

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2022

Subject: Manchester Libraries Strategy Update

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

The purpose of the report is to provide the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee with an update on the library strategy and to present future plans.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this Report, including the intention to abolish fines for overdue items.

Wards Affected: All

<p>Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city</p>
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<p>Libraries support the zero-carbon agenda. This includes high quality, low-carbon buildings that are community hubs to be used by multiple organisations, that libraries encourage books to be read by multiple people and the increase in ebooks – reducing the use of paper.</p>
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<p>More details contained within section 2.5.1</p>
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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	Libraries enable people to improve their skills, apply for work on-line, offer and offer volunteering opportunities, increasing residents' employability. Libraries lead the Council's work on reducing digital exclusion amongst residents. More information in 2.5.2
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Libraries assist in raising literacy and skills levels, and with enabling our youngest residents to become school ready, helping to deliver Read Manchester. More information in 2.5.2
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Libraries are at the heart of our communities and offer a wide range of services and activities for free that help to build and maintain community cohesion and place pride. The intention to abolish fines will tackle inequalities and remove a barrier to library use, allowing more people to use libraries and help unlock their potential More information in 2.5.2
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Good local libraries are part of the fabric of neighbourhoods, helping to sustain pride in Manchester and its communities. Manchester Central Library is a regional, national and international visitor attraction More information in 2.5.1
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Our libraries are a key location for residents to access digital technology and helping build skills that will assist future generation of Mancunions to sustain the growth of the city. Our digital inclusion work is increasing connectivity in homes. More information in 2.5.6

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Manchester's libraries embody the Our Manchester Strategy, providing locally based, customer focussed services at the heart of communities. The service contributes greatly to Manchester Strategy Outcomes, as detailed in section 2.5. Manchester's Library, Information and Archives Service delivers leisure, cultural, learning and information services through a network of 15 neighbourhood libraries, 6 community partnership libraries and the internationally renowned world class Central Library – the most visited public library in the country. The service also operates 24-hour virtual library, HMP Manchester Prison library and Books to Go (housebound) service and supports a number of neighbourhood-based book collections. Manchester Libraries manages the Greater Manchester County Record Office function on behalf of GMCA which holds records from across the city region. Manchester Libraries also leads on digital inclusion for the Council and city.
- 1.2 The library service has evolved and reinvented itself over the past decade and whilst seeing significant reduction in revenue funding we have seen £80 million capital investment, including the £50 million transformation of Manchester Central Library. In the last 10 years, and we have relocated 80% of libraries into new or refurbished or co-located premises. The Libraries Capital Programme will see significant investment into the service in the next 3 years to improve the estate and service further. The latest Adult Public Library User Survey reported that over 93% of customers were satisfied with the service – the highest satisfaction rating we have ever received.
- 1.3 As valued community spaces, libraries act as a shop front and access point for a range of other council, government and public services and partner organisations, enabling people to access these services at a local level. A wide range of council services are delivered through our network of libraries for example adult learning (including learning specifically aimed at getting people back to work), youth provision, councillor surgeries, benefits advice and many other advice sessions.
- 1.4 Library services also provide significant support for key Manchester City Council objectives such as raising literacy levels (both reading skills and digital), reducing dependency, sustaining local neighbourhoods and creating economic growth, and have a critical and key role in supporting the City Council's priorities. Libraries manage Read Manchester with the aim of spreading the love of reading throughout the city and increasing literacy levels with children and adults. Manchester Libraries lead on digital inclusion for the Council and city. We work with the VCSE sector to reduce digital exclusion across community venues and in people's homes. Libraries also play a vital role through the provision of free public access to computers, free Wi-Fi, access to information, benefit validation and advice sessions.
- 1.5 In terms of a strategic planning framework, Manchester Libraries continue to provide a strong, key and vital role in the heart of their communities and neighbourhoods supporting learning, literacy, economic opportunity and inspiration, through the 4 universal public library offers around reading,

information & digital, health & wellbeing, culture & creativity. This ensures that we have a coherent structured offer which meets the current and future needs of our residents and also ensure that our service offer is aligned to support the delivery of Our Corporate Plan.

- 1.6 It is now nearly eight years since Central Library reopened following its transformation. It continues to be the most visited public library in the country, attracting a diverse range of residents as well as being a key attraction for visitors from outside the city. Part of the transformation vision for Central Library was to be an inclusive space, appealing to families, children and young people, aspiring entrepreneurs and visitors to the city, as well as traditional library visitors. Eight years on, despite the pandemic, Central Library's cultural programme, Library Live, exists as a busy and diverse cultural programme for everyone to enjoy. In recognition of the importance of Central Library and Archives+, the library became the Northern Hub for the 1921 Census, being only one of three venues in England and Wales that can offer free access to the census.
- 1.7 Across the city, our neighbourhood libraries and community partnership libraries - play an integral role in their local communities, acting as safe, trusted, socially inclusive, free, accessible, welcoming and non-threatening spaces, that play a significant role in helping to address deprivation and inequality. Research has shown that using libraries improves residents' health and wellbeing by combating loneliness and social isolation, as well as providing a quiet place to study and read. We support customers with reading for pleasure and literacy, and the level of book-borrowing is increasing again after a fall due to the pandemic, whilst the borrowing of ebooks/eaudio has increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic.
- 1.8 Libraries are the primary community venue for residents to access IT, and offer training, support and assistance to residents. This is done through staff, volunteers and partner organisations, for example Citizens Advice Manchester, which offers highly popular weekly digital-advice sessions at libraries across the city.
- 1.9 Fundamental to our ability to provide a high-quality breadth and range of services is the need to work well and effectively with a broad spectrum of partners and volunteers. Our partnership working across the city ranges from local community groups to specialist intellectual property lawyers who give their time pro-bono to support fledgling entrepreneurs, to the British Library, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Manchester, the Manchester College and Arts Council, England. Pre-pandemic, over 400 volunteers enable us to make the best use of the resources available within the city, and we are starting to build up volunteer numbers again.

2.0 Delivering the Library Strategy during the pandemic and beyond

- 2.1 Through investment in the previous Library 2020 strategy, the City Council has demonstrated its commitment to maintaining effective libraries at the heart of

Manchester's communities. The key strands of Library 2020 strategy have been:-

- Introducing and strengthening customer self-service transformation to all libraries
- Introducing new Open Plus technology to increase opening hours and widen access at Withington Library, Wythenshawe Forum Library and Avenue Library
- Transforming Withington library
- Refreshing other libraries such as Central Library and Archives +, Hulme High Street, Forum Library

2.2 There will be significant in capital works to libraries from 2021 to 2024. The grade 2 listed Chorlton Library will be fully refurbished during 2022, with a £600,000 budget for capital works, supplemented by additional AMP works and Open Plus budget. The works include remodelling and refurbishment of the newer extension area, creation of a new community meeting room, full redecoration, enabling the Open Plus access system, and restoring the historic dome over the lobby area that has been covered over in previous refurbishments.

£500,000 has been allocated 2021-2024 for citywide library renewal works to ensure that all libraries are in a strong position to serve their local communities for the next 10/15 years. Works will include redecoration, replacing worn furniture, shelving and carpets, plus redecoration where needed. For example, as part of this programme of activity, Didsbury Library will undergo full redecoration commencing February 2022; new community meeting rooms will be created at Newton Heath and Longsight Libraries; and North City will have a new children's library and Age Friendly area.

Gorton Hub is currently being constructed, and the new library will be a cornerstone of the community offer from the building that embodies partnership working in action. Due to open to the public in October 2022, the new library will offer the same overall space as the current well used library, with 2 large community meeting rooms, an ICT suite and increased hours of access enabled via the Open Plus system.

The new joint library and leisure centre at Abraham Moss will open to the public in late Summer 2023. The development is currently progressing on site. The library will work on the same model as Hulme High Street and Arcadia libraries, with the library being accessible outside of staffed hours for customers to use self-serve, making library services available from early morning until the centre closes, plus all day on Sunday.

2.3 Libraries proved to be an invaluable service to residents during the Covid pandemic. Alongside almost everywhere else, all libraries closed in March 2020 as part of the first lockdown. During the first few months of the pandemic, the service developed an extensive digital 'libraries at home' programme. Activities and events were delivered online to residents of all ages, including storytimes, Lego clubs, creative activities, performances, memory boxes of different areas

of the city and a facebook book club. The use of ebooks, eaudiobooks, emagazines and enewspapers was promoted and usage increased massively, ensuring we continued to provide access to reading for tens of thousands of residents, despite physical libraries not being open. The Books To Go Service for housebound residents reopened in June 2020, and as soon national restrictions on libraries were lifted (on 4/7/20), we opened six neighbourhood libraries as well as Central Library, with a limited offer. Services were carefully delivered in a Covid-secure manner, ensuring the safety of staff and customers. All services and sites underwent rigorous Covid Risk Assessment, and all staff had individual risk assessments completed prior to being allowed to work front-facing again. Services increased as restrictions lifted, with libraries classed as an essential service by Government from the second lockdown onwards, recognising the crucial role libraries play in people's lives, particularly around digital access for people without Internet access at home. Since the pandemic started, between 15%-20% of visits to library have been to access our ICT offer. With restrictions on services and activities lifted, from September 2021, our events programme for all ages and community groups was able to resume. Visitor numbers have generally remained lower than pre-pandemic as, understandably, some residents have higher risk and vulnerability and remain cautious. Our role as a trusted community resource has meant that since April 2021, libraries have been a community collect point for Lateral Flow Tests (LFT), and to date, around 8000 test kits have been collected by residents from libraries.

2.4 Using a library improves the quality of residents' lives in ways stated throughout this report. Using a library reduces inequality and increases life opportunities. Therefore, we need to reduce barriers to becoming a library member and to using the library throughout different life stages. It is recognised that fear of library fines is a barrier to using a library, and fines incurred are a reason to stop using library services. As a result, we plan to remove library fines with Executive Member approval. This has been implemented in 4 other authorities in Greater Manchester, and is being implemented by other core cities, and early indications are that, as expected, library membership increases following the ending of fines. This will particularly benefit those residents on the lowest incomes, who will potentially gain most benefit from the resources available from libraries across the city. Any budget shortfall will be covered by in-service savings. This will be introduced on 1st April 2022, and we will report on the impact of this at our next Library Strategy Update Scrutiny Report.

2.5 The library service contributes hugely to the Council's Corporate Plan Priority Outcomes

2.5.1 Contributing to achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Libraries are possibly the longest standing re-use and recycling programme through the borrow and use of a book by multiple people. The increase in lending of ebooks and eaudio books reduces the carbon footprint of reading in the city still further. The library estate contains generally good quality buildings with excellent carbon emission standards, and the capital investment into several of the libraries improves this further. By widening use of libraries as

community hubs, we are preventing the need for other services and organisations to have their own buildings and reducing travel time amongst staff and partner organisations. Neighbourhood libraries are accessible for partners as workplaces and for service delivery, supporting the Our Manchester and Bringing Services Together approaches. They can also be used for environmental and climate change campaigns, to increase the understanding of the need for carbon emission reductions across the city.

2.5.2 Growth That Benefits everyone

Libraries develop and implement the Council's Digital Action Plan. This work reduces the number of digitally excluded residents in the city and increased the level of digital skills. People without digital skills are at increased the level of disadvantage – e.g. unemployment, low wage employment, social isolation, financial poverty - more information in section 2.8

The BIPC (based at Central Library) and the Build a Business initiative, support the establishment and growth of start-up businesses, increasing the number of successful businesses in the city and the creation of jobs and opportunities – more information in section 2.9

2.5.3 Young People

Libraries support young people from 0-18 years, as outlined in the Libraries Services to Children and Young people in Appendix 2.

Working with Read Manchester, children and young people and their families benefit from library use, resulting in increased skills, confidence, happiness, literacy, educational attainment and job prospects. Libraries are positive environments that children and young people choose to use. Two of our libraries offer times in the week where young people are the only users of the library. Section 2.10 outlines more information on the offer for children and young people.

2.5.4 Healthy Cared For People

People who use a library have improved health and wellbeing. A Central Library survey during the pandemic reported that 87% of respondents said they felt happier after using the library. The CIPFA Public Library User Survey of 2019 reported that over 80% of Manchester's respondents who sometimes felt lonely, felt less lonely after using the library. Libraries reduce social isolation in a whole range of its customers – from Mums and Dads attending storytimes with their children, to older people who use the library for social interaction in a welcoming environment, to Books To Go customers who are housebound and may not see anyone else for a few days apart from the delivery driver who provides a range of books. Libraries are also key for residents receiving accurate health information, through digital access, health information and books on prescription and reading well collections. Libraries are also used by partner organisations such as Buzz to deliver health promotion sessions. All library staff have received training on dementia and are Dementia Friends.

2.5.5 Housing

Libraries contribute to the social infrastructure of successful and cohesive local communities. We work in partnership with Housing providers to reduce digital exclusion within their residents – to the benefits of the tenants and the housing providers. We work with organisations such as Lifeshare and Booth Centre to encourage and enable homeless people to access library services.

2.5.6 Neighbourhoods

Libraries are the beating heart of communities, being used and owned by the communities they reside in. They are well used venues key to successful and cohesive local communities. As community hubs they are used to gain access to skills, creative opportunities, digital access and access to a wide range of services at neighbourhood level. Libraries are increasingly becoming community hubs used to meet a whole range of priorities of people in the neighbourhood. The existence of a library within the neighbourhood is a critical factor to the quality of life of communities and residents in the neighbourhood. Throughout 2022 we will be running 'Roadshows' in different neighbourhoods with partner organisations to talk to residents and reduce digital exclusion in areas where it's highest.

2.5.7 Connections

Libraries ensure residents are digitally connected – particularly those who do not have Internet access at home. Each library offers free Internet access and high-speed Wi-Fi. Libraries are digital hubs where residents can access other services through video technology – for example Citizens Advice Bureau. We are leading a bid for GM Libraries to expand this further. Manchester Libraries leads digital inclusion for the Council – more information in section 2.8.

2.5.8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are at the forefront of everything libraries do. Libraries are representative of the diverse communities in which they are located, and are a key means to increase community cohesion. To ensure that our workforce represents our communities, and to broaden access, we reviewed our recruitment practices two years ago, such that all entry level Library Assistant jobs grade 3 posts are now advertised in local libraries, and recruited to via drop-in open days, when anyone who has booked a place is given an interview. This has proved to be a really positive experience for both applicants and existing managers, who have been more directly involved in recruitment than previously. We have so far recruited around 40 Manchester residents through this process, who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including a number of staff who are over 60, thus demonstrating our commitment to being Age Friendly in employment as well as direct service delivery. More information on Age Friendly in 2.11

A libraries staff group meets to discuss racism and develop actions for the service to promote equality and diversity. Each Library displays 'Libraries

Against Racism' notices. The book stock is diverse, including the recent 'See Myself in Books' initiative and the events programme outlined in 2.13 contains artists and authors from diverse backgrounds and is attractive to all. Key EDI events are celebrated in libraries such as Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, International Women's Day, LGBT History Month and International Mother Language Day. Manchester Libraries are accredited Libraries of Sanctuary. More details on this and our wider EDI work in 2.12.

2.5.9 A Well Managed Council

By widening use of libraries as community hubs, we are preventing the need for other services and organisations to have their own buildings and reducing travel time amongst staff and partner organisations. Neighbourhood libraries are accessible for partners as workplaces and for service delivery, in an Our Manchester and Bringing Services Together approach.

2.6 The Latest Public Library User Survey (PLUS) that we conducted in 2019-20 reported that over 93% of customers were satisfied with the service – the highest satisfaction rating we have ever received. We believe that this figure will increase further when its next carried out, as the feedback from customers to our service during the pandemic has been positive. We have been a lifeline to so many residents. The survey provided some powerful insight into the libraries role in reducing social isolation. As part of the Survey, four in ten respondents reported experiencing feelings of loneliness or isolation from others. Respondents who indicated that they often or sometimes experience feelings of loneliness were asked whether the library helped combat these feelings. More than 80% of these people agreed that it did. So over 80% of people feel less lonely as a result of using the library. Full details of PLUS is shown in various maps and a summary report in Appendix 6.

2.7 Each library has a huge impact upon its local neighbourhood and residents. Here are brief examples from each library that show the range of services we deliver and impacts on residents.

Central and Neighbourhood libraries

- **Abraham Moss Library** - The new temporary library is at the heart of the community, offering a wealth of community activities including the popular Tiny Tots Storytime. It also offers a welcoming space for groups to meet including the Women Zone group of elders, and a new knitting group attended by young people from Abraham Moss High School.
- **Arcadia Library** - our partnership with GLL (Greenwich Leisure limited) ensures that the library offer is seamlessly available to customers from 6.30am - 10pm on weekdays and 9 – 5pm at weekends, including Sunday. GLL staff are friendly to the library customers and quick to step in and help customers pick up their reservations etc during the library's Self-Service hours
- **Avenue Library** - Partners Citizens Advice Manchester and Yes Manchester offer weekly employment and advice sessions that are well attended. Several social groups including the Manchester Carers group, the Blackley Crafters and the popular Hello Saturday club for families meet at the library on a

weekly basis to enjoy social interaction, learn new skills and have fun! Avenue is one of the Open Plus Libraries offering access to customers outside staffed opening hours. Open Plus also operates at Forum and Withington Libraries.

- **Beswick Library** – The strong partnership with The East Manchester Academy High School and neighbouring schools has resulted in an excellent and varied programme of school classes, including Black History workshops and Libraries of Sanctuary events with live music, dance and rich cultural arts workshops. Other positive partnerships include working with Manchester City Football Club's in the Community who offered a popular food bank offer in the library last summer to local families. Staff regularly support residents online who need help to renew their parking permits, showing libraries' key role as digital hubs supporting digitally excluded residents
- **Brooklands library** – The ever-popular storytime has already returned to pre-COVID visitor figures, and people have been delighted to have the sessions back. The Christmas story time was very special with Santa in attendance handing out gifts and a library customer playing his cello to Christmas songs. The story sessions have such a lovely, warm shared community feel to them.
- **Central Library** - forms the hub at the centre of the city's 22 libraries. It delivers a diverse and popular cultural programme, Library Live, including animation festivals, the Manchester literature Festival as well as multi language and autism friendly children's sessions. The Archives + Partnership is successfully embedded in the delivery model of the library and we also partner with The Work Rights Centre, Citizens Advice Manchester and Henshaw's to offer vital one to one support for customers. Space is also provided on a commercial basis to Sopra Steria visa services. Central library has strived to deliver as full an offer as possible during the pandemic and our Science X event in October 2021 saw 7,000 customers visit on one day. Central Library also is home to Manchester Visitor Information Centre with the library managing the offer working with Marketing Manchester.
- **Chorlton Library** - The numbers at our extremely popular Chorlton library Storytime keep climbing, children and parents/carers love attending to sing songs, listen to stories and interact with each other. There is a real buzz to the sessions with lots of people telling us how good they are, and how important they are to them.
- **Didsbury Library** - All 22 libraries have paid a key part in the Council's response to Covid. This includes being community pick up points for LFT kits for residents. 7800 kits have been handed out to residents across the city, with Didsbury giving out 1400 which is the highest of all libraries.
- **Forum Library** – As a 'Creative Space' library, Forum has held amazing cultural events delivered for and with local groups and residents. For example, Culture Feast was a festival style event produced by Manchester Enterprise Academy's Include Group (pupils learning outside of the classroom), supported by community arts organisation Creative City and library staff. The event brought local people together to celebrate cultures of the world, and included live music, dance, and food, it was well attended and received lovely feedback from community members. The event won the Manchester Culture Award 2021 for the Promotion of Culture and Education, which was a huge

achievement for the young people involved and a source of pride for their parents and teachers.

- **Gorton Library** - Gorton Library is a brilliant example of strong community partnerships, with meeting rooms booked out for 90% of the available time. Both the Local History Group and Coffee Morning are led by volunteers. They are always on board with any library projects and initiatives and have developed very strong relationships with the library staff. The library has an emphasis on Health and wellbeing, and works successfully with Buzz (Manchester Health & Well Being service) and this work will be strengthened by the move across to the Gorton Hub in the Autumn 2022.
- **Hulme High Street Library** - In partnership with the Talk English partnership (Manchester Adult Education Service), a weekly class is in run in the library, with sessions well attended and oversubscribed. The learners love the sessions and the Talk English coordinator fed back that they feel so “welcomed and looked after” by the library. MAES also run Digital Skill-Up sessions in this library, as they do in several others, helping residents become more confident online users.
- **Longsight Library** - The library has a real sense of community ownership and is the most visited of our neighbourhood libraries. The library and Stanley Grove Primary Academy have developed a fantastic cultural partnership for several major events throughout the year, such as International Mother Language Day each February, the multilingual Mushaira, Fun Palaces, Winter Welcome/Lantern Parade. & The Big Book Bash. Parents and children from the school use the library all the time.
- **Moss Side Powerhouse Library** - The library and the Powerhouse centre work closely in partnership. During the summer, staff from the library and centre made up bag packs in the Sports hall ready for the playscheme which was located in the whole of the Powerhouse building including craft and computer sessions in the library and activities outside in the courtyard. The library hosted Black History Month events in 2021, and will host International Mother Language Day events for the first time this year
- **Newton Heath Library** - A traditional well-loved community hub that works closely with local Councillors to support a strong cohesive community spirit. This library offers a wealth of Age Friendly, children and young people’s activities, including Read & Feed holiday sessions, and will host the Holiday Activity Fund this year, community fun days and Lego clubs. It offers coding and digital activities, key aspects of our offer to schools and local families. We are re- shaping our offer to young people, creating a new teen zone to engage a new generation of teenagers with positive and creative solutions and activities including film clubs, music, drama, green screen, robotics, stop motion and film making, with Odd Arts recently offering drama and social action workshops.
- **North City Library** - Co-located with The Manchester College, North City is one of the three Creative Space libraries. It continues to offer a lively and vibrant cultural programme to its community encompassing live music bands, dance, theatre, and performances. A Winter Wonderland Christmas Party, annual International Mother Language Day and Fun Palaces are just some of the highlights of our cultural and diverse artistic programme. As part of the

Engaging Libraries project with partners from University of Manchester, last summer saw North City and Abraham Moss Libraries join with local schools and parks to offer an active and fun project relating to nature, picnics, cultural diversity and the many different languages that are spoken in Manchester.

- **Withington Library** – Withington was the first of our Open Plus libraries, opening an extra 20 hours a week in self-serve mode to customers who have upgraded their membership. This resumed in September 2021, with an increasing number of people using the library during unstaffed hours for quiet study, computer and laptop use, printing, picking up reservations or choosing books, as well as providing access for community groups who have prebooked the meeting rooms.

Community partnership libraries – run in partnership with community groups and volunteers

- **Barlow Moor Library**- The community partnership library is at the heart of Barlow Moor Community Centre so runs alongside other offers and activities. This library is successfully run purely by volunteers, with support from neighbouring libraries with staff just at the end of a phone if needed, but day to day it is just volunteers in the library. This has worked successfully for many years now and gives the local community access to all the library facilities.
- **Burnage Library** - School visits to Burnage community partnership library have been popular with two local primary schools, Acacias and Green End wanting to bring in the whole school class by class for an introduction to the library visit, the library officer with the help of library volunteers has been running these well enjoyed and favoured visits. This library is supported by Southway Housing and the Friends of Burnage Library.
- **Fallowfield Library** – Based at the Place Platt Lane, this community library works extremely well with a number of partners. A perfect example of this is the library volunteers, who are recruited by One Manchester, trained and managed by library staff, overseen by Friends of Fallowfield library. This has proved to be a winning formula with a number of the volunteers going on to successfully get jobs in Manchester libraries.
- **Miles Platting Library**- Recently refreshed, this is a popular community library working in partnership with local housing provider Jigsaw which offers regular Family Fundays. Activities include weekly Children’s Art Clubs, Make Do & Mend workshops, and we have recently worked with University of Manchester offering creative workshops highlighting climate change, urban resilience and appreciation of environmental change. Currently in the process of working with Canals and River Trust to offer a Community Cycle Library. We also offer an ad hoc café and play activities to make the best of our lovely landscaped outdoor space.
- **New Moston Library** - A small community library that has a loyal local presence with families and residents of all ages who enjoy popping in to use computers and attend holiday activities. This little gem had a mini makeover during lock down and has a growing connection with local schools, after playing a starring role in the winning video competition for the Summer Reading Challenge in 2021

- **Northenden Library** - The holiday craft sessions at Northenden community library have been tremendously attended. In December alone 137 people attending and enjoying the free crafts over four three-hour sessions. The local community have embraced and welcomed this fabulous offer, as well as the lovely creative opportunity it also allows them to come together. This library is supported by Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and the Friends of Northenden Library.

Other libraries

- **Books To Go** – This service delivers books, information and other resources to housebound residents. This was the first library service to return after the Covid Lockdown. Customers began receiving a service again in June 2020, with books delivered in a Covid secure fashion to people’s front doors. Many Books To Go customers have been shown how to borrow ebooks and eaudio books from the libraries’ Borrowbox service, enabling vulnerable residents the choice of 1000s of books available in an accessible format, in addition to their usual book delivery.
- **HMP Manchester Library** – The prison library aims to improve the literacy levels of prisoners, as low literacy levels correlate with a higher likelihood of re-offending on release. The Prison Library has not been able to reopen fully in its normal fashion since the start of the pandemic due to strict covid restrictions enforced at HMP Manchester. However, the library team have continued to deliver many services including offer access to reading by taking books to the wings. The Prison Library is actively developing Age Friendly services, as many prisoners fall within this category. Also, an exhibition of prisoner’s artwork has been touring libraries in the north of the city, providing an opportunity for prisoners’ families to view this in a neutral space.

2.8 Within the last twelve months, libraries have taken responsibility for developing and implementing the Council’s and city’s strategy to combat digital exclusion. Digital exclusion is where a resident lacks one or more of the following – access to the Internet, skills to use be a confident online user, or motivation to be online. Libraries have always been the foremost community venue for providing access to the Internet, and this continued to be the case during the pandemic – Appendix 7.4 shows that computer users predominantly came from the more deprived areas of the city. Libraries have expanded their role in tackling digital exclusion to outside of the libraries’ four walls. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan that we have developed and are implementing for the Council is included as Appendix 1. Since the start of the pandemic we have set up 2 initiatives which directly support digitally excluded residents in their own home. For people who have Internet access but don’t have the skills or confidence to use it effectively, we have set up and deliver a telephone skills support service which has helped residents to do such things as set up their own email address, facetime their relatives to stay connected, do their online supermarket shopping, manage their Universal Credit, search for jobs and complete the 2021 Census. We have formed a network of trained people to deliver these calls, such as libraries staff, Citizens Advice Bureau, Manchester Adult Education Service, community organisations and volunteers. We have assisted nearly 1000 residents in the scheme. Residents access it themselves by texting us on 07860064128, or they

can be referred by another person. In addition to this we have supported people who have no Internet access at home by delivering 750 devices (Chromebooks or laptops or smartphones) and an additional 400 data packages to residents. Each person who has received a free device with 12 months Internet access has also been assigned a digital champion who offers telephone support. To make this sustainable and reach hundreds more people, we have commissioned a company to run a refurbished device scheme, which will refresh old devices and deliver them to residents across the city. Our plan for 2022 outlined in Appendix 1, will be directed by the Digital Exclusion Index which we developed in partnership with PRI. This shows the areas of the city, to Super Output Area level, where the risk of residents being digitally excluded is highest. We are targeting those areas, by holding roadshows in these neighbourhoods with local community organisations to help local residents become digitally included.

2.9 In addition to supporting the basic digital skills, libraries play a crucial role in supporting higher level skills and supporting business start-ups. Manchester Libraries have supported the business community for over 100 years. When Central Library re-opened in 2014 the business information service returned, rebranding as the Business & IP Centre Manchester and taking a prime location on the second floor of the library. Manchester was one of the initial six cities to establish a national network of BIPCs in partnership with the British Library (alongside Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, & Sheffield). Learning from the success of the BIPC, in 2021 we received funding from the European Regional Development Fund for the Greater Manchester wide Build a Business Project. This project has received £2.6 million funding, creating 12 FTE posts across GM, and is delivering from Autumn 2021 to June 2023. See Appendix 5 for more information on the BIPC and the Build a Business project.

2.10 Libraries have always played a crucial role in providing access to reading, spreading the love of reading, and improving literacy levels. This has increased in recent years with the Read Manchester initiative which we manage and work in partnership with Education. This has complemented the services we offer to children, including Bookstart, Storytimes, Summer Reading Challenge and Class Visits. The Children's and Young People Library Offer is shown in Appendix 2. Libraries are a key delivery partner of Our Year, enriching the lives of children from 0-18 years. Using libraries improve educational attainment and provide positive activities for young people. Libraries are a safe place for parents and children to visit with a range of books, attractive children's areas, making the library visit a positive experience for parents and children. In 2020 we launched The Reading Map in conjunction with Read Manchester, 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.

Manchester Libraries and Bookstart gift book packs to more than 16,000 babies and 3-4 year olds annually to encourage an early love of books and reading.

Since the pandemic started Libraries and Read Manchester have gifted over 100,000 books and magazines through our programmes and community work, targeting the 1 in 8 disadvantaged children who don't own a book. Gifting books has become even more important during the pandemic as access to reading material was more limited with libraries closing following national guidance. 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. 100,000 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. The Transition Read gives a book to every year 6 pupil to support the move up to high school, with over 7000 pupils receiving a free copy of *The Kid Who Came from Space* by Ross Welford. This will happen again in September 2022 with all year 6 pupils again receiving a free book.

The Summer Reading Challenge encourages 4-11 year olds to maintain their reading levels over the summer holidays by reading any six books and receiving incentives along the way. Libraries also offer a range of free activities for families including storytimes and crafts. We were part of a national Summer Reading Challenge pilot in 2021 aimed to increase engagement with other sectors. We worked closely with Education who funded Summer Reading packs for children in 41 schools. All 15,000 children in these schools were automatically joined to the library and the challenge, being given a library card. The uptake of the summer reading challenge was significantly higher for children in those schools than the other schools. Due to the success of this pilot, it will be repeated in 2022 with a mix of schools from 2021 and new schools – with approximately being part of this year's pilot.

Class visits have continued during the pandemic. Schools were invited to attend virtual class visits with authors. More children attended class visits in 2021 than they did in 2019 pre-pandemic, mostly through virtual sessions, but also some in libraries. Over 55,000 children attended class visits in 2021, with over 52,000 attending in 2019. Appendix 7.6 shows how many children and schools attended class visits in the different areas of the city.

Several of our libraries will be venues for the Holiday Activities and Food programme in Easter, Summer and December. We will host sessions that involve lunch and activities such as arts and crafts, reading, music and other positive, engaging activities.

Three of our libraries offer times of the week where only young people are allowed in the library. This offer to engage positively with young people, will be expanded in 2022. We will be working with the organisation Stories of Care during Our Year 2022. Stories of Care is a Manchester organisation that works with care experienced young people on various writing and outreach projects. In 2022 they are publishing 2 new works. A new anthology of short stories written by young people and adults. A novella written by their Lead Artist Oliver Sykes called 'Alfie's First Fight'. Illustrated by Ian Morris who created the Wythenshawe Park story trail with ReadMCR - [Wythenshawe Park Story Trail |](#)

[ian-morris \(ianmorrisillustration.com\)](http://ianmorrisillustration.com) Oliver Sykes has adapted the short story 'Alfie's First Fight' into a one person play and will be touring the performance in 10 Neighbourhood libraries later in 2022. Central Library will host the launch of 'Alfie's First Fight' in May 2022. We will also purchase 1000 copies of each title, which will be gifted as part of Our Year to children in care and priority families. The Children's and Young People Library Offer is shown in Appendix 2 and will be more prominent than ever during Our Year.

2.11 Age Friendly Libraries

Manchester Libraries are a much loved local resource, and we are committed to ensuring that all our libraries become recognised as Age Friendly places and services. Alongside other local facilities and services, libraries are seen as an important and crucial feature of an Age Friendly neighbourhood. Manchester Libraries in partnership with Age Friendly Manchester have agreed and adopted a set of Age Friendly standards - attached at Appendix 4 - which set out how we will ensure that our services and buildings are Age Friendly. We developed these after consultation on our plans at the Age Friendly Manchester Assembly (formerly the Manchester Older Peoples Forum), the AFM Board and the Neighbourhood Coordination Group.

We know how important it is for people to have easy access to information in different formats, so in addition to our online information we have made sure we have an Age Friendly notice board on display in all libraries. Our notice boards are kept up to date, are easy to see and read, and ensure that we are promoting activities and information across the community. They are also portable so that they can be on prominent display in coffee mornings or Grand Day Out sessions. During lockdown, libraries have been used by partners as a means to cascade vital information regarding COVID and Health matters to everyone in the local community.

Library staff conducted a detailed self-assessment for each of our libraries, covering the physical space as well as our service offer. These assessments have highlighted some areas for change, especially during lockdowns. One of these changes was the introduction of an Age Friendly Hour in most of our libraries whilst the pandemic was at its height, helping to support older people to return to the library safely. This was directly after each library will have been cleaned, so any risk of infection is lower, and the first hour after opening is usually quieter thus giving staff the opportunity to spend more time with customers if they needed additional support on-line or would like to just take a seat, read the paper or have a chat. This proved to be extremely popular with 12,500 visits by older people in the Age Friendly hour.

We are also carrying out a customer service audit, which we put on hold last year due to Covid. This will be carried out by older people recruited via existing library volunteers, friends, Cultural Champions and AFM Assembly members. These audits will take place in libraries where volunteers will engage with older service users, listen to their feedback and produce an action plan specific to each library.

All library staff are aware of our age friendly aspirations and of the issues that can affect people as they age. We developed a bespoke Dementia Friends session, and have trained nearly 120 staff, including nearly 70 over 2 days in special sessions at our staff conference in 2019. Workshops have recently taken place training staff in how to set up and facilitate Age Friendly groups, activities and events.

Manchester Libraries is committed to supporting Manchester City Council becoming recognised as an Age Friendly Employer. Nearly 60% of library staff are aged over 50. We have supported staff who want to reduce their working hours or take flexible retirement, and have a number who have retired but keep 7 hours a week with us – giving them a continued small income and interest, whilst retaining their skills and experience within the service.

Library staff kept in touch with our older social group members throughout lockdown to help support mental health and wellbeing. They offered digital support - for example help to buy shopping, or to connect with family via Zoom, dropped off Christmas goodie bags and cards and phoned people on a regular basis for a friendly chat. More recently, libraries offered Census support for anyone who was struggling with the digital aspect of the return. We are currently providing virtual reading groups with technical support via phones, plus a Reading Friends project via zoom for older people who are digitally excluded, both help to support mental health and wellbeing. Digital champions have provided tablets, chrome books and continued online support for older residents who previously had little or no digital connectivity or experience. As part of our Age Friendly commitment, all libraries are being formally assessed as Age Friendly by local older people, and those that meet the standards, will receive “Age Friendly Library” branding. Libraries are spaces that older people want to use and connect with other people, access reading material and be part of community groups. All libraries now have an Age friendly notice board, are developing Age Friendly activities (where these are not already in place), and we are trialling the creation of a dedicated seating area, for people to relax, read newspapers / magazines, have a brew, meet new people or listen to music from our Age Friendly Dementia playlist. We have teamed with Playlist for Life to offer people information about creating and using a personal music playlist to help someone living with dementia. There are also many older people’s groups who meet in libraries on a regular basis, offering activities, talks, a chance to learn new skills and trips out.

2.12 Manchester Libraries are at the heart of the community and are welcoming and used by all and promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

In June 2021 Manchester Libraries received the accreditation of Libraries of Sanctuary. This award from the national City of Sanctuary organisation demonstrates that asylum seekers and refugees receive a warm welcome in our libraries. Our commitment to asylum seekers and refugees was shown from October 2021 with the arrival of Afghan refugees. Within a few weeks of them arriving in the city, libraries had arranged for Chromebooks to be deployed into the hotels which were used for setting up bank accounts and universal credit. We also ran creative arts and crafts sessions for over a hundred

children before their school places were arranged. We have since taken many of the adults to Wythenshawe Forum Library and Central Library, to help them access library services independently.

There are many other examples of libraries promoting equality and diversity across the service. The following relate to activities at Central Library.

Disability

- Young Creatives - This Project for young disabled people, working in partnership with GMCDP and Contact MCR. Young disabled people have been learning about the Disabled People's Archive. Inspired by the material in the DPA archive they will produce creative work to be performed at Contact in 2022. At the recent IDDP event on 3rd December at Central Library, the Young Creatives produced short films highlighting the barriers faced by young people.
- International Day of Disabled People 2021 and UK Disability History Month - Collaborating with the University of Manchester and GMCDP, a series of talks were screened via Zoom during Nov/Dec. There were 4 disability history month talks which included a 1-hour film followed by Q&A session with speaker. At the end of UKDHM, we celebrated IDDP with an in-person event at Central Library. This included a workshop with Venture Arts, a film screening of the 4 disability history films (shortened versions) followed by a panel discussion with staff from the University of Manchester and members of Young Creatives. This event has strengthened our links with disability organisations, academics and Manchester Histories which we hope to build on throughout the year.
- Disabled People's Archive - Working closely with Greater Manchester Coalition for Disabled People and with funding from the Wellcome Trust, a project to digitise the Disabled People's Archive has now commenced. In what will be one of the largest disability archives in the UK. This is the start of a very exciting time for capturing disability history and making these collections accessible to as many people as possible. Three GMCDP staff are now based at Central Library, to deliver this three year project.

LGBTQ+

- LGBTQ+ history -Working closely with the University of Manchester, Archives+ are producing a pilot project to create an accessible LGBTQ+ school lesson plan and collection of accessible LGBTQ+ archives to support the lesson plans.
- LGBTQ+ History Month 2022 - Plans are in place to deliver workshops for school visits utilising the lesson plans created from the University of Manchester PGCE students. These will take place at 2 venues in Manchester. We also have a virtual author talk planned for early February 2022 with Professor Upchurch, who will be discussing early 19th century 'Queer' preliminary reform movement of the buggery laws. An expert from the University of Manchester will chair the Q&A.

- Pride August 2022 - Potential LGBTQ+ Rugby exhibition in performance space during Pride. Plus, pilot project to create accessible LGBTQ+ archive collection downloadable from Archives+ website.

Vulnerable young people

- Lockdown Project – One Day Last Year. Working with vulnerable young people, such as SEND students, home educated young people, care leavers etc. Archives+ have created a series of art workshops to capture the experience of young people in Manchester during lockdown. Each participant receives an art pack and creates their own creative keepsake of their time during this unprecedented period.

Black History

- Moss Side Carnival (Manchester Carnival) - Working with other Manchester City Council staff members, Archives+ are planning a series of outreach events to capture the history of the carnival as it celebrates its 50th year in 2022. Working alongside Councillor Igbon, subject to funding, we plan to produce an exhibition to be displayed to coincide with the carnival's anniversary.

2.13 Manchester's libraries are an important part of the city's cultural and creative infrastructure, often providing access to a first cultural experience. The Central Library's cultural programme, Library Live, is complemented by three libraries badges as Creative Spaces – North City, Longsight and Wythenshawe Forum. These activities have been supported by a number of successful Arts Council England funding grants.

Alongside the busy events calendar delivered by library staff, such as cultural festival days, Sunday Fundays, school holiday crafting, author events etc, the cultural programme provides access to other high quality creative experiences and opportunities on residents' doorsteps, as well as an introduction to the citywide offer. The cultural programme is delivered in partnership with the city's cultural organisations and artists, supported and informed by library staff. Since 2018 the programme has developed a focus on family and school performance, engagement, and festival style activity for young people (11-13 years old), original, site-specific creative commissions and focussed on supporting local artists, both established and individuals early in their career.

Since the advent of Covid, in common with the rest of the cultural sector, delivery of the programme has needed to be different. Here are some examples of activity that has taken place during that time.

During lockdown, the libraries Creative Space programme continued to support young people through Express Yourself – a 10-week programme of art challenges included activities such as sketching, writing, beat making and dance. The programme was available on-line with artists delivering by video and in a booklet, with an accompanying pack of stationery and craft resources.

The booklets were distributed via community networks for young people in need and those less likely to be able to access the project online.

Express Yourself on-line achieved a total of 83,000 video views with 3,000 people visiting the website. 200 resource packs and 900 printed booklets were distributed. 16 Manchester groups, including colleges, schools, pupil referral centres, mutual aid groups, community centres and youth groups were involved, using the challenges to continue engagement with their students or members during lockdown. One of the young people who took part in the project said: "The project was helpful during lockdown because you don't have much to do and sometimes you feel isolated, but this keeps you up and keeps you busy."

The library's cultural programme also supported the early re-opening of cultural life in the city with the Manchester International Festival (MIF) 2021 co-commission I Love You too. In development with MIF and South African artist, Kemang Wa Lehulere since 2019 the commission produced a book of love letters co-authored by Manchester residents and writers and a stunning visual arts exhibition in Central Library's Reading Room, part of the festival's main programme.

The concept for the book and exhibition were inspired by the time Wa Lehulere spent in the city's libraries and talking to library staff during the 2019 International Festival. Over 100 people from across Manchester shared their love stories: to people, to places, even to possessions. The exhibition was a collection of new works, reflecting Wa Lehulere's ongoing interest in libraries as institutional spaces for education and the dissemination of knowledge – and was also deeply connected to the history of apartheid South Africa.

MIF 2021 was the first major arts event in the city since the first lockdown in March 2020. Participation in the love letter sessions was mostly on-line, but in April 2021, with the easing of restrictions, carefully planned in person sessions took place in Central Library and each Creative Space library, this was some the first face to face activity in libraries since the start of the pandemic. Between July and October 2021 events to mark Manchester Libraries successfully becoming Libraries of Sanctuary - welcoming spaces for refugees and people new to Manchester - took place at Central, Beswick, Longsight and Forum libraries. Programmed by Community Arts Northwest and Crossing Footprints these family orientated events were delivered by artists from or with cultural heritages from across the world. The events, even with social distancing and limited capacity, were a fantastic way to welcome families back into libraries with music, dancing, drumming and doll making - 200 people attended in total. The project introduced new and exciting artists and performers to the libraries, many of whom bring audiences, new to the libraries, with them and the service will continue to work with them as part of the cultural programme. Manchester Libraries and Archives+ are partners of Manchester City of Literature, a status awarded to the city in 2017, in recognition of Manchester has long been a dynamic, diverse, inspiring, and supportive place for the written and spoken word.

As well as celebrating and promoting the city's rich literary history and institutions – including the libraries in the city – the initiative is committed to foregrounding the rich diversity of the voices in the city, building on the strengths of Manchester's people and widening participation in literary activity. Manchester Libraries are major partners in two programmes to support these aims – International Mother Language Day and the Festival of Libraries, which is a Greater Manchester wide event and took place for the first time in June 2021.

International Mother Language Day is held worldwide annually on 21 February to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and to promote multilingualism. Manchester is the global lead for UNESCO's City of Literature in recognition of the diversity of languages in Manchester, where over 200 languages are spoken and half of all adults and 4 in 10 young people are multilingual. All the events were on-line in 2021 and included fun, family-friendly crafts and performances, discussions, and workshops. Vibrant family-friendly events will take place in 5 libraries this year.

The Libraries Festival presented 80 free, on-line and in person events in libraries across Greater Manchester. It celebrated the key role that libraries play in civic life by encouraging the public, children, young people, migrant communities, and vulnerable groups to use the diverse library service offer creatively. Partner libraries around the city hosted performances, talks, activities, and artists' residencies that responded to the vital role libraries play to the people of Manchester and highlighted the network's full offer across wellbeing, culture, and creativity, digital and information and of course reading.

2.14 Archives

Manchester Libraries manages the Greater Manchester County Record Office function on behalf of GMCA which holds records from across the city region. We manage two partnerships – The Archives+ partnership with colleagues at Manchester Central Library and the Greater Manchester Archives and Local Studies Partnership with the nine other GM Local Authorities. The Archives Service continued operating throughout the pandemic – initially via social media and responding to enquiries virtually, and when Manchester Central Library reopened the service resumed fully. Some of the highlights relating to archives are detailed below.

Arguably the most exciting development has taken place in the last couple of weeks. On 6th January the 1921 Census was made available. It is accessible across the world, via the www.findmypast.co.uk/. People need to pay if they want to view a full record, however in recognition of the quality and popularity of Archives+ and the library, Manchester Central Library has been designated the Northern hub for the 1921 Census, meaning people have completely free access. Manchester Central Library is one of just 3 places where it's completely free to access – The National Archives and the National Library of Wales being the other. The Manchester and Lancashire Family History Helpdesk operates Monday – Friday from 9.30-3.30 and have been helping on average 30-40 people per day and many more are accessing it independently in

the library. The 1921 Census is a particularly important release as there won't be one for another 30 years as the 1931 was destroyed in a fire and 1941 didn't take place because of the second world war.

The Unlocking Our Sound Heritage project has continued to digitise sound archives throughout the pandemic. Much of these archives will become available from the new British Library website later this year. It will feature material from across Greater Manchester, including oral histories – which provide fascinating insight into lives of residents. Some of the material from this project will be available by the end of the year within Manchester Central Library. Using capital funds, the Archives+ exhibition area is being overhauled to ensure its sustainable for the next seven years. The film pods are being transformed into Sound and Vision and will feature sound archives for the first time, alongside the films. This includes Unlocking Our Sound Heritage archives and Manchester Voices material – an MMU project that explored the accents of Greater Manchester.

A great example of contemporary collecting is one that involves the Marcus Rashford mural in Withington. Following the European Championships Final in July 2021 the mural was defaced. In the following week the mural was covered in messages of hope and support from local residents and visitors from across the country. We worked with partners and Marcus himself to gather the messages. When they are returned from Harwell Restoration we will work with stakeholders to decide next steps in making these messages accessible. The three year project to digitise the Disabled People's Archive has now commenced in partnership with Greater Manchester Coalition for Disabled People – more information in 2.12.

3.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this Report, including the intention to abolish fines for overdue items.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2022

Appendix 2 – Libraries Children and Young People's Offer, and Reading Map

Appendix 3 – New children's library at Central Library

Appendix 4 – Manchester Libraries Age Friendly Pledge

Appendix 5 – Supporting Businesses – BIPC and Build A Business

Appendix 6 – Public Library User Survey summary

Appendix 7 – Performance in 2019 (pre-Covid), and Performance in 2021