



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# Integration Area Programme: Community Conversations Evaluation

Strand Report



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# Glossary of terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
DLUHC	The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The government department responsible for creating great places to live and work, and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.
IAP	Integration Area Programme. A DLUHC programme aiming to improve community cohesion involving various interventions including Community Ambassadors, Community Conversations and School Linking.
<b>Community Conversations projects</b>	
Bradford-as-1	The name of the Community Conversations intervention in Bradford.
Community Connectors	In Walsall, members of community groups were identified as 'Community Connectors' to help organise and facilitate the Conversations events.
Community Voices	The name of the Community Conversations intervention in Blackburn with Darwen.
Community Dialogues	The name of the Community Conversation intervention in Walsall.
Core Group	In Bradford, community leaders and community members were recruited as a 'core group' members and trained in social action.
Volunteers	Community Connectors and Core Group members are referred to as 'volunteers' throughout the report, as distinct from the professional facilitators used in the Blackburn with Darwen events.
<b>Delivery partner organisations</b>	
Faith and Belief Forum	The organisation responsible for running the Community Dialogues intervention in Walsall.
Peace Foundation	The organisation responsible for organising the Community Voices intervention in Blackburn with Darwen.
Thornbury Centre	The organisation responsible for running the Bradford-as-1 intervention in Bradford.
<b>Evaluation methods</b>	
Baseline survey	Questionnaire completed by participants before the start of the Community Conversations events.

Counterfactual / comparison survey	Commissioned by IFF and fielded by YouGov among its online panel members with the aim of creating measuring outcomes with a comparison group of non-IAP participants.
End of event / end of intervention survey	Questionnaire completed by participants at the end of the Community Conversations event(s).
Three month follow-up survey	Questionnaire completed by participants three months after taking part in Community Conversations event(s).

# Executive summary

## Introduction

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), launched the Integration Area Programme (IAP) in 2019, trialling a new localised approach to social integration in five local authorities. This programme was borne out of the Integrated Communities Strategy green paper, published in March 2018, which outlined the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities, and opportunities.

For three out of five of these local authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford and Walsall), a common goal was to bring together local people from different backgrounds in a safe space to engage in facilitated debate on topics such as race, culture and religion. Activities run by the three local authorities under this umbrella were collectively referred to as 'Community Conversations'.

The Community Conversations activity was tailored to the local context in each of the three local authorities, and the impact of COVID-19 meant that the reach and format of activities had to be somewhat modified.

- In Blackburn with Darwen, 'Community Voices' comprised fifteen one-off events with discussion facilitated around views on the local community. Participation was encouraged from different parts of the community, including some women-only events.
- In Bradford, 'Bradford-as-1' involved training for local community leaders to facilitate social action events, such as exhibitions and workshops, with the aim of bringing the community together and creating sustained change through resident-led groups.
- In Walsall, 'Community Dialogues' saw ten local community groups come together for three online sessions. The first online session was limited to a single community group, with the second and third sessions partnering community groups together to create a mixed debate about issues such as integration, cohesion, migration, faith, and race.

## Evaluation approach

DLUHC commissioned IFF Research to carry out an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of Community Conversations on a range of participant outcomes, such as greater social mixing and increased levels of respect between members of different communities. Taking place between 2019 and 2021, the evaluation involved baseline and post activity surveys amongst those participating in Community Conversations, qualitative interviews amongst project co-ordinators and participants, observations at community events (Blackburn with Darwen only), and analysis of management information.

## Evaluation limitations

This evaluation was subject to some important limitations which must be taken into account when reading this report.

The original design for the national impact evaluation was based on some key assumptions relating to the design of Community Conversations. These were that: local interventions would be clearly defined; interventions would remain broadly consistent across areas in their intended outcomes and mechanisms for achieving change; and that sufficiently large sample sizes (determined by levels of participation and response to measurement surveys) would be achieved to help detect statistically significant change. Soon into delivery, it became apparent that local authorities' flexibility to deliver locally tailored interventions allowed for variations across areas, pragmatic changes to delivery over the course of the programme, and different delivery timeframes. Additionally, interventions would be of a smaller scale than originally planned. These issues were then exacerbated by COVID-19, which led to further changes in intervention design and scale. In addition, the evaluation encountered obstacles to data collection and analysis. These included low levels of engagement in the evaluation by participants, and, in some cases, reduced levels of comparability in metrics/question design between areas due to the differences in delivery.

Overall, this led to sample sizes which were too small to detect any statistically significant impacts at individual project level. In addition, longitudinal analysis for the purpose of impact assessment has only been possible for a sample of 20 individuals on three outcome metrics. This very small sample size means it is not possible to draw firm conclusions on the net impact of the programme from this analysis.

Bearing this in mind, there remains value in having attempted a net impact assessment on an intervention of this type, which alongside qualitative insights, provides useful learning about the intervention, and how it has helped to change participant views and opinions of people from different backgrounds.

## Key findings

### Programme impact

- The Community Conversations evaluation measured outcomes for participants in six key areas relating to integration within local communities: meaningful social mixing; feeling comfortable communicating with different groups; respecting differences between others; feeling empowered to create positive change; having an increased sense of belonging; and feeling personally able to influence decisions in the local area..
- The evaluation has not identified statistically significant changes on the six high-level target outcomes using pre- and post-intervention scores on a variety of underpinning survey metrics. This does not necessarily mean that the programme does not work but rather it has not been shown to work. Evaluation limitations (principally small sample sizes) mean that it is not possible to say with certainty whether or not the Community Conversations intervention works to achieve the desired outcomes.



- There is one outcome for which the counterfactual impact assessment findings suggest that Community Conversations did have a statistically significant impact which relates to feelings of empowerment to create change. Participants were more likely to agree they are 'personally motivated to work with others to improve the neighbourhood' after the intervention than before (compared to a group of non-participants). However, a variety of factors, including COVID-19 restrictions, had limited the ability to translate these intentions into action at the time of the research.
- Findings from the qualitative interviews indicate that participants have gained a better awareness and understanding of other cultures, and also more recognition of where similarities exist between different groups within their local community. Some spoke of new connections or friendships they had made, others of increased self-belief and confidence through participation in social events. All of these are foundation areas towards better understanding between communities and groups, and the potential to work together towards positive change in the local community.

### **Programme delivery**

The evaluation has been able to identify the following key learning points for successful delivery of a Community Conversations model:

- Delivery partners should aim for events to have a mix, or equal representations, of community groups. This can be facilitated through recruitment timeframes that allow for creative approaches which seek to reach individuals or groups with limited existing community engagement and limited exposure to other communities. These kinds of approaches require months rather than weeks to achieve.
- The 'best' sessions, i.e. those in which there was an open, interactive debate, were characterised by a well-facilitated and structured discussion, with clear ground rules about listening and respecting others' views. Participants particularly mentioned that having a set subject for the session (for example cooking and cultural traditions) as well as focusing discussions on the local area helped them to feel confident to participate and to find common ground with people from different backgrounds.
- Ideally blend and optimise the value of both face-to-face and online delivery channels. Online approaches help to reach people with busy schedules who are less able to find the time for an in-person session and who are more used to communicating through apps such as Zoom and FaceTime. Face-to-face approaches are often needed to reach the digitally excluded community members and to give socially isolated people a chance to mix.
- Facilitators must be trained on techniques to respond to different situations, and there should be structured channels for facilitators to proactively share ideas. Use of good techniques were observed with facilitators using role play to challenge views and reminding individuals to speak about personal experiences and not in generalisations.
- A more structured approach to following up with participants, or planning additional touch-points after the conversations events have finished, would help ensure momentum to continue community discussion and mixing is maintained. Proposed examples might include formal channels for people to connect after the event to build

on relationships that have started to form, or signposting to further resources; this could help create lasting and sustainable change.

## Conclusions

Community Conversations has been well received by local delivery partners and participants. Participants found the experience of Community Conversations positive, and there is a sense of pride and satisfaction from being involved, including for volunteers involved in programme delivery. The conversations and community social events were seen, by both staff and participants, as providing a forum for open discussion and enabling participants to make new connections.

Evaluation limitations mean that it is not possible to say with certainty whether or not the Community Conversations intervention works to achieve its intended outcomes. Evidence from the surveys, observations and interviews suggest the experience of Community Conversations has had some influence in the outcome areas of 'meaningful social mixing', particularly around feeling comfortable communicating with different groups of people (e.g. age group, ethnicity etc.) about differing attitudes and beliefs.

There are also some positive indicators around increased *motivation* to create change in the community. These include the tentatively positive findings from the counterfactual impact assessment (albeit amongst a very small number of participants). Those involved (co-ordinators and participants), talk about the new connections or friendships that they have made through the programme, plus there are situations recorded where self-belief and confidence have been boosted through participation in social events. All of these are foundation areas towards empowerment and influence.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Integrated Communities Strategy and the Integration Area Programme

The Integrated Communities Strategy green paper<sup>1</sup>, published in March 2018, outlined the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. The Government highlights that integration is the responsibility of all communities and leads to improved health, education and employment outcomes. The paper outlined eight themes for achieving this vision and the government's Action Plan<sup>2</sup>, published in February 2019, updated on progress for delivering this vision.

As part of the strategy, DLUHC (then MHCLG) launched the Integration Area Programme (IAP)<sup>3</sup>, trialling a new localised approach to integration in five local authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest). In addition to using an evidence-based approach to identifying areas likely to benefit from the programme, DLUHC chose to work with these local authorities because they had already demonstrated a keen grasp of the challenges they face and had used evidence to inform how to address local needs. IFF Research was commissioned to undertake a national evaluation of the IAP, to gather learning and to gauge the impact of the interventions implemented in the participating areas.

IFF and DLUHC reviewed local strategies then collated and mapped the interventions to identify some common interventions across local areas; these became the focus of evaluation. Three local authorities - Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford and Walsall – proposed a similar intervention with a common aim to make different communities feel comfortable living alongside and mixing with each other. All three local authorities proposed bringing together local people from different backgrounds in a safe space to engage in facilitated debate on topics such as race, culture and religion.

Across the areas, this intervention is collectively referred to as **Community Conversations**. However, within each area a different name for the initiative is used, and each area tailored their interventions in line with local need:

- *Blackburn with Darwen*<sup>4</sup> – Their 2018-2021 strategy states there are people of different ethnicities and religions living in segregated areas of the borough, and this can hinder building positive relationships within their community. This segregation (i.e. groups of people existing separately and not mixing) is reflected in some schools and sections of their local economy. **Community Voices** in Blackburn with

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696993/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/778045/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy\\_Govt\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/integration-area-programme>

<sup>4</sup> <https://theshuttle.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Blackburn-with-Darwen-Integration-Area-Strategy-Final-1.pdf>

Darwen facilitated one-off engagement events with people across the borough to help to break down barriers between people from diverse backgrounds.

- *Bradford*<sup>5</sup> – Their 2018-2023 strategy states local schools are not as mixed or diverse as the Council knows it can be to bring about benefits of social mixing; the local authority has the third highest level of residential segregation in England; economic participation is lower than the average, with women's participation a particular challenge; lack of English proficiency; low democratic participation in parts of the District; and a lack of meaningful social mixing across the District. **Bradford-as-1** in Bradford facilitated repeat engagement amongst local people leading to a self-sustaining social action group.
- *Walsall*<sup>6</sup> – Their 2019-2021 strategy states the number of residents from minority ethnic groups and from Central and Eastern Europe settling in the borough has risen in the last two decades. The borough also welcomes asylum-seekers and refugees as part of the asylum dispersal system. **Community Dialogues** in Walsall facilitated repeat engagement to create spaces for local people to come together to engage in conversations about the things that are important to them.

## 1.2 IAP national evaluation

Funding for the five Integration Areas was accompanied by an overarching Integration Area Programme (IAP) Evaluation which aimed to understand the impact of the interventions across areas and share transferable learning about what works to improve integration. Specifically, the national evaluation aims to:

- Measure the profile of locally delivered events or activities and their participants
- Measure outcomes of local intervention approaches; and to a lesser extent
- Learn lessons about factors influencing successful local event delivery.

There are three strands to the overall IAP evaluation, linked to three interventions: Community Conversations, Community Ambassadors and School Linking. Common outcomes were identified across the IAP interventions, although not all are relevant (and therefore measured) for every intervention in terms of what they aim to achieve and plan to deliver.

The outcomes that all evaluated IAP interventions are intended to achieve, and thus what the national evaluation aims to measure, are as follows. Those applicable to Community Conversations are in bold:

- 1. Increased levels of meaningful social mixing between communities**
2. Reduced isolation / loneliness
3. Feeling more at ease with and / or trusting people from different backgrounds
- 4. Understanding and respecting differences between people from other backgrounds**
5. Improved sense of safety in the community

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<sup>5</sup> <https://bdp.bradford.gov.uk/media/1363/stronger-communities-together-strategy.pdf>

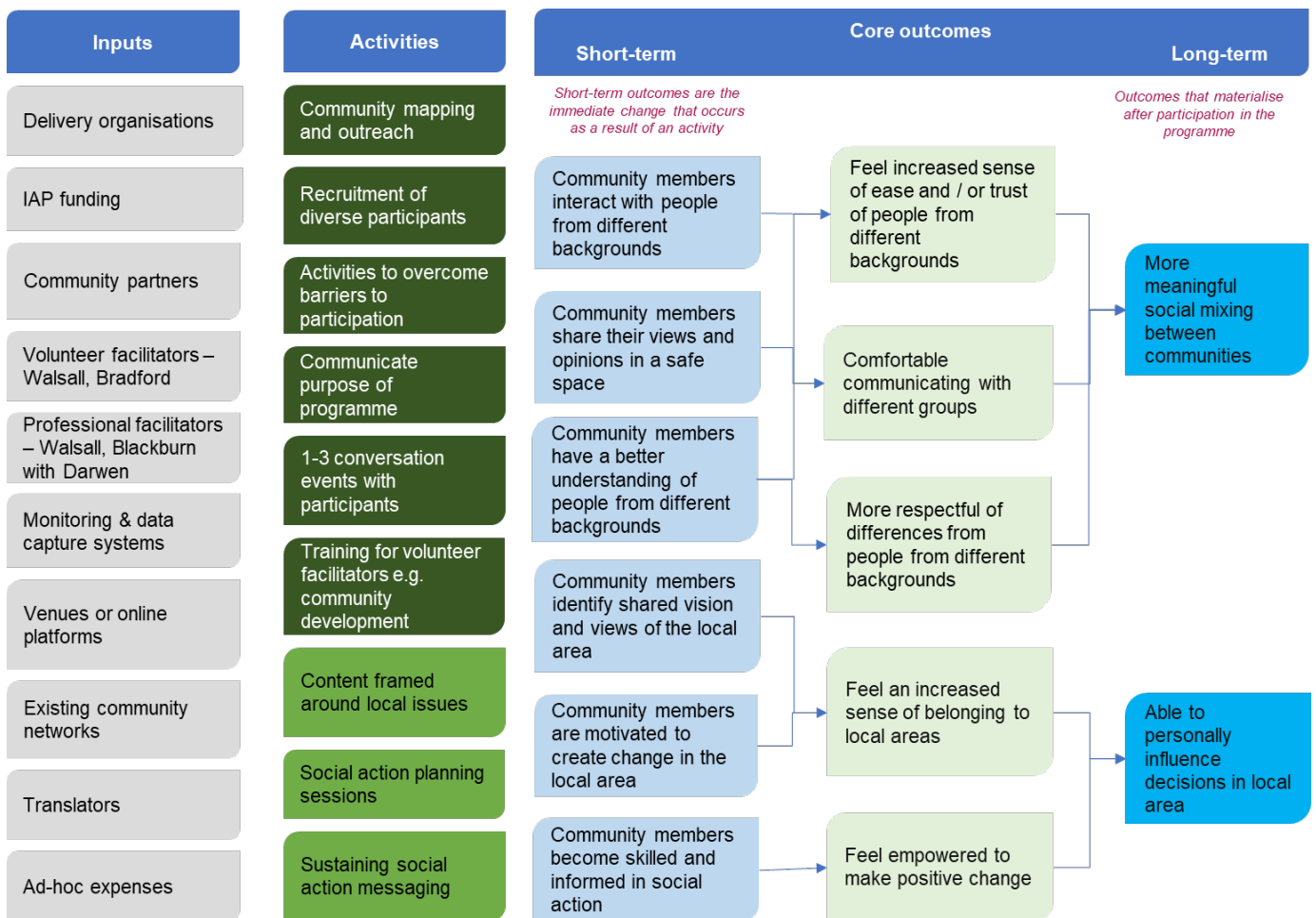
<sup>6</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ffd8a6\\_a4bdd91b47eb47f29d4c17e6764be14f.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ffd8a6_a4bdd91b47eb47f29d4c17e6764be14f.pdf)

- 6. Increased feeling of empowerment to make positive change in the community**
7. Reduced indicators of prejudicial views
- 8. Increased sense of comfort communicating with different groups**
9. Identifying shared values and vision
10. Increase in spaces seen as shared
11. Improved perception that people from different backgrounds get along well in your area
12. Reduced levels of anti-social behaviour in the areas targeted by the interventions
13. Improved perception of whether hate crime/community tensions are a problem in the local area
14. Improved appreciation of the need to respect differences in the local area

The logic model below (Figure 1.1) summarises how the activities undertaken within the Community Conversations intervention are expected to lead to the outcomes listed above i.e. the expected routes to impact. The logic model sets out how the programme is intended to work, including the resources used (inputs), programme activities, and anticipated outcomes for the target groups. It includes:

- Inputs – the resources that will be used, including time, money and infrastructure
- Activities – what will be done as part of the programme
- Outcomes – the changes seen as a result of the programme activities; short-term outcomes relate to those stemming directly from participating in Community Conversations and longer-term outcomes materialising over time.

**Figure 1.1: Community Conversations Logic Model**

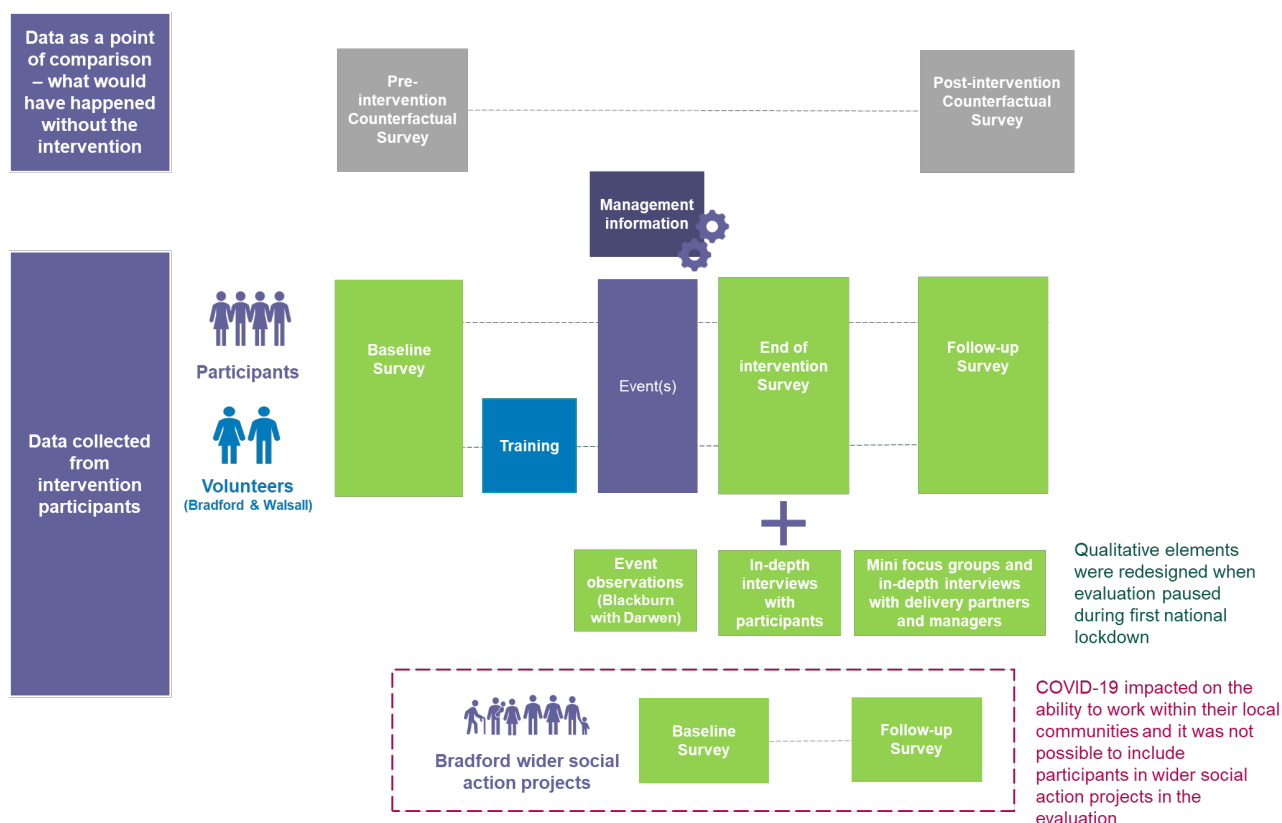


The evaluation is unable to comment on longer-term impacts because of the nature of the interventions and the evaluation timeframes.

### 1.3 Evaluation approach

The evaluation approach for Community Conversations is summarised in Figure 1.2 below. Further detail about each element is also provided.

**Figure 1.2: Community Conversations Evaluation Approach**



**BASELINE AND END OF INTERVENTION SURVEYS**

To measure the individual-level attitudinal and behavioural impact of the interventions on those taking part we undertook pre (baseline) and post (end) intervention surveys. Surveys included demographic questions and, to measure the impact of Community Conversations, questions covering target outcomes were asked in the same way in both the pre and post intervention surveys, usually using a Likert scale. This allowed a direct comparison in opinion to be made. In the end of intervention surveys for Walsall and Bradford there were also some questions asking participants to retrospectively reflect on the experience.

Depending on the area, surveys were administered online or by paper and were intended to take on average 10 minutes to complete. Table 1.1 shows survey completes at each stage by area. Further details on survey administration and base sizes are included in Section B of the accompanying technical annex.

**Table 1.1 – Survey completes at each stage by area.**

Survey completes	Blackburn with Darwin	Bradford	Walsall	Total
No. of participants	322	82	107	511
Start of Event	110	35	47	192
End of Event	80	23	29	132
Follow up	20	2	18	40
Total	210	60	94	364

All survey findings reported have been tested for statistical significance. Significance tests indicate how likely it is that a pattern seen in data is due to chance, and therefore how likely it is that this is a genuine difference between the groups being compared. All

differences noted are significant to a 95 per cent confidence level: by convention, this is the statistical 'cut off point' used to mean a difference is large enough to be believed as genuine. This means the significant differences noted throughout this report have a 95% chance of being 'true', i.e. due to a genuine difference in the groups being compared, and only a 5% chance that the results are just due to chance.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

For Community Conversations in Blackburn with Darwen we observed nine one-off events. Researchers did not actively participate in the activities like the community members, to avoid influencing participants' responses or behaviour. Observations were structured with researchers using a checklist, a document that can be used flexibly and unobtrusively during observations. It indicates the observable features and behaviours of participating community members for researchers to look out for. The observation was not intended to judge the facilitator's performance and thus we do not comment on their performance unless it directly and obviously influenced the content of conversations or community members' behaviours.

Observations did not take place in the other two areas because these were conducted post-COVID-19 and run online. Delivery partners did not feel that it was appropriate for researchers to be present at these sessions, given the added challenges of engaging participants virtually and making them feel comfortable with expressing themselves fully in this setting.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Project and evaluation delivery was paused during the first national lockdown which provided an opportunity to rescope the evaluation. As part of this process a qualitative element was agreed which took place in the two areas with ongoing delivery – Bradford and Walsall. In each area qualitative research involved up to 10 participant depth interviews to explore their stories of what changed for them, when, and why, including what they valued in the intervention. There were also 1-2 depth interviews with delivery partner managers and 1-2 mini-group discussions with delivery partners playing back participants' stories and identifying any additional impacts and exploring how they think the impacts were achieved.

## **PERFORMANCE AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION**

In addition to surveys and observations, the evaluation draws on a range of locally collected information. Performance and management information (MI) is important for describing the scope and reach of the interventions and measuring the profile of audiences that engaged with the interventions. The list of measures was developed in collaboration with DLUHC and the local areas and differs by evaluation strand and local area. An Excel template was produced, and areas were asked to complete it at two time points: midway through their intervention and after their intervention concluded.

## **COUNTERFACTUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The baseline and post-activity surveys provide a measure of *change* in the attitudes and beliefs of people taking part in Community Conversations. What we cannot do with these findings is say how far any changes in attitudes and beliefs are as a result of taking part in Community Conversations, and how far people's views may have changed naturally or because of other factors (e.g. other events or things being reported in the press).



To isolate the effect of participation in Community Conversations, a number of the same survey questions were asked as part of a longitudinal two-wave 'comparison' survey commissioned by IFF and fielded by YouGov among its online panel members. By comparing the change in attitudes and beliefs of Community Conversation participants against those of the YouGov comparison group, we can test whether Community Conversations has an effect on people's attitudes and beliefs that would not have happened if they had not participated. The timing of this survey was aligned as closely as possible to the delivery of the Conversations events. Three outcomes relevant to Community Conversations were measured in the comparison survey:

- Increased levels of meaningful social mixing between communities
- Understanding and respecting differences with people from other backgrounds
- Increased feeling of empowerment to make positive change in the community

The 'baseline' survey was carried out among 407 panel members in early April 2021. Three months later, these panel members were approached to take part in a follow up survey, which was completed by 288 members.

The impact of Community Conversations has been measured by comparing the average (mean) change scores of participants and the matched comparison group. The full breakdown of responses and mean scores, as well as tests for statistical significance can be found in Section B of the accompanying technical annex. The impact assessment was carried out by Bryson Purdon Social Research.

## 1.4 Evaluation limitations

There are some important limitations to the evaluation which must be taken into account when reading this report.

DLUHC's priority for evaluation was to obtain robust measures of impact (and to use the evaluation to explore whether this kind of impact measurement were feasible for this type of intervention). The original evaluation approach therefore sought to measure impacts and attribute these to the interventions by obtaining 'pre' and 'post' data for intervention participants and comparing these against measures at the same points in time for a comparison group (of similar non-participants in the same local areas).

### **Programme delivery**

The original design for a robust national impact evaluation required the local interventions to be clearly scoped and defined and to remain broadly consistent in their intended outcomes and mechanisms for achieving change. These requirements sat slightly at odds with the locally-driven nature of delivery, with considerable flexibility given to local areas to tailor their interventions to the context, to work to their own timeframes, and to make pragmatic changes to delivery over the course of the programme. This led to some key differences in intervention design between the Community Conversations areas such as the duration of engagement / number of sessions and approach to delivery. For example, the Blackburn with Darwen project comprised a single event run by professional facilitators, whilst Walsall and Bradford ran multiple events (over similar timeframes but a disparate number of sessions) with a mix of staff and community members acting as facilitators. Further detail of each intervention can be found in the following chapter.

The pre / post evaluation design also required sample sizes (i.e. points of data about participant outcomes) to be as large as possible to increase the chance of detecting impacts. Larger sample sizes are particularly important where the likely effect size (i.e. the change expected to occur as a result of the intervention) may be small. In this case, the intervention – a conversation/social mixing event – may be expected to have a fairly small impact on the outcomes of interest i.e. attitudes and behaviours, which are often long-held and deeply engrained.

Robust participant volumes are also important where surveys are the key method of collecting information about outcomes. Whilst a census approach can be (and was) attempted with all participants, there is inevitably some level of non-participation in a voluntary survey, reducing the final number of participants for which outcomes data (over multiple data points) is available.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were concerns about whether the scale of the interventions, i.e. the number of potential participants, would be as large as initially expected. Post-COVID-19, the interventions understandably operated on a smaller scale (more detail on participation is provided in the following chapter and the accompanying technical annex). The scope to combine data across areas (increasing sample sizes) was limited by the fact that Blackburn with Darwen took place before COVID-19 and the other two areas delivered after/during COVID-19. Blackburn with Darwen has not been included in any combined analysis. In the end, longitudinal analysis for the purpose of impact assessment was only possible for a sample of 20 individuals (across both Walsall and Bradford).

A further, final issue which is discussed in the following chapter is that the participants recruited were already fairly well engaged in social action activities in their local communities. This meant that some of the target outcome scores (e.g. feelings able to create positive change in the local community, feeling comfortable talking to different people) were already high in the baseline which made it all the more difficult to detect changes in attitudes/behaviour.

## **Evaluation delivery**

There were also a number of issues in evaluation delivery that limited its scope.

The evaluation was reliant on delivery organisations for data collection at baseline and end of intervention (usually during first and last sessions), as well as to provide contact details for follow-up surveys. The rationale for this method of survey administration was that recruitment processes could be fairly informal and because local delivery partners were concerned that contact from a third party evaluator could jeopardise relationships with (potential) participants. Language was also an issue; lacking the budget for translation of survey materials, the evaluation was reliant on delivery staff to help translate and interpret the survey questions from English for some participants. Local delivery partners made best efforts, with support from the evaluation team, but this contributed to lower than anticipated survey response rates.

This evaluation has also generated learnings around the framing and content of research materials in this context. As much as possible, the survey questionnaires sought to use standardised questions across evaluation strands and areas, taken from other relevant surveys, to allow aggregate analysis and facilitate comparisons across studies. However,

delivery partners reported that some respondents found the language and phrasing difficult to comprehend. For example, questions such as: “To what extent do you agree or disagree that: ‘I feel comfortable talking to people who express attitudes or behaviours I disagree with’” were considered overly complex and particularly difficult for those with limited English. Delivery partners also advised that some participants were wary of the research. They suggested that some participants had previous negative experiences with government institutions (e.g. HMRC and the Home Office) and the reference to government bodies in this research limited their willingness to engage.

Local projects had the scope to tailor the survey to better meet the needs of their audience. Some questions were included in some areas but not others as they were not felt to reflect what the local area was trying to achieve or deliver. Some wording amendments were also made to improve question clarity over time. Whilst it is important to ensure that delivery partners are bought into the evaluation and empowered to influence it for their needs, this did lead to disparities in questionnaire content and wording between areas which impacts on comparability.

Limited qualitative research was conducted for this evaluation due to a prioritisation of quantitative net impact analysis from DLUHC. The iterative and local nature of the programme design and delivery, together with target audience and scale of interventions, is well suited to qualitative inquiry. The qualitative work that was eventually agreed was fairly small-scale and focused on impacts rather than delivery as much as possible. This limits the potential for learning on how to deliver such interventions for any future, similar programmes.

Taking all this together, the main implications for reading this report are that:

- Achieved sample sizes were too small to detect any impacts at individual project level.
- The net impact assessment is based on a combined sample of 20 individuals. This small sample size means it is not possible/credible to draw any firm conclusions on the impact of the programme from this analysis.

Further details on evaluation methods are contained in Section B of the accompanying technical annex.

## 2. Programme Delivery

This chapter discusses the profile of locally delivered events and their participants captured over the course of the evaluation. It provides an overview of the defining features of the three areas including their demographic makeup and their integration needs. It also seeks to describe the three Conversation interventions in more detail and experiences of delivery from the perspective of the participants and those involved in delivery.

### 2.1 Blackburn with Darwen

Between 1991 and 2011 the ethnic minority population in Blackburn with Darwen increased from 15% to 31%. In 2011, 31% of residents were from Black and minority ethnic groups. Asian/Asian British was the largest of these groups, with more than one in four people in this group (28%).<sup>7</sup> Eighty-seven percent of Blackburn with Darwen's population reported having English as their main language in 2011, and over 70 languages are spoken there.

The 2019 Indices of Deprivation revealed Blackburn with Darwen was ranked as the 14th most deprived area out of 317 districts and unitary authorities in England, when measured by the rank of average LSOA rank.<sup>8</sup> The local authority identified that geographical segregation based on ethnicity and religion can work against social integration, which is also reflected in school populations and sections of the local economy.<sup>9</sup>

#### Community Voices

The area's priority is to strengthen relationships between the borough's diverse communities. The Community Voices initiative, run by the Peace Foundation, was designed to provide a safe space for people from different cultural backgrounds to come together and share their views. The aim was to connect geographically segregated communities, providing an opportunity to identify common ground, shared values and aspirations. Therefore, the events were designed to provide an opportunity to express concerns and areas of challenge to help community members better understand one another.

The Peace Foundation ran fifteen, one-off events in different areas to encourage participation from different parts of the community, some of which were aimed at women only. At each event, participants were given key topics to discuss – some with the whole group and some in smaller sub-groups. The facilitators had a structure of activities and topics to cover and guided the conversations around these topics. The 15 events reached 322 community members, coming close to their intention of reaching 360 community members. These were not unique individuals, and this number includes individuals who attended more than one event.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/area-profiles/local-authority-profiles/blackburn-with-darwen-unitary/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Blackburn-with-Darwen-Integration-Area-Strategy-Final.pdf>

## 2.2 Walsall

According to the 2011 Census, Walsall's population was 269,323 with Black and minority ethnic groups accounting for 21%.<sup>10</sup> The Black and minority ethnic population more than doubled between 1991 and 2011 (10% to 21%), the majority of whom (72%) were Asian or Asian British. However, in recent years the European population in the area has risen with 80% percent of National Insurance Number registrations in Walsall between March 2016 and March 2017 originating from people in Europe. While Walsall is ethnically diverse, most residents speak English; 93% of Walsall's population reported having English as their main language in the 2011 census. Most of the population in the 2011 census also stated they belong to a religion (74%), with Christians making up the largest group (59% of total population) and Muslims the second largest faith (8% of total population).

Walsall is also an area of above average deprivation. In 2019, Walsall was the 25th most deprived local authority district (out of 317).<sup>11</sup> It is among the lowest performing 20% of all local authorities in England in social mobility, according to the 2016 Social Mobility Index and is classed as a "social mobility cold spot."<sup>12</sup>

Walsall ranked the 12th highest in residential segregation in England on the Index of Dissimilarity.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, South Walsall has a high Black and minority ethnic population, while North Walsall has a predominantly White British population. Both areas suffer high levels of multiple deprivation and migrants tend to settle in the most deprived wards.

### Community Dialogues

The Community Dialogues intervention in Walsall, run by the Faith and Belief Forum, attempted to address local social integration issues. Sessions were run online with local community groups to have honest discussions about integration and the changing neighbourhood. Session participants were part of, or linked to, pre-existing local community groups. The types of community groups involved including religious groups, voluntary organisations and charities. 'Community Connectors' were identified in each community group to help organise and facilitate the sessions. These 19 Connectors received training on how to run the sessions.

Each group met for one 'local' session with their own community group and then partnered with another group for two 'linked' sessions. The purpose of partnering different community groups was to build trust between these groups to facilitate open and honest conversations around topics like local concerns, integration, cohesion, migration, faith, and race. Sessions were facilitated by Connectors and delivery staff from the Faith and Belief Forum.

Community Connectors began some sessions in-person before the COVID-19 pandemic. These ended after social distancing measures were introduced, new groups were recruited and sessions ran online, between November 2020 and February 2021. Each session

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-index>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata>

included around 10 participants, and participants received a gift card at the end of the sessions in thanks for taking part. Across 33 sessions, the Walsall project reached 107 unique community members.

## 2.3 Bradford

The 2011 census showed that 33% of Bradford's population were from Black and minority ethnic groups. Twenty percent of Bradford residents were Pakistani and a further 7% identified from other Asian or Asian British backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> Bradford is also highly segregated, having ranked third on residential segregation in England on the Index of Dissimilarity.

Nearly three quarters (73%) of Bradford's population were religiously affiliated, according to the 2011 census. The largest religious group in Bradford was Christian (46%) and the second largest was Muslim (25%), the fourth highest Muslim population of all the Local Authorities in England.

Bradford is ranked 254/324 on the Social Mobility Index (Social Mobility Commission, 2017)<sup>15</sup> and the 13th most deprived local authority in England – its position has worsened by six places since 2015.<sup>16</sup>

### **Bradford-as-1**

The Bradford-as-1 project, run by the Thornbury Centre aimed to create safe shared spaces in three target communities: Keighley, Little Horton and Ecclesfield. By creating opportunities and incentives for people from different faith, ethnic, socio-economic and age groups to interact, the project hoped participating community members would meaningfully connect. For each of the three areas, a 'core' group of people received training and £500 to run social action events with the wider community.

Fourteen core group members were recruited by the Thornbury Centre from the three target areas to take part in 12 weeks of training. These were a mix of community leaders and community members that those leaders support. The training was expected to lead to social actions projects however, due to COVID-19, there was less time to complete social action activities than planned so they only managed to run one social action activity per area rather than multiple. COVID-19 restrictions also limited the number of people they could involve in the social action activity (68 in total).

The social action events ran as follows:

- In Keighley the social action project was delivered remotely (due to COVID-19) and themed around food with 3 elements: cookbook, photography and sewing. Wider community members invited to submit favourite recipes and pictures of the foods through a Facebook group hosted by a different local charity (Healthy Living Bradford) than the charity delivering the Community Conversations Programme. Those recipes and photos were showcased in a shop window in the centre of town.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata>

<sup>15</sup> Local authorities are ranked 1 – high social mobility, to 324 – low social mobility

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-index>

For sewing, there was a sewing demonstration at a workshop, and they ran a placement competition.

- In Little Horton the social action element involved an in-person garden party of around 20 people that involved cooking food from different communities, having stations like henna, hair braiding etc.
- In Ecclesfield, not all participants were able to attend training sessions due to COVID-19 restrictions. This meant that some participants were only involved in the end event which took the form of a garden party in the church.

A demographic breakdown of participants for all Community Conversations projects can be found in Section A of the accompanying technical annex.

## 3. Project Experiences

Findings in this section focus primarily on Walsall and Bradford where more extensive qualitative research was conducted. The Blackburn with Darwen events took place pre-COVID-19 with a limited qualitative element (event observations focused on outcomes only).

In Bradford and Walsall, there were community members who were recruited and trained to lead sessions or social action projects, these are distinct from the professional facilitators used in Blackburn with Darwen. For clarity, in the remainder of this chapter these groups – the Walsall Community Connectors and the Bradford Core Group – are referred to as ‘volunteers’.

### 3.1 Recruitment

Participants’ initial involvement in Community Conversations mainly came from the community group they were involved in or connected to, sometimes snowballing from these contacts. Some were already involved with the group as volunteers or community members. Others were known and approached to see if they would be interested in taking part. For example, in Walsall one participant was recruited through their parents, who were involved in the community group, to increase the number of young people involved.

Participants interviewed in the qualitative research generally had not taken part in anything like Community Conversations before. In this respect, in Walsall it was noted that the status and remit of the Faith Belief Forum (FBF) (the organisation responsible for running Community Dialogue in Walsall) helped to gain buy-in from community members. Their work was known by many other community groups who were gatekeepers to community members, and these groups reportedly felt their work was good and impactful, and sensitively delivered. FBF involvement was particularly impactful in reaching religious groups and ethnic minority groups, who were felt to be less often engaged in community events like these.

Motivations for getting involved varied across the areas. In Walsall, generally participants took part in Community Dialogues with an open mind. Motivations for participation included trying something new or different, curiosity about what the sessions would involve and the chance to get to know people from different backgrounds. Participants mentioned it was ‘something to do during lockdown’ and therefore slightly more appealing than it may have been in normal life. The gift card incentive used in Walsall was also a motivator for some.

*"I was intrigued to find out what it was about. I've grown up in Walsall so it's quite nice to find out how everyone else perceives Walsall as a whole."*

Participant, Walsall

*"I just thought, it's something to do, why not, something different."*

Participant, Walsall

In Bradford, one of the groups was recruited from ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes which had large numbers of women attending. This recruitment



channel was chosen as the aim was to target women to boost their confidence. There was a deliberate agenda to reach out to women from a mix of ethnic backgrounds and different languages, ensuring that they had to converse in English rather than a common native language. Participants interviewed for the evaluation reported that they were motivated to engage for more personal than community-related reasons. Their motivations centred on the desire to improve their English language skills, usually with the aim of expanding horizons beyond the family and gaining employment in the longer term. Additionally, involvement in the initiative was seen an opportunity to reduce isolation and give individuals something to do with their time (not just because of COVID-19, but because the group were not employed). Participants saw the project as something they would enjoy and as an opportunity to use their creative skills, rather than coming from any understanding of the underlying rationale behind Community Conversations.

*"Get exposure and be outside a little. Do things with friends"*

Participant, Bradford

Qualitative feedback indicates that recruiting participants from a range of backgrounds was challenging. In both Walsall and Blackburn with Darwen there was acknowledgement that recruiting from existing community groups meant that they may not be reaching those most at risk of isolation or segregation.

*"I guess if you're talking about your community, only people who are community-minded are going to be on that kind of thing."*

Participant, Walsall

In Bradford, co-ordinators felt they were broadly successful in engaging the right people, although the audience for one of the three local activities was less diverse in age than intended, with a larger proportion of older participants. It was acknowledged that the coronavirus pandemic had some impact on recruitment. For some there was a fear of catching coronavirus which would impact on their livelihood (through self-isolation), for others home schooling meant they had less time/freedom. It was felt that the commitment to attend every session for 6 weeks was a barrier for some and ran the risk of biasing volunteers to those who are retired.

*"It would have been nice if more [people from the refugee group] had attended but we didn't have a lot of attendance from them because I think they have more fear of the virus."*

Volunteer, Bradford

To boost attendance further for all events, organisers suggested longer lead-in times for recruitment and regular reminders beforehand might help. Also, some reference was made to the use of more creative advertising/promotion and that a marketing budget would help.

*"Somehow we've got to be different and creative about different locations. I don't know whether to just do them sitting at a park, on a bus. That's an idea I've had recently."*

Facilitator, Blackburn with Darwen

## 3.2 Moving to online delivery

Due to the COVID-19, the number and format of community events had to be adapted, thereby somewhat limiting the full potential impact of Community Conversations. Sessions and conversations were held online, and face-to-face tended to be restricted to smaller groups. Those involved in Bradford commented that, had Community Conversations been held during a different period, they would have had more people involved in the workshop, more sharing of food from different countries and they would have been active in terms of visiting schools and other community groups.

Where Community Conversations was delivered online, sessions were generally found to work well, allowing people from different physical locations in the community to join easily and conveniently. Naturally some materials had to be adapted for different access needs, but in Walsall the Faith Belief Forum was specifically praised by facilitators for being responsive to emerging access needs, for example providing a Zoom help sheet and written materials in large font.

*"I think if anything it [being online] made it more accessible as we are all from different areas."*

Project co-ordinator, Bradford

*"It was convenient, I could do my work in the day and in the evening, I had time to join, I didn't think I had to rush home."*

Participant, Walsall

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some would have preferred an in-person format, for example to allow for conversations with people before and after the session. But there was understanding that this was not possible due to lockdown restrictions.

*"It would have been much nicer to be face to face and interactive but because of the pandemic I understand completely and I've kind of got used to it because of the university and my own teaching."*

Participant, Walsall

*"I would prefer to meet people in person. I kind of find chatting on Zoom hard because you don't read the cue as to when to contribute."*

Participant, Walsall

At times there were some difficulties running training sessions online. In Walsall some participants were slightly concerned about accessing technology to take part but did manage to access the sessions without any issues. Sometimes participants had internet connectivity issues, but in general felt this was not too disruptive. In Bradford and where there were difficulties running training online, other solutions were found. As an example, for one of the Bradford interventions where participants had limited (or no) digital access for the training programme, the training was instead run on a one-to-one basis, and then opened to groups of four as COVID-19 restrictions eased.

On reflection, staff and facilitators in Walsall felt a hybrid approach to intervention delivery would work best to leverage the strengths of both delivery modes. The move to online meant that previously engaged participants could no longer take part. For example, Roma

and Gypsy, deaf and digitally excluded community members. Yet, the move to online also enabled participation from other groups that were less able to accommodate the in-person sessions. For example, parents of school-age children and people with anxiety who feel more comfortable joining groups from their home. Regardless of mode, the in-person incentivised activities used in Walsall were viewed by the delivery staff and those facilitators involved in the pre-pandemic delivery as important for establishing rapport and building trust, and thus should feature in future designs.

### 3.3 Participant experiences

Qualitative findings indicate that most participants found the experience of Community Conversations positive. The conversations or community events were seen as providing a forum for open discussion, for connecting people and for understanding similarities and differences.

As one participant in Bradford noted, not only had she enjoyed the learning but by understanding more about her community it had helped to change her perceptions so that she was noticing now how helpful people are. As another example, observations at Blackburn with Darwen reported an instance where misconceptions about Islamic culture and traditions were challenged, as a Muslim participant corrected misperceptions about traditional funerals and weddings. Another example was noted for Blackburn with Darwen where the sharing of a story of when a local corner shop had flooded, and community members arrived to sweep out the water, which had helped to create a more balanced opinion when the topic of respect and trust within community groups was discussed.

*“It was a very good and positive project, bringing up discussions about key issues affecting the communities.”*

Participant, Walsall

*“It was quite interesting to hear everyone's perspective and I have quite a few friends that would be into these sorts of community dialogues so they could talk to people in their area and just see what other people think.”*

Participant, Walsall

*“I think any opportunity for people from different areas of the town, different ethnicities to get together in a safe environment and really discuss issues openly without feeling intimidated is useful and helpful.”*

Participant, Blackburn with Darwen

Although overwhelmingly positive, there were a few themes that arose which should be considered with any future similar initiatives.

**Composition and balance of participants at conversation events:** Not all the community conversation groups ended up with a good split or mixed representation from different communities, which lessened the ability for diverse views to be shared. This reflected recruitment difficulties and meant that in some instances, rather than challenging views or hearing different perspectives, existing opinions were validated and became more entrenched.

For example, within a particularly homogenous group at an event, a participant mentioned they were unhappy with children being picked up from school by women in burqas, explaining they thought this was a security and safeguarding issue. Other participants' body language suggested they agreed with this view, and the facilitator noted this discussion may have contributed to reinforcing rather than challenging the view.

*"It was a self-selecting group of people ... everybody came because they wanted to engage ... I don't know if we learned a lot from each other, but perhaps saw a different perspective that made us reflect on our own perspectives."*

Participant, Walsall

In some of the Blackburn with Darwen events a high number of councillors, council staff and other individuals in attendance was observed. Sometimes this audience outnumbered community members and contributed their views in discussion, which risked influencing discussions.

**Expert facilitation skills are required to ensure an open debate:** Feedback on the moderation of the conversations was, on the whole, positive, but there were instances where it was felt it could have been better managed by facilitators to ensure everyone had an equal opportunity to share views. There were a few moments where the most confident speakers were given more focus, meaning there was not always a true balance of opinions voiced.

*"I think giving a time frame in which everyone can say what they actually think [would help] because when we were discussing it, it was more heavily argued by one person rather than anyone else and by the time it came to us pitching in, time was limited."*

Participant, Walsall

In some groups, sensitive topics which touched on personally upsetting experiences emerged which required good facilitator management. Equally there were instances where the facilitator needed to nudge people away from giving what they perceived to be the 'correct' or 'appropriate' responses and to speak openly and from their own personal views and experiences. One facilitator in Walsall minimised this issue by reminding participants, both before and during sessions, to talk about their own experiences and not generalisations. By doing so, they felt that participants could be honest and not worry about what others may think. Another technique used to good effect, on occasions, was the facilitator playing a 'devil's advocate' to role-play critical views, which participants may have felt uncomfortable to express themselves but which then enabled a fuller and more honest discussion.

**Event materials need to be tailored to audiences:** Many events in Blackburn with Darwen included participants with a main language that was not English. This was also the case in Bradford with a few commenting that the training presentations were "too deep" and "business-like" for those for whom English was not their first language. Some co-ordinators overcame this by adapting any presentations to the language ability and skills that volunteers were bringing to the group.

**Ice breakers and a relaxed/informal setting help the conversations:** At the conversation events, ice breakers (in different forms) played a role in helping people feel

comfortable. These were used at the start of the events, before the main discussion, to enable participants to get to know a little about one another and to become comfortable with speaking in front of others. It is important that icebreakers are inclusive and tailored to the audience; there was one instance where the activity required physical participation which was not felt to be appropriate for a disabled audience.

In Bradford, where participants showcased their skills and talents at an open day or workshop, one person commented on how the individual activities were particularly good at acting as an ice breaker, creating the more relaxed environment to start conversations. They felt that act of bringing a dish from their own country or sharing skills linked to their cultural heritage (e.g. henna, hair braiding) gave people a talking point from which to share experiences and create a bond.

**New relationships and networks at the local level can create sustainable change:** In both Bradford and Walsall project teams mentioned of the value of creating a wider network through the new relationships they had developed. In Walsall, volunteers felt this would specifically allow them to work collaboratively on projects going forward rather than having to bid for opportunities individually. In Bradford, they felt that they had found new ways of engaging communities, i.e. sharing foods, crafts and cultural activities, which they would build into future programmes.

*"I've also made great contacts with people that were in the group, and we are now all friends and have connections with all the different groups."*

Volunteer, Bradford

*"The activity that was done in Keighley - how unique it was? If it was done in a place like Little Horton, it would have had a bigger impact. Most people in Keighley know what cyanotype photography is but in Little Horton they would have been like 'wow'. If you were to take [hair] braiding into Keighley, they would be like 'that's amazing'. They don't have a lot of African people there so if they were to watch hair braiding being done, they would have been impressed."*

Project co-ordinator, Bradford

## 4. Programme Impact

The section presents findings on the impact of Community Conversations, drawing on multiple sources of data including the participant surveys, counterfactual impact assessment, qualitative depth interviews and focus groups (Walsall and Bradford) and event observations (Blackburn with Darwen).

Table 4.1 summarises findings from the participant surveys for each of the six core outcomes, as well as noting where questions were asked in only certain areas. These are discussed in detail throughout the chapter.

**Table 4.1: Survey outcome measures, bases, and base sizes**

	Baseline survey	End of intervention	Follow-up survey
<b>Meaningful social mixing</b> (Base: Respondents in all areas)	(192)	(132)	(40)*
Comfort talking about the similarities and differences between people in the area - % comfortable	82%	82%	90%
Comfort talking to people who express different attitudes of behaviours - % agree	69%	77%	78%
Had opportunities to mix with people from different ethnic group - % agree	-	-	78%
Had opportunities to mix with people from different religious group - % agree	-	-	75%
Had opportunities to mix with people from different age group - % agree	-	-	78%
<b>Comfort communicating with different groups</b> (Base: Respondents in Walsall and Bradford only)		(52)	(20)**
Comfort talking to people from different backgrounds before Community Conversations - % comfortable	-	73%	-
Comfort talking to people from different backgrounds now - % comfortable	-	87%	80%
<b>Respecting differences from between people from different backgrounds</b> (Base: Respondents in all areas)	(192)	(132)	(40)*
Residents in this local area respect differences between other people in the area - % agree	56%	54%	38%
<b>Feeling empowered to make positive change</b> (Base: Respondents in all areas)	(192)	(132)	(40)*
Personally motivated to work with others in neighbourhood to improve the neighbourhood - % agree	81%	85%	85%

	Baseline survey	End of intervention	Follow-up survey
<b>Increased sense of belonging to the local area</b> (Walsall & Bradford only for baseline & end-intervention)	(82)	(52)	(40)*
In my local area, I feel I belong - % agree	62%	73%	65%
<b>Personally able to influence decisions in the local area</b> (Base: Respondents in Walsall and Bradford only)	(82)	(52)	(20)**
Opportunities to express views about local community - % agree	59%	63%	55%**
Personally can influence decisions in local area - % agree	39%	42%	50%**

\* Base size is low (\*\* = extremely low) and findings should be treated only as indicative

## 4.1 Meaningful social mixing

Three survey measures were used to indicate meaningful social mixing: 'comfort talking to unknown people from different backgrounds about the similarities and differences between people in the local area', 'comfort talking to people who express different attitudes or behaviours' and 'agreement with opportunities to mix with different ethnic, religious and age groups.'

### COMFORT TALKING ABOUT THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEOPLE IN THE LOCAL AREA

Baseline findings show that prior to Community Conversations most participants felt comfortable talking to unknown people in the local area about the similarities and differences of others. Just over 4 in every 5 participants (82%) felt comfortable in this respect prior to participation. The high level of comfort recorded prior to the Community Conversations intervention may reflect the use of local community groups for much of the participant recruitment. By default, those involved may be potentially more engaged with the local community, or more confident.

"...you're preaching to the converted."

*Participant, Blackburn with Darwen*

"You can see people open up in the course of the event, just need to be able to get out into the places where people are most reluctant to come."

*Participant, Blackburn with Darwen*

No improvement was recorded for this measure across the intervention, but comfort levels did remain high (82% in the end-intervention survey and 90% in the follow-up survey). There was an indicative increase in the degree of comfort recorded; whilst only 43% claimed to feel 'very comfortable' in the baseline, this rose to 53% in the end-intervention survey.

Alongside this, when Walsall and Bradford participants were asked at the end of the intervention to self-report the level of change in their comfort levels over the course of the programme, nearly two-thirds (62%) said they felt more comfortable talking to people with different backgrounds than before.

This positive outcome is echoed through the qualitative findings as various participants commented that the sessions and activities had not just explored differences but had also helped them to recognise what they had in common with others (including the threat of COVID-19). On some occasion, even new friendships had developed as a result of meeting at the events. As an example of where similarities were discovered, in Bradford a group of volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds bonded over having played the same game in childhood despite growing up in different parts of the world including Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

*"I feel happy to have met so many different but like-minded individuals, confirming there are lots of people on the same page."*

Volunteer, Walsall

*"It has made me actively search for opportunities to communicate with people of different, faiths and beliefs. I realise that on most occasions, we actually have a lot of similarities and definitely should celebrate our differences."*

Volunteer, Walsall

*"There were more similarities than differences although people obviously have different circumstances and a lot of people obviously have it worse than me."*

Participant, Walsall

## **COMFORT TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO EXPRESS DIFFERENT ATTITUDES OR BEHAVIOURS**

There was an indicative, but not statistically significant, change in levels of agreement in respect to feeling comfortable talking to people who express different attitudes or behaviours between the pre, end-intervention and follow-up surveys: from 69% rising to 77% and 78% respectively. The uplift in comfort levels is, in part, driven by Walsall, which saw an indicative rise from 57% in the baseline to 90% in the end-intervention survey.

When we compare the responses of the 20 Community Conversation participants for whom we have both baseline and follow up data at a suitable interval, there is no discernible impact on the extent to which participants agree that they feel comfortable talking to people who express attitudes or behaviours they disagree with. Community Conversation participants came into the intervention with much more positive views than the matched comparison group. After matching the two groups in terms of their gender, age, ethnic group and religion, participants were much more likely than the matched comparison group to feel comfortable at baseline (80 agreed, compared to 47 per cent of the matched comparison group). By the follow up stage, there was very little difference between the change experienced by participants and the comparison group. Participants saw their mean score move from 4.11 to 4.00 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with a higher score better), compared to a mean score change of 3.29 to 3.14 among the comparison group.



As a separate question after the Community Conversations intervention, Walsall and Bradford participants were asked directly about the impact on their comfort levels. Half (50%) claimed that Community Conversations had made them feel 'more' comfortable talking to people with different attitudes and behaviours.

In Walsall it was noted by some that the structured discussion and the 'safe space' created by facilitators played an active role in encouraging all to share their views without judgement and to find common ground. Debates for the mixed-community group sessions in Walsall were themed against differences in backgrounds, what they had learnt from each other and how to engage more in the local area, and participants credited these elements for helping to create an open dialogue.

*"I felt safe in the fact I could say what I thought without the feel of judgement, regardless of who I was saying it to and regardless of my age and gender and anything that influences my choice. I felt safe to say what I thought, knowing there was no right or wrong answer was helpful in that sense."*

Participants, Walsall

*"It was clearly stated that what was said in the group stays in the group... people felt free to speak openly and say 'look I grew up in this specific area and it's gone really downhill.' "*

Participant, Walsall

#### **HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO MIX WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS, RELIGIOUS GROUPS OR DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS**

The questions around whether they had had opportunities to mix with people of different ethnic groups, with people from different religious groups or with people of different ages were solely asked in the follow-up survey.

Positively around three quarters agreed with each of the scenarios: 78% agreed they had had opportunities to mix with different ethnic groups, 75% with different religious groups and 78% with different age groups. Whilst disagreement levels were low, there was a higher level of disagreement (18%) for opportunities to mix with different ethnic groups.

Overall, and as evidenced by these high scores, there was a sense that Community Conversations helped people from different communities to connect and share experiences. That said, as noted earlier, there was also some acknowledgement from the qualitative interviews that Community Conversations did not tap into as diverse a group as initially hoped for, with some bias towards those who were already community minded. Also, that the number and format of community events had to be adapted and restricted down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lessened the ability to fully mix with different groups.

In Bradford, and where an activity was centred on isolated women from different ethnic backgrounds, there was a strong sentiment that the events had improved confidence in participants, particularly in respect of socialising with others and language skills. The events made volunteers aware of the skills and strengths they had (cooking, hair braiding, sewing etc.) and often improved their language skills. An example was given of one participant who initially didn't speak at all in the group, partly because she had very little

English. She brought her 8-year-old daughter to the training sessions to help with translations and by the end of the training had bonded with other women in the group and was very chatty.

*"I learned how to deal with people. How to prepare food and give it to them. Learned a lot after going outside house because I had to set the table, provide for different ethnicities. So had Pakistani people there. I made some Pakistani food. Nice experience. Different ladies doing different food from difference cuisine."*

Participant, Bradford

## 4.2 Comfort communicating with different groups

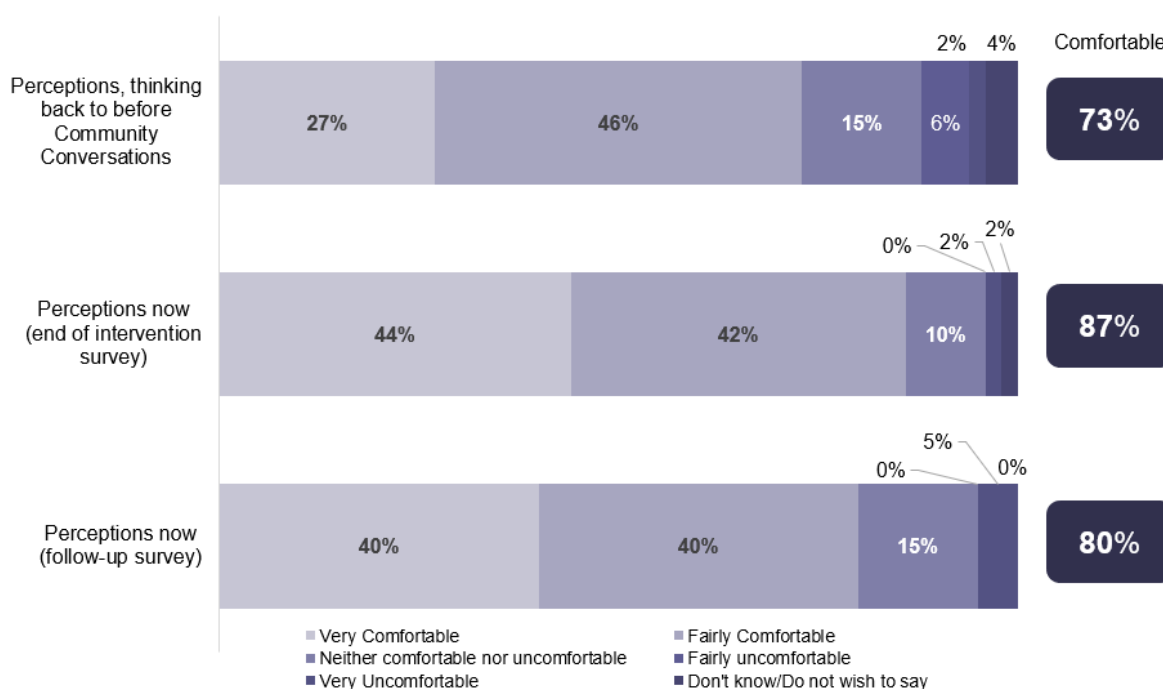
### COMFORT TALKING TO PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

Findings indicate that Community Conversations has had some impact on how comfortable participants feel when talking<sup>17</sup> to people from different backgrounds. In the end-intervention survey, Walsall and Bradford participants were asked to retrospectively report their comfort levels before they took part and their comfort levels now. Figure 4.1 shows that a quarter (73%) said they felt comfortable talking to people from different backgrounds before the intervention, but this rose to 87% saying they now felt comfortable. Comfort levels were also measured in the follow-up survey and stood at 80%.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Talking' was defined in the questionnaire as 'more than saying hello'

**Figure 4.1: Self-reported change in level of comfort when talking to people from different backgrounds<sup>18</sup>**



Base size: A11a: Please think back to before you took part in Bradford-as-1. How comfortable did you feel talking to people from different backgrounds to you (more than just saying hello)? End of Event Survey (52), A11b: Please think about how you feel now. How comfortable do you feel talking to people from different backgrounds to you (more than just saying hello)? End of Event (52), Follow-up (20\*\*)

These findings were reflected in qualitative research:

*"I recognise a change in me towards some people that I didn't feel so comfortable approaching because I felt their body language was saying you know... stay away. But after getting into groups with them and hearing their views I realise it's my bias, it's nothing to do with them."*

Participant, Blackburn with Darwen

*"I've got at least one new potential friend from a community that I have not engaged with at all since I've been here ... I hope going out with her will give me an insight into her community and their approach to things ... I find that really exciting ... three online sessions have helped me make a connection enough to make a friend."*

Participant, Walsall

Through the social action events in Bradford, a number of those interviewed also mentioned the benefit of meeting police officers in a more relaxed environment - this allowed the police officers to be seen as human. For example, at one event participants

<sup>18</sup> Charts presented in the report may not add up to 100% due to rounding and exclusion of responses under one per cent.

talked to a female, Asian police officer about how her job interacts with cultural expectations of her as a wife and mother. They also found out the number to call to speak to the police, something they were not previously aware of. One participant explained how she would shake when she saw the police, but after chatting with them, she no longer felt scared.

*"A lot of our members have been through personal difficulties so haven't always had a good relationship with the police, it was really good for them to be able to work with them and improve that."*

Volunteer, Bradford

## 4.3 Respecting differences between people from different backgrounds

### **RESPECTING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEOPLE IN THE AREA**

This was one of the measures with lower levels of initial agreement, with only just over half (56%) of baseline participants agreed that residents respect differences between other people in the area. This finding was unchanged for the end-intervention survey (54%), with a drop in agreement for the follow-up survey (just 38%).<sup>19</sup>

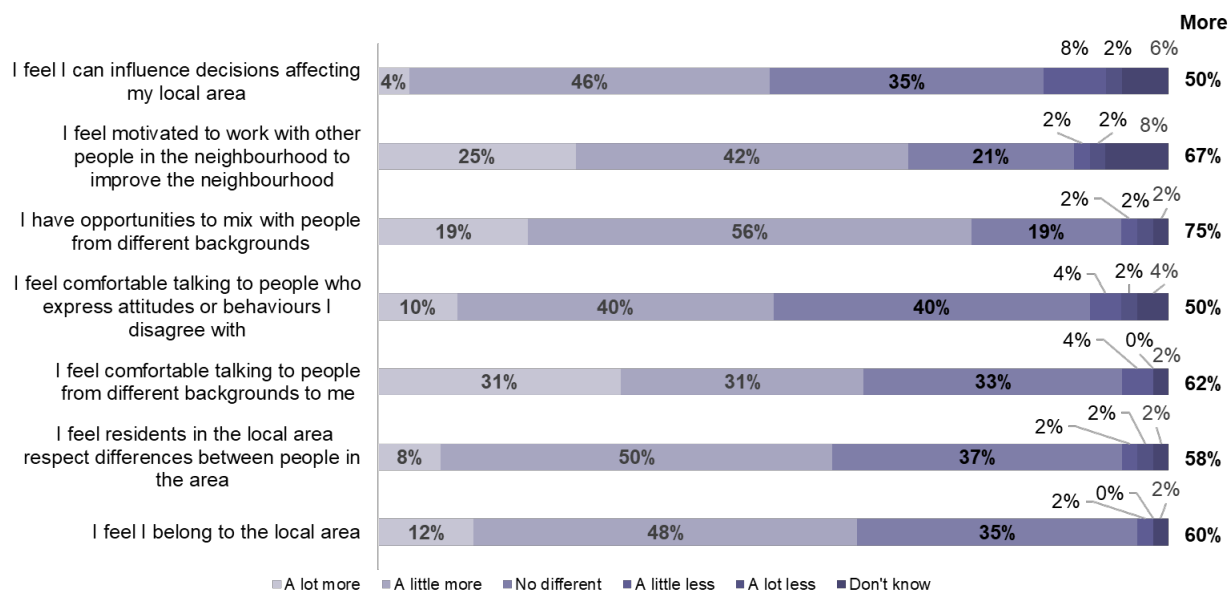
This is corroborated by the counterfactual impact assessment findings which found no discernible impact on this measure. Under half (45 per cent) of the Community Conversation participants in scope for this analysis agreed with statement, compared to six in ten (59 per cent) of the comparison group (after matching). By the follow up stage, there was very little difference between the participants and comparison group in terms of how much their views had changed. Participants saw their mean score move from 3.26 to 3.37 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with a higher score better), compared to a mean score change of 3.46 to 3.54 among the comparison group.

When asked more directly about the impact of Community Conversations on respect levels in the local area, Walsall and Bradford participants presented a more positive picture in the end-intervention survey; just over a half (58%) felt there was more respect albeit that response tended to the more muted category of a 'little more' rather than 'lot more'. See Figure 4.2.

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<sup>19</sup> Care needs to be taken with any interpretation around the follow-up survey due to the very low sample size.

**Figure 4.2: Self-reported change since the start of the intervention, for key metrics**



Base size: End of Event Survey (52)

Qualitative evidence shows that the community sessions and events provided an opportunity to start to understand each other more and thereby respect differences. As mentioned earlier in this report, anecdotal stories show how some misconceptions had been addressed and participants had started to develop a better understanding of those around them.

*"[The event] ... gives a better insight into how people feel about things."*

Participant, Blackburn with Darwen

*"Seeing everyone as a whole community, we can all go out and help each other. There are no right or wrong way for doing things, everyone has a perspective and you just need to be respectful of that."*

Participant, Walsall

*"There was conversation we had about identity, saying how we perceive ourselves, what do we label ourselves as in the UK, are we British, are we Indian, are we Chinese, how do we state ourselves or is it the label we have to accept from society was one of the discussions we had. Some of the views did clash on that point but we still respected each other."*

Participant, Walsall

## 4.4 Feeling empowered to make positive change

### PERSONALLY MOTIVATED TO WORK WITH OTHERS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TO IMPROVE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Across all three points of measure (baseline, end-intervention, follow-up), the vast majority of participants agree that they were personally motivated to work with others to improve the neighbourhood: 81% baseline, 85% end-intervention and 85% follow-up survey. Of note, many selected the stronger 'definitely agree' category to reflect their strength of

opinion. These high levels of agreement throughout mean that no significant change was observed on this metric.

However, survey respondents in Walsall and Bradford were also asked a separate post-intervention question about change over time, which found that Community Conversations was perceived as making a difference with two thirds (67%) claiming to be more motivated to work with others to improve the neighbourhood. See Figure 4.2 above.

In addition, this is the one outcome for which the counterfactual impact assessment findings suggest that Community Conversations did have a statistically significant impact (at least among the 20 Community Conversation participants for whom there is baseline and follow up data at a suitable interval to match to the comparison group). After matching the two groups in terms of their gender, age, ethnicity and religion, participants were much more likely than the matched comparison group to feel motivated at baseline (55 definitely agreed compared to 10 per cent of the matched comparison group). By the follow up stage, the proportion of participants who definitely agreed had risen from 55 to 70 per cent. The comparable change among the comparison group was from 10 to 12 per cent. Participants saw their mean score increase from 4.25 to 4.40 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with a higher score better), compared to a mean score decrease of 3.37 to 3.30 among the comparison group.

Positive findings were reflected in the qualitative depth interviews in both these areas, and to an extent with the event observations in Blackburn with Darwen, where two of the nine observed events included an element of encouraging volunteering and social action in the community, and in one of these events four people expressed interest to get involved beyond the event.

*“It’s inspired me to continue working within the community where possible to bring people back together.”*

Volunteer, Walsall

*“It’s been immensely empowering for me personally, being involved in something that brings people together like it has.”*

Volunteer, Walsall

*“I have got to know and understand the group more and this newfound dialogue can be built upon to develop understanding within communities. Hopefully more community get together events can be arranged for closer linking as well.”*

Participant, Walsall

*“Really good to get different groups together. Even if numbers were small, that’s all it takes to start building new connections between bigger groupings.”*

Participant, Walsall

Although there was some motivation for positive change, the qualitative research identified some barriers to converting motivation to action. In Bradford, co-ordinators hoped to continue one group to encourage women to invest in their skills and talents and potentially learn how to channel these skills into business, and for one group to continue as a neighbourhood forum. However, it was also recognised that when the funding runs out the

momentum can be lost, and they felt that having a structured programme that participants could progress onto would have been welcomed by project leads.

In Walsall when participants were asked whether they had been involved in any community activities since the programme, lockdown restrictions had been a barrier for most. One participant had continued to volunteer but as part of the community group they were already active in. The impact of lockdown restrictions makes it difficult to say whether the feelings of empowerment to make positive change would have otherwise translated into tangible action.

## 4.5 Increased sense of belonging to the local area

The metric, belonging to the local area, showed no change as a result of the intervention although there was some indicative uplift at the end of the intervention (62% baseline, 73% end-intervention, 65% follow-up)<sup>20</sup>. Reinforcing this, when Walsall and Bradford participants were directly asked about the impact of Community Conversations on their belonging to the area, three in every five (60%) answered positively (see Figure 4.2 above).

There are a few examples in the qualitative research that relate to this outcome. In Bradford, one participant mentioned that the guest speakers in the training programme had helped to understand their local area and that the role-playing scenarios had helped them to learn what was around and about in their local community.

Similarly, in Blackburn with Darwen, discussion themes and prompts which centred around what it means to live in a local area, and what is important to community members, were felt to create a good discussion between older and newer residents to the area about the community they share. Participants who had immigrated to the area were surprised other residents had issues with the area because they felt Blackburn with Darwen offered better opportunities and a better standard of life than their original country.

*“I think any opportunity for people from different areas of the town, different ethnicities to get together in a safe environment and really discuss issues openly without feeling intimidated is useful and helpful.”*

Participant, Blackburn with Darwen

## 4.6 Personally able to influence decisions in the local area

Being able to personally influence decisions in the local area was measured in two ways: ‘opportunities to express views’ and ‘being able to personally influence decisions within the local area.’

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<sup>20</sup> For Blackburn with Darwen this question was only asked in the follow-up survey amongst community members.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPRESS VIEWS ABOUT LOCAL COMMUNITY

Participants in Walsall and Bradford were asked to what extent they agreed that they have opportunities to express views about the local community. Three-fifths of participants agreed that they had the opportunity to express views at the start of the intervention (59%) and there was no significant change in this opinion across the intervention (63% at end-intervention, 55% in the follow-up survey<sup>21</sup>).

Despite no overarching change in this metric, qualitative interviews in Walsall captured the value participants felt being asked to share their opinions on the local area had, something that was not a regular occurrence for them.

*"There aren't many chances where people get to speak up. There isn't really another place where you can take your opinions on these issues. Community Dialogues gives you a chance to put your opinion or view in and suggest changes."*  
Participant, Walsall

*"It's good to be heard, I found myself opening up about issues that I think are important."*  
Participant, Walsall

## PERSONALLY CAN INFLUENCE DECISIONS IN LOCAL AREA

As well as asking about the opportunities to express views, participants in Walsall and Bradford were also asked whether they felt they could personally influence decisions affecting their local area. This was the lowest recorded metric in the baseline survey and only two in every five (39%) agreed that they can influence decisions. There was no change in this impact metric across the intervention (42% end-intervention, 50% follow-up survey<sup>22</sup>). By area, Walsall recorded an indicative uplift for influence and Bradford a fall, thereby creating a net no-change position.

As with many of the other measures, when participants were asked more directly whether they felt the intervention had affected their ability to influence local decisions, Figure 4.2 above shows that the picture looks more positive (50% citing 'more'). Again, however, this does not translate into a real change for the overarching impact measure.<sup>23</sup>

In Walsall there is some indication from the qualitative insight that that Community Conversations can play a part on the road to influencing decisions, with comments suggesting that the chance to share views and issues with people in the local area helps to create a shared appetite for change. Discussions in Walsall identified shared goals for the community and what small steps they could collectively take to make a difference. (No

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<sup>21</sup> Please note that the base size is extremely low, and this percentage is based on just 20 completes.

<sup>22</sup> Please note that the base size is extremely low, and this percentage is based on just 20 completes.

<sup>23</sup> There were no metrics relating to the ability to personally influence decisions in local area included in the comparison survey, so no impact assessment data can be included.



insight around this issue came through in the Bradford interviews<sup>24</sup>, or through the Blackburn with Darwen observations).

*“As a young person I feel like there is an opportunity to voice our concerns in the community and being able to represent them to get them involved too.”*

*Participant, Walsall*

*“It has helped me to reflect on myself and what I want from community as well as feeling privileged to hear others share personal stories.”*

*Participant, Walsall*

*“Everyone in the community appears to have similar fears and concerns and wish to work closer together. With this common goal, perhaps we can move forward and actually do it.”*

*Participant, Walsall*

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<sup>24</sup> As interviews were held with participants who were looking to improve language skills (and thereafter their work/social interactions), their motivations for participation in Community Conversations were more personally driven.

## 5. Conclusions

Community Conversations has been well received by local delivery partners and participants. Participants found the experience of Community Conversations positive, and there is a sense of pride and satisfaction from being involved, including for those volunteers involved in programme delivery. The conversations and community social events were seen, by both staff and participants, as providing a forum for open discussion, for connecting people and initiating change in views and opinion.

This evaluation measured outcomes for participants in six key areas relating to integration within local communities: meaningful social mixing; feeling comfortable communicating with different groups; respecting differences between others, feeling empowered to create positive change; having an increased sense of belonging and feeling personally able to influence decisions in the local area. Evaluation limitations mean that it is not possible to say with certainty whether or not the Community Conversations intervention works to achieve these outcomes. This does not necessarily mean that the programme does not work but rather it has not been shown to work.

Anecdotal stories and more direct questions provide evidence that Community Conversations has helped to change some participants' attitudes and behaviours. Evidence from the surveys, observations and interviews suggest the experience of Community Conversations has had some influence in the outcome areas of 'meaningful social mixing', particularly around feeling comfortable communicating with different groups of people (e.g. age group, ethnicity etc) about differing attitudes and beliefs. This is evidenced by two-thirds of Walsall and Bradford participants stating, in the end of intervention survey, that Community Conversations has made them feel more comfortable talking to people with different backgrounds. There are also stories from the qualitative interviews that show a better awareness and understanding of other cultures, and also more recognition of where similarities exist between different groups in their community.

There are also some positive indicators around increased *motivation* to create change in the community. These include the tentatively positive findings from the counterfactual impact assessment (albeit amongst a very small number of participants). Those involved (co-ordinators and participants) talk about the new connections or friendships that they have made through the programme, plus there are situations recorded where self-belief and confidence have been boosted through participation in social events. All of these are foundation areas towards empowerment and influence.

### 5.1 Practice implications

This section brings together the learnings about what conditions are needed for implementing and supporting the delivery of Community Conversations-style interventions i.e. those which involve bringing together local people from different backgrounds in a safe space to engage in facilitated debate.

#### **Drivers of positive outcomes:**

- **A well-facilitated and organised discussion, which creates a safe space for all to share their views without judgement.** Participants particularly mentioned the benefit of having a set subject for the session (such as cultural traditions and foods), and discussions that focused on the local area helped participants from different backgrounds find common ground.
- **Tailoring the activities to increase comfort and confidence amongst participants.** In Walsall, the opportunity for participants from the same groups to interact first within a familiar environment was felt to be beneficial, before moving to the conversations with mixed groups. In Bradford, the programme tapped into the skill set of a less confident group, and by allowing them to showcase their skills and creativity this led to pride and an increased confidence. Ice breakers were recognised as being important to prompt people to comfortably engage together and share experiences. Also, the inclusion of guest professionals (such as police officers) in the more informal setting of these events was well received and helped to build relationships and break down barriers between the community and ‘authorities’ like the police, local government.

#### **Aspects to consider in future designs:**

- **Increasing the lead-in times for recruitment and creative recruitment approaches to target individuals or groups with limited existing community engagement and limited exposure to other communities.** Participants’ initial involvement in Community Conversations mainly came from community groups they were involved in or connected to. To an extent, this worked successfully and was used to target very specific groups. For instance, in Bradford there was a deliberate agenda to reach women to boost their confidence and the route via an ESOL class was felt to be successful. However, there is some acknowledgement that recruiting from existing community groups did have unintended consequences of drawing people from more similar backgrounds than intended and it introduced a bias towards those already more community minded, thus reducing the opportunity to change attitudes and beliefs.
- **Ensuring there is clarity at the start of the project about the purpose, explaining the wider community benefits, and the time commitment required.** In Walsall there was recognition that the status and remit of the Faith Belief Forum helped to gain buy-in from community groups, especially those described as less often engaged in community events. To build on this learning, future interventions should make sure to highlight the delivery organisation’s offer, credentials and ethos as a selling point, as well as being more clear about the purpose and content of the programme. In a few instances in Bradford, it did not always feel explicitly clear to the participants the purpose of the project, and often they joined because of personal rather than community benefits.
- **Tailoring training and events to those for whom English is not their main language and ensure flexibility to adapt and tailor materials to the make-up of the participant group, taking into account their skillset, language capabilities and the specific problems/issues in the area.** In a few cases during Community Conversations, it was noted that the presentations were too formal or intimidating for participants, for example the use of PowerPoint felt ‘corporate’ and a bit too serious and business-like.

- **Blend and optimise the value of both face-to-face and online delivery channels to reach the widest possible group of participants.** Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the Community Conversations had to be delivered on-line; there was understanding of the situation and a general sense that the online delivery worked well. Co-ordinators in one area felt a hybrid approach to intervention delivery could be a good option moving forward, leveraging the strengths of online and in-person: Online to reach 'busier/digitally engaged' people who are less able to find the time for an in-person session, and face-to-face to reach the digitally excluded community members.
- **The number of and length of sessions needs to be carefully balanced to allow the time for ideas and opinions to be discussed and challenged, whilst also minimising burden on participants.** In Bradford there were six training sessions which, on reflection, was felt to bias participation to an older non-working profile because of the ongoing time commitment. In addition, some event sessions were felt to be too short (at 60 minutes) to delve into the root of an opinion or view, with the unintentional outcome that this sometimes acted to authorise a belief rather than challenge it.
- **Delivery partners should aim for events to have a mix, or equal representations, of community groups. Where this is not fully achieved, facilitators need to adopt techniques to allow time for all participants to speak.** For example, calling upon individuals to share their view with the group and posing open questions to the group. For both Blackburn with Darwen and Walsall, not all the community conversation groups had a good split or mixed representation from different communities, which lessened the ability for diverse views to be shared. There were also moments in the conversations where the opinions and views of those who were more most confident speakers were given more focus, meaning that there was not always a true balance of opinions voiced. There were also some groups where there was a high number of non-participant attendees that observed the events, which can negatively impact on the sense of a 'safe and shared space', particularly where observers are 'professionals' such as councillors, or even researchers.
- **Facilitators should be trained in techniques to handle difficult conversations/topics, and provided with structured channels to network, share ideas and seek support.** The nature of topics discussed in mixed-community group settings meant that sensitive topics or personally upsetting experiences sometimes emerged that had to be dealt with. There was also a tendency for some participants to give what they perceived to be 'correct' or 'appropriate' responses or for some participants to try to dominate the conversations. Some facilitators proactively connected off-line to share experiences and soundboard off their counterparts. Use of good techniques were observed with facilitators playing 'devil's advocate' to role play critical views, and reminding individuals to speak about personal experiences and not in generalisations.
- **There should be formal plans for methods to remain involved and to take action, to ensure the momentum is maintained amongst participants after events have ended.** Although there was some motivation for positive change, there was limited evidence to suggest that participants have been able to act on their intention to change in their community, although pandemic restrictions potentially played a part here. Establishing more formal channels for people to connect after the event to build on

relationships that have started to form, or to be signposted to further resources, could help build the relationships that initiate through Community Conversations.

## 5.2 Policy implications

This evaluation has not been able to prove that the Community Conversations model of intervention had a significant, positive net impact on the intended outcomes. However, overall the evidence gathered suggests that it is well-received by staff and participants as an informal and non-threatening approach to bringing individuals and communities together. The key implications for any future model include:

- A key assumption underpinning the expected outcomes is that diverse people attend the events (to enable mixing amongst people with different views, attitudes and experiences), which was not fully borne out in this version of delivery. To fully test whether this approach can achieve these outcomes, **any similar intervention must strike a balance between capitalising on the authority and reach of existing community organisations / leaders and bringing in people who would not otherwise have engaged** and who can effect change in their area in new and different ways.
- A further success criterion is that participants are willing and able to share their diverse views and life experiences; this is achieved through the creation of a safe space and effective facilitation. Involving community members as volunteer facilitators has been positively received and helped to reach a range of participants. But **it is critical that facilitators have the right support and skills to facilitate sensitive topics and appropriately challenge extreme views**. Failing to do so risks the unintended consequence that views are reinforced rather than challenged.
- It is important to recognise that the Community Conversations model is most likely to deliver 'small steps' – it is unlikely to shift a mindset, opinion or behaviour overnight. It has not been possible to determine whether a longer intervention brings additional benefits to a single, one-off activity. However, **findings suggest that for any shift in attitudes and behaviours there needs to be sufficient time for their foundations and roots to be fully explored**.
- Drawing on the above, whilst recognising the need for local tailoring and flexibility, **for any future model DLUHC should consider providing a clearer framework for intervention design** (e.g. multiple recruitment channels, training and support for volunteers, minimum duration, social action requirement) to be adopted across areas. Key areas of local interpretation could then be the target profile of participants, balance of in person and online, and content of discussion.

## 5.3 Evaluation implications

The issues experienced in this evaluation have been laid out in this report, many of which were identified as risks from the start of designing the Community Conversations intervention and evaluation. The evaluation team at IFF and DLUHC worked collaboratively to mitigate these risks as much as possible but they were exacerbated by COVID-19. The pandemic was the setting against which Community Conversations was rolled-out and it further limited the size and scope of the intervention.

- However, there remains value in having attempted a net impact assessment on an intervention of this type and there are a number of useful learnings that should be considered in any future similar evaluation: The evaluation design should comprise a blend of observations, interviews and surveys to create a rounded view of impact and underpinning delivery.
- Given the nature of the outcome measures and the profile of participants, it is unlikely that it would be possible to form a counterfactual group using administrative data. Surveys are therefore likely to be the main evaluation tool. To achieve a robust impact analysis of an achieved survey sample of participant and comparison groups (response rate in the region of 10-30%, dependent on mode), will require significantly higher numbers to participate in future programmes.
- To achieve strong engagement with the evaluation (and maximise survey completion), the evaluation tools must be designed into the Community Conversations package. It needs to be clear to facilitators how survey materials should be introduced and distributed, and it needs to be made explicit to participants that feedback through the survey is part of their commitment to taking part in Community Conversations. The option to translate materials into relevant languages is likely to also support engagement.
- Careful positioning of the research will also be vital with this (often vulnerable) target audience, including explaining its purpose, the requirement from them and how it will be beneficial. This includes considering how to make survey questions meaningful and comprehensible for respondents, and focused on a limited set of relevant and realistic outcome metrics that are consistent across areas, projects and timepoints.

# Appendix

## A. Demographic profile of participants

This annex presents the profile of locally delivered events and their participants as captured over the course of the evaluation. Management information was drawn at a particular date, after which further events may have taken place across areas, reaching further participants.

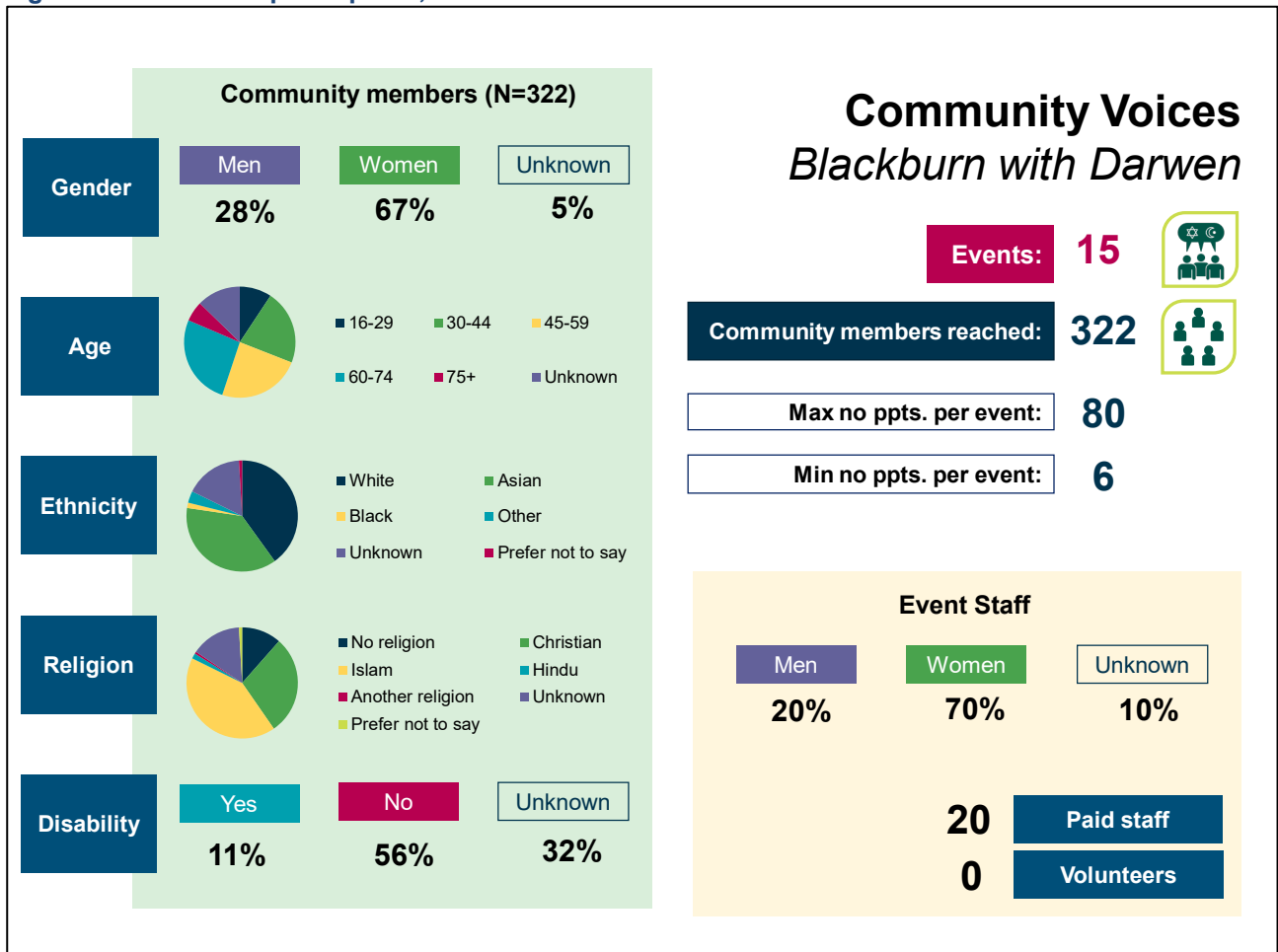
### **BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN**

Blackburn with Darwen ran 15 events reaching 322 community members, coming close to their intention of reaching 360 community members. These were not unique individuals, and this number includes individuals who attended more than one event.

Of these, two thirds were women (67%) and just over a quarter were men (28%). Two of the events were women only and the majority of these attendees were Muslim (with one of these having 80 attendees); this explains the larger proportion of women than men overall, and the greater proportion of participants with Islam as their religion.

Most participants were White (40%) or Asian (37%) and the largest religious group were Muslim (42%), followed by Christian (29%) with 11% reporting to have no religion. Over half of participants (56%) were over the age of 45. One in ten had a disability (11%), although around a third of participants chose not to declare their disability status.

Figure A.1: Profile of participants, Blackburn with Darwen



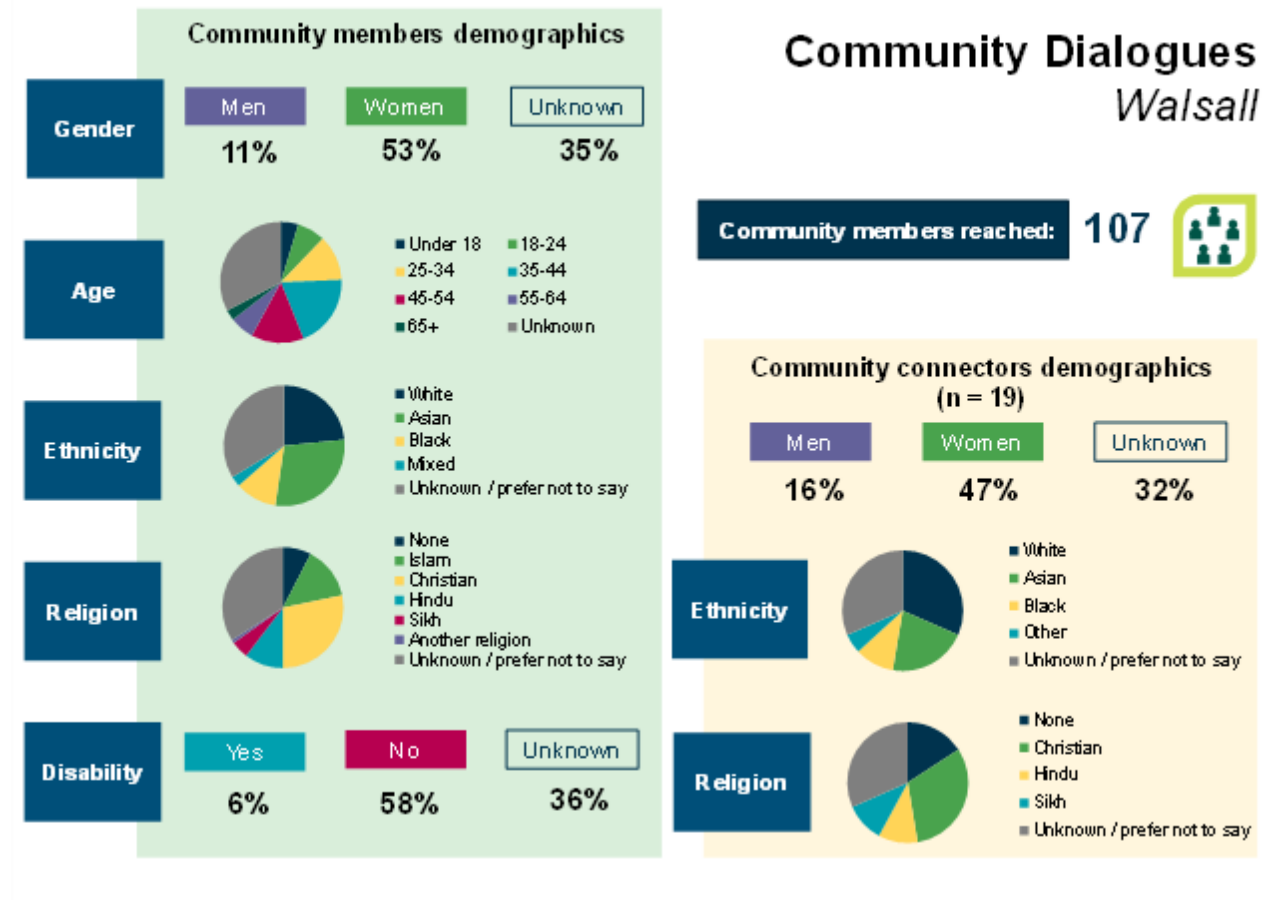
## WALSALL

Over 33 sessions Walsall reached 107 different community members. Of these, approximately half were women (53%) and around a tenth were men (11%) with the gender of the remaining third (32%) being unknown. A range of people from different ethnicities and religions took part, although most participants were Asian (29%) or White (23%), with the largest religious groups being Christianity (28%), followed by Islam (14%). All age groups were represented within the sessions with the most common age group being 35-44 years old (20%). One in twenty participants reported having a disability (6%), though around a third of participants chose not to declare their disability status (36%).

‘Community Connectors’ were identified in each community group to help organise and facilitate the sessions. These 19 Connectors received training on how to run the sessions. The profile of Connectors is set out on the right hand side of Figure A.2 and is broadly similar to the overall profile of community members.



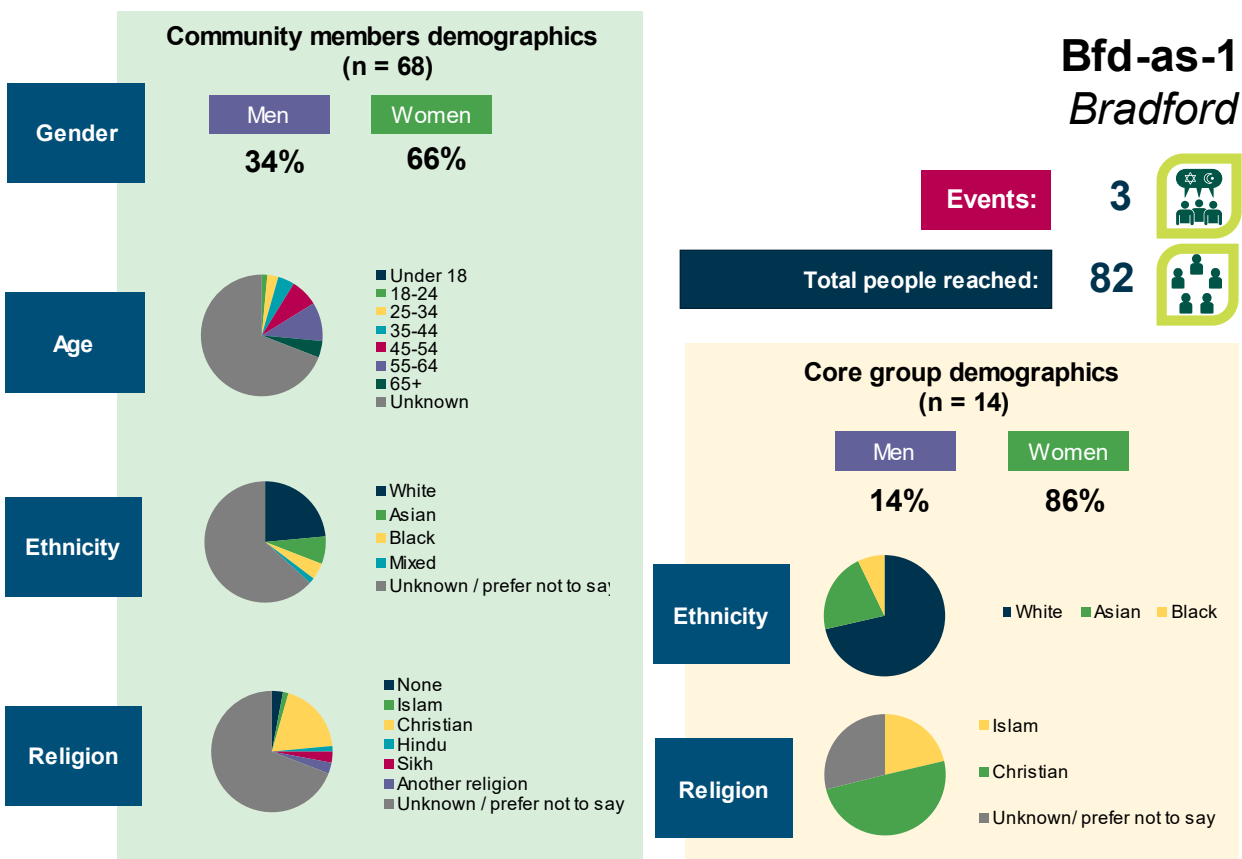
Figure A.2: Profile of participants, Walsall



## BRADFORD

The management information indicates that the three events in Bradford reached 82 people; 14 core group and 68 community members, summarised in Figure 4. Across the three events, two thirds of community members were women (66%) and a third (34%) were men. The age, ethnicity and religion profile were generally not recorded and therefore the profile of community members cannot be reported on with any certainty. That said, by age the most common bands were 45-54 (7%) and 55-64 (10%). The most common ethnicity recorded was white (24%) and the most common religion was Christian (19%). Whether community members had a disability or not was not recorded.

Figure A.3: Profile of participants, Bradford



## B. Evaluation Methods

### B.1 Qualitative research

#### Blackburn with Darwen

Interviewers from IFF Research attended nine Community Conversations events between September and November 2019 and conducted observations of the sessions.

#### Walsall

A total of six community connectors took part in an online focus group in April of 2021.. Interviews with eight Walsall participants were conducted remotely using telephone or video call software in March and April of 2021.

#### Bradford

Five participants from Bradford Community Conversation events were interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of June. There were also 2 mini-group discussions; one with project coordinators and one with the Bradford area leads. These took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2021 respectively.

### B.2 Survey research

#### Blackburn with Darwen

Community members who took part in the Community Conversations event were asked to complete the start and end of event survey on iPads at the event by researchers from IFF Research. Follow up surveys were then conducted on the phone with respondents who had consented to being recontacted.

#### Bradford and Walsall

Community members taking part in sessions in Bradford and Walsall completed the start and end of event surveys on paper in their first and final sessions respectively. Follow up surveys were then completed over the phone and online, via an email invitation, with participants who had consented to being recontacted.

The numbers of survey completes in each area are shown in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1– Survey completes at each stage by area.**

Survey completes	Blackburn with Darwin	Bradford	Walsall	Total
No. of participants	322	82	107	511
Start of Event	110	35	47	192 (38%)
End of Event	80	23	29	135 (70%)
Follow up	20	2	18	41 (30%)
Total	210	60	98	368

### B.3 Counterfactual impact assessment

To isolate the effect of participation in Community Conversations, a number of the same survey questions were asked as part of a longitudinal two-wave ‘comparison’ survey

commissioned by IFF and fielded by YouGov among its online panel members. By comparing the change in attitudes and beliefs of Community Conversation participants against those of the YouGov comparison group, we can test whether Community Conversations has an effect on people's attitudes and beliefs that would not have happened if they had not participated. Three outcomes relevant to Community Conversations were measured in the comparison survey:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with: 'I feel comfortable talking to people who express attitudes or behaviours I disagree with'
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that residents in this local area respect differences between other people in the area?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are personally motivated to work with other people in your neighbourhood to improve the neighbourhood?

A decision had to be made about the optimal time interval between the baseline and follow-up fieldwork for the comparison group, given the differences across the three IAP areas in relation to the length of time between the start of the intervention (and collection of baseline data) and the follow up surveys. In the end, the 'best fit' was to have a baseline and three-month follow up for the comparison survey. The 'baseline' survey was carried out among 407 panel members in early April 2021. Three months later, these panel members were approached to take part in a follow up survey, which was completed by 288 members.

The original plan was to carry out the comparison survey within the IAP areas (among those who had not taken part in Community Conversations). However, the YouGov panel did not include sufficient numbers of members in these areas alone. As a result, the comparison survey was expanded to cover similar areas such as Birmingham and Greater Manchester.

## **Methods for assessing impact**

### **1. Matching the participant and comparison samples**

In order to make the participant and comparison samples comparable, the comparison sample was weighted so that it matches the participant sample on a few broadly defined characteristics, the small sample of participants precluding the use of more detail: age-group (a binary split: up to 55; 55 and over); gender; ethnic group (white; non-white); religion (none; Christian; other). The matching method used was propensity score matching. That is, a logistic regression model was fitted to the data with a binary group status as the dependent variable, and age, gender, ethnicity, and religion as the predictors. The probability (or propensity) of being a participant was saved per person and the comparison group weighted to give the same distribution of propensity scores per group. Matching, in addition, on baseline outcomes was considered but the small sample size of participants led to an unstable propensity score model.

### **2. Calculating mean scores per outcome**

The outcome variables are summarised using mean scores. In calculating these means the following scores are used, with positive statements being given higher scores:

Definitely agree: 5  
Tend to agree: 4  
Neither agree nor disagree: 3  
Tend to disagree: 2  
Definitely disagree: 1

Mean change scores are simply the average of the change scores between baseline and follow-up per person.

### **3. Statistical testing**

Statistical tests have been used to test:

1. Whether the mean change score per group is significantly different to zero. This is a simple paired t-test, but the test accounts for the weighting of the comparison group.
2. Whether the mean change score is significantly different between the participant and comparison groups. This is based on a regression, and controls for any baseline difference in the mean scores between the two group. Again, the test accounts for the weighting of the comparison group.

