

ALL TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER SOCIETY

belong

THE COHESION AND
INTEGRATION NETWORK

Hartlepool's cohesion strategy

February 2026 - Hartlepool Board

Mike Waite: Senior Advisor, Local Government, Belong

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THE COHESION AND
INTEGRATION NETWORK



- **Non-governmental organisation / network of partner organisations**
- **Based in Manchester, with teams around the country**
- **Working for a *more connected, less divided society***
- **Improving practice and transforming policy**
- **Evidence based and research led**
- **Convening and connecting across sectors & geographies**
- **Providing knowledge, resources and skills**

Evidence-based research

Beyond Us and Them

Perception of Covid-19 and Social Cohesion

Prof. Dominic Abrams, Dr Fanny Lalot (University of Kent)
Jo Broadwood, Isobel Platts-Dunn (Belong – the Cohesion and Integration Network)

Nuffield Foundation | University of Kent | School of Psychology | belong

**After the riots:
Building the foundations for social cohesion**

Policy priorities for cohesion and resilience

September 2024

British Future... | belong



Parallel Lives: 25 Years On Webinar – Findings from our first year of research

**The State of Us:
Community strength and cohesion in the UK**

A foundational report by British Future and the Belong Network
Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion

A photograph showing a group of people participating in a community cleanup activity on a city street. Some are using brooms and tools to clean the pavement.

Jake Puddle, Jill Rutter and Heather Rolfe

July 2025

British Future... | belong

THE COHESION AND INTEGRATION NETWORK

Free resource packs: sport, events, culture

Welcome to the Power of Sport Toolkit

Welcome to the Power of Sport Toolkit created by the Belong Network in collaboration with StreetGames, and funded by Sport England. This interactive toolkit will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and is designed to be completed in one sitting, however, you can save your work and come back to it in sections if required. By the end of this toolkit you will have produced your very own Theory of Change to apply to your sports programme.

Launch toolkit

Learning resources

Explore expert-crafted learning resources designed to weave social cohesion into the fabric of your work

Welcome to our learning resources

Our learning resources are based on rigorous research, evidence and developed with the knowledge from practitioners, delivery organisations and sectoral experts. They aim to offer guidance and learning on how to put principles of social cohesion at the heart of your activities.



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About Belong

Our new FREE learning resources designed to support event organisers estimate the social value of their events

Author: Alexandra Fraser
Published: October 22, 2025

Belong's current place-based programmes

Co-production and partnership working with:

- Local councils
- Partner organisations
(police, health, education)
- Voluntary & community sector organisations (VCS)
- Local businesses and trusts



Our work in Hartlepool: Understanding the local context

- Engagement to hear voices and perspectives from all sections of the community and local agencies
- Facilitated conversations to explore the long-term root causes of the disorder in 2024



Extent of engagement

- **10 workshops / forums / focus groups** (*including on tension monitoring, and on aligning health impact assessment, restorative justice and cohesion, branding and communications*)
 - **50 individual structured interviews**
 - **8 dialogue events and skill-sharing events** (*including 'having difficult conversations' sessions for council staff, VCS reps, and local care workers*)
 - **34 organisations engaged**
 - **470 individuals involved** (*sometimes just once, for a particular session or conversation, more often on a recurrent basis*)
- 

Here For You: Hartlepool's cohesion strategy for stronger communities

- Introduction, including definition of cohesion
- Context: statistics on borough and scene-setting
- 'What people are saying': summary of points from community engagement
- Considerations from Belong Network (*consistent with / feeding into other key documents including the Sixth Form College Stronger Communities Framework; Pride in Place submission; Regeneration Plan*)



Strong positives to build on ...

- Most core services across agencies being provided professionally and systematically, to high standard
- Sharp awareness of challenges facing many people and some parts of the borough
- Commitment, pride and ambition, and thoughtful insights into borough's history, social dynamics and 'mood'
- 'Critical mass' of new initiatives - and preparedness to collaborate to improve borough and peoples' lives

Some linkages and connections

- Establishment of Hartlepool Board
 - Emergence of Hartlepool Opportunities Partnership
 - Plan for Neighbourhoods / Pride in Place strategy
 - Public health focus
 - Sport England Place Expansion Partnership and new Leisure centre
 - 'Tides of Change' – transformation of visitor experience at Museum of Hartlepool
 - Promoting pride in Hartlepool through 'place branding' initiative
- 

Key challenges identified include ...

- Loss, decline, nostalgia
- Neglect, isolation, distance, mistrust
- Issues around morale and aspiration
- Race, immigration, uncertainty about 'others', social distances,
potential for increasing tension
- Social challenges, recognition of pressure on services
- Scope for concerns and anxieties to be shaped into
resentments, divisive attitudes, openness to misinformation
- Ongoing fragility and vulnerability in community relations

Overall approaches proposed ...

- **Close the gaps:** Build connections and links
- **Extend the reach:** Engage wider numbers of people
- **Handle things in healthy ways:** Recognise opportunities to connect to people and to address identified needs and make the most of these. Identify shared challenges and deal with these openly, with confidence and honesty
- **Do it creatively:** Build on the many positives about the borough. Involve and include people through culture, arts, sport, and participation



Common ground: Building cohesive communities



This guidance on social cohesion authored by Belong and endorsed by the LGA, aims to help local authorities fulfil this role. It provides local authorities with the tools to address the challenges they face and share good practice, with the goal of building cohesive communities.

Community safety | 27 Jan 2026 | LGA | 27.20

Foreword

- Section One – Introduction
- Section Two – Developing a social cohesion strategy
- Section Three – Partnerships and partner organisations
- Section Four – The role of councillors and different local authority service areas

Foreword

We are delighted to jointly introduce this new guidance, authored by the Belong Network, a non-government organisation undertaking research, policy and practice on social cohesion. The guidance has been endorsed on a cross-party basis by the Local Government Association (LGA).

In many respects, everything councils do is relevant to social cohesion. Council services contribute towards a shared sense of belonging, of communities at ease with themselves -an aspiration we all share. As Belong and LGA members recognise, social cohesion is not self-sustaining; it must be actively nurtured to endure. Too often, social cohesion is only noticed by

local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/role-sport-arts-and-culture-supporting-community-cohesion



The role of sport, arts and culture in supporting community cohesion

This report explores how sport, arts and culture can support community cohesion. The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the report in partnership with Belong, the Cohesion and Integration Network.

Executive summary

- Recommendations
- Introduction
- Preventative measures and provision of sports, arts and culture
- Steps to take

Executive summary

Authored by Dr Chris Stone and Dr Jeni Vine – Belong, the Cohesion and Integration Network

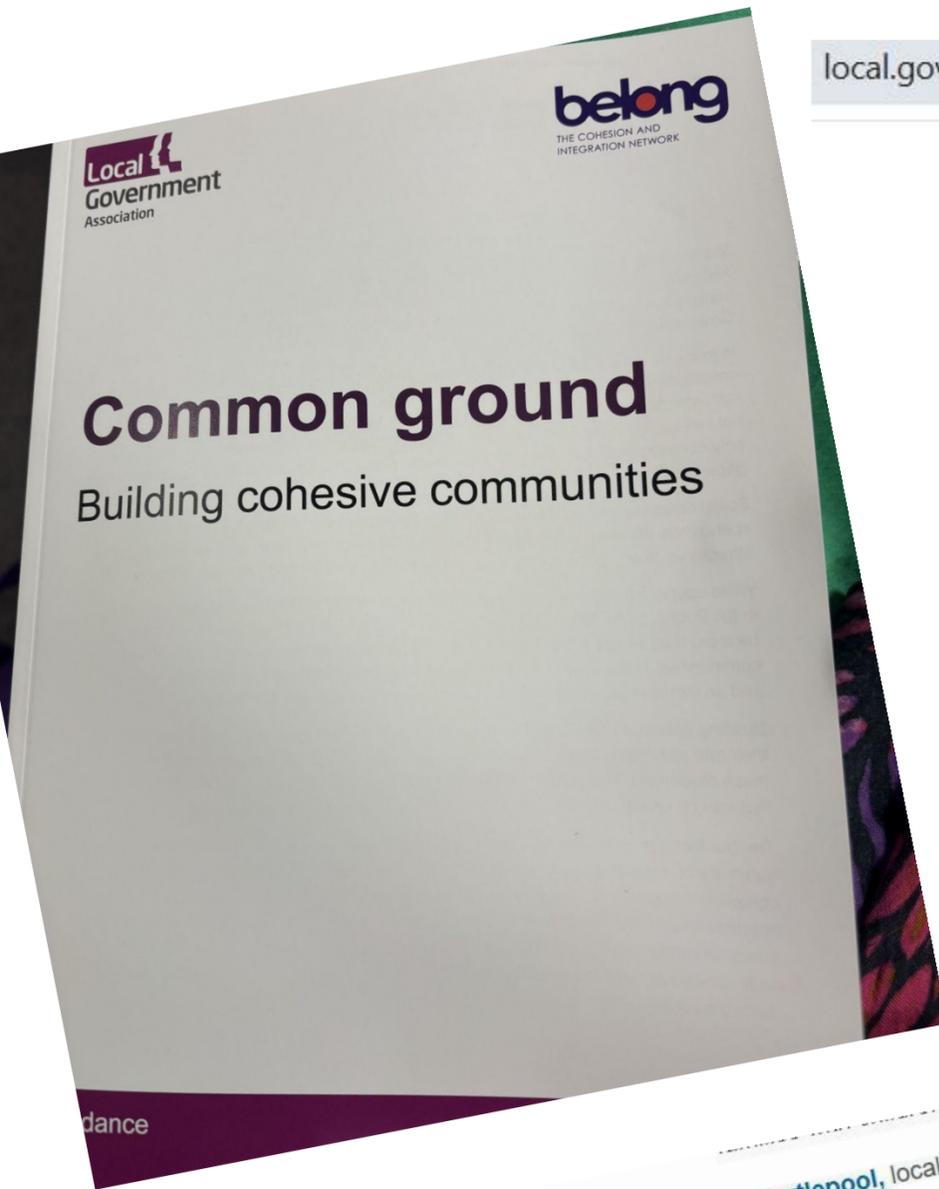


Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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Foreword

Section One – Introduction

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Section Four – The role of councillors and different local authority service areas

Section Five – Addressing Social Cohesion Challenges

Section Six – Sustaining social cohesion strategies

Annex A: Special Thanks

Case study: Hartlepool Pride in Place data analysis

Context

Hartlepool has secured £21.5 million through the Government's Pride in Place Programme. This will be delivered through a four-year investment plan and a ten-year regeneration plan running until 2035. Oversight is provided by a 28-member board representing civil society organisations, elected members and local authority officers, business, education, faith, youth organisations, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the NHS, social landlords and parish councils. The MP serves as deputy chair, and the board brings together extensive knowledge and expertise in community development and regeneration. The programme aligns with wider efforts to strengthen civil society, including the creation of Hartlepool Opportunities Partnership (HOP), a new infrastructure organisation which is supporting the work of the Pride in Place programme, initially through community engagement.

Approach

Early work focused on quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to inform the local strategy of the Pride in Place programme. Programme staff undertook stakeholder mapping which highlighted gaps in the board, which were later filled. A geospatial consultancy was commissioned to analyse place-based data. Crucially this showed that 23 per cent of residents in the target area had no formal qualifications and 38 per cent of households lack access to a car, restricting their employment opportunities. HOP staff and volunteers are undertaking consultations with a target 1,200 residents, prioritising areas with historically low responses to consultations. First analysis of this data suggests that safety and security, health and wellbeing, and social cohesion and connectedness are the most common concerns of residents.

Impact and learning

Although it is too early to assess impact, several aspects of Hartlepool's approach provide useful insights for future evaluation. Key features that offer valuable lessons for other Pride in Place recipients include the proactive use of volunteers to reach out to residents and the core role of civil society in programme governance – both of which merit closer impact monitoring.

cohesion strategy

Section Three – Partnerships and partner organisations

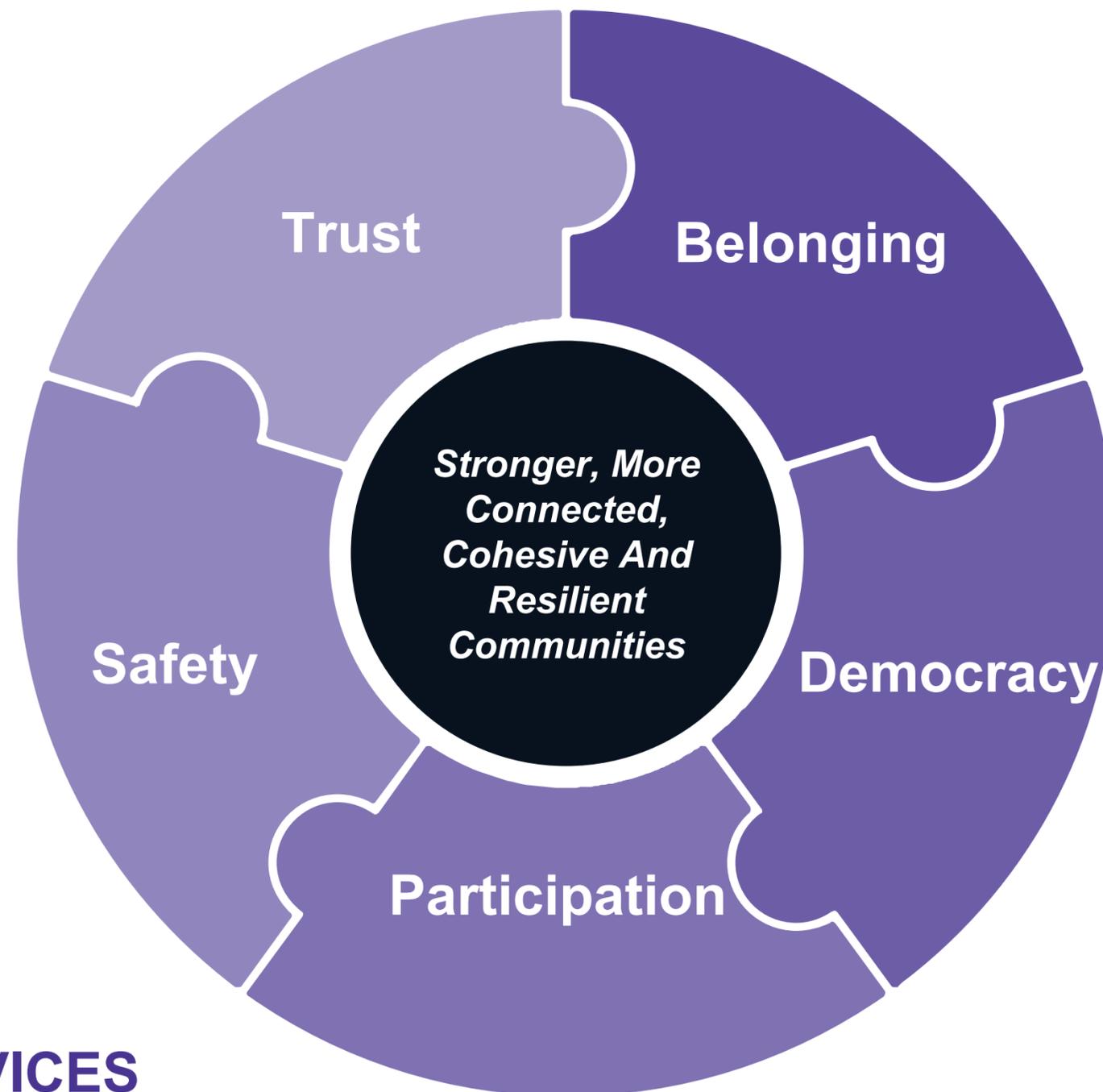
Section Four – The role of councillors and different local authority service areas

Section Five – Addressing Social

In **Hartlepool**, local authority libraries are co-located with community hubs, which together offer a wider range of services which include social events, employment and skills workshops and health and welfare advice services. These hubs provide access to books, free WIFI and study spaces. Some community hubs have children's play areas or cafes.

Knowledge-sharing partnerships – These focus on exchanging expertise, data, and best practice between organisations. They help partners learn from each other and develop more

INFLUENCING FACTORS



LOCAL POLICIES AND SERVICES



Making the change: From identifying challenges to seeing positive outcomes

In relation to key themes, the strategy

- Considers key issues
 - Identifies work to date
 - Examples of planned work, initiatives and commitments
 - Illustrates how the work will make a difference
- 

Example of key themes ...

Overall approaches to bridging the gaps and rebuilding trust

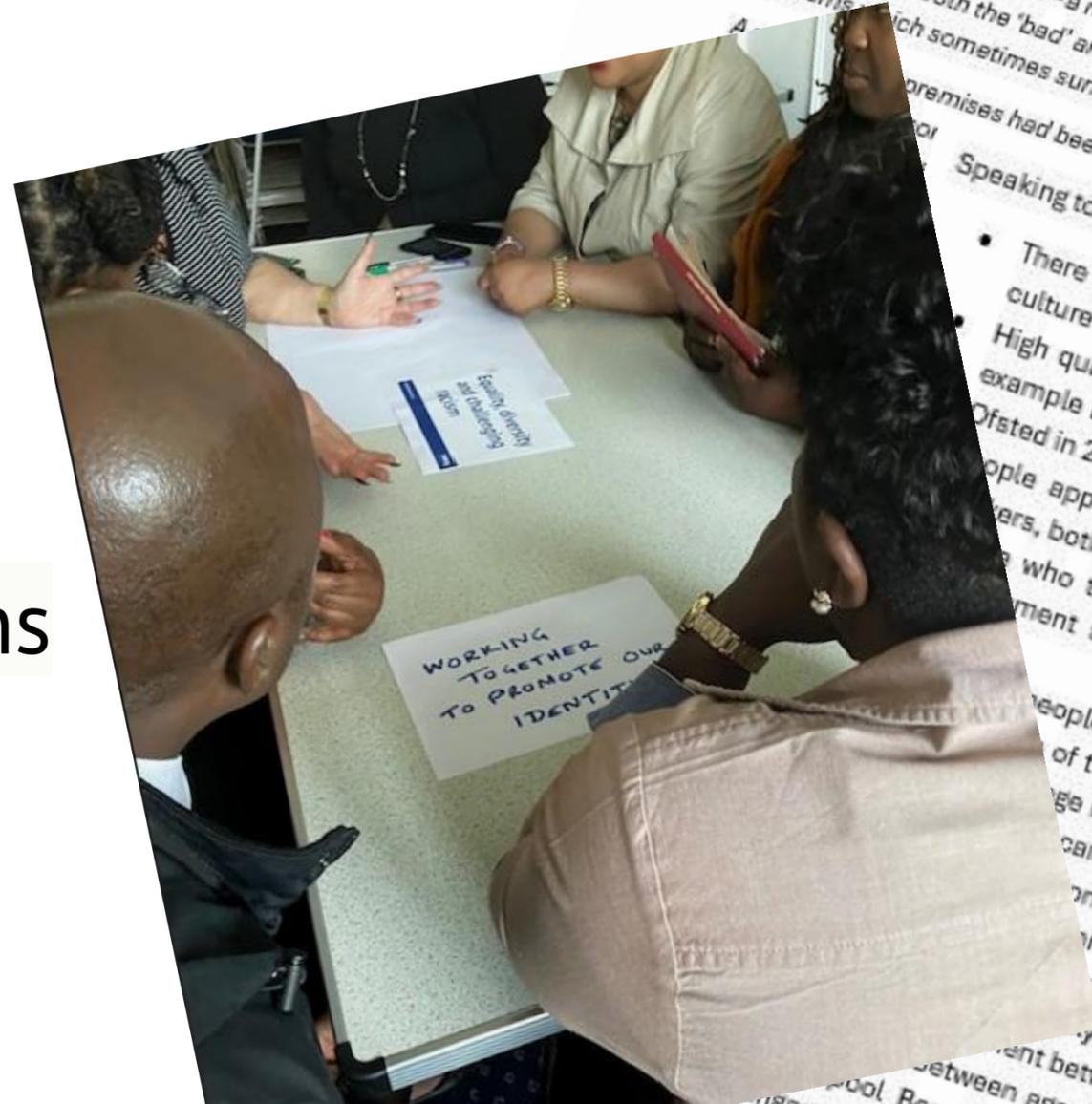
- Hartlepool Council to refresh approach to communications and develop community engagement, to better connect and relate to residents
- Voluntary and community sector organisations to aim to extend the reach of their services and activities, providing new opportunities for people to participate – including using culture, arts and sport

Example: Welfare and health

- Hartlepool example (*along with restorative justice*) of national good practice: one of a relatively small number of areas to handle issues from 2024 rioting positively through a 'health' lens
- Understanding of psychological aspects of poor social relations – and health benefits of good relations
- Educational Psychology Team to provide support to agencies dealing with 'shock events' and disputed issues
- Pool Together continuing their positive activities, building on last month's Week of Action to extend work further

Other themes covered in strategy

- Business and economy
- Young people
- Restorative justice
- Pride in Place
- Diversity
- Media and communications



Hartlepool: Here For You Hartlepool's cohesion strategy for stronger communities

Signs of the times

At a Hartlepool community meeting in March 2025, people were asked to describe an incident in their neighbourhood which had troubled and concerned them – and to identify an example of something which had given them hope and optimism.

One group of participants – a mix of white and minority ethnic residents – chose the same event to cover both the 'bad' and the 'good', an example of something which showed the problems which sometimes surface – graffiti on the way to address these problems.

premises had been sprayed with offensive, hateful graffiti – a racist crime

Speaking to residents and agencies, Belong also often heard of more hopeful things

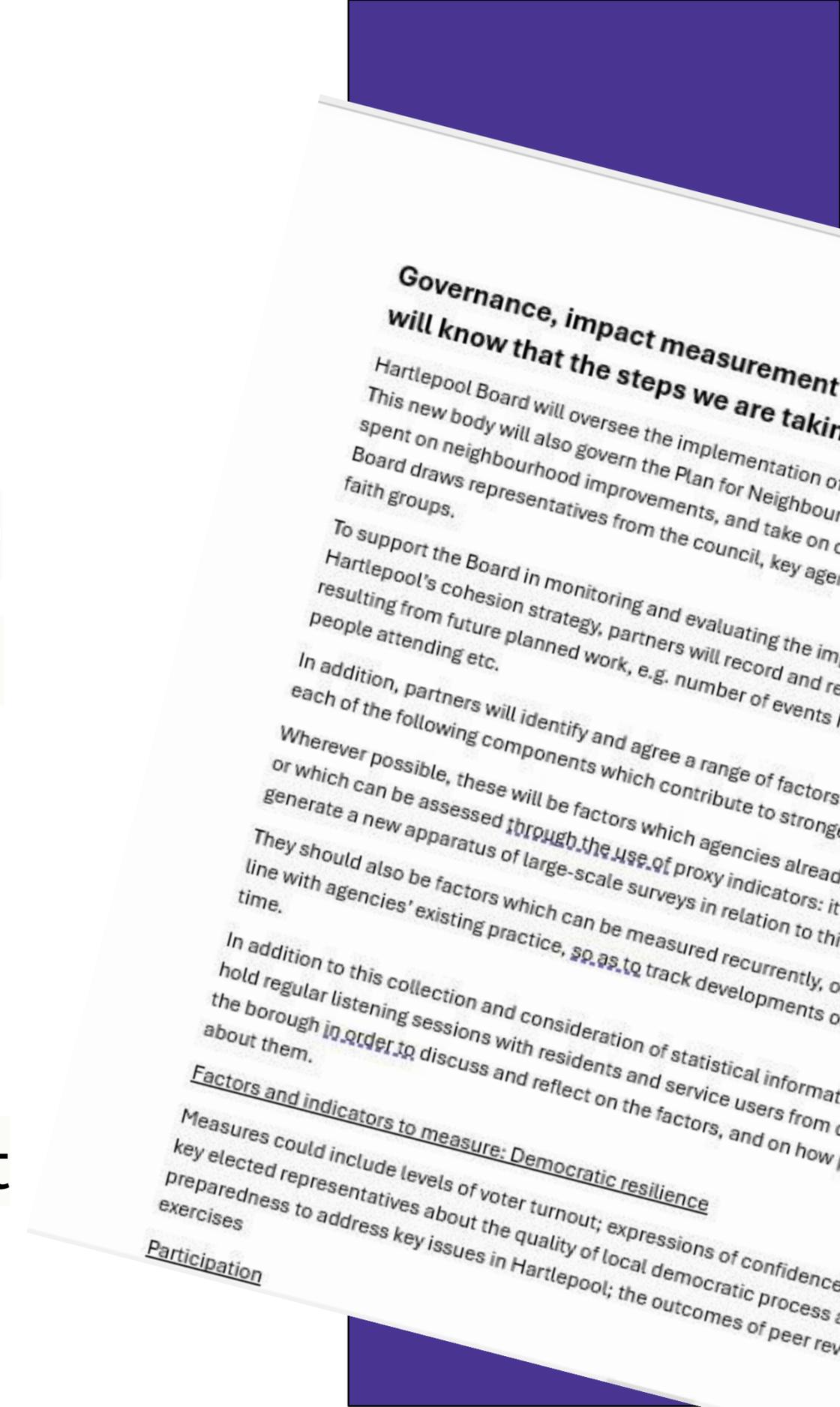
- There are many positive initiatives in relation to health, nature, sport, well-being, culture and events
- High quality core services are provided by a range of agencies, exemplified by Hartlepool's Children's Services team being rated as outstanding in Ofsted in 2024, and winning national awards for their work
- People appreciate the contribution of high quality and committed front line workers, both from the public sector and voluntary groups
- People who take up opportunities to participate in education and Skills and Apprenticeship sessions find it a positive experience, giving them a sense of

people have a strong "feel" for the borough's history and heritage. They are proud of the borough changing over time. If this often takes the form of change in regretful ways ('Once it was ... now it is ...'), there is also a desire for things to change again, for the better

on the part of workers in statutory agencies and non-statutory agencies in the community sector to respond to evident desires

Next steps ...

- Determination by Board as to whether to endorse strategy and to take on overall governance (*strong alignment with Pride in Place*)
- Development of detailed workplans by partners individually and in collaboration to address strategy's themes
- Workplans to include measurable targets on activity and intended outcomes to assess impact



Ongoing advisory support from Belong ...

- Offer to contribute to developing workplans and setting of targets, informed by national guidance
- Support on measurement and evaluation and future development of strategy
- Linkages to partnership working on resilience and emergency planning

Stronger communities: cohesion and resilience



“Cohesive communities are more resilient, better able to withstand shock events ...

“Places with a track record of working for social cohesion have a reduced risk of tensions escalating ...

Councillor Louise Gittins, Local Government Association chair,

27 January 2026

Ongoing direct input from Belong ...

- Option to work with council and partner organisations on developing effective approaches to counter mis- and disinformation
- Option to work with police, council and partner organisations on taking in useful practice from elsewhere on monitoring and responding to community tensions
- Training and skill-sharing sessions / programmes



Thank you ...

Mike Waite mike@belongnetwork.co.uk