensuring a more visible presence of council, police, and services in neighbourhoods

"Takes a few people in the community to have the initiative to make the communal spaces look better."

Youth Engagement

Engaging young people through citizenship schemes, youth clubs, and creative activities was viewed as a key strategy for building community pride and reducing anti-social behaviour. These initiatives were seen as opportunities to foster responsibility and inclusion among younger generations.

Infrastructure and Environment

Reopening or repurposing community buildings was a recurring suggestion, alongside the development of community gardens, clean-up initiatives, and beautification projects.

Strategic Priorities

Our communities do best when people feel safe, included, and empowered. Over the next five years, this strategy focuses on five key priorities to build stronger, more connected the neighbourhoods across Gateshead. Each priority guides our actions and partnerships helping ensure everyone can live work and belong in a community they value.

1. Reduce Harm and Community Tensions

Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected in their community. We will aim to prevent and respond effectively to hate crime, intolerance, and behaviours that divide communities. Our focus will be on early intervention, building trust, and strengthening confidence in local systems that tackle harm. When incidents occur, we will support recovery and work with communities to rebuild relationships and resilience so that individuals and neighbourhoods feel safe, confident, and connected.

2. Build Stronger Community Connections

Strong communities are built on trust and relationships. We will create opportunities for people to come together, build positive relationships, and develop a shared sense of belonging. Strengthening cohesion also means building trust between residents, communities, and public services. By being visible, responsive, and fair, we will increase confidence in local authorities and partners, helping people feel heard, represented and supported. By supporting inclusive activities and community spaces, we will continue to strengthen the social fabric that holds Gateshead together.

3. Address Barriers and Promote Fair Access

Everyone should have fair access to the opportunities and services that allow them to take part fully in community life. We will identify and tackle barriers such as language, mobility, digital access, or inequality in service provision so all residents can access services opportunities and support fairly. We will work closely with communities to understand their experiences and make sure our approach reflects their needs and aspirations. We will raise the profile of local advice and support guidance agencies by making routes into support clearer, promoting what each service offers, and strengthening links with trusted community partners.

4. Engage Young People to Prevent Harm

Young people are central to Gateshead's future, and their voices and choices shape the communities they live in. We will engage with young people as active partners in shaping their communities. By promoting positive opportunities, a voice in decision-making, and access to support, we will help them challenge prejudice, promote respect, and prevent harmful attitudes and behaviours from taking root.

5. Support Local Leadership and Community Action

Communities are strongest when people have the power and confidence to lead change, take action, and influence decisions that affect their lives. We will support residents, community groups, and local organisations to take a leading role in building stronger, more cohesive communities. People should have real influence over local decisions and feel ownership of the changes that affect them. By supporting grassroots initiatives and local problem-solving, and creating spaces for collaboration, we will strengthen the capacity of communities to lead change and shape the neighbourhoods they live in fostering local ownership and pride.

Delivery & Partnership

The delivery of this strategy will be based on partnership, shared ownership and local insight. A coordinated multi-agency approach will be supported by Gateshead's Community Cohesion Group and overseen by Safer Gateshead Partnership (Gateshead's Community Safety Partnership). We will ensure that 50% of the Community Cohesion Group membership is made up of VCSE and community representatives, so their involvement is protected and their voices remain central to the strategy.

Delivery will build on the strong foundation already established through the work of the Localities service and other teams who engage daily with communities across Gateshead. The strategy strengthens coordination, sets shared priorities, and ensures that all partners are working towards the same outcomes.

Delivery will be overseen by Gateshead's Community Cohesion Group, which evolved from the former Hate Crime and Tensions Monitoring Group. This multi-agency partnership monitors tensions, coordinates local responses, and drives progress towards the strategy's progress.

Gateshead also leads the newly established North East Regional Community Cohesion Network, enabling council across the region to discuss challenges, share best practice, and strengthen joint responses to issues that cross local boundaries.

Action Planning

Each strategic priority will be supported by a detailed action plan with:

- Specific actions and interventions
- Named leads and accountable partners
- Timescales and resource planning

Partnership Working

We will deliver this strategy alongside:

- Gateshead Council teams
- Northumbria Police
- Voluntary, Community and faith groups
- Schools, youth providers and health services

Capacity Building

We will ensure those delivering and supporting cohesion have the tools and skills to succeed by developing:

- Training for staff and volunteers.
- Support for resident leaders and grassroots groups.
- Practical use of local data to target activity effectively.

Community Engagement

We will keep residents informed and involved in meaningful ways.

- **Consultation:** Conduct surveys, focus groups, and digital engagement to gather views
- **Feedback loops:** Demonstrate how residents input shapes decisions and projects.
- **Accessibility:** Use plain language, multiple formats and translation services where needed.
- **Celebrating success:** Highlight community-led initiatives and positive outcomes publicly.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To track our progress and maintain accountability, we will use both quantitative measures and resident feedback to assess impact.

Key Monitoring Areas:

Priority 1. Reduce Harm and Community Tensions

- Number of reported hate crimes or anti-social behaviour incidents
- Repeat incidents involving the same individuals or locations
- Community perceptions of safety

Priority 2. Build Stronger Community Connections

- Percentage of residents who feel connected to their neighbourhood
- Attendance at local events or use of shared spaces
- Number of community-led initiatives supported

Priority 3. Remove Barriers and Ensure Fair Access

- Satisfaction with local services across different communities
- Number of translated or accessible service materials
- Feedback from community leaders or outreach workers

Priority 4. Engaging Young People and Preventing Harm

- Youth participation in local decision-making forums
- Number of schools/youth groups engaged in resilience or safety programs
- Feedback from young people on their sense of belonging and influence

Priority 5. Enabling Local Leadership and Action

- Number of grassroots groups supported or funded
- Participation in co-production or community planning activities
- Resident satisfaction with opportunities to influence decisions
- Case studies of community-led impact

Review Process

- Annual review of progress by the Community Cohesion Group.
- Twice annually reporting to Safer Gateshead Partnership Board.
- Full mid-term review at 2.5 years to update priorities and actions.

Appendices

- A. Glossary of key terms
- B. Links to national and local strategies
- C. References

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Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Action Plan

A detailed plan outlining specific steps, responsibilities, and timelines for delivering the strategy's priorities.

Community Cohesion

A state where people from different backgrounds feel a sense of belonging, trust, and mutual respect, and work together to build strong, inclusive communities.

Community Cohesion Group (formerly Hate Crime and Tensions Monitoring Group)

A local partnership group that tracks community tensions and hate crime trends to inform early intervention and work together to improve cohesion.

Community Safety Board

A multi-agency group that oversees strategies and actions to keep communities safe, including crime prevention and cohesion work.

Co-production

A way of working where residents and service providers design and deliver solutions together, sharing power and responsibility.

Digital Exclusion

When individuals or communities lack access to digital technology or the skills to use it, limiting their ability to participate fully in society.

Digital Inclusion

Ensuring everyone has access to the internet and digital skills so they can participate fully in modern life.

Grassroots Initiatives

Community-led projects or activities that start at a local level, often driven by residents themselves.

Hate Crime

Any criminal offence perceived by the victim or others to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a protected characteristic. In addition to the five legal categories (race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, transgender identity), Northumbria Police also monitor hate crimes based on sex and age. Gateshead Council additionally recognises care-experienced people as a locally protected characteristic.

Hyper-local Approach

Solutions tailored to the specific needs of individual neighbourhoods or communities rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model.

Intersectionality

The way different aspects of a person's identity (such as race, gender, and socio-economic status) combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

Prevent Duty

A legal requirement for public bodies to take steps to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, focusing on safeguarding and early intervention.

Protected Characteristics

Characteristics defined under the Equality Act 2010 that are legally protected from discrimination: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage/civil partnership. Gateshead Council additionally recognises care-experienced people as a locally protected characteristic.

Pride in Place

A government initiative promoting local identity and community pride through investment in public spaces and neighbourhood projects.

Public Consultation

A process where residents and stakeholders are invited to share their views on a proposed policy or strategy before it is finalised.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

A legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010 requiring public bodies to consider how their decisions and policies affect people with protected characteristics.

Safer Gateshead Partnership

Gateshead's statutory Community Safety Partnership, bringing together the council, police, health services, and other partners to reduce crime and improve safety.

Thrive Agenda

Gateshead Council's overarching approach to improving wellbeing, reducing inequalities, and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live a good life.

VCSE Sector

Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise organisations that deliver services and support at a local level.

Appendix B: Links to National and Local Strategies

Local Strategies and Policies

Gateshead Council Corporate Plan 2025–2030

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11956/Thrive-our-strategic-approach>

Gateshead Council Thrive Agenda

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11956/Thrive-our-strategic-approach>

Safer Gateshead Partnership Plan

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11958/Safer-Gateshead-Partnership>

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11959/Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy>

Good Neighbourhood Policy

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11960/Good-Neighbourhood-Policy>

ASB & Hate Crime Policy

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11961/Anti-Social-Behaviour-and-Hate-Crime-Policy>

Anti-Poverty Strategy

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/11962/Anti-Poverty-Strategy>

National Strategies and Policies

Integrated Communities Strategy (MHCLG, 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

Prevent Strategy (Home Office)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

Pride in Place Strategy (MHCLG, 2025)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pride-in-place-strategy>

Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

Appendix C: References

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