

## Manchester City Council Report for Information

**Report to:** Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 5 March 2024

**Subject:** Manchester Libraries 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.

### Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the information in the report.

---

### 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	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. We have signed up to the Green Libraries manifesto. More details contained within section 2.4.1
<b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</b> - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments	As this is an update report, an EQIA has not been carried out specifically on the report. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of the library service. Examples of excellent EDI initiatives are outlined in 2.48 and throughout the report.

<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the Our Manchester Strategy/Contribution to the Strategy</b>
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, supporting the new Economic Strategy.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Libraries assist in raising literacy and skills levels, including enabling our youngest residents to become school ready, helping to deliver Read Manchester.
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. Libraries have always supported those that need the help the most, and have continued to do so during the cost-of-living situation, as described in section 2.5
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. Manchester Libraries have signed up to the Green Libraries Manifesto.
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 Mancunians to sustain the growth of the city. Our digital inclusion work is increasing connectivity in homes.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

### **Financial Consequences – Revenue**

None.

### **Financial Consequences – Capital**

None.

**Contact Officers:**

Name: Neil MacInnes OBE  
Position: Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth,  
Play and Participation Services  
Telephone: 0161 234 1902  
E-mail: neil.macinnes@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Philip Cooke  
Position: Libraries and Archives Lead  
Telephone: 07773206277  
E-mail: philip.cooke@manchester.gov.uk

**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 2.3. 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 several 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. Manchester Libraries work alongside the other nine authorities in Greater Manchester, progressing joint projects which provide benefit for residents and improved value for money, such as a shared library management system, joint procurement of e-books and working together on priorities such as 'green libraries.'
- 1.2 In 2023 we produced a new vision for Manchester Libraries which is included in Appendix 1. The vision set out how libraries contribute to Manchester being a high-class city improving the lives of residents and neighbourhoods and sets out the priorities for coming years. The key priorities identified are: Our Manchester Our People, Literacy & Reading, Health & Wellbeing, Culture & Creativity and Digital Inclusion. Appendix 4 also lays out how we've made progress in the first 12 months of this vision.
- 1.3 The library service has evolved and reinvented itself over the past decade and whilst seeing significant reduction in revenue funding we have seen nearly £100 million capital investment, including the £50 million transformation of Manchester Central Library. In the last 10 years, and we have relocated over 90% of our libraries into new or refurbished or co-located premises. The Libraries Capital Programme continues to see significant investment into the service, improving the estate and service further. The 2023 Adult Public Library User Survey reported that over 93% of customers were satisfied with the service – the highest satisfaction rating we have ever received.
- 1.4 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, subsidised food provision and many other advice sessions. This has been particularly beneficial to residents during the cost-of-living crisis, where libraries have been the Council's warm spaces, acting as the neighbourhood living rooms. The support provided in response to the cost-of-living situation is laid out in section 2.5.

- 1.5 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 have a leading role with 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 and advice sessions.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 It is now a decade since Central Library reopened following its transformation. 2024 will feature a number of celebrations for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reopening of Central Library and the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Central Library in its current building in St Peters Square. The library 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, the city's living room and treasure trove appealing to families, children and young people, aspiring entrepreneurs and visitors to the city, as well as traditional library visitors. Central Library's cultural programme, Library Live, exists as a busy and diverse cultural programme for everyone to enjoy, and Central Library remains the most visited public library in the country.
- 1.8 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 borrowing is increasing – both books and eBooks/eAudio.
- 1.9 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. The offer has been supplemented by the availability of free SIMs for residents – over 3000 being donated in the last 12 months.

- 1.10 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 such as The Bread and Butter Thing and Citizens Advice Manchester 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, Arts Council England and The National Archives. Over 200 volunteers enable us to make the best use of the resources available within the city; increasing the number of volunteers further is a key priority for 2024.
- 1.11 In 2022 the Government commissioned an independent review of public libraries. The review was undertaken by Baroness Sanderson. Manchester City Council and Manchester Libraries contributed to the review, and we were highlighted on several occasions in the report that was published in January 2024. We are supportive of the recommendations in the review and have included a summary of our responses to the recommendations in Appendix 13.

## **2.0 Delivering the Library Strategy in 2023 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
  - Transforming Withington library.
- 2.1.1 To continue to progress and embed the strategy a 2021-2024 programme for citywide library renewal works to ensure that all libraries are in a strong position to serve their local communities for the next decade. Works include redecoration, refreshment and replacement of furnishings and equipment, and redecoration as required. This has included:
- Remodelling Newton Heath Library to create a new community meeting room and interview/advice room.
  - Refreshing other libraries such as Central Library and Archives +, Hulme High Street, Forum Library, Didsbury Library and North City Library.
  - Gorton Library opened in the new integrated Gorton Hub in 2022
- 2.1.2 In 2023 we have:
- Refreshed Longsight Library, 13 years after the last transformation programme, creating an improved childrens library and 2 new meeting rooms – this has allowed Barclays to have presence in the library, bringing much needed income into the service. Open+ has been installed, leading to being open 12 hours more per week.

- Opened the new Abraham Moss Library, as part of the Library and Leisure Centre, opened in August 2023 with the official opening in September 2023. It has proved very popular and is now one of the most visited libraries in the city.
- The opening of the new site for Northenden Community Library in St Wilfrid's Church Hall at the start of 2024. Its previous premises at Parkway Green became unavailable as Wythenshawe Community Housing Group are reviewing their estate however with the support of the church, we have retained library services in the village.

2.1.3 Significant capital investment is continuing in 2024. The grade 2 listed Chorlton Library will be fully refurbished during 2024-25, with a budget for capital works, supplemented by additional AMP works and Open Plus budget, making best use of Manchester City Council resources. The works include remodelling and refurbishment of the 1970's extension area, a new community meeting room and interview rooms, full redecoration, and the introduction of the Open Plus access system, whilst also restoring the historic dome over the lobby area that has been covered over in previous refurbishments. The library will operate a limited service for approximately 10 months whilst the work takes place, however additional hours will be introduced at neighbouring libraries.

2.1.4 All libraries across the city continue to thrive, acting as community hubs to serve the residents in their community. Appendix 2 gives examples from each library about services, initiatives and events that have taken place in the last 12 months. Providing access to reading material continues to be at the core of the library offer, and demand for books remains as high as ever. There is extremely high demand for books that are purchased from the bookfund. In 2022-23 a total of 695,000 books and 324,000 ebooks/eaudio were borrowed. There are waiting lists for thousands of the books. Currently over 10,000 books are reserved with customers waiting for them – this equates to approximately £112,000 of spend required to satisfy need. There are approximately 5,000 reservations on ebooks and 13,000 reservations on eaudio books from Manchester Libraries customers, equating to £150,000 and £700,000 additional spend if it was available respectively. These figures show the high level of demand for books, and the strain that brings upon the bookfund, and the increase in resident and customer expectation and demand.

2.2 In 2023 we produced a new vision for Manchester Libraries which is included in Appendix 3. The vision set out how libraries contribute to Manchester being a high-class city improving the lives of residents and neighbourhoods and sets out the priorities for coming years. The key priorities identified are: Our Manchester Our People, Literacy & Reading, Health & Wellbeing, Culture & Creativity and Digital Inclusion. Appendix 4 also lays out how we've made progress in the first 12 months of this vision. Appendices 4 – 7 lay out in more detail some of the actions taken to deliver the vision. This includes library services to children, school engagement and Read Manchester; supporting start-up businesses; the culture and creative programme; health and wellbeing (including age friendly); Archives and Heritage

2.3 The library service contributes hugely to the Council's Corporate Plan Priority Outcomes and other strategies, including the Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35, the newly launched Economic Strategy, Making Manchester Fairer, Making Manchester Fairer: Anti-Poverty Strategy 2023-27, Manchester Age Friendly Strategy, Manchester Digital Strategy 2021-26 and the emerging new Cultural Strategy which will place libraries as cultural hubs in their communities. Examples of our contributions follow below.

#### 2.3.1 Investing in Success an Economic Strategy for Manchester

This strategy stresses the importance of inclusive growth. Libraries are a key contributor of this, with libraries contributing to a skilled local workforce through their role supporting lifelong learning and information provision. Specific work around digital inclusion, business support and the new generator spaces increase the role libraries play supporting this strategy.

#### 2.3.2 Making Manchester Fairer: Anti-Poverty Strategy 2023-27

Libraries have always been a democratic space where support is given to those who need it the most. Use of the library computers is disproportionately from people who live in areas of most deprivation. Examples are given in section 2.6 below, of how this role has increased during the recent cost of living crisis.

#### 2.3.3 Manchester Age Friendly Strategy

Libraries are heavily used by older people and contribute greatly to this strategy. This is detailed in Appendix 8.

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

#### 2.4.1 **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. We have signed up to the Green Libraries Manifesto <https://www.cilip.org.uk/general/custom.asp?page=greenlibrariesmanifesto>.

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, including Keep Manchester Tidy, which itself contributes towards carbon emission reductions.

Each library is now a collection point for old devices – these get refurbished by Community Computers and sold to Manchester residents for discounted price, benefiting the resident and reducing waste.

We hold events, workshops and activities for children that promote sustainability. These have included sessions from Biffa. During the Festival of Libraries, Central Library hosted The Roundview. This guides participants towards a sustainable and regenerative future, using a collection of puzzles. After the success at Central Library, The Roundview will be hosted at libraries around Greater Manchester later in 2024.

#### **2.4.2 Growth that benefits everyone**

Libraries develop and implement the Council's Digital Action Plan, which feeds into the Digital Strategy. This work reduces the number of digitally excluded residents in the city and increases 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. The Business & IP Centre (based at Central Library) and the Build a Business in GM Libraries 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. Libraries play an important role in supporting the business community in Manchester, and across Greater Manchester, offering insights and access to free resources, training and events. In 2023 the BIPC offered more activities and support than ever before. In January 2024 the Generator space opened on the ground floor of Central Library. This and other work supporting businesses is detailed in Appendix 6.

#### **2.4.3 Young People**

Libraries support young people from 0-18 years, as outlined in the Libraries Services to Children and Young people in Appendix 5. These include ongoing access and promotion of reading, joint initiatives with Read Manchester, events and activities including weekly storytimes at each library and Summer Reading Challenge, school engagement and developing more services with young people.

#### **2.4.4 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 2022 reported that over 80% of Manchester's respondents who sometimes felt lonely, felt less lonely after using the library. Libraries reduce social isolation for 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, and 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 to deliver health promotion sessions. All library staff have received training on dementia and are Dementia Friends. More on how libraries support health and wellbeing is detailed in Appendix 8.

#### **2.4.5 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. As part of our Digital Inclusion Action Plan we have encouraged housing associations and homelessness organisations to embed digital inclusion in their work, with more than 10 venues establishing themselves as National Databanks in 2023 and are now able to give free data sims to their clients.

#### **2.4.6 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. They are vital in the Council's response to the current cost of living crisis, with each library acting as a 'warm space' - more details in section 2.5.

#### **2.4.7 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 currently upgrading all PCs across our libraries to ensure that we have the best access possible and will be upgrading Wi-Fi provision in line with wider MCC plans.

#### **2.4.8 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. The book stock is diverse, including the recent 'See Myself in Books' initiative and the events programme outlined 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, LGBTQ+ History Month and International Mother Language Day. In 2023 we hosted the Black British Book Festival where hundreds of people attended a vibrant programme of black authors and speakers. Manchester Libraries are accredited Libraries of Sanctuary and will re-accredit in 2024. We are supporting Manchester City Council to become a City of Sanctuary.

#### 2.4.9 **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. Libraries are front door to council services, and other partner organisations. This can range from supporting a wide range of key messages from the council – including Keep Manchester Tidy, Budget consultations, to supporting residents with accessing specific initiatives online, including applying for parking permits and applying for a Voter Authority Certificate.

#### 2.5 Cost-of-Living support

2.5.1 Libraries have always supported those that need the help the most and have continued to do so during the cost-of-living situation. Libraries have been pivotal in the support that the Council has given to residents at this time. Over the last 2 winters each library has been a registered warm space. From October-February free hot drinks have been given, to complement the existing offer of warm, welcoming, non-judgemental space with a vast range of services always available from libraries. Many residents have become digitally excluded at this time as they've not been able to afford data charges. To alleviate this, we have donated over 4000 data sims offering six months free data over the last year. Organisations such as Citizens Advice Manchester use libraries to deliver welfare, debt and housing advice – the number of sessions per week has increased because of higher demand – with new sessions at Longsight Library and Gorton Library. Libraries have supported residents with food poverty. The Bread and Butter Thing operate successfully from four libraries and each library is now a donation point for food, with donations going to the local foodbank. We are supporting residents with period poverty, giving women free sanitary products in each library.

2.6 The priorities for future actions are outlined in the library vision, included as Appendix 3. We will continue to ensure that libraries improve the lives of residents and the communities in which they reside. We will maximise the use of services and ensure the investment made into Manchester's libraries bring the best outcomes for residents and the city. We will continue to develop and deliver services that deliver the priorities of: Our Manchester Our People, Literacy & Reading, Health & Wellbeing, Culture & Creativity and Digital Inclusion. We will continue to promote our services to residents and increase awareness of the huge variety of services. We'll continue to produce e-

newsletters, social media, hard copy leaflets, and work with partners to promote services, for example building on a successful partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University, where a post about Manchester Libraries was their most viewed Instagram post in August 2023. Widening access and participation and visits to libraries remains crucial to Manchester Libraries strategy.

### **3.0 Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the information in the report.

### **4.0 Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Libraries 2023 infographics

Appendix 2 - Examples of service delivery per library

Appendix 3 - Library vision 2023-28

Appendix 4 - Library vision action plan

Appendix 5 - Read Manchester, Children, Young People & school engagement

Appendix 6 - Supporting business

Appendix 7 - Cultural and creative programme

Appendix 8 - Health and wellbeing (including age friendly)

Appendix 9 - Archives

Appendix 10 - Manchester City of Literature

Appendix 11 - Performance figures and Heat Maps

Appendix 12 - Public Libraries User Survey 2023

Appendix 13 - Manchester Libraries response to the Sanderson Review of Public Libraries