

## Manchester City Council Report for Information

**Report to:** Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 20 July 2021

**Subject:** Manchester UNESCO City of Literature - Progress Report

**Report of:** Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

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### Summary

This report details the progress with Manchester UNESCO City of Literature - following the designation awarded in 2017 an independent organisation was established in 2019. The vision for Manchester City of Literature is for Manchester to be an innovative, distinctive, equitable, globally connected city of reading and writing, where diverse voices are celebrated, creative talent and industries are nurtured and where literary activity changes lives. This report shows the progress the organisation has made towards the vision, how it has unified the city's literary sector to strengthen programmes and events that support reading for pleasure, literacy and social capital. It also shows how the charity has leveraged additional funds for the city and created new festivals and activity to benefit residents.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to consider and comment on the information in the report, noting the progress of Manchester UNESCO City of Literature, and the achievements it has made towards its objectives in just over a year of existence as an organisation.

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### Wards Affected: All

<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b> - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
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None
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Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Manchester City of Literature's core values were informed by the Our Manchester strategy and shaped by the whole partnership. The network includes publishers, libraries and community organisations, which will benefit from the work and increase employment opportunities to the city.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Manchester City of Literature's core values were informed by the Our Manchester strategy and shaped by the whole partnership. One of the agreed values is:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformative – developing skills, nurturing creative talent and transforming lives.</li> </ul>
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	<p>Manchester City of Literature's core values were informed by the Our Manchester strategy and shaped by the whole partnership. The agreed values are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive – creating distinctive cultural experiences inspired by Manchester's unique, radical character and rich cultural heritage whilst looking to the future.</li> <li>• Inclusive – celebrating the rich diversity of voices in the city, building on the strengths of Manchester's people and widening participation in literary activity.</li> <li>• Transformative – developing skills, nurturing creative talent and transforming lives.</li> <li>• Connected – linking and supporting literary activity and enabling collective advocacy for Manchester's literary community and international collaborations.</li> <li>• World-leading – a beacon for high quality, culturally democratic, truly diverse literary activity.</li> </ul>
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	<p>Manchester City of Literature's core values were informed by the Our Manchester strategy and shaped by the whole partnership. The agreed values are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive – creating distinctive cultural experiences inspired by Manchester's unique, radical character and rich cultural heritage whilst looking to the future.</li> <li>• Inclusive – celebrating the rich diversity of voices in the city, building on the strengths of Manchester's people and widening participation in literary activity.</li> </ul>
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	<p>Manchester is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network connecting the city to 245 other Creative Cities globally who share practice in learning in using culture and creativity to deliver sustainable development.</p>

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):** None

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Manchester UNESCO City of Literature: following the award of the designation in 2017 work was undertaken to develop the governance and partnership model to manage the designation. Following this an independent organisation was established in 2019. It is funded equally by Manchester City Council, the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. It has a Board of ten Trustees and an executive staff team of three (two FTEs).
- 1.2 The vision for Manchester City of Literature is for Manchester to be an innovative, distinctive, equitable, globally connected city of reading and writing, where diverse voices are celebrated, creative talent and industries are nurtured and where literary activity changes lives.
- 1.3 Manchester City of Literature's core values were informed by the Our Manchester strategy and shaped by the whole partnership. The agreed values are:
  - Distinctive – creating distinctive cultural experiences inspired by Manchester's unique, radical character and rich cultural heritage whilst looking to the future.
  - Inclusive – celebrating the rich diversity of voices in the city, building on the strengths of Manchester's people and widening participation in literary activity.
  - Transformative – developing skills, nurturing creative talent and transforming lives.
  - Connected – linking and supporting literary activity and enabling collective advocacy for Manchester's literary community and international collaborations.
  - World-leading – a beacon for high quality, culturally democratic, truly diverse literary activity.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 Manchester City of Literature: a partnership network**

- 2.2 Manchester City of Literature brings together the City Council, the two universities and over thirty literary organisations: independent and commercial publishers, specialist writing agencies, spoken word promoters, literature festivals, public and independent libraries, specialist writing agencies to work collaboratively to deliver this vision.
- 2.3 Partners include the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre, the International Anthony Burgess Foundation, Carcanet, Central Library, Centre for New Writing, Chetham's Library, Commonword, Comma Press, Creative Manchester, Dead Ink Books, Dostoyevsky Wannabe, Elizabeth Gaskell's House, Flapjack Press, Fly On The Wall Press, Hachette Children's Group, Harper North, John Rylands Library, Manchester Children's Book Festival, Manchester Libraries, Manchester Literature Festival, Manchester Poetry Library, Manchester University Press, Manchester Writing School, Manchester

Muslim Writers, Pariah Press, Poets & Players, Read Manchester, Ripples of Hope, Saraband Press, The Portico Library, Working Class Movement Library and Young Identity. The strength of the partnership network and the City of Literature's co-ordinating role is demonstrated on the website - <https://www.manchestercityofliterature.com/>

- 2.4 The roles of the City of Literature include leading a network of partner organisations, advocacy, unlocking funding opportunities, engaging with residents and communities and co-ordinating partnership events and initiatives.

## **2.5 Funding**

- 2.6 Manchester City Council supports Manchester City of Literature to manage the UNESCO designation via a three-year grant of £50K per annum. This investment unlocks a further £100K per annum from the two universities. Manchester City of Literature became a charity in May 2020. In just its first fully operational financial year (2020-21), Manchester City of Literature secured an additional £90K+ of investment into the city's literary sector from Arts Council England and the British Council.

## **2.7 Responding to the Pandemic**

- 2.8 In March 2020 the Manchester City of Literature Executive team of three had only been in post for a matter of weeks. In response to the pandemic and to lockdown, the executive team created a large-scale project to support Manchester's literature scene called A City Connects.
- 2.9 In response to the need identified by partners, in April 2020 the team created the A City Connects website to support any and all activity from the partnership network as it moved online. From its launch to the retirement of the site in December 2020, there were over 150 events listed from publishers, spoken word nights, book launches, readings and more. In that time, more than 4000 visitors used the site as a way to find out how to stay connected with the world of literature in Manchester from home.
- 2.10 Key events were hosted on there too, including:
- Manchester City of Literature co-produced spoken word night Our City Speaks in partnership with Contact Theatre, Young Identity and United We Stream engaged residents in lockdown. It also raised funds to support Manchester's night-time economy. There were 59,000 views of this high quality, creative event within 24 hours.
  - For South Asian Heritage Month 2020 across July and August seven writers of South Asian heritage were interviewed on their writing and created a reading list of their favourites to accompany the celebrations.
  - In November 2020 the first Manchester Book Fair was launched to support book sales direct from independent publishers, featuring 12 Manchester publishers sharing their insider knowledge and insight into the best reads and recommendations.

- Beyond the website, Manchester City of Literature delivered targeted interventions to support communities in lockdown and freelance writers facing a dramatic loss of income. These included:
  - Creative writing workshops for vulnerable adults in partnership with The Men's Room by writer and therapist Jane Bradley.
  - Workshops on resilience with writer and coach Shamshad Khan for female writers of South Asian Heritage impacted by the pandemic.
  - Commissions for three creative writing activity packs by writers Nicole May, James Varney and Cheryl Martin for younger and older residents.
  - Connectedness Through Comics commissioned local artist Ian Bobb to create a comic strip in partnership with young people at 42nd Street to enable them and other young people to discuss the effects of the pandemic. The same comic strip was shared with young people in Nanjing City of Literature to show how we are all connected in our feelings of isolation during this time.

2.11 To learn from the twenty creative writing projects that were delivered during the first phase of the pandemic by partners, Manchester City of Literature commissioned an independent evaluator to interview project leads for these programmes to understand better the impact of creative writing on wellbeing. This led to a workshop for partners on the benefits and practicalities of shared evaluation including documenting methodologies and approaches.

## **2.12 Project Activity supporting literacy and reading for pleasure**

2.13 Manchester City of Literature brings its partners together to deliver key calendar events and projects that support reading for pleasure and literacy, that develop soft-skills and social capital, and contribute to community cohesion, multiculturalism, multilingualism and civic pride. The work of Manchester City of Literature brings extra funding into the city for these initiatives and its work leads to a better event than would otherwise be possible – in terms of profile, quality and quantity of events.

## **2.14 International Mother Language Day**

2.14.1 2021 was the fifth consecutive year that Manchester has celebrated this UNESCO calendar event which occurs every year on 21<sup>st</sup> February. IMLD is a celebration of the nearly 200 languages spoken in Manchester and of the cultural diversity that is one of the city's strengths. The events involve libraries, cultural venues, community groups, universities, schools, poets and writers.

2.14.2 2021 saw Manchester's biggest celebrations yet, despite the pandemic. Between 16 and 28 February, over 18 films and online events took place celebrating language diversity. Community groups that took part included The Sebene Project (who celebrate Congolese culture), the Polish Saturday School and Language and Culture of Bangladesh who all created films to share with other communities.

Activity was hosted on Manchester City of Literature's website and YouTube channel and on partner's websites. One example of partner work was that Manchester Libraries held a full day of videos showcased on the Manchester

Libraries Facebook site. In February, visits to Manchester City of Literature's website increased by 140% - and 85% of these users were new visitors. The press campaign to promote IMLD 2021 led to 51 pieces of coverage across radio, print and online media with a potential reach of over 8 million people.

## **2.15 Festival of Libraries**

2.15.1 Manchester is known as 'the library city' because of the number of unique libraries in its city centre. Launching an annual libraries festival was a key aspiration of the bid to become a City of Literature. The inaugural Festival of Libraries ran between 9 and 13 June this year and celebrated the city-region's public, heritage and specialist libraries. Its aim was to change the traditional public perception of libraries and to attract new and lapsed users of libraries especially those with lower levels of cultural engagement. The event was supported by Arts Council England, via the National Lottery funded Project Grants programme.

2.15.2 The Greater Manchester wide programme brought together over 80 events, 50 artists and local communities to celebrate the library network's contributions to wellbeing, culture and creativity, digital and information and, of course, reading. In addition to some high quality engaging online events, the festival also featured the return of face-to-face events in many of the participating libraries. This included a vibrant family Sunday Funday at Central Library on 13<sup>th</sup> June. Evaluation of this successful event is currently taking place and will be available in August 2021. The Festival of Libraries will be an annual event within Manchester's festival calendar.

## **2.16 Community Champions**

2.16.1 This programme works with communities in Manchester who are not currently accessing literature, to engage with literature in a way that suits them. These are communities where educational attainment is low, and there are few extra-curricular programmes for literature, and residents are unlikely to be engaging with reading for pleasure. The reasons for this are thought to be:

- Where literature programmes have taken place, they may have been 'parachuted in' with relatively little involvement from local people to design programmes 'in their terms';
- People in these communities may not see themselves reflected in the literary activity and literature they see;
- There are high levels of inequality and deprivation in these communities.

2.16.2 Manchester City of Literature has designed the Community Champions programme, drawing on participatory arts practice and examples from other parts of the cultural sector including The Agency (Battersea Arts Centre, Contact Theatre and other partners). In 2021, the first year of the programme, there will be three Champions working in Rusholme, in Harpurhey/Moston and in Longsight. The communities engaged include the Pentecostal faith community, carers, families and South Asian women. The Champions will act as a bridge between these communities and literature in its broadest sense

and will seek to co-design programmes with communities that are sustainable and community owned. The programme has evaluation built-in which will inform future strategies for roll-out to other neighbourhoods and to support fundraising.

## **2.17 Write Manchester**

- 2.17.1 Write Manchester is a programme from Manchester City of Literature and partners to encourage residents of all ages to engage in creative writing. This is to support confidence and well-being, to help develop literacy, to create writing that reflects on identity and location and for those keen to continue their writing it will signpost people to regular groups, short courses and development opportunities. The programme will celebrate and value the creativity of local people and build grassroots engagement with literature in any genre, style or format.
- 2.17.2 Over time Write Manchester will build a network of writers, teachers, librarians, and volunteers city-wide to champion writing competitions with schools, businesses, and community groups, pairing adults and under-18 participants, encouraging intergenerational, intercultural cohesion.
- 2.17.3 In autumn 2021, we will launch the 'Year of Writing Calendar' in partnership with the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. This will be the first phase of Write Manchester and will platform searchable resources for teachers, home educators, families and young people from across the literary and culture sector. The two universities and Manchester City of Literature will implement a distribution and engagement strategy, using extensive Widening Participation and Schools Outreach networks to ensure effective and joined up communication across the city in conjunction with Read Manchester and Manchester Cultural Education Partnership.

## **2.18 The future**

- 2.19 Manchester City of Literature aims to continue the great progress it has made in just over a year in existence to help nurture, advocate for and engage people with the literature network in Manchester. It will continue to seek to bring funding into the city, help to increase engagement with culture and the recovery of the city and support partners with their work.

## **3.0 Recommendations**

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider and comment on the information in the report, noting the progress of Manchester UNESCO City of Literature, and the progress it has made towards its objectives in less than two years of existence as an organisation.