

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

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

Subject: Read Manchester - Progress Report

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report details the progress with Read Manchester since it was launched in 2016, managed within the library service in partnership with Education, and the National Literacy Trust. It shows how by developing the love of 'reading for pleasure', Read Manchester contributes to tackling low literacy levels in the city. It shows how initiatives such as book gifting have continued to maintain residents' access to reading, during the pandemic. Read Manchester will be more important than ever over the next 12 months with the Year of the Child.

Recommendations

Members are asked to consider and comment on the information in the report, noting the progress of Read Manchester and the impact it has on reading in Manchester's residents, particularly children.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
None

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	
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Read Manchester aims to improve the literacy levels of Manchester's residents, particularly children and young people. Literacy is a key life-skill which is a significant factor in people's quality of life

A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Read Manchester aims to improve the literacy levels of Manchester's residents, particularly children and young people. Literacy is a key life-skill which is a significant factor in people's quality of life
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Introduction

Read Manchester promotes reading for pleasure in Manchester, focussing mostly on children and families. It has been funded by the Council since 2016. It is managed jointly by the Library Service and Education. We are a National Literacy Trust Hub. Read Manchester has held many successful initiatives over the past few years and impacted greatly upon residents of Manchester. This is detailed in this report.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Read Manchester approach is a response to the strong body of national research that links deprivation with low literacy skills. Read Manchester is a partnership between Manchester City Council and The National Literacy Trust (NLT). It was launched in April 2016 to embed culture change by engaging the whole community around a focus of literacy. The campaign is led by MCC staff from Libraries who work with partners including Sure Start Children's Centres, Schools, businesses, Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES), and Health Partners. The Board is chaired by the Director of Education with senior representation from Libraries, NLT, MAES, Manchester City of Literature and Population Health. There is also a Steering Group that represents the broad partnership of organisations supporting the campaign.
- 2.2 In 2017, NLT carried out an analysis with Experian to reveal the wards nationally with the highest potential for literacy issues. Several wards in Manchester were identified in the top 10% of wards nationally that most need Literacy support. The Board agreed to focus on Wythenshawe as a priority for its place-based approach to improving literacy. All wards continue to be part of the wider campaign work and programmes.
- 2.3 Read Manchester commissioned the NLT to conduct a survey to gather baseline information on the enjoyment of reading and reading behaviours and attitudes of children and young people aged 8 - 18. Compared with their peers nationally fewer children and young people in Manchester enjoy reading and think positively about reading. The survey also highlighted that the gap is wider with specific groups including boys, 11-14 year olds and pupils receiving free school meals. The findings identified that only 38.7% of the sample (5,256) read daily outside of school and 32.8% reported that they only read when they have to.
- 2.4 To raise literacy standards, approaches need to be adopted to engage families and local communities. Read Manchester was designed to support the delivery of this broader approach, underpinned by key factors that include
 - a. A positive home learning environment
 - b. A focus on reading for pleasure
 - c. A local, place-based approach
 - d. A partnership model

2.5 The pandemic has increased literacy needs of residents in the city, with the most deprived being disproportionately affected, as they are most at risk of lacking access to reading. Read Manchester has a central role in combatting this and the subsequent recovery of the city.

2.6 Read Manchester's activity is designed to tackle needs of residents

2.6.1 **Children from the poorest families start school with language and vocabulary skills that are 19 months behind their peers.**

Our work to ensure that the poorest children in Manchester start school with language and vocabulary skills on par with their peers:

- The campaign (2016-21) gifted a total of 133,136 free Bookstart packs to families with children under five, providing them with advice and resources to improve their home learning environment and help support their child's language learning at home. The following were gifted:
 - 39,354 Baby Packs, which include information for parents on the importance of early language development and communication.
 - 42,245 Treasure Packs have been gifted to three and four-year-olds in nurseries
 - 37,307 Time to Read Packs have been gifted to schools for all children in reception class
 - 14,230 Bookstart Corner packs to families through Sure Start Children's Centres
- Read Manchester is supporting the Dolly Parton Imagination Library book gifting programme to expand in the city and is represented on the Trustee Board
- The National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together programme, which helps parents support their child's language development at home, has been delivered in 6 Sure Start Children's Centres and the approach is now embedded in the Stay, Play and Learn sessions.
- Encouraging Library membership has been embedded as a core offer from Sure Start Children's Centres.
- All Sure Start Children's Centres have joined Bookstart Corner from BookTrust, creating a dedicated book corner in each Centre.
- Hungry Little Minds campaign from the National Literacy Trust has worked in partnership with Read Manchester to support parents to Chat, Play and Read and has developed a family Walk and Talk Trail in Platt Fields Park.

2.6.2 **1 in 4 (25%) children leave primary school in England unable to read well; rising to 2 in 5 in disadvantaged children (40%)**

Our work to ensure that all 11-year-olds in Manchester leave primary school able to read well:

- 29,668 Manchester children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge (2017-2020 inclusive). Over 90% of these were primary aged. To complete the challenge, children aged between 4-11 signed up at their local library to read any six library books during the summer holidays. The challenge motivated children in Manchester to read over 160,000 library books during this period.
- In 2021 we are part of a national pilot with The Reading Agency which increases links between schools and the Summer Reading Challenge. As part of this, 40 Manchester schools have agreed to join all their pupils to the challenge and the library. 16,000 pupils received full library membership, a library card and the summer reading challenge resources. We will be looking to learn from this pilot and increase links with schools further in 2022.
- Working in partnership with World Book Day UK, 10 award-winning authors performed as part of the Share a Story Live national events in 2019 and 2020. Nearly 3,000 children from over 30 primary schools were entertained and inspired by the authors, attracting both TV and press coverage.
- Meeting an author can make a real difference to a child's engagement with books and reading - 69% of children attending the Share a Story event said they were inspired to 'read more' as a result.
- Between April 2018 and March 2021, 27,342 children and young people have met an author / illustrator / poet either in-person or virtually.
- This academic year to date, 17,156 children have attended virtual library class visits and 414 have attended in-person class visits. This number will grow significantly when the figures for Empathy Week and the Summer Reading Challenge engagement are added.
- A network of 13 Read Manchester Primary School Champions shares best practice and promotes reading for pleasure to stakeholders and local networks.

2.6.3 Young people who enjoy reading are five times as likely to read above the expected level for their age compared to those who don't enjoy reading. Young adults in Manchester enjoy reading less than their peers nationally.

Our work to ensure that young people in Manchester develop an enjoyment of reading:

- As Learning Partner for Bee in the City 2018, we worked with 30,000 children in 61 schools, community / youth groups and libraries to decorate 131 medium bees and display them in cultural venues as part of a bee trail around the city.
- We worked with 10,000 pupils in 35 local primary schools and 10 public libraries in 2017 to paint and decorate 58 BookBenches in the theme of children's favourite books, which were then placed around the city on a special trail.
- We worked with reading charity, Read for Good to bring a city-wide Readathon to Manchester in 2019. The Readathon encouraged schools to sign up to two weeks of reading activity. Schools could decide

whether or not to raise funds for their school and local hospital libraries. Over 100 schools took part with participation from 36,667 children and young people. £10,000 was raised and a second Readathon was planned for June 2020 (cancelled due to the pandemic).

- In 2020 we launched The Reading Map, in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester, based on the Metrolink map. The map, aimed at children aged 8-11, encourages children to read books from different lines by a wide variety of authors. Every child in Years 5 and 6 (14,463) in Manchester primary schools received a free copy of the map See Appendix 2.
- Connecting Stories is an Arts Council Funded programme delivered by the National Literacy Trust and Read Manchester to promote reading for enjoyment. The Connecting Stories programme (2021) has engaged with 103 schools, reached an audience of 9,480 children and young people through author events and gifted 820 books to date.
- Little Big Book Club - part of a pilot with 5 primary schools and 25 families with children in Year 3 to test an approach to family reading groups
- Reading Well for Children collections of 33 books (1,980 in total) will be gifted to 60 primary schools in July-September 2021. These books support children with their mental wellbeing and will be added to classrooms and school libraries.

2.6.4 England has the lowest teenage literacy rate in the OECD. This contributes to wage inequality later in their lives.

What we did to prepare young people in Manchester for the workplace:

- We bought 19 Shelf Help collections of 34 books (646 books) for 16 high school libraries and 3 public libraries with additional resources and promotional material. These collections support young people with their mental health and wellbeing.
- An additional 60 Shelf Help collections (2040 books) have been secured in 2021 by Read Manchester to gift to secondary schools and youth/community groups
- We gave 220 secondary school students the communication skills to prepare them for the world of work through our Words for Work programme.
- Words for Work: Women in Leadership (in partnership with Lancôme), was delivered to 200 young women, supported by 8 business volunteers.
- Manchester was prioritised as an area for Words that Count from the National Literacy Trust. This aims to improve the financial literacy of young people as evidence shows that children and young people who have good reading skills are four times as likely to have good financial skills.
- As a response to the pandemic, we delivered six online author sessions promoting mental wellbeing, resilience and self-confidence for young people. 'SUMO Guy' inspirational speaker Paul McGee delivered online sessions for 4 high schools to 313 pupils. 150 copies of his book Yesss! were gifted between these schools.

- To highlight the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers and in recognition of the power of stories to develop empathy and understanding, we collaborated with Manchester Children's Book Festival (MMU) on a *Boy, Everywhere* programme in 2021. 650 pupils from 6 secondary schools attended virtual author sessions with A.M. Dassu. In addition, 300 books were gifted to schools as class sets and a learning resource was developed to encourage discussion on the topic.

2.6.5 **Children who own a book are three times more likely to read above the level for their age than those that don't**

Our work to promote book ownership in Manchester:

- Read Manchester has gifted over 100,000 books through our programmes and community work, targeting the 1 in 8 disadvantaged children who don't own a book.
- Since the pandemic started, gifting books has become even more important as access to reading material was more limited with libraries closing following national guidance.
- We have therefore increased our book gifting initiatives. We have sought free books from publishers and distributed them across the city to those most in need, and most at risk of not having access to reading.
- In total during the pandemic, we have distributed over 60,000 books and magazines through a variety of partners including foodbanks, community grocers, mental health organisations, Early Years partners and schools. We have expanded our community links through the book gifting programme by partnering with over 70 local community organisations.
- In July 2020, we launched the Bee Ready Bee a Reader Transition Read project, gifting a free copy of *The Kid Who Came from Space* by Ross Welford to over 7000 year 6 pupils in Manchester primary schools. This was supported financially by various business and community sponsors. The project aims were to encourage children to read over the summer while giving them shared reading experience amongst peers to help gain confidence during the transition to secondary school after a disrupted final year in primary school. Along with their free book, every child received an enrichment pack with activity ideas linked to the book's narrative.
- Building on the success of the inaugural transition read, Read Manchester's Big Read launched in 2021 with a CPD event attended by over 100 teachers from primary and secondary schools. Over 7500 books were gifted to all Year 6 pupils with the supporting enrichment activity booklet.
- 3,000 books were gifted to the Baby Box sensory project to support babies born during lockdown.
- 1,260 books have been gifted to 126 Private, Voluntary and Independent Early Years settings to supplement their small book collections.
- 400 books have been gifted to 200 Looked After Children by working in partnership with the MCC LAC team.

2.6.6 A recent OECD report found that 7.1 million adults in England have very poor literacy skills. Studies show that adults with low literacy levels feel like they lack influence in public decisions.

Our work to promote adult literacy in Manchester:

- Take 10 campaign strand as a call to action for all ages to read for 10 minutes. Promoting the benefits of reading for mental wellbeing. The recent Take 10 activity in May engaged 57,749 participants in the city (all ages) from 48 schools, businesses and Early Years settings.
- We launched the Manchester Reading Ahead challenge, which was completed by 2,000 adults. The challenge was delivered in partnership with organisations including Talk English, Manchester Adult Education Service, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and Children's Centres. Manchester Libraries continues to deliver Reading Ahead.
- Over 5,000 Quick Read books were bought to support adults reading with low literacy levels and we have continued to secure books for adults through our book gifting programme.
- Engaging with a variety of partners, we developed a multilingual community project to create a unique poem – Made in Manchester. Original entries in 63 different languages were selected from hundreds of entries written by Mancunians. 11 schools and community groups including MAES took part. An inspiring video was created with highlights of the poem being read by the different authors of the poem
- Working in partnership with MAES Family Learning team, a variety of events have been co-delivered to support parental engagement in reading and modelling reading behaviours for children. A Read Manchester story-telling course for parents is now part of the adult learning offer.
- We have supported Read Easy Wythenshawe, a volunteer-run organisation that supports adults to read

2.6.7 Studies show that libraries are essential community resources, which promote literacy for all ages, strengthen social capital and promote social mixing amongst its users.

Our work to engage communities in literacy through libraries in Manchester:

- As part of the campaign (up to March 2021), 170,000 Manchester pupils attended educational sessions held in public libraries or virtually. These featured fun and interactive activities that encourage children to read for enjoyment.
- During summers 2017-19, 26,301 children and adults attended 844 activity sessions in Manchester libraries.
- During summers 2017-19, a total of 134,720 books were read for the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Read and Feed initiative - in 2017-2019, Read and Feed sessions were held to help combat holiday hunger and promote the Summer Reading Challenge (one library in 2017, three in 2018 and four in 2019).

- Summer 2020, the Summer Reading Challenge was a digital offer only. The significant fall in engagement was felt by all Library Authorities, showing how important library staff and a comprehensive free summer activity offer are in supporting children to read.
- Evidence shows that the Challenge is an effective Covid recovery tool, encouraging reading for pleasure over the summer holidays, building reading skills and confidence, and helping to prevent the 'dip' in reading skills while children are out of school
- We are increasing links with schools for this year's Summer Reading Challenge, automatically enrolling 16,000 pupils, as mentioned above. We are hoping to expand this pilot, to make 2022's Summer Reading Challenge the biggest ever.

2.7 The future

- 2.8 Read Manchester aims to continue promoting reading for pleasure across the city. We will support the recovery of the city with an innovative range of initiatives and projects. We will continue to work with the National Literacy Trust, Libraries and community partners to develop our book gifting programmes, reading promotions and the Summer Reading Challenge. We will continue to focus on Wythenshawe in our place-based approach and will use the learning from this community focused work to develop initiatives in other areas of the city.
- 2.9 We will contribute significantly to Year of the Child, ensuring as many children and young people as possible in the city have access to reading and are inspired to become life-long readers.

3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider and comment on the information in the report, noting the progress of Read Manchester and the impact it has on reading in Manchester's residents, particularly children.