



Home Office

Building a Stronger Britain Together

Evaluation of BSBT delivery in Tower Hamlets

November 2020



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides findings from an evaluation of the Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT) funded activity within the London borough of Tower Hamlets¹. The Home Office wanted to develop a more in-depth understanding of how the BSBT programme was working to tackle extremism at the local level. There was also interest in exploring the relationship between BSBT activity and, where possible, other work being carried out locally to counter extremism.

Tower Hamlets in context

Tower Hamlets has some of the most deprived wards in the UK², particularly in the East of the borough³. Rising housing costs have led to rapidly changing areas in Tower Hamlets, with people vulnerable to displacement no longer feeling connected to their local area. Stakeholders, project leads and beneficiaries have cited that this has generated feelings of social inequality and segregation of communities. In this context, the need to foster **a sense of belonging and civic participation at the local level** to reduce the risk of individuals becoming marginalised was evident. The main extremism concerns in the borough related to far-right and Islamist extremism. Additionally, there has been a steady increase in reported hate crime⁴ within Tower Hamlets, particularly since the EU referendum in 2016⁵. Influenced by a perceived lack of understanding of other cultures and beliefs and tolerance towards others, evidence suggests that BSBT activity has had a positive impact on **fewer people holding attitudes, beliefs and feelings that oppose shared values** and the development of **more resilient communities**.

What has BSBT achieved?

Although it has not been possible to make a definitive assessment of the impact BSBT has had within Tower Hamlets, the evaluation does indicate that BSBT funded activity made a **positive contribution** to addressing some of the key extremism-related issues affecting

¹ Funding activity includes a Community Co-ordinator (CC), network activity, 8 projects – Building Positive Futures Together (Bromley-by-Bow), Schools partnership for empathy based on mutual respect (Building Bridges for Peace), Empowering Women through Community Netball (England Netball), Catalyst Leadership Programme (Dawatul Islam), Inspiring Youth Leaders (Rio Ferdinand Foundation), Game Changers (The Feast), Belonging and Participation through Local Heritage (Toynbee Hall), Youth Empowerment Programme (Spotlight/Poplar HARCA)

² The average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score measure shows that Tower Hamlets is the 7th most deprived local authority district in England out of 326 local authority districts.

³ Lansbury, Mile End, Bromley North and Bromley South.

⁴ Hate Crime is defined as any incident that is perceived by the victim or any other person to be committed due to a person's religion, belief or disability (MOPAC, 2020)

⁵ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8537/>

the borough. Through building trust and integration amongst communities, BSBT has made a positive contribution towards addressing feelings of **social exclusion and marginalisation** in Tower Hamlets. Additionally, participants felt **less socially excluded** and their **perception of the local area and sense of belonging to their community significantly improved** as a result of taking part in BSBT activities.

BSBT participants reported **positive changes in building resilience and improved leadership and critical thinking skills**, which suggests that funded projects made some progress in equipping participants with the skills to **challenge negative viewpoints and extremist narratives**.

Evidence from grant-funded projects indicated that promoting an open dialogue between people of different religions and beliefs in the community had increased participants' **understanding of different faiths** in the borough. There was evidence from one project that engagement in BSBT activities had enabled participants to **feel more connected** with their community and help to generate new friendships. Most BSBT supported activity focussed on young people (13-18 years old), with the evaluation also finding limited evidence to suggest that BSBT contributed to addressing extremism issues **amongst adults aged 21 or over** in the borough.

Further work is needed to **increase integration amongst migrants** and address the increase in **extremist behaviours**, such as far-right, Islamist extremism and wider harms, such as FGM and Forced Marriage in Tower Hamlets. None of BSBT grant-funded projects sought to address these issues.

Drivers and enablers: what worked in Tower Hamlets?

The evaluation identified elements of delivery which have worked well to promote community cohesion and to a lesser extent addressed counter extremism in Tower Hamlets.

- **Organisations using tried and tested project designs delivered as expected** and required less support throughout the project lifecycle, especially around recruitment.
- **Engaging young people through effective delivery.** Findings from the BSBT grant-funded projects highlighted the benefits of engaging young people and equipping them with the skills to counter negative attitudes and behaviours. Facilitated by experienced staff, BSBT activities (workshops, trainings, classroom-based sessions) provided opportunities for young people to learn about other cultures and beliefs, aiding the development of increased tolerance and respect towards others.
- **Bringing people from different communities together** and supporting them to develop and lead community-focussed initiatives, reduced feelings of isolation, perceptions of difference and inequality, and susceptibility to extremist narratives.

Key considerations for enhancing BSBT delivery in Tower Hamlets

- **Fostering better local partnerships in Tower Hamlets.** The evaluation found limited evidence of partnership working between the BSBT-supported organisations in Tower Hamlets. This contrasted with the partnerships and networks that existed between projects that were not funded by BSBT, showing that such collaboration was possible in Tower Hamlets. Improving the support to develop networks of BSBT-supported organisations at a local level can help facilitate shared learning and partnership working.
- **Alignment of funded delivery to local needs.** Evidence collected through this evaluation suggested that BSBT-funded delivery in Tower Hamlets could have been better aligned to local extremism needs. The evaluation found few explicit references to the types of extremism needs identified in Tower Hamlets.. Stakeholders highlighted gaps in delivering counter-extremism interventions specifically aimed at tackling far-right and Islamist extremism, despite both being key extremism issues for the borough.
- **Providing greater support to organisations targeting those most at risk .** Organisations that attempted to reach beneficiaries most at risk of harms and extremism faced most challenges in identifying and engaging relevant participants. To do so effectively required relevant delivery experience, supported by skilled staff to better understand how to mitigate potential issues (such as recruitment, staff absence and sourcing appropriate partners to support delivery). Organisations targeting such groups may require more tailored support (from the Community Coordinator and the BSBT team more broadly) at a local and national level in developing effective approaches to engaging vulnerable audiences.
- **Clearer definition around the role and remit of the Community Coordinator.** Grant-funded projects were often unaware of the support that could be provided by the Community Coordinator in Tower Hamlets. A local network, facilitated by the Community Coordinator, could be positioned to:
 - support the development of local partnerships between funded activity;
 - develop organisations' understanding of delivering counter-extremism work in relation to local community needs; and
 - share learning amongst organisations.
- **Language is an important consideration.** Most BSBT-supported organisations in Tower Hamlets addressed problems that were precursors to extremism - such as community cohesion and social integration. As a result, they avoided using the terms 'counter-extremism' or 'extremism' in their communications about project activities. The Home Office should consider increasing shared language used by different organisations to support delivery of counter-extremism objectives, including indirect language used to effectively engage end beneficiaries.

1. Counter extremism context in Tower Hamlets

1.1 Introduction

Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT), launched by the Home Office in 2016, is an integrated programme of work designed to counter extremism⁶. It supports civil society and community organisations across England and Wales to create more resilient communities, stand up to extremism in all its forms and offer vulnerable individuals a positive alternative, regardless of background. It has three overarching objectives, which are to achieve:

- Fewer people holding attitudes, beliefs and feelings that oppose shared values;
- An increased sense of belonging and civic participation at the local level; and
- More resilient communities.

An independent evaluation of BSBT, undertaken by Ipsos MORI, was commissioned in 2016 in order to assess the effectiveness of the BSBT programme activity against its intended outcomes and to understand the efficacy of the processes involved in delivering BSBT.

As part of this evaluation, the Home Office wanted to acquire a more in-depth understanding of how the BSBT programme works to tackle extremism at the local level. The evaluation was designed to assess the delivery of BSBT across three local authority areas⁷ in order to:

- Generate an increased understanding of the local context and extremism issues in those areas;
- Explore the relationship between BSBT activity, local extremism challenges and, where possible, other work being carried out in the area; and
- Understand the range of BSBT-supported activity in each area and the effectiveness of that activity in working towards the intended outcomes.

⁶ The government's strategic approach to countering extremism defined extremism as "the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs." The strategy, covering all forms of extremism, violent and non-violent, in 2015 set out perceived drivers of extremist narratives and behaviours and the harms that can be caused by such actions.

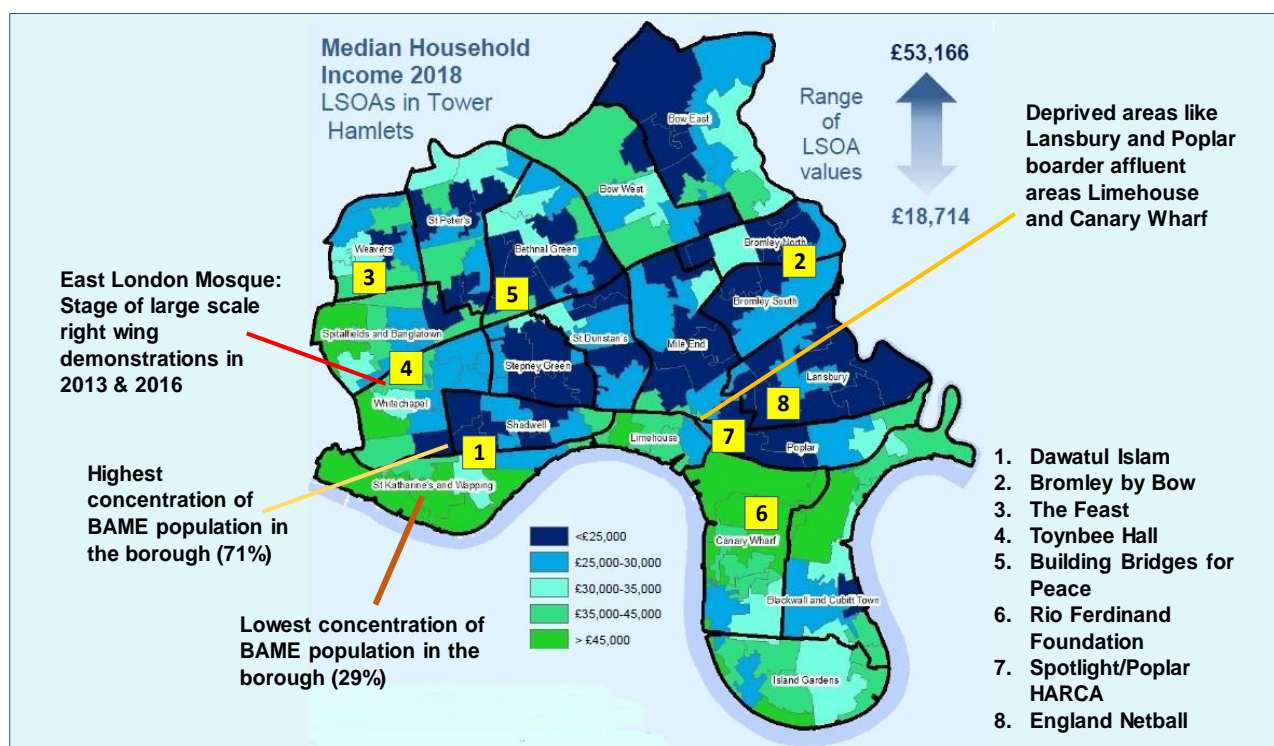
⁷ The three local authority areas selected were Stoke-on-Trent, Birmingham and Tower Hamlets.

This report summarises the evaluation findings on the contribution of BSBT-supported activity in countering extremism in Tower Hamlets. This chapter outlines the context of Tower Hamlets in which BSBT funded activity was delivered.

1.2 The Tower Hamlets context

Tower Hamlets is a London borough located in East London. Formed in 1965, it merged the former metropolitan boroughs of Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green. The borough has a high proportion of deprived neighbourhoods and a diverse ethnic profile. Economically, some elements of the borough have undergone a major shift in recent decades, namely the redevelopment of Canary Wharf in the 1980s, creating the financial hub of London⁸.

Figure 1.1: Illustrated map of Tower Hamlets (Tower Hamlets 2018d)



Sociodemographic characteristics and ethnic profile

Tower Hamlets is the eleventh largest borough of London, with a population of 308,000 in 2017, an increase of 54,000 from the 2011 Census (ONS, 2017a). The median age of people living in the borough is 31 years old, this compares to equivalent figures of 35 years for London and 40 years old for England as a whole (ONS, 2017a). Only nine per cent of Tower Hamlets residents are aged 60 or over (the lowest of all local authorities in the UK), compared to 16 per cent in London and 23 per cent in England (ONS, 2017a). This demographic profile may explain why BSBT funded projects predominantly focused on engaging young people in the borough, as was also the case for non-BSBT funded activity (as will be discussed further in this report).

⁸ Found at <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/One-TH/Part-II-The-economy-employment-skills-and-opportunities.pdf>. No date of publication available.

The ethnic profile of the Tower Hamlets population has changed in recent decades and reflects a much more diverse profile than across England & Wales as a whole. The borough has a large Asian population, accounting for 41 per cent of all residents compared to 8 per cent across England and Wales. Residents born in Bangladesh are the single largest migrant group in Tower Hamlets, representing 15 per cent of the borough's population and accounting for 36 per cent of the migrant population (ONS, 2011).

Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion of Muslim residents of all local authority areas in England at 38 per cent, compared to equivalent figures of 13 per cent for London and five per cent for England as a whole (ONS, 2011). The borough has the lowest proportion of Christian residents of all local authorities in England at 30 per cent, compared to 49 per cent across London and 59 per cent across England (ONS, 2011). Historically, Tower Hamlets has experienced substantial international migration, particularly from Muslim residents, contributing to nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of the borough's population growth from 2005 – 2015 (ONS, 2016). Stakeholders interviewed spoke of this increasing demand for both housing and employment in the borough, which in turn raised tensions between the immigrant community and 'settled' population. This has resulted in Far-Right groups holding a number of demonstrations in Tower Hamlets, due to the borough being viewed as the central pillar of Muslim immigration in England.

Deprivation and Inequality

The 2015 IMD highlighted that deprivation was widespread in Tower Hamlets, with more than half (58%) of the borough's 144 Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs)⁹ being in the most deprived 20 per cent of LSOAs in England. Geographically, the most highly deprived areas – which fall into the five per cent most deprived LSOAs nationally – are mainly clustered in the East of the borough in the Lansbury and Mile End area. Tower Hamlets has almost twice as many households living below the poverty line (39 per cent) compared to England and Wales (21 per cent) (Tower Hamlets, 2018c).

Analysis of the 2015 Indices of Deprivation (IMD) data shows that high levels of deprivation in the area relate mainly to issues with housing, such as overcrowding, homelessness and housing affordability. There is evident disparity in levels of income across the borough. Wards such as Canary Wharf and Limehouse have high median household incomes (higher than the Greater London average), whilst being bordered by wards that display some of the lowest median household incomes in London (Poplar and Lansbury).

Existing research has highlighted the link between deprivation and economic inequalities and extremism (Bellis & Hardcastle, 2019). It has been suggested that communities who feel marginalised or have limited access to education, health services and employment are more susceptible to extremist narratives. Extremist activities can potentially provide an outlet to vent their frustrations and feelings of social discontentment (Wilson & Atacamite,

⁹ A Lower Layer Super Output Areas are a geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales.

2017). Stakeholders interviewed as part of the evaluation highlighted the inequalities that now exist in parts of the borough, noting how it can generate feelings of exclusion amongst those living in poorer areas.

“Wealth-wise, the borough is quite diverse. You can be in Canary Wharf or St Katherine’s Docks, then walk for ten minutes and be in one of the poorest areas in London... it can be hard for those to see that sort of disparity” Stakeholder

Historical interventions in Tower Hamlets through Prevent

Tower Hamlets has been identified as a Prevent priority area (Tier 1). This is partly due to the high number of terrorist offences taking place in the borough¹⁰. Between 1998 and 2015, Tower Hamlets and the neighbouring boroughs of Newham and Waltham Forest combined accounted for 38% of all terrorist offences in London and 16% in the UK (Stuart, 2017). Data on Prevent referrals at borough level is not available, but of the 5,738 individuals referred to the programme between April 2018 and March 2019, 915 (16 per cent) were from London (Home Office, 2019). Similarly, 231 (18 per cent) of the 1,320 individuals discussed at a Channel panel in 2016/17 were from London.

Key extremism-related challenges in Tower Hamlets

The Home Office counter extremism prioritisation model considers data on racially and religiously aggravated offences, community tensions, far-right and Islamist extremist related-events and cases referred to Channel¹¹. This model has identified Tower Hamlets as a counter extremism priority area.

Desk research to inform the evaluation plan and interviews with the Tower Hamlets BSBT Community Coordinator, Prevent Lead, and other local stakeholders have identified a range of key extremism-related challenges for Tower Hamlets, some of which are closely linked.

- **Rising tensions with the far-right:** The second wave of Bangladeshi immigration in the 1970s saw the rise of opposition, in the form of demonstrations, in the Shadwell and Whitechapel areas from organisations such as the National Front and British National Party. They claimed that immigration to Tower Hamlets had resulted in increased competition for both housing and employment in the area (Goodwin, 2011). This caused substantial friction amongst the community, polarising individuals principally from the Islamist community who felt they were victims of prejudice and who lacked a sense of belonging (Tower Hamlets, 2018d). The East London Mosque (highlighted on figure 1.8) has been a target of demonstrations from far-right groups from outside the borough who promote Islamophobia and cite

¹⁰ Defined as the use or threat of action, designed to influence any international government organisation or to intimidate the public. It must also be for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause (cps.gov.uk)

¹¹ Channel is part of the Prevent strategy. The process is a multi-agency approach to identify and provide support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

immigrants in the community as increasing competitiveness around the labour and housing markets.

- **Rising Islamophobia:** In the period from December 2018 to December 2019, Tower Hamlets had the second highest number of Islamophobic offences in London, highlighting increasing tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim residents.
- **Islamist Extremism:** Viewed in part as a response to the rise in far-right demonstrations and increase in Islamophobic offences, more cases of Islamist extremism have been reported, with one stakeholder citing it as the most prevalent issue in the borough along with the rise of the far-right.

“I think with the ‘far Right and Islamist Extremism’, it’s like a chicken and egg situation. I’m not sure which came first but I think one spurs the other on, so you have this perpetual cycle of extremism in the area.” Stakeholder

- **Rise in Hate Crimes around the EU-Exit Referendum:** Tower Hamlets experienced a rise of 52 per cent rise in hate crimes¹² from January 2016 to December 2016 (compared to a 44 per cent rise nationally¹³), around the same period as the EU-Exit Referendum in June 2016.
- **Forced Marriage and FGM:** Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) were identified by the Community Coordinator as forms of extremism within Tower Hamlets. These issues are tackled by the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) team as part of the No Place for Hate programme¹⁴. Of the 1,196 cases that the Forced Marriage Unit gave advice or support to in 2017, 351 (29 per cent) were in London, the highest proportion in the UK¹⁵.
- **Inequality, Marginalisation and Poverty:** Issues such as inequality, marginalisation and poverty have been cited as potential drivers of extremism (Allan et al, 2016) (Bellis & Hardcastle, 2019). Individuals and communities can view extremism narratives to vent their discontentment and frustration with their socio-economic situation, making them more susceptible to extremist narratives.
- **Lack of integration:** As an illustration of potential lack of integration of some residents into the wider community, over one-quarter (27 per cent) of Bangladeshi adults living in the borough have been found to have limited English¹⁶. Research

¹² Hate Crime is defined as any incident that is perceived by the victim or any other person to be committed due to a person’s religion, belief or disability (MOPAC, 2020)

¹³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8537/>

¹⁴ See paragraph 2.2.5 for more information about ‘No Place for Hate’ (NPFH).

¹⁵ For context, London accounts for 14% of the overall population of the United Kingdom (ONS, 2019).

¹⁶ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Diversity/Language_proficiency_in_Tower_Hamlets.pdf

has also highlighted that migrant Bangladeshi communities have been found to keep strong socio-spatial ties with their country of origin (Gardiner, 2002).

Current and historic counter-extremism interventions

Tower Hamlets council is also currently delivering its **Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Plan (2017 – 2021)**, which aims to make Tower Hamlets a safer and more cohesive place to live. The priorities for the plan are to tackle anti-social behaviour, violence, hate crime and extremism (Tower Hamlets, 2016). The CSP plan has grouped hate crime, community cohesion and extremism together as one priority, due to the links between these three issues and their potential impact of the wider community (Tower Hamlets, 2016). The plan is being implemented by a range of CSP sub-groups relating to each of the themes set out in the strategy. In relation to hate crime, community cohesion and extremism, the sub-groups are the 'No Place for Hate Forum', 'Prevent Board' and 'Community Cohesion Working Group'.

There are a range of CE related interventions that have been delivered across the borough that are not funded by BSBT. These all ran concurrent to the Call 3 BSBT funded projects.

Table 1.1: Non-BSBT funded activities

Name	Description
No Place for Hate	Tower Hamlets Council runs a borough-wide campaign, 'No Place for Hate' (NPFH). The campaign provides training to members of the community to tackle hate crime, support victims, raise awareness of the impact of discrimination and aid the prosecution of perpetrators (Tower Hamlets, 2018e).
Violence Against Women and Girls	In conjunction with NPFH, the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) initiative also operates through Tower Hamlets Council. It aims to address acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, harm or suffering to women. This includes honour-based violence, FGM, forced marriage, domestic abuse and dowry-related abuse. VAWG aim their activities at raising awareness of these issues via talks and provide refuge for victims of violence.
Limehouse Boxing Academy	The Academy ran their 'Street Elite' project in the summer of 2019 that aimed to support vulnerable young people as young as 11 years old into education or employment. The Academy also has an ongoing partnership with Poplar HARCA (a BSBT Call 3 grant-funded project). This involves training sessions around physical activity and boxing skills in the Poplar HARCA centre, with young people recruited through Poplar HARCA and Spotlight (a partner organisation).

Wapping Football Club	Founded in 2013, Wapping FC provides opportunities for young people (aged eight years and over) from the surrounding areas of Shadwell, Whitechapel, Stepney Green and St Dunstan's to get involved in community-based activities. The club view themselves as providing a vehicle through which to empower young people to make better, more positive decisions and to foster a feeling of inclusion within the area.
Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum	The Interfaith Forum meet quarterly to discuss pertinent issues in the community from an interfaith standpoint. The forum is comprised of a number of faith leaders from the Tower Hamlets community. The Forum also runs a number of events in the borough, covering topics such as mental health, the rise of populism and combating faith hate. They also deliver workshops on combatting misinformation about other faiths.

1.3 Identified “needs” of Tower Hamlets to be addressed by BSBT

The evaluation identified six “needs” existing within Tower Hamlets which may need to be addressed to counter extremism. These are presented in the table below and whilst not exhaustive, are a collective representation of the needs identified through the evaluation.

Table 1.2: Identified needs in Tower Hamlets

Needs	Description
Addressing issues of far-right extremism	As described under the counter-extremism challenges heading earlier in this chapter, far-right extremism has been identified as a concerning issue in Tower Hamlets. Any counter-extremism activity in the local area should look to respond to this issue.
Addressing issues of Islamist extremism	Recent well publicised instances ¹⁷ of Islamist extremism highlights the pertinence of the issue in the borough. Therefore, there is a need to build trust within the Muslim community so that members of this community can participate in BSBT activities without facing repercussions from the Muslim community.

¹⁷ Examples include four young women from Tower Hamlets joining Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014/15 and the prosecution of the ‘Muslin Patrol’ vigilante group in 2013.

Addressing issues of social exclusion and marginalisation	There is a need to reduce the rising feelings of social exclusion and marginalisation in parts of the borough. Rising housing costs have led to areas rapidly changing in the borough, with people vulnerable to displacement, no longer feeling connected to their area/community and prompting feelings of social inequality. This in-turn can result in affected individuals becoming more vulnerable to extremist narratives.
Increase opportunities for integration amongst migrants in Tower Hamlets	Integration has been an issue for migrant adults in Tower Hamlets. Struggling to communicate with the wider community can lead to isolation and a lack of sense of trust and belonging, which stakeholders have identified as being drivers of extremist behaviours.
Addressing the increase in harms, such as FGM and Forced Marriage	Another issue that was identified in the counter-extremism challenges section above is the need to address rising harms, such as FGM and Forced Marriage. Any counter-extremism activity in the local area should look to respond to these issues through heightening awareness and illegality of such practices and offering support for individuals most at risk of these.
Addressing extremism issues amongst adults aged 21 or over	There is a need for counter-extremism activities to be offered to older age groups, predominantly amongst adults aged 21 and older. Wards in Tower Hamlets suffer from high levels of deprivation. Adults unable to find employment or economic stability can be vulnerable to extremist ideologies. Moreover, Tower Hamlets already has a number of interventions focussed on supporting younger age groups, particularly those still in school.

1.4 BSBT-supported activity in Tower Hamlets

Previous to Call 3 BSBT¹⁸ funding, five BSBT grant-funded projects had been delivered in Tower Hamlets. This included projects such as Diversity Role Models (Call 1), City Gateway, Futureversity, Family Action and Poplar HARCA (Call 2). The inclusion of these previously funded projects was not within the scope of the evaluation.

The following is a brief description of BSBT related activity delivered in 2019/20. Further detail on the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing the needs within Tower Hamlets is provided later in the report.

¹⁸ This is third round of funding for the BSBT programme. This round of funding are referred to as 'Call 3' for the duration of this report and was preceded by Call 1 and Call 2 funding.

BSBT grant-funded projects

Eight projects based in Tower Hamlets received BSBT grant funding in 2019/20. An overview of the delivery of each are summarised below. To note, the target communities referred to in Table 1.3 were included in the project's application forms, however as is discussed further in chapter three, some projects had to adapt their recruitment criteria to ensure engagement in the project activities.

Table 1.3: Call 3 BSBT grant-funded projects in Tower Hamlets

Project	Delivery organisation	Brief project description	Targeted communities
Building Positive Futures Together	Bromley By Bow Centre	Workshop sessions aimed at developing young people's community knowledge and understanding and providing them with skills and training to access employment and training opportunities in the future.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Schools partnership for empathy based on mutual respect	Building Bridges for Peace	Looked to create an opportunity for school children personal reflection to enable participants to deepen their empathy for others, increase respect for themselves and others, and uncover a greater resilience to being drawn in to divisive narratives.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Empowering Women through Community Netball	England Netball	Empowering (predominantly) minority ethnic women and women from disadvantaged communities through community netball, with the aim to help build their resilience and confidence.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Catalyst Leadership Programme	Dawatul Islam	A community 'catalyser' programme which looked to engage people of all ages in the community and explore issues around race hate, intolerance and the roots of potential radicalisation for those who have become socially excluded.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Inspiring Youth Leaders	Rio Ferdinand Foundation	Programme of weekly sports activity over three cohorts to develop leadership, personal skills and confidence of young people at risk of crime, exploitation and radicalisation.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Game Changers	The Feast	Activities focussed on developing young people's confidence and sense of identity, bringing young people from different communities together, and supporting them to develop and lead community-focussed initiatives.	Multiple Ethnic Groups
Belonging and Participation through Local Heritage	Toynbee Hall	School-based workshops that promoted shared values of democracy, free speech, mutual respect and opportunity for all through the history of Tower Hamlets and the work (campaigns, social change and community participation) associated with Toynbee Hall.	Multiple Ethnic Groups

Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP)	Poplar HARCA/Spotlight	Weekly three-hour workshops aimed at helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds develop leadership skills and build resilience against extremism.	Asian/Asian British (Mainly Bangladeshi)
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Campaign

Delivered through London Youth, the BSBT East London Campaign was delivered across five East London boroughs, including Tower Hamlets. The campaign aimed to recruit and train up to 200 young people aged 16-21. London Youth recruited young people via their network of partnership organisations. The campaign was delivered to two cohorts of young people. Participants attended weekly sessions and received training on how to run their own social action campaign. Each cohort then created their own social action campaign¹⁹ and participated in a 'democratic engagement masterclass', which brought together lessons from across the programme to increase awareness of local and national democratic processes.

In-Kind Support (IKS)

Three organisations in Tower Hamlets received In-Kind Support (IKS)²⁰ through the BSBT programme; the Black Women's Health and Family Support (BWHAFS), WISE Youth Trust and The Unity of Faith Foundation (TUFF). For BWHAFS this involved the provision of support to create a new social media platform and refresh their website. This aimed to help them better engage with the community and support on-going community cohesion work. Wise Youth Trust received matched funding to help improve their online platform to better promote the range of developments activities – such as vocational and employment workshops, creative arts classes and sport training. IKS also helped develop a film that promoted their various initiatives at the organisation and create a virtual learning platform. TUFF received IKS in order to create and edit a film that promoted TUFF's activities to help secure future funding and secure partnerships with local organisation in other areas.

BSBT Network

The role of the national BSBT network is to bring together BSBT supported groups and provide events and training to help these projects tackle counter extremism in meeting the objectives of BSBT. There has been a range of BSBT Network activity in Tower Hamlets

¹⁹ Examples included; 'Washing Out Hate Crime' where young people in Tower Hamlets cleaned racist graffiti, 'Streets Are Not My Home' where young people assembled aid packs for homeless people in their community and 'Dear Mental Health', with young people promoting discussions around mental health at their school.

²⁰ In-Kind Communications Support (IKS) to amplify the voices of key organisations working to challenge extremism and build long-term capacity

since 2017, with events including a funding application workshop in January 2017, an amplification event²¹ in February 2018 and a local issues event²² in February 2019.

Further training was provided to members of the BSBT Network (including those in Tower Hamlets) throughout 2019/20. This included a national bid-writing training session, regional crisis and incident response, and financial management training.

The Community Coordinator

The Community Coordinator acted as the main point of contact for the delivery of counter-extremism and community cohesion projects within the area. The Community Coordinator attempted to link BSBT grant-funded projects together via the BSBT Network and provide support to resolve any issues that arose during delivery. The role of the Community Coordinator and their involvement in tackling extremism in Tower Hamlets was a key area of exploration for the evaluation.

²¹ An amplification event was held to promote the Call 3 application window being open, and encourage groups operating in Tower Hamlets to apply.

²² More details about what this event entailed can be found in the *Community Coordinator role and networking of BSBT-supported organisations* section in Chapter 3.1.

2. Evaluation approach

2.1 Objectives of the Tower Hamlets area evaluation

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the contribution made by BSBT funded activity, between January 2019 and January 2020, to countering extremism in Tower Hamlets. The evaluation sought to assess the role BSBT has played in working with wider local efforts to counter extremism. To determine the contribution made by BSBT, the range of BSBT activities (funding local projects, local campaign, IKS projects and the provision of a Community Coordination, relevant Network activity) were assessed, alongside understanding the nature of non-BSBT activity and insights from wider stakeholders.

In reviewing the perceived impact of BSBT activities in Tower Hamlets, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the eight BSBT grant-funded projects have been able to reach their intended project participants, implement planned activities, and ultimately achieve their intended outcomes and address counter extremism needs in the area. .

The evaluation also identified non-BSBT activity aimed at addressing community cohesion and counter extremism in the local area²³. This helped inform an assessment of the extent to which BSBT activities addressed a specific need and/or gap in the area or duplicated work already being undertaken to counter extremism.

2.2 Methodology

The evaluation approach for Tower Hamlets is built around the BSBT area-level logic model²⁴ which shows the pathways through which BSBT-supported activities aimed to deliver outputs and achieve intended outcomes. This activity is framed by the contextual issues within Tower Hamlets that BSBT activity sought to address. Within this, consideration is also given to non-BSBT counter extremism activity being delivered in the area (although this is not set out in area logic model). The model details intermediate and longer-term (micro) outcomes that are hypothesised to ultimately lead to achievement of the three high-level (macro) outcomes of the BSBT programme (Appendix 1):

- ***Fewer people hold attitudes, beliefs and feelings that oppose shared values***
- ***An increased sense of belonging and civic participation at the local level***
- ***More resilient communities***

²³ Such as any other key local interventions and activity implemented in Tower Hamlets by local organisations and institutions outside of BSBT. These were identified through desk research and consultations with wider, relevant stakeholders who were well-placed to speak to the perceived impact of the implementation of such non-BSBT related activity, and other activity which may not be as well documented.

²⁴ Appendix 1.

Further detail of the evaluation methods and delivery to date is provided in Appendix 1.

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection as detailed below.

Qualitative data

Qualitative insights and evidence were collected from 43 individuals directly involved with BSBT, including beneficiaries of BSBT grant-funded projects; BSBT project leads; IKS recipients; organisations that were unsuccessful in their bid for BSBT funding and a range of wider stakeholders²⁵. Stakeholders included those working for organisations delivering counter-extremism or community cohesion activities, and representatives from the Metropolitan police, members of Tower Hamlets council and members of the Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum.

Table 2.1: Summary of qualitative consultations

Participant Type	Individuals interviews ²⁶	Number participating in paired interviews/ groups
Project Lead (Scoping Interview)	8	
Community Coordinator	1	
Wider Stakeholder	8	
Organisations that were unsuccessful in their bid for BSBT funding	4	
Project Delivery Staff	18	
Project Beneficiaries		9
IKS	2	

Quantitative data

The project participant survey (PPS), a standardised pre and post survey used across the broader BSBT evaluation, was used to collect quantitative data from participants across grant-funded projects. The data collected through these questionnaires has been used to assess the impact of grant-funded activity on individual beneficiaries across the BSBT programme's target outcomes (individual measures within the survey are aligned to the most relevant outcome). Two versions of the PPS were used, in line with the broader approach across the programme evaluation:

²⁵ Included those working for organisations delivering counter-extremism or community cohesion activities, and representatives from the Metropolitan police, members of Tower Hamlets council and members of the Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum.

²⁶ Some individuals were interviewed on multiple occasions.

- 1) Four of the projects returned a total of 69 pre-and post- matched questionnaires completed by beneficiaries at the start (pre) of the project and a second survey (post) at the end of the project. These questionnaires allow for comparisons to be made regarding attitudinal changes at the start and end of their engagement in these projects;
- 2) One project returned 250 combi²⁷ questionnaires completed by beneficiaries. The combi survey includes the completion of both pre- and post- questions *after* the intervention in one questionnaire.

In addition, a bespoke survey was developed for one project to tailor questions around their particular needs²⁸, whilst retaining alignment to BSBT target outcomes (though due to the variations, responses cannot be analysed within the combined PPS dataset). This project returned 13 matched pre-and post-questionnaires. Two projects did not return any PPS.

Interpretation of the data

Evidence in this report is derived and synthesised from a range of evaluation activity. Data was triangulated and analysed thematically to develop a rounded picture against the evaluation questions. When interpreting the evaluation findings, the following considerations should be borne in mind:

- Overall, it has not been within the scope of the evaluation (with data collection taking place between April 2019 and January 2020) to determine the longer-term impact of BSBT in tackling counter extremism in Tower Hamlets, but instead a qualitative assessment has been conducted on the possible contribution BSBT has made to wider efforts to counter extremism in the local authority.
- As noted, the value of qualitative research is that it provides in depth insight and detail; it does not claim to be generalisable to the whole population and should therefore be treated as indicative only.
- Where verbatim quotes are included these are used to illustrate general themes and should not be taken to represent the views of all participants engaging in BSBT activity in Tower Hamlets.

²⁷ The combi is not a true pre / post measure, as both pre- and post- questions are answered after the activity in one questionnaire. Participants indicate the extent they agreed before they took part in BSBT activity and the extent they agree now after having taken part in BSBT activity. It is used when it is not possible for the project to administer the full 'pre' and 'post' questionnaires (e.g. if it is a one-off activity completed in a short timeframe).

²⁸ Following feedback from project staff that the survey was taking too long to administer and concerns about understanding of the concepts due to young age amongst some participants, a bespoke questionnaire was produced (see Appendix 2).

- Selection bias, which is at play both in terms of who agreed to participate in the BSBT projects in the first place, and then in terms of who agreed to speak to the evaluators.
- Not all beneficiaries taking part in the projects completed a PPS survey. Findings are based on relatively small sample sizes which may not fully reflect the broader range of project end beneficiaries. Furthermore, PPS data only provides evidence for grant-funded projects, meaning there is no quantitative measure of BSBT's overall impact.
- It was not possible to conduct qualitative fieldwork with beneficiaries of three of the eight grant-funded projects, which means that the evaluation has more robust evidence for some aspects of delivery than others. This is reflected within the assessments made in this report. For Dawatul Islam, they had difficulty in commencing their activities due to external factors, whilst Bromley-by-Bow and Building Bridges for Peace had issues with recruitment²⁹.

²⁹ Bromley-by-Bow were able to run workshops in January & February 2020, but this was outside the period of fieldwork.

3. BSBT in Tower Hamlets

This chapter addresses the contribution of BSBT to countering extremism in Tower Hamlets by assessing the extent to which it has:

- Strengthened trust and integration amongst local communities to build resilience to extremism and help promote community cohesion and engagement;
- Developed leadership skills amongst individuals to help improve communication skills and build confidence ;
- Fostered individual resilience against extremist narratives and behaviours; and
- Engaged different age groups and vulnerable audiences across the borough to help build individual and community resilience to extremisms.

Before assessing the extent to which BSBT has contributed to addressing these, it is useful to provide broader context on the strategic approach taken to countering extremism in Tower Hamlets, within which BSBT was delivered.

3.1 Strategic Approach to Counter-Extremism in Tower Hamlets

This section of the report sets out the strategic approach of Tower Hamlets to tackling extremism focussing on the interplay of BSBT with local counter-extremism networks.

Collaborations and local coordination

There was limited evidence of collaboration between BSBT-grant funded projects delivering in the borough. However, there was some evidence of partnership working between BSBT and non-BSBT organisations. For example, Poplar HARCA/Spotlight shared delivery space with other non-BSBT projects, which sometimes resulted in cross-referrals between these organisations. There was also some evidence of networking between local community leaders and BSBT projects to support recruitment of specific audiences.

*“We would hear from Spotlight, saying they have someone interested in our classes, so we would tell them to come down and get involved... it can work the other way as well with us, we’ve had kids who might be more suited to what they’re doing, or want to try something new, so it works well for us both.” **Delivery Staff***

Discussions with stakeholders indicated that these local organisations who worked collaboratively tended to prioritise issues such as deprivation, marginalisation and community cohesion as their common goals. Whilst not directly referencing ‘extremism’ within their interventions (often because of the perceived negativity around associations with it), stakeholders and project leads highlighted these factors as key risk factors for extremism and therefore essential to countering extremism.

“Using terms around community cohesion and resilience makes more sense [than using a term like ‘extremism’]... extremism becomes an issue when you get people who fall outside that sort of community, it’s the definition of extremism, it’s an extreme end of a behaviour, if you like, against the social norm. These groups aren’t there yet so you need to promote things like community to stop them falling out of the social norm.” Stakeholder

This approach of seeking to address broader societal issues was echoed by the BSBT-funded projects within their approaches to countering extremism. Projects tended to direct their activities towards issues such as building cohesion, developing personal capacities (such as confidence, critical thinking and communication skills) and broader themes around collective action. These projects also tended to adopt recruitment strategies that used terms and outcomes such as ‘*personal and community development*’ when engaging project participants.

“I believe groups like us that are not directly working with counter-extremism are still working towards the same goal as those that are addressing extremism...it is about integrating young people into the community or making sure there’s opportunities in the community...I think organisations that address extremism have the same vision and mission as us...we just approach it differently.” Unsuccessful Call 3 BSBT Applicant

This lack of explicit association with ‘extremism’ was further apparent with some projects noting a reluctance to reference the counter-extremism objectives of the BSBT funding, due to concerns that this would hinder recruitment or generate a negative perception of their project in the local community. Staff from BSBT-supported organisations and wider stakeholders reported that this was most prevalent amongst the Muslim community who, in some instances, associated ‘counter-extremism’ with negative perceptions of the Prevent programme. As a result, when recruiting participants and delivering activities, some projects placed more emphasis on the skills and experiences (i.e. the project-level outcomes) that participants would gain as a result of their involvement rather than explicitly referencing the counter-extremism objectives of the funding. Whilst the overall context for the BSBT funding was not undisclosed, the result was that **many participants were unaware of their involvement in a Home Office funded counter-extremism project.**

“I think, at first, we were a bit nervous around labelling things as part of the BSBT project because there has been some discussion around a bit of bad press, so I think we were not necessarily wanting to be like, ‘This is a Building a Stronger Britain Together project’, because that can force participants into thinking that they’re part of something that they might not want to be. So, we went down a subtler route of how we would promote our sessions.” Delivery staff

At a broader level, discussions with stakeholders across the borough highlighted limited awareness and understanding of the BSBT programme. Whilst key individuals may have heard of the programme, they noted a **lack of visibility of BSBT across the counter-extremism groups within the borough.** Furthermore, organisations that were not, and never had been, funded by BSBT had low awareness of BSBT-funded activities in Tower Hamlets.

Evidence from the East London Campaign³⁰ also suggested that awareness of BSBT and the counter-extremism agenda was low, both among participants and project leads. Project leads tended to view the funding as stemming from London Youth³¹, and therefore perceived the agenda to be aimed more towards community development and personal empowerment.

“Yes. I mean, it may be that I am coming across it [BSBT], but I’m just not realising it or nobody’s flagging it as it’s funded by that programme? So, it may be that I am but I’m just not being made aware of it, or it’s not very clear.... I have not seen much of it anywhere.”
Stakeholder

Community Coordinator role and networking of BSBT-supported organisations

The placement of a Community Coordinator within selected local authorities was a key aspect of the BSBT programme. At the beginning of the BSBT grant application process, the Community Coordinator played a key role in facilitating submission of funding applications from organisations based in Tower Hamlets. The Community Coordinator saw it as their role to raise awareness of the funding opportunities amongst relevant and applicable organisations in the area, informed also by their knowledge of the local needs in the borough. They then supported organisations with their applications, which several projects reported to have been very valuable, particularly for some smaller organisations.

“We also had [the Community Coordinator] at the council, who was absolutely amazing, really supportive of us and often brings us opportunities as part of engaging us through BSBT that we might not have seen elsewhere. So, we felt supported, 100%.” **Delivery staff**

Moving beyond the application stage there was less clarity around the role of the Community Coordinator. The Community Coordinator themselves had anticipated establishing relationships with projects and playing a key part in helping them connect with the BSBT national network. In practice, this did not prove to be the case and the Community Coordinator only had close engagement with a few projects during the delivery phase. The evaluation particularly found that the Community Coordinator had limited interactions with the more well-established and well-resourced organisations during the delivery stage. This was predominantly due to a **perceived lack of need amongst these organisations for this involvement**. Most projects were delivered by large organisations with sufficient resources and/or delivering tried and tested delivery models.

³⁰ This evidence was collected across five boroughs; Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Barking & Dagenham, Redbridge and Newham.

³¹ As part of the East London Leaders Campaign, London Youth recruited a range of local member organisations who, in turn, recruited c.10 young people to participate in their BSBT-funded programmes.

“I did not feel much need for support. I think, certainly, when I was putting the project together, I had lots of support-related questions to ask and that was very helpful. I think once we got to the project delivery, there were not those sorts of questions.” Delivery staff

However, there were some projects who referenced hoping for greater support from the Community Coordinator than they felt they had received. Delivery staff particularly referenced the support they hoped the Community Coordinator would have provided when they had experienced recruitment issues and difficulties in developing local partnerships.

“Yes, I mean, they [Community Coordinator] were very friendly and supportive. I would say that they promised more than what they could deliver. They did not actually get me into any schools and that was the hardest thing, was getting into schools.” Project lead

Projects who liaised most with the Coordinator tended to be those most affected by funding delays. Projects that were well-resourced and had existing local partnerships to assist with recruitment were able to begin delivery despite the delay, whilst those that were more reliant on the funding could not begin due to staff and budget constraints. This placed well-resourced organisations ahead on their delivery timeline than others and requiring less support. The Community Coordinator provided regular updates and assurances to those that were unwilling or unable to commence activities before funds were secured. In these instances, they gave extra assistance where possible as projects were often behind on their delivery timescale, helping to locate delivery staff or give advice on adjusting the project’s delivery model. They also helped some of the local organisations to secure appropriate facilities and spaces to deliver their project activities. There was a clear role for the Community Coordinator in these scenarios and benefits gained through their knowledge and local connections.

This was particularly true for the Dawatul Islam organisation, for whom negative media reports relating to BSBT created concern within the local community. These reports stemmed from the withdrawal of a number of Muslim contributors from the Bradford Literary Festival due to BSBT involvement, as well as media reports highlighting BSBT’s funding of J-GO, whose subsidiary ‘SuperSisters’ was a website aimed towards young Muslim women. In this instance, the Community Coordinator, in conjunction with the project lead, was able to bring together different responsible bodies and stakeholders to meet with the project and provide reassurance and support to Dawatul Islam with communications around the negative media reports.

Whilst many of the projects worked with partners in Tower Hamlets, **the extent of network activity amongst BSBT grant-funded projects was more limited** and was seen as a missed opportunity. The Community Coordinator arranged a network event in February 2019 which was well attended by BSBT grant-funded projects, but no further events took place. The Community Coordinator struggled to secure a second network event citing the different stages of project delivery, the lack of demand for network events from larger, well-resourced organisations, and difficulties agreeing a time and place with organisations who were time-poor. Some projects reported being reluctant to engage in the BSBT Network events as they felt that these were unlikely to be directly related, or

beneficial, to their work. This was compounded to some extent by organisations becoming aware through group emails, which sometimes gave the impression of a lack of targeting to their individual needs.

“The Community Coordinator certainly gave us access to the network, to meetings, that kind of thing. I think to be honest a lot of it felt maybe relevant to us as an organisation, broadly, but not particularly relevant to the specific project.... We were not sure of what the outcomes of these meetings were going to be. Everyone is very time poor. So, if those meetings do not perhaps directly impact on your project, it is quite a lot of time and effort to participate in those” **Project lead**

The **limited progress made in establishing a local network** was more evident amongst projects that were either less experienced in delivering counter-extremism activity or had limited existing partnerships with other projects in the borough.

One project that lacked experience delivering counter-extremism activities was eager to be part of a local network in providing a source of guidance and support, particularly in helping to resolve issues in targeting more marginalised populations. This lack of support resulted in the project adapting its proposed delivery model and altering its recruitment approach, recruiting participants that were already engaged in some form of community activity.

Another project had no established links in the borough and hoped that local networking would assist them in delivering their intended activities in Tower Hamlets. Whilst the project experienced delays it was able to establish partnerships with non-BSBT projects and deliver as intended.

“It took a long time for us to find a partner [organisation] which we had hoped [from the network]... it meant we were behind schedule for a long time... but the benefit of the funding for us has been to gain a presence in Tower Hamlets, which we now have but did not have before” **Project lead**

3.2 Addressing local counter-extremism needs

This section looks at where BSBT-supported activities attempted to deliver against the programme objectives within Tower Hamlets.

Overall, the evidence collected suggests that the **BSBT-supported activities in Tower Hamlets made a positive contribution towards delivery of the overall programme objectives**³². The timescales and scope of evaluation activity mean it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the longer-term contribution.

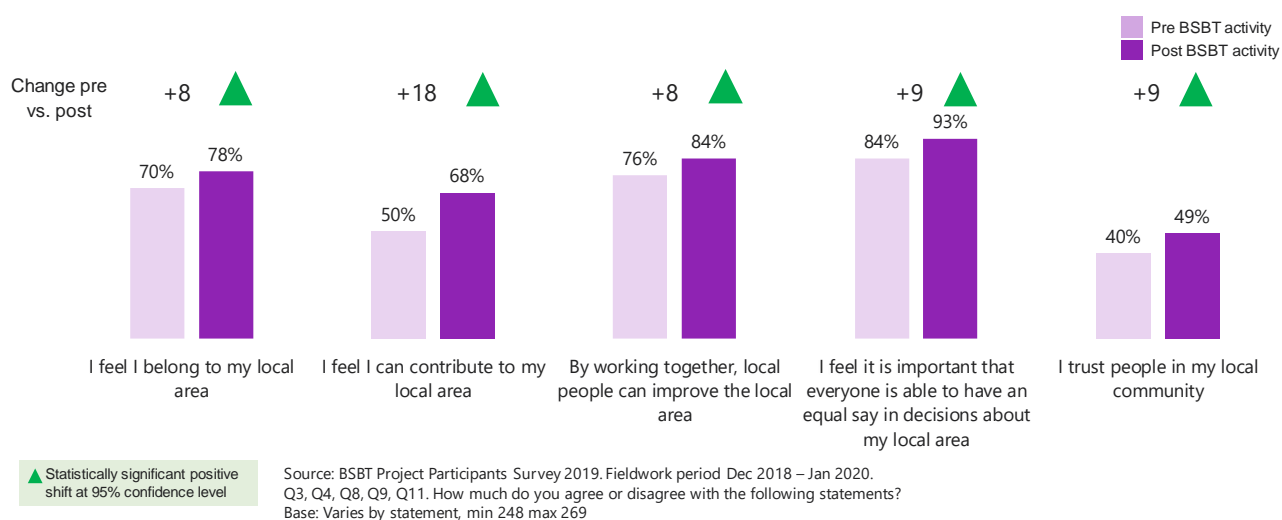
³² BSBT has three overarching objectives, which are to achieve:

- Fewer people holding attitudes, beliefs and feelings that oppose shared values;
- An increased sense of belonging and civic participation at the local level; and
- More resilient communities.

Building trust and integration amongst communities

A key priority identified in Tower Hamlets was the need to increase trust and cohesion between different ethnic groups within the borough. The BSBT grant-funded projects which aimed to address this adopted a range of different delivery models (such as one-off presentations at school assemblies, classroom-based and subject-specific workshops, weekly training sessions). They all targeted younger people, ranging between 9 and 18 years of age. The relevant indicators relating to trust and belonging to the community within the Project Participant Survey (PPS) showed significant improvements in stated attitudes pre and post individuals' participation in BSBT-supported activity. Figure 3.1 shows increases of at least seven percentage points in all measures between the pre and post surveys. The most positive shift was the proportion of participants who felt they could contribute to the local area.

Figure 3.1: PPS findings: Trust and belonging



Some BSBT-funded projects partnered with delivery organisations who had relevant experience in working with young people from the local area. Project participants indicated that they **benefitted from interacting with facilitators (football coaches, netball instructors, workshop trainers) from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds**. Being able to relate to the young people participating in the project on a personal level and share their own lived experiences was also deemed extremely important. When probed on reasons, participants frequently referred to **sessions creating a safe environment** where they were encouraged to share information about their past, their backgrounds and be supportive of each other. Relationships and trust were built and, in some cases, friendships formed. Attending weekly sessions had a positive effect in terms of being able to socialise, talk and spend quality time with their peers, especially for more socially isolated groups. BSBT-supported activities were key enablers for increasing feelings of understanding and trust through:

- Breaking down barriers and facilitating access to those statutory and non-statutory organisations (such as Tower Hamlets Council and other institutions) which were

previously seen to be ‘the establishment’ and whom participants may never have accessed or found difficult to access.

- Organised visits to museums and other cultural activities, as well as signposting participants to wider support available in the community (such as youth groups and services).
- Raising awareness of support. Project staff recounted examples of how most young people were unaware of professionals working to support young people in the area, apart from teachers.
- Sharing examples of good practices delivered by organisations such as Tower Hamlets Council increased trust between participants and the community or local institutions.
- Bringing together representatives from local communities from across the borough to give talks and prompt engagement in identifying and addressing local challenges and issues.

“A lot of the local institutions and organisations within the local community previously were organisations that were hard to penetrate. We have provided these young people access to those institutions and I suppose we contributed to enabling them to understand that they can trust these people and these organisations. They can potentially work with them in the future.” **Delivery staff**

In addition to this, some BSBT-funded projects enabled participants to broaden their community knowledge and understanding of different religions within the borough. Project staff believed that this would lead to a greater sense of belonging, and ultimately help tackle issues of segregation and separation between communities. Most of the young participants interviewed cited how **BSBT activities had helped them to better understand some of the similarities and differences between religions**. In addition, they had improved their understanding of the different faiths in the community and that they had **more freedom to express what religion means to them**.

“Project activities helped us learn about each other’s backgrounds, learn what others believe, and compare and see the similarities between our religions or beliefs.” **Project participant**

Environments such as schools, youth clubs and community centres were all utilised within activities as places for young people to mix with peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Project participants considered these interactions with peers from both the same, and other religious backgrounds, fostered relations between different ethnic groups and strengthening links with the wider community.

“The project helped us not think stereotypically, like how not all Christians do the same thing, or act the same. There are different types of Muslims, and other types of religions.”

*And it also taught us that not all of them act the same way as you would think.” **Project participant***

Case study example

Toynbee Hall aimed to increase participants’ mutual respect and sense of belonging through teaching the history of Tower Hamlets. Staff organised visits and day-trips which played a key role in increasing participants’ understanding of both local history and the factors that contributed to the development of certain areas as opposed to others in the borough. Furthermore, Toynbee Hall staff delivered interactive and hands-on school-based sessions where participants were asked to share issues affecting their communities and propose solutions.

“I have realised that I do not really do anything when it comes to community work, and this is the first opportunity I have had to actually do something. So, it has pushed me to do more things in and for my community, and help other people” (Toynbee Hall participant)

Developing leadership skills

Despite differing delivery models (one-off sessions, repeat workshops with consistent groups of participants, schools-based, community-based), almost all the BSBT-supported projects in Tower Hamlets delivered teamwork and team building activities. For example, some projects used sport activities as a way of fostering collaboration and communication between project participants.

*I have learnt important skills that I wouldn't have otherwise - teamwork, communication, group work. New opportunities have been opened for me. **Project participant***

Both focus groups with beneficiaries and interviews with project staff shed light on how targeted sessions around leadership have enabled them to develop communication skills. This, in turn, has contributed to increased confidence and for one project, led to participants becoming members of youth advisory groups.

BSBT activities were described as instrumental in helping to develop leadership skills among project participants **who often felt more confident and capable to step up and take responsibility for acting as positive role models for their peers**. In line with this, PPS data in Figure 3.1 shows an increase of eighteen percentage points in the relevant measure between the pre and post surveys indicating that participants felt they could contribute more to the local area as a result of their participation in BSBT-supported activity.

*“We are not only role models to young people, obviously, we are also role models to old people, as, when they were younger, they used to do bad stuff on the streets. But now they look at us and see we do not do those stuff and there is a big difference.” **Project participant***

Case study example

Rio Ferdinand Foundation delivered a 1-week intensive leadership training programme (sport leadership, arts awards, digital media and youth leadership) to young people aged 15-19. These consisted of group sessions to challenge negative perceptions, tackle specific issues driven by participants and develop self-confidence, resilience and leadership skills. Role models (facilitators, teachers, sport coaches) were found to be effective when they were more relatable to young people. Project participants described their relationships with these figures as greatly inspiring and now feel both motivated and empowered to act as leaders within their groups and communities.

“Personally, I have learnt self-belief skills. Before I started this course, out of ten I felt like a two or three in self-belief. I did not think I was really going to get anywhere, but at the end of the course, it is amazing how much you could improve in three days” (Rio Ferdinand Foundation participant)

These findings were substantiated by evidence collected through observations, and beneficiary and staff feedback from the evaluation of the BSBT East London campaign³³. As a result of participation in the programme activities, participants reported developments in confidence, communication skills, teamwork, public speaking, and budget setting capabilities.

“I have learnt important skills that I wouldn't have otherwise - teamwork, communication, budgeting. New opportunities have been opened for me.” **Project participant**

Fostering individual resilience against extremist narratives

The evaluation found that most of the BSBT-supported activities delivered in Tower Hamlets had not been designed to tackle extremist narratives explicitly. However, the findings provide evidence to suggest that **increased critical thinking skills may translate to beneficiaries being able to better reject extremist narratives and disrupt extremist activity** in their community. Activities have contributed to:

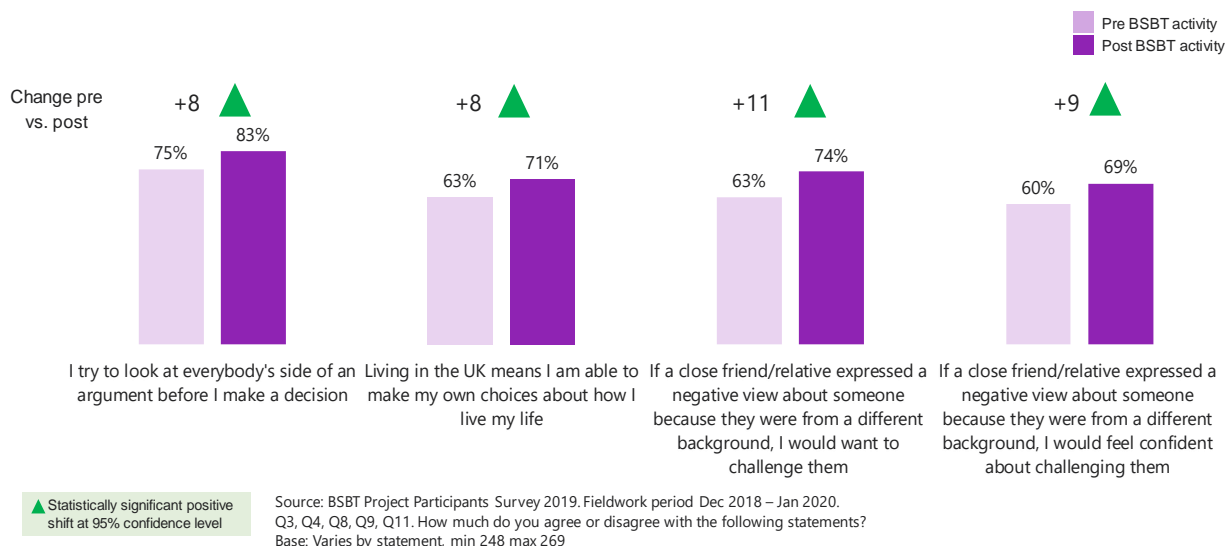
- Increasing beneficiaries' ability to think critically and analyse messages across media channels (including offline channels and social media);
- Improving beneficiaries' knowledge and awareness of some forms of extremism;
- Improving beneficiaries' confidence to challenge extremist narratives.

The relevant indicators within the PPS showed significant increases between the pre and post participation self-reported measures. Figure 3.2 shows increases of at least eight percentage points between the pre and post-surveys (based on matched data). The biggest increase was in the proportion of participants who **would feel confident and**

³³ This evidence was collected across five boroughs; Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Barking & Dagenham, Redbridge and Newham.

willing to challenge a friend or relative expressing a negative view about someone because they were from a different background.

Figure 3.2: Agreement with statements (strongly agree or agree) before and after BSBT activity



This was further reinforced by data collected through interviews with participants and project staff. When asking participants how they engaged with their peers as a result of the BSBT project, it was clear that the activities were an important catalyst for increased levels and more positive types of engagement. For example, they reported feeling better equipped to be contribute to classroom discussions and be more open-minded to various viewpoints they would not have come across had they not been on the project. This is believed to have contributed to **improving their ability to engage in sensitive debates and conversations**, as well as increasing their resilience and listening skills to engage (agree or disagree) in contradictory arguments in a debate.

“They have more understanding about empathy and listening to people that they disagree with, and that it is possible, you do not have to agree with people and then you can try and understand why someone’s got a different perspective.” **Project staff**

Some project sessions were designed to increase understanding of how political systems work and the importance of having constructive political oppositions in the democratic process. As a result of taking part in these sessions, participants spoke of improved understanding of the importance of countering negative rhetoric and attitudes as well as feeling better able to contribute towards society and their local community.

“It is important to have your voice heard through voting, through challenging, through turning up and having a say.” **Project participant**

Delivery staff spoke of how participants had engaged constructively in discussions on how to be more open-minded to various viewpoints, however they noted some **disparity in engagement amongst certain participants**. For instance, participants from some communities reported to have sometimes found it hard to engage with other participants

not from within their same community due to language barriers. They cited being more reluctant to challenge extremist narratives due to English not being their first language.

Barriers to recruiting vulnerable audiences

Whilst all the BSBT grant-funded projects were ultimately able to engage with relevant target audiences, they had mixed levels of success in the initial recruitment stage. The most successful projects were those who had established relationships with relevant partners in place at the outset.

A contributing factor to this was existing networks of youth and charitable organisations, including the notable presence of Spotlight³⁴. For some projects this created difficulties recruiting in what some saw as an already saturated market. Project delivery staff reported that **saturation had led to a competitive market in which some organisations were reluctant to collaborate**, and were sometimes protective of target audiences.

“After a few meetings in August, and this was confirmed, we are talking to partners and even collaborators in Tower Hamlets that basically there is a sense of competition over funding. I have been told that the market is quite saturated in Tower Hamlets as well, and that basically this stops people from working together and collaborating on projects.”

Delivery staff

Saturation of interventions being delivered with young people (particularly under the age of 18) was evident. This was particularly notable for projects seeking to work with schools. For Toynbee Hall this ultimately led to delivery happening outside Tower Hamlets, in the neighbouring borough of Newham. Projects run by Poplar HARCA/Spotlight and The Feast had more efficient recruitment phases due to pre-established school partnerships...

The evident number of youth focused projects being delivered in borough, highlighted **limited work being undertaken with adults**. Where such delivery did exist, the evaluation found some positive changes amongst those participating in the project. s. In particular, this was evident amongst adults who reported low levels of interaction with other people in the community before taking part in their project and felt through their participation they had been able to form new friendships:

“Our children have been going to the same school for years but we never spoke before this...now we arrange social activities outside of doing this [project activity] as well. It has helped us form friendships by doing this because you speak to people you would not necessarily speak to.” **Project Participant**

The target audience also had a significant bearing on recruitment, with **projects targeting the most vulnerable audiences typically having more difficulty**. More than one organisation aimed to engage those more directly at-risk of extremism. These organisations struggled to identify suitable participants and, as a result, had to redesign

³⁴ Spotlight is a creative youth service designed to inspire young people based in Poplar, Tower Hamlet. It offers free art sound, film, design, art and broadcasting facilities, alongside performance, dance, boxing, fashion, styling and chill areas. More information is available at <https://wearespotlight.com/>

their approach. For instance, Bromley-by-Bow faced difficulties to recruit most at-risk participants, intending to recruit young people from local partnerships such as the Youth Offending Team, local Mosques, Job Centre Plus and the Prison Service. Bromley-by-Bow initially targeted these organisations to ensure referrals were targeted at those who have been identified as most at risk of extremist agendas. However, due to a lack of referrals, they were unable to successfully recruit sufficient participants³⁵.

*“They did set themselves quite a high target of trying to reach out to certain individuals from a community that’s hard to reach, and he found that, over time, he needed to remodel what it was that they were delivering and also have another look, twice now, on their target audience.” **Community Coordinator, Tower Hamlets***

3.3 Organisational capacity and capability

This section looks at the impact of BSBT funding, both grant and IKS, on increasing organisational capabilities and supporting project delivery.

There was positive feedback from BSBT grant-funded projects on the **impact BSBT funding had had on various aspects of their delivery, including scope and reach**. BSBT was cited as having provided grant-funded projects with a platform to pilot and develop different types of delivery models and recruiting target beneficiaries that would have otherwise been beyond their scope. For example, one project reported increased capability to deliver in the counter-extremism space by delivering ‘one-to-one’ intervention sessions aimed at fostering discussions on extremism issues amongst community members, which they had not done previously.

*“We have targets around having more diverse participants, so it has definitely had an impact on the way we engage with different communities, and we have had significant learning from it as well, which I think is really important going forward.” **Project Lead***

Feedback from project staff also highlighted how delivering the BSBT-funded projects had allowed organisations to **take away broader key learnings for future projects**, leading to wider organisational learnings. This included a perceived increased understanding of what had worked well in recruitment and delivery of counter-extremism activities.

*“We have learnt a lot, with the research we have done on this, we can already see the impact on our young people. I think it has been fantastic for us to be able to run this pilot project, similar in some ways [to an existing model] but different, and in different contexts: the school and community. We would not have been able to do that without such a grant from BSBT, and so we are just incredibly grateful.” **Delivery Staff***

³⁵ Bromley-by-Bow adapted a new delivery model which took place outside of the evaluation fieldwork period.

Alignment of IKS and grant funding

Organisations were broadly positive about the impact of the IKS. One recipient felt that it had completely modernised their communication platform and substantially improved the design of their leaflets.

“From what we have now, to what we had before, they [pamphlets and posters] are completely different... we would not have been able to do this by ourselves.” **Project Lead**

Recipients felt supported throughout the IKS process, both at the application stage (through the Community Coordinator), then by M&C at the IKS delivery stage. In particular, recipients felt the IKS delivery team took onboard their ideas and were able to generate an output close to their intended vision.

“They’ve been very receptive to our ideas... they have been effective, they’ve been quite understanding, they’ve been quite cooperative, and they’ve provided as much as they could to make it look like we wanted.” **Delivery Staff**

However, the perceived lack of alignment between IKS and grant applications was raised by a number of projects who had applied for both, including successful and unsuccessful applicants. It was noted how two separate application processes had been required and that not all successful IKS applicants were awarded grant funding. This led to a perception amongst some that the two streams were not as joined-up as they should be and frustration around having to complete two separate applications.

Some felt that a **more joined-up process would also result in greater impact**. One example was a small organisation that focused on tackling FGM in the borough. They received IKS but ended up closing shortly afterwards due to funding shortages. In this particular case, it was felt that grant funding would have provided financial stability to enable the benefits of the IKS to be realised.

“We got the IKS... but it defeated the purpose [of the IKS application], because the idea was to use the IKS to develop our communications of what we are doing [if the grant had been secured] and promote and project our activities to the audience that we are trying to target.” **Delivery staff**

Another IKS recipient expressed frustration having applied for the IKS to amplify activities they would run if they secured grant funding from BSBT. However, despite being unsuccessful in their grant funding application, they still received IKS but subsequently felt the IKS received was a wasted opportunity and offering the organisation little benefit.

4. Conclusions

Tower Hamlets is characterised by a complex socio-economic context, with the borough facing challenges of deprivation, cultural and economic divides and the segregation and marginalisation of particular communities. These factors have been seen to contribute to the emergence of extremism issues, with far-right and Islamist extremism evident in the borough.

In reviewing the range of BSBT-supported activity being delivered, the evaluation assessed the effectiveness of that activity in addressing local extremism challenges. A range of initiatives have operated historically in attempting to address counter extremism, however blurring between delivery in the community cohesion and counter extremism spaces is apparent. The evaluation found that BSBT grant-funded projects were more focussed on the wider community issues, such as cohesion and integration, rather than directly challenging extremist narratives and behaviours. This promotion of community cohesion and integration has contributed to ***increase the sense of belonging and civic participation at the local level*** within Tower Hamlets and was evidenced by the significant improvement in PPS results among BSBT project participants. Furthermore, positive contributions made by these projects also have the potential to ***promote shared values and make communities more resilient*** by building resilience of individuals and communities to extremism and equipping them with critical thinking skills to reject and disrupt extremist narratives.

4.1 Addressing local extremism needs

The evaluation has identified the variable success of BSBT funded activity in addressing the local extremism needs within Tower Hamlets.

Challenging the presence of far-right extremism. There is limited evidence to suggest that BSBT-supported activities have addressed this need. Only a few grant-funded projects indirectly promoted discussion on the subject and encouraged participants to tackle such extremism through increasing their confidence in engaging in collective community action. PPS data around building community resilience and improving critical thinking saw a positive movement, which suggests some participants are more equipped to challenge negative viewpoints and counter far-right narratives.

Challenging the presence of Islamist extremism. There is no evidence to suggest that BSBT-supported activities contributed to addressing Islamist extremism explicitly. However, qualitative evidence from grant-funded projects suggested that some progress was made to tackle religious extremism at a broader level. For instance, promoting an open dialogue between religions and beliefs in the community increased participants understanding of different faiths in the borough. At a broad level, data from the PPS around understanding and tolerance of different cultures and beliefs showed a positive change pre- and post- participation in overall scores.

Addressing feelings of social exclusion and marginalisation through building trust and integration amongst communities. There is qualitative evidence, particularly from grant-funded projects, to suggest that BSBT-supported organisations have contributed to addressing this need in Tower Hamlets. In addition, PPS data indicated a significant improvement in participants' perception and sense of belonging to the local area.

Addressing extremism issues amongst adults aged 21 or over. There is limited evidence that BSBT-supported activity contributed to addressing extremism issues with older beneficiaries due to fact that most did not seek to engage this target audience. However, qualitative data from one grant-funded project working with adult participants suggested they felt more connected to their community and generated new friendships as a result of their participation.

Increase opportunities for integration amongst migrants in Tower Hamlets. There is no evidence to suggest that BSBT-supported activity had an impact on this identified need in Tower Hamlets. In fact, none of the grant-funded projects were found to be tackling this issue directly. This points to a potential misalignment between the types of activities that were supported through BSBT in Tower Hamlets and the extremism needs of the area.

Addressing the increase in harms, such as FGM and Forced Marriage. None of the BSBT-supported organisations in Tower Hamlets addressed these issues. Whilst one organisation targeting FGM-related issues received IKS support through BSBT, it subsequently lost its council funding and ceased operating.

4.2 What works and why

Organisations using tried and tested project designs delivered against their delivery targets and required less support throughout the project lifecycle, especially around recruitment. Adopting an established recruitment process and using local networks enabled more effective engagement of participants.

Effective delivery to young people. Interventions being delivered to young people (particularly under the age of 18) struggled to gain access to schools in Tower Hamlets. However, once participants were engaged and recruited, BSBT activities (workshops, trainings, classroom-based sessions) were well received by young people, providing opportunities for them to learn about other cultures and religions. In addition, these interventions were found to be effective in supporting young people to **develop leadership and teamwork skills** and to support them in improving their communications, interactions with peers, considering their own opinions, goal-setting and decision-making.

BSBT funding had a **positive impact on various aspects of project delivery**, including scope and reach. BSBT-supported organisations noted how the funding provided opportunities for them to test and develop delivery models and target beneficiaries that would have otherwise been beyond their scope. In addition, **bringing people from different communities together**, and supporting them to develop and lead community-

focussed initiatives reduced feelings of isolation, perceptions of difference and inequality, and susceptibility to extremist narratives.

4.3 Key learnings for BSBT

The evaluation drew positive findings of delivering BSBT in Tower Hamlets, but also revealed barriers that need to be navigated if BSBT is to have a greater impact in future.

Learnings specific to Tower Hamlets

The lack of cohesive relationships between BSBT-supported activities in the area was apparent, whilst partnerships and networks between non-BSBT projects showed that this was attainable in Tower Hamlets. As such, improving opportunities to develop local networks amongst BSBT and non-BSBT supported organisations could **foster a more cohesive approach to addressing counter extremism in Tower Hamlets**.

Furthermore, evidence collected through this evaluation suggested that BSBT-funded delivery in Tower Hamlets should be better **aligned to the local extremism needs**. Stakeholders highlighted gaps in delivering counter-extremism interventions specifically aimed at tackling far-right and Islamist extremism, despite both being key extremism issues for the borough.

Learnings to tackle extremism generally

Organisations that attempted to reach beneficiaries most at risk of harms and extremism faced more challenges than those using established delivery models, both in identifying and engaging suitable participants. A key challenge for BSBT delivery in Tower Hamlets highlighted by those interviewed was that innovative models aimed at reaching individuals not already engaged in the community and therefore most at risk of harms and extremism, required more bespoke support. Stakeholders interviewed reported that **organisations targeting vulnerable audiences required a longer set-up phase** in order to identify and develop measures to address their additional support needs.

*“It would be a shame if we just recruited well-behaved young people, who would come and stick and all the rest of it. It would be nice for me as a trainer, but are we then meeting the needs? So, it is a tightrope we are walking all the time.... Do we go for those most at risk or just try satisfy the funding [requirements]?” **Delivery staff***

Stakeholders felt that **organisations could be better supported** to understand how to mitigate potential delivery issues or challenges (such as recruitment, absence of delivery staff or engaging relevant partners to support delivery) when trying new / innovative delivery models.

A clearer definition of **the role and remit of the Community Coordinator** would provide organisations with greater clarity on the type of support Community Coordinators can provide. Moreover, consideration could be given to expanding the role of the Community Coordinator to help facilitate support for organisations who are struggling with their

recruitment strategy and approach in the future (for example, by drawing on their connections within the local community. The role of the Community Coordinator could also be used to better facilitate shared learning, good practice and collective problem solving across organisations. A local network facilitated by the Community Coordinator could be positioned as:

- helping develop organisations' understanding of delivering counter-extremism work in relation to the needs and communities,
- helping organisations that had low-knowledge of delivering in the counter-extremism area³⁶,
- sharing learning amongst organisations,
- helping generate relationships with organisations without established partnerships or historic links to the area.

"I think one of our goals here is to get everyone under the same roof and hear about what's been going on the area...what has been happening and if it is negative, how can we address it in the future... it means everyone gets a voice." **Stakeholder, non-BSBT activity**

Lastly, most BSBT-supported organisations in Tower Hamlets addressed problems that were precursors to extremism - such as community cohesion and social integration. As a result, they were often reticent to use the terms 'counter-extremism' or 'extremism' in their communications, which resulted in very few explicit references to extremism types in the content of their work. **It would be useful for the Home Office to consider the terminology used around these types of initiatives in future.** A useful approach to consider might involve co-production of appropriate language to promote and aid the delivery of counter-extremism objectives with organisations delivering in this space.

Overall, the BSBT evaluation in Tower Hamlets has highlighted many positive examples of work which addressed community cohesion and some local extremism needs. It has generated useful learnings which can be applied to future BSBT funding opportunities to facilitate an effective local approach to countering extremism.

³⁶ The project lead for Bromley-by-Bow inherited the funding after their colleague (initial bid-writer) left the charity.