

Greater Manchester Culture Strategy - A Review

2019-2024

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Introduction

Grown in Greater Manchester: known around the world

In April, 2019, GMCA Published its first ever culture strategy, Grown in Greater Manchester, Known Around The World.

The strategy drew inspiration from and was supported by the ten districts of Greater Manchester (GM), with a focus on codifying a shared vision for the city region that capitalised on the unique strengths and opportunities available in GM.

From its well-connected cultural communities to the established links between culture, health, economy, education and place, the strategy set out a plan that would use investment, partnership and advocacy to strengthen the cultural sector in Greater Manchester, recognising the vital role creativity plays in our residents' lives, the vibrancy and prosperity of our places and our reputation around the world.

The strategy comprised three key priorities;

1. Create the conditions for creativity to flourish
2. Enrich the lives of all our people through engagement with the culture and heritage of Greater Manchester
3. Celebrate, protect and develop Greater Manchester's unique culture, heritage strengths, assets, and ecology

This review looks at the activity undertaken by GMCA over the past five years to deliver these priorities and the overall vision of the strategy, ahead of the development of Greater Manchester's next cultural strategy. Against a backdrop of unprecedented challenge and change, from the impacts of Brexit and COVID-19, the cultural sector in Greater Manchester has shown strength and resilience and provided moments of real joy and innovation.



Headlines

Between 2018 and 2024 the GMCA has:

- **Increased investment in culture** by 40% from £2,828,795 P/A IN 2018 to £3,965,000 p/A IN 2023
- **More than doubled the number of organisations funded by GMCA** from 19 to 40 With a focus on improving the diversity of investment across GM
- **Which has resulted in an increase in engagements with culture** of 53% from 4.6m to 7m engagements with GMCA-funded cultural organisations

‘This unique approach, Greater Manchester’s cultural offer will reflect the diversity of our people, who feel empowered to share their stories with the world, improving their wellbeing and increasing the prosperity of our businesses and the attractiveness of our places’



Greater Manchester Culture Fund

From AGMA Section 48 Grants to the current Greater Manchester Culture Fund, the ten councils of Greater Manchester have long believed in the importance of culture and the value of a combined approach to cultural investment.

From our world-class cultural organisations to our grass roots and emerging creative communities, Greater Manchester's approach to cultural investment aims to support a diverse range of organisations that reflect the diversity of our city region.

The Greater Manchester Culture Fund currently has five priorities, with recipients, from theatres and orchestras, to galleries and museums, all committing to delivering high quality cultural experiences for our residents and visitors.

The five priorities and the organisations who deliver them support delivery of the Greater Manchester Culture Strategy.

1. Contribute to the recognition of Greater Manchester locally, nationally and internationally to attract new investment, new visitors and new talent to Greater Manchester
2. Make a positive contribution to improving skills and employability of residents in Greater Manchester, including support for the creative education, expression and ambition of young people across Greater Manchester
3. Play a strong role in developing strong and inclusive communities and an improved quality of life for residents, particularly those residents at risk of disengagement or social isolation
4. Be able to evidence how the project will make a positive contribution to improving residents' health and well-being and meeting our equality duties.
5. Provide paid employment and opportunities for freelancers, individual practitioners and organisations within the Greater Manchester



There are currently 40 organisations supported by the GMCA culture fund

Art with Heart, Arts for Recovery in the Community, Brighter Sound, Cartwheel Arts Comma Press, Company Chameleon Dance Theatre, Contact, ESEA Contemporary, English Folk Expo, Everyday Wigan, Factory International, From the Other Ltd, Gaydio, Global Groove, GM Arts, Grit Studios CIC, Headspace Bolton CIC, HOME, Made by Mortals CIC, Manchester Camerata, Manchester Histories, Manchester, Jazz Festival, Manchester Jewish Museum, Manchester Literature Festival, Manchester Pride, MancSpirit, Music Action International, Muslim Arts and Culture Festival, Octagon Theatre, Odd Arts Old Courts, People's History Museum, Portraits of Recovery, Royal Exchange Theatre, Sheba Arts, The Halle, The Lowry (Quays Culture), The Met – Bury, Walk the Plank, Z-Arts

“It’s incredibly encouraging to see Greater Manchester Combined Authority make this kind of strategic investment, to support the cultural ecology of the city region. This significant investment, made in a challenging financial climate, demonstrates Greater Manchester’s understanding of how central culture can be in supporting all residents to live fulfilling lives.”

Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England



Great Place

Through Great Place funding provided by Arts Council and National Heritage Lottery Fund, Greater Manchester has established new collaborations between the cultural, voluntary and health sectors, exploring new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

This included creative approaches to children and adolescent mental health, creative social prescribing, the wellbeing of LGBTQ older people in the housing sector and cultural activism and volunteering as a way to combat social isolation in older people through the Culture Champions programme.

During the Pandemic the Great Place project developed and delivered a range of ground-breaking programmes including Creative Care Packs, which were posted to vulnerable residents during lockdown.

One of the principal findings from the action research element of the Great Place programme has been to identify the health sector as a key partner in the drive to diversify and increase audiences and participation for arts and culture.

Research by Manchester Metropolitan University confirmed Greater Manchester's position as a national lead and potential worldwide reference in the field of Culture, Health and Wellbeing and made recommendations as to how this can be maintained and built upon.

Greater Manchester now has a Creative Health Strategy and a Strategic Lead for Creative Health who works to develop and drive partnerships between the cultural sector and GMNHS.

“We learnt, and the system learnt. And what the system learnt has become embedded and won't run the risk of being lost as individuals move on. We learnt that partnerships start with listening and with open, considered and often slow conversations. Real change takes time and our schedules and funding cycles should be a planning framework, not a straightjacket.”

Julie McCarthy - Great Place Project Manager / Strategic Lead Creative Health



Town of Culture

The Greater Manchester Town of Culture programme was launched in 2019. Bury became GM's first Town of Culture in 2020, with a £50,000 award to support activity in the Town Centre.

While Bury worked tirelessly throughout 2020 on online programmes, including United We Stream, which saw more millions of people around the world tune into content filmed at Bury Met, it became clear that Bury deserved a bigger celebration once public gatherings were allowed again.

In late 2020 GMCA agreed to roll-over GM's inaugural Town of Culture to 2021, giving Bury the opportunity to make the most of the title. This saw the first ever Burrs Festival take place and was pivotal in the development of Bury's new culture Strategy, Different Cultures, Same Horizons.

In December 2021, following a competitive process, Stalybridge was awarded GM Town of Culture 2022 and has run an exciting programme throughout the year, with a focus on community and nature. Stalybridge Town of Culture saw more than 80 events take place in the town, with more than 46,000 'active participants' taking part in Town of Culture Activity.

Both Bury and Stalybridge were able to bring in investment that more than doubled the initial award and welcomed new visitors to their town centres, as well as developing and activating thriving creative networks.

In Spring 2023, Stockport was announced as GMCA's third Town of Culture, with an exciting programme of events programme set to cement Stockport's title as the 'New Berlin'.

“By building upon successes like Street Fest we can sustain reasons to visit and give confidence to the wider region in Stalybridge as a destination. By nurturing and developing the new networks and embedding the local authority into them as a collaborator, we can make sure that the town's creatives can steer their future together.”

The Bridge, Stalybridge



Creative Improvement Districts

Creative Improvement Districts (CIDs) are the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's approach to cultural, creative, and nighttime economy led town centre and high-street regeneration. There is a need to bring residents, visitors and workers back to town centres and high streets whilst driving investment, creating good local jobs, economic growth and developing local pride, identities and community cohesion.

The concept of CIDs has been developed with partners, including CLES, the national organisation for local economies, the University of Manchester and Culture Commons. Creative Placemaking organisation LOCAL are currently working with GMCA to develop the theory and evaluation of the programme.

The aims of a CID is to drive the start-up, growth, development and relocation of creative, cultural and nighttime economy businesses to a pre-determined area, creating good jobs, economic growth, vibrancy and visitors.

The Foundation of a CID is theoretically split out into four areas- Place, Support, Engagement & Legacy, with individual places shaping the scope and needs of the programme with the GMCA.

GMCA piloted its first ever CID in Oldham in 2020 and 2021, before moving on to Wigan and Leigh and Stockport in 2022 and 2023, with CIDs in other boroughs planned over the next three years.

“We were initially quite sceptical about what we could get out of CID, but it really helped to be able to sit down explain what our priorities are and agree a series of actions and an area of focus. It’s been particularly helpful having a CID over a longer period so we are able to develop relationships and refine the approach, rather than just coming for a short period. This has given us the time to consider how we resource culture & creativity going forward.”

Peter Ashworth, Head of Culture and Leisure, Stockport Council



StreamGM

In the early days of the pandemic, GM Night Time Economy Adviser Sacha Lord drew on international relationships to establish and develop United We Stream (UWS).

In nine months, UWS produced **48 original live shows** and **had more than 20 million views**. The project raised **£583,000** and supported over **100 freelancers and cultural organisations** with 'solidarity grants' as well as raising funds and the profile of **30 charities**.

Beneficiaries included Nordoff & Robbins Music Therapy, Manchester Mind, Albert Kennedy Trust, LCR Cares, Eat Well MCR, St John's Hospice and the GM Mayor's Charity.

In 2021 as cultural organisations began to open their doors UWS developed into StreamGM, capitalising on the networks and audiences developed during the pandemic, with a focus on promoting and highlighting the beautiful diversity of Greater Manchester culture to a global audience.

Since then, StreamGM has developed a number of programmes and partnerships including MainRoom, our grassroots clubbing series and Special Edition, profiling the very best, one-off cultural events taking place across Greater Manchester.

In September 2023, StreamGM announced a brand new partnership with the Yard in Cheetham Hill, placing StreamGM in the heart of a thriving creative community in Greater Manchester.

"Partnering with StreamGM on their MainRoom series made such a difference to our event. The team were so professional with their support and guidance and really made the event look good on screen. Getting over 20,000 views worldwide was more than we could have ever dreamed of, as is testimony to StreamGM's creativity and hard work."

BB - Promoter Supernature Disco



Greater Manchester Music Commission

The Greater Manchester Music Commission was established in 2022 following an open recruitment process designed to bring together industry experts to advise the Mayor of Greater Manchester on how to best support music in Greater Manchester.

Co-chaired by Jay Taylor of Music Venues Trust and Riv Burns of From The Other, the Greater Manchester Music commission comprises more than 30 musicians, promoters, educators, label owners and studio managers who meet quarterly to discuss and address the needs of the Greater Manchester music industry and ecosystem.

The group has five thematic areas of work, spaces and places, skills, education and talent, routes to market, diversity and music, health and wellbeing.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 a number of key work strands have been developed, including programmes designed to improve the diversity of boards in the sector, a programme to support the training of musicians in creative health and a practical guide to dealing with planning and noise complaints.

GMMC is also committed to raising the profile of artists from Greater Manchester, including support for the Mayor's Artist of The Month.

A key strand of activity is international and national showcasing, so in March, 2023, GMMC supported Loose Articles, The Orielles, Pops Roberts and Chardine Taylor-Stone to go out to SXSW, showcasing the most exciting artists from our city region at the most prestigious music event in the world.

“To be named Artist of the Month was an incredible recognition of my musical journey and the initiative is a testament to the city's vibrant support for local talent. Since featuring as AOTM, my latest single RADAR has been featured on BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 1Xtra and I've also been featured in CLASH magazine”

Lois Rae, Mayor's Artist of the Month, February, 2023.



Strategic Investment

As well as investing directly into cultural organisations and developing and delivering strategic projects like Town of Culture, Creative Improvement Districts, the GM Music Commission and StreamGM, GMCA has also co-invested and supported a number of strategically important events and projects.

From supporting the development of Chat Moss as a visitor destination to welcoming large-scale events like the WEEURO cultural programme, GM Strategic investment has provided support to existing projects that has brought millions of pounds into Greater Manchester.

A Modest Show (British Art Show GM Satellite Programme), Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Creative Ageing Development Agency, Chat Moss, Cultural Tourism, GM Artist Hub, GM Covid Commissions, GW Theatre, ISPA Manchester, Nordoff & Robbins Northern Music Awards, Pop, Hyde. Redesigning Creative Freelancing, Ripples of Hope, The North Will Rise Again, WEEURO, WOMEX.

“From first time practitioners to award-winners, solo artists to a 30-piece orchestra, City Centre choral outbursts to Hip Hop in Heaton Park, Museum takeovers, Postal art packs + Library phone-ins, in Manchester Independents delivered 23 new cross artform commissions presented across the City Region. The work was relevant, current, driven by our times – from decolonisation to gender dysphoria to disabled superheroes, tales of immigration + mothers’ chronicles of pandemic isolation.”

Tamsin Drury, Director, hAb



New Investment Approach

In April, 2023, GMCA agreed a new three-year investment approach. Developed in consultation with the sector, GMCA's new investment approach will continue to provide core funding to cultural organisations as part of its culture portfolio as well as introducing two new strands, Inspire and Collaborate.

Inspire is a small grants programme, designed to support freelancers and grass roots organisations. Collaborate will encourage consortia to form to develop and deliver innovative programmes around three key elements of the Greater Manchester Strategy, Greener, Fairer, More Prosperous. These funds will sit alongside strategic investment to support a diverse range of sector need.

GMCA Investment 2023-2026

Inspire - A small grants programme to support individual practitioners, freelancers and grass roots and community organisations, building on the success of GMCA's cultural 'Covid commissions' project. This will ensure that talent is supported and developed across the city region. Awards will be between £500 and £2,000 p/a. GMCA will procure a partner to deliver this programme. Grants will be given across several thematic areas to ensure the total grant programme supports delivery of strategic aims.

Spirit - These grants will support locally-loved and important organisations with an award of between £20,000 and £200,000 p/a. Organisations in receipt of Spirit Grants will not need to deliver across all of Greater Manchester, but will be of strategic importance to the cultural ecosystem of the city region

Sustain - This strand will provide support for organisations who require £200,000 or more per year to deliver GM-wide activity and support for artists and grass-roots organisations in every district of Greater Manchester. Sustain organisations will be expected to have both local and International impact and will be required to support the cultural ecology across Greater Manchester, providing space, expertise and employment for artists and smaller cultural organisations across the city region.

Collaborate - Collaborate provides organisations in Greater Manchester with an opportunity to form consortia to deliver the strategic aims of GMS. Consortia will be

asked to apply to deliver one of the three core aims of GMS; Greener, Fairer, More Prosperous. This programme will stimulate innovation in the delivery GMS priorities by cultural organisations. Consortia will be expected to match-fund activity to bring the greatest possible value to GM investment.

Strategic - GM Strategic funds will continue to fund activity that supports delivery of the GM Culture strategy, including Town of Culture, Creative Improvement Districts, StreamGM and the Greater Manchester Music Commission.



Devolution

On the 23rd of March 2023 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) signed a Trailblazer Devolution Deal with UK Government, a key recommendation of The Levelling Up White Paper. The deal, which covers various key policy areas including health, transport and skills, also has a section on culture, negotiated and between GMCA, DCMS, DLUHC and associated Arms Length Bodies including Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England.

The culture section of GM's devolution focusses on partnership and the potential to maximise the impact of collective investment, 'with agreement that an MOU will be signed that will lead to the formation of a new Strategic Cultural Partnership for Greater Manchester.'

GMCA is currently working with DCMS and its associated Arms Length Bodies on the delivery of the ambitions articulated in the deal, with a view to new ways of working being operational by March, 2024.

“To maximise the impact of this collective investment, and to explore new ways in which culture and heritage can deliver on wider levelling up outcomes like regeneration, skills, business support and health and wellbeing, GMCA and the government will establish a Greater Manchester Strategic Cultural Partnership. The partnership will facilitate two-way exchange, connecting the government and relevant arm's length bodies with GMCA and delivery partners in Greater Manchester, and ensuring Greater Manchester's voice is heard on issues of national importance.”

Greater Manchester Combined Authority: "Trailblazer" deeper devolution deal, 2023



New Culture Strategy

One of the key opportunities within Greater Manchester's trailblazing devolution deal is the opportunity to work with local and national partners on the development and delivery of a new culture strategy, that will run between 2024 and 2029.

The new strategy will build on the work undertaken and lessons learned during the delivery of Grown in Greater Manchester, Known Around The World.

Much has changed since during those past five years but the strategy has been a useful guide during times of significant challenge, with all activity mentioned within this report delivering directly the strategic aims outlined back in 2019.

While the new GM Culture strategy will undoubtedly be informed by learnings of the past five years, more importantly it will need to set out that will support the cultural and creative sector in Greater Manchester to thrive when faced with new challenges and opportunities.

From political change to technological advances, economic pressures and climate change, the new Greater Manchester Culture Strategy will identify and propose solutions to some of the sector and Greater Manchester's most pressing challenges, ensuring the sector continues to thrive and that Greater Manchester remains one of the best places in the world to create and enjoy high quality culture.

- **November 2023 - Call for Evidence**
- **December 2023 - Strategy development**
- **January 2023 - Strategy Consultation**
- **February 2024 - Finalise Strategy / Strategy Approved by GMCA**



Strategy Delivery Matrix

Create the conditions for creativity to flourish	Enrich the lives of all our people through engagement with the culture and heritage of Greater Manchester	Celebrate, protect and develop Greater Manchester's unique culture, heritage strengths, assets, and ecology
GM Culture Fund	GM Culture Fund	GM Culture Fund
Great Place	Great Place	Great Place
Town of Culture	Town of Culture	Town of Culture
Creative Improvement Districts	Creative Improvement Districts	Creative Improvement Districts
StreamGM	StreamGM	StreamGM
Greater Manchester Music Commission	Greater Manchester Music Commission	Greater Manchester Music Commission
A Modest Show (British Art Show Satellite Programme)	Arts, Health and Wellbeing	Chat Moss
GM Artist Hub	Creative Ageing Development Agency	Cultural Tourism
GM Covid Commissions	GW Theatre	ISPA Manchester
Redesigning Creative Freelancing	Ripples of Hope	Nordoff & Robbins Northern Music Awards
The North Will Rise Again	WEEURO	Pop, Hyde

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