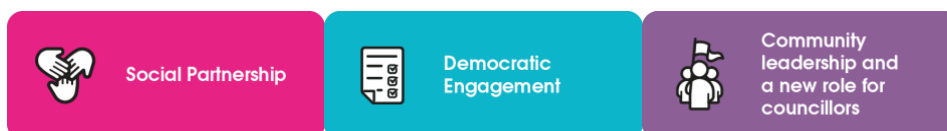




STRATEGY



Manchester City Council

A New Approach to Community Consultation

OUR MANCHESTER is Manchester City Council's overarching strategy for the city. The original Our Manchester strategy ran from 2015-2025, and in 2023, we began working on plans for consulting on a new approach. To ensure all the communities in Manchester had the opportunity to participate, an engagement plan was developed to reach as broad an audience as possible. This included targeted intervention through a commission to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

A lot has changed in the last ten years. Manchester's population has grown considerably in that time and the composition of that population has also altered.

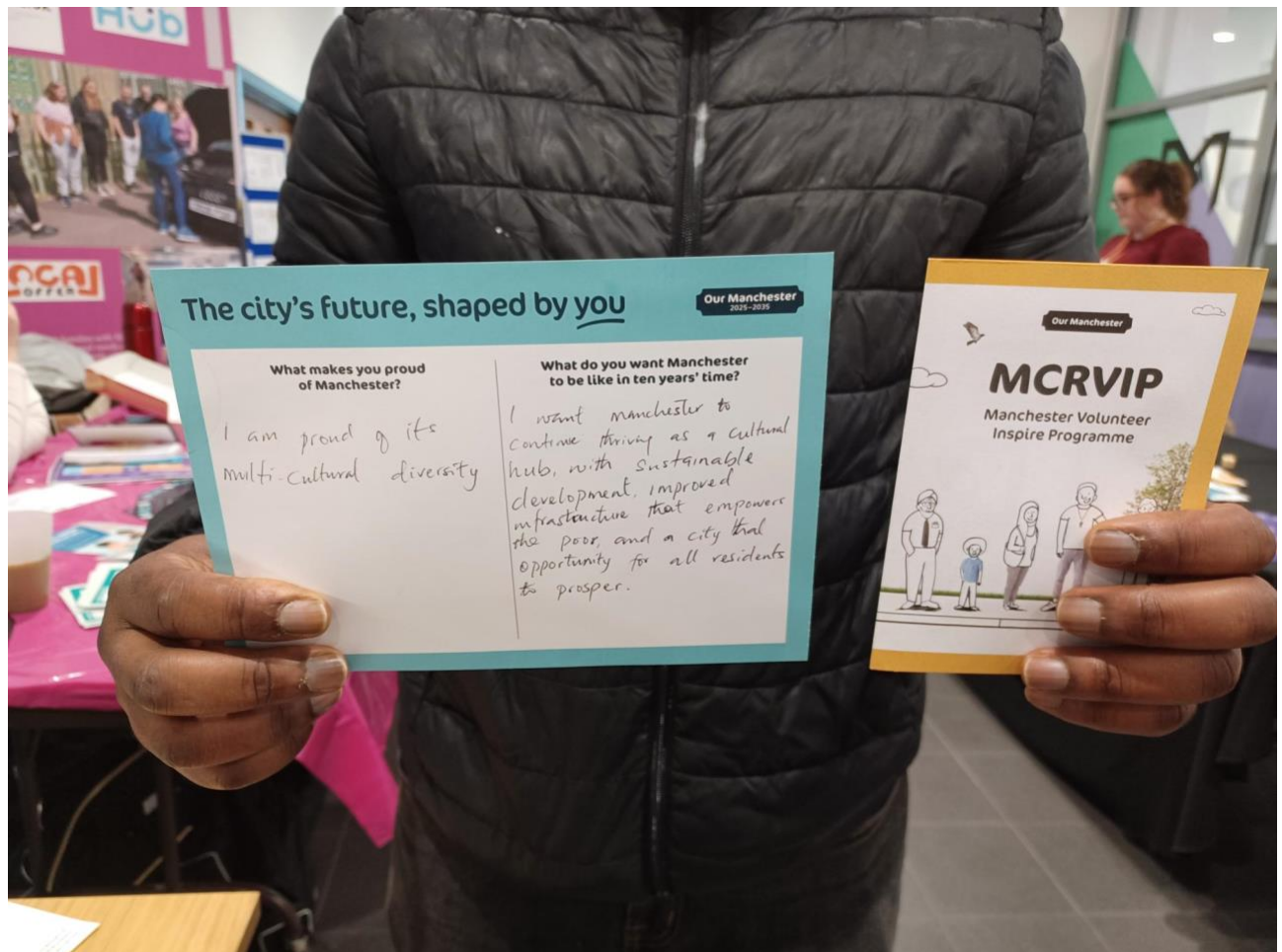
The City Policy team was tasked with developing a wide-ranging consultation approach, and an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken to ensure the new strategy was representative of the whole of the city.

Before we opened the consultation, we invited all 96 councillors across the 32 wards of the city to find out about our approach, and actively involve them in promoting it locally. They were able to suggest groups, events and community venues to engage with.

An online survey was launched in March 2024, enhanced with in-person events; with a community "post box" in libraries and community venues servicing every ward in the city. However, we knew we would need to support this city-wide approach with more targeted engagement.

Analysis of early responses to the online survey showed that certain communities were underrepresented. The Our Manchester VCS commission was developed to address these

issues. Previously we have brought in residents with “lived experience” to support policy making, for instance around Making Manchester Fairer, our strategy for tackling health inequalities. This had shown us how important it was to remunerate communities involved in consultations, and this remuneration model was now used for the Our Manchester Strategy.



Our Manchester Consultation – completing the form

Following guidance from ward councillors, we then worked with our VCS grants team to identify community organisations in North Manchester and those representing Muslim and African communities. We invited them to apply for a commission to run consultation workshops within their own communities. They attended online advice sessions, for which they were paid, and a simple application process was put in place to commission them to support the consultation.

The commissioning process was kept straightforward, requiring only evidence of safeguarding and bank account details. We took a tiered approach to funding, offering £200, £400, or £600, depending on what organisations were able to offer.

In the end, 11 community groups were funded through the commission. They all received a pack to run consultations within their own communities and were invited to online training sessions. The packs included leaflets and consultation forms in up to seven community

languages, as well as branded pens, tote bags, and water bottles as incentives for participants.

Because we needed responses to be returned in time for analysis alongside the online and paper surveys, the time frame for completing this work was short.

Community groups ran sessions in different ways – using the online survey or the translated survey as a guide, or providing a summary report and photographs. Much of this had to be translated and fed into the overall results.

Over 10,000 responses were received in total to the Our Manchester consultation, the largest the city has ever undertaken. However, the VCS commission was important in that it reached out to underrepresented groups in the city and ensured their voices could be heard. The commission took place alongside other engagement work, including speaking to various community forums and being present at events such as Eid in the Park, Friday prayers, and Africa Day.



Our Manchester Collateral

Our Manchester Strategy 2035 was launched in April 2025 and will be the overarching strategy for the city for the next decade. The wide-ranging consultation means that it is a strategy for everyone in the city.

Lessons Learned

- Our early engagement with councillors ensured that we had support across the city for the consultation.
- However much time you have, it's never enough! The VCS Commission had to be set up in a very short period of time.
- Consulting widely is resource-intensive – from the number of stakeholder meetings we presented at, to producing leaflets and other collateral, to analysing the data.
- The VCS commission enabled us to “fill the gaps” by carefully targeting. Providing funding enables community groups to commit their time and resources. It also builds important relationships and trust amongst underrepresented communities.
- Many parts of the council had a role to play—from City Policy to Communications to Neighbourhood Teams to Performance, Research, and Intelligence colleagues—and this was achieved by involving lead officers from each service early in the planning process.

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