



Impact & Evaluation Report

ROCHDALE: GREATER MANCHESTER'S
TOWN OF CULTURE 2025-26

Common Walls,
AYLO 'Dreams Never End'
Credit: Chris Foster

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213,099+

live attendees
across

**Rochdale's Year as
Greater Manchester
Town of Culture
in numbers¹**

297+

events

INVESTMENT

£5.5mil+

estimated leisure spend generated

£60,500

external sponsorship attracted

£245,614+

of advertising value generated

£1,136,211+

additional investment made by partners

CREATIVE EMPLOYMENT

1,374+

artist employment instances, of which 85% were freelance

83+

placements or apprenticeships offered

3,097+

artist days, equalling 12.2 full-time equivalent roles

PROGRAMME SCALE

1,466+

event days, equivalent to just over 4 full years

785+

volunteering roles

5,909+

children and young people participated in 282+ creative learning sessions

4,767+

adults participated in 160+ training/workshops sessions

Executive Summary

In 2025-26, Rochdale held the title of Greater Manchester Town of Culture, delivering a year-long programme that celebrated the borough's creativity, heritage and communities while demonstrating the role of culture in supporting regeneration, wellbeing and economic growth. Rooted in Rochdale's identity as the birthplace of the Co-operative Movement and aligned with the borough's cultural strategy, Pioneering Creativity, the programme placed collaboration, participation and place-making at its core.

The programme built on several years of strategic cultural development, including Arts Council England Priority Place status, Cultural Development Fund investment, the creation of the borough's Cultural Compact, 'Rochdale Creates', and the establishment of Rochdale Development Agency's Culture and Placemaking team. These foundations enabled Rochdale to deliver an ambitious and inclusive cultural programme at a scale not previously seen in the borough.

Over the course of the year, more than **213,099 people attended over 297 events and exhibitions**, reaching residents and visitors across Rochdale borough and beyond. Major projects included Common Walls International Mural Festival, THE HERDS as part of Manchester International Festival 2025, Merhaba Festival, Heritage Open Days, Feel Good Family Picnics, Side by Side, the Poet Laureate Programme and FAB Youth Arts Festival, alongside a wide range of artist commissions, heritage projects and community-led initiatives.

The programme delivered significant impact for people. Local artists were placed at the centre of delivery, communities actively co-curated cultural activity, and thousands of children and young people participated in creative learning, leadership and talent development opportunities. Feedback consistently demonstrated strong outcomes relating to pride, wellbeing, community cohesion and personal development. The programme also created pathways into volunteering, training, employment and creative careers, leaving a lasting legacy of increased confidence and skills across the cultural sector.

Town of Culture also transformed perceptions of place. By bringing internationally significant cultural work to Rochdale while celebrating local stories, heritage and talent, the programme helped strengthen the borough's cultural identity and reputation. Audience feedback demonstrated increased pride in Rochdale and improved perceptions of the borough, while flagship projects attracted visitors from across Greater Manchester and beyond. Investments in public art, cultural infrastructure and heritage assets have created lasting improvements that will continue to benefit residents and visitors in the years ahead.

The programme generated tangible economic benefits, including increased visitor spending, sponsorship, inward investment and national media exposure. It strengthened partnerships between the cultural sector, businesses, education providers and public services, embedding culture more firmly within regeneration, tourism and economic development strategies. Annual Creative Industries Survey results show marked improvements in confidence, collaboration and leadership across the sector during the programme period.

The Town of Culture year demonstrated that culture is not an add-on in Rochdale, but a core component of the borough. The programme has established strong foundations for continued growth, strengthened cultural infrastructure and partnerships, and created a clear platform for future investment, innovation and ambition across the borough.

INTRO



Following a competitive process, Rochdale was awarded Greater Manchester's Town of Culture 2025–26.

The designation provided a platform for a year-long programme celebrating the town's rich heritage, creativity and diverse cultural sector, significantly raising its profile regionally and nationally.

The Town of Culture (ToC) programme built on sustained strategic development and investment across the borough. This followed the creation of the borough-wide culture strategy 'Pioneering Creativity', and included the establishment of RDA's Culture and Placemaking team in 2023 as well as the creation and continued growth of Rochdale Creates, the borough's Cultural Compact and sector brand for culture, creative industries and heritage. Together, these initiatives strengthened collaboration and enabled the coordination and amplification of Rochdale's cultural offer.

The year coincided with several major milestones, including:

- Hosting the national Cultural Development Fund (CDF) symposium in March 2025
- The reopening of Heywood Civic and Peine Square in February 2026
- Centenary celebrations for Champness Hall, Curtain Theatre and St John's Baptist Church
- The launch of Rochdale's Arts Council England (ACE) Place Partnership programme

ToC accelerated this momentum, increasing ambition, visibility and external engagement with Rochdale's cultural programme.

Project Objectives

Rooted in Rochdale's heritage as the birthplace of the Co-operative Movement, the programme aligned with the UN International Year of Co-operatives 2025 and placed 'People Power' at its centre.

Delivery aligned with Rochdale's Cultural Strategy 'Pioneering Creativity (2020–2030)'² and was structured around three priorities: People, Place and Prosperity.

Rochdale's Cultural Compact Rochdale Creates wanted to renew local pride in place, leaving a lasting legacy for Rochdale, and culture's place within it. Despite the title Town of Culture, we were committed to implementing the programme across Rochdale borough, including Middleton, Heywood, the Pennines and both Rochdale townships.



People

The programme prioritised participation, talent development and community collaboration aiming to:

- **Showcase local artists** by increasing investment, creating paid opportunities and supporting professional development
- **Engage young people** through targeted programmes that build skills, confidence and pathways into creative careers
- **Collaborate with communities** to develop cultural activity, ensuring relevance, increasing ownership and strengthening community cohesion



Prosperity

The programme positioned culture as a driver of economic and social value. Key objectives were to:

- **Change perceptions of culture's role** by embedding it within regeneration, tourism and investment strategies
- **Grow audiences** by attracting both local residents and visitors, possible due to strong transport links and audience development insights



Place

The programme aimed to strengthen Rochdale's identity and cultural infrastructure. It sought to:

- **Shape a positive place narrative** by showcasing Rochdale's heritage, creativity and hospitality offer, increasing civic pride and attracting visitors
- **Increase cultural capacity** by developing infrastructure, supporting long-term partnerships and strengthening organisational sustainability - allowing ToC to pave the way for the future of Rochdale's cultural scene

2 Rochdale Borough Council (2020). Pioneering Creativity: A Cultural Strategy for Rochdale Borough. <https://democracy.rochdale.gov.uk/documents/s109438/Appendix+2+Pioneering+Creativity+Strategy.pdf.pdf>

3 The Audience Agency (2023). Population Profile Report, highlights that Rochdale is ideally placed geographically to attract day visitors within a 45-drive radius, including the whole of Greater Manchester and Calderdale, as well as being placed on main train lines connecting cities across the North, such as Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield. This report and benchmarking data from previous local events provided clear understanding of potential audiences, which informed the programme for the year.

How We Got Here

ToC marked a key milestone in Rochdale’s ongoing programme to strengthen its cultural infrastructure and capability. Under the strategic leadership of Rochdale Borough Council (RBC) and Rochdale Development Agency (RDA), the sector has undergone sustained development over several years, building creative, organisational and digital capacity.

Historically, Rochdale has experienced low levels of cultural engagement and investment. Limited infrastructure, underdeveloped cultural markets, and a lack of affordable workspaces constrained opportunities for audiences and artists, while weak perceptions of place and limited creative pathways impacted participation and progression.

In response, RBC and RDA established a new cultural policy framework in 2019, informed by extensive research and consultation. This resulted in the Cultural Strategy Pioneering Creativity, alongside a suite of supporting strategies including:

- Visitor Economy Strategy
- Cultural Asset Strategy
- Festival and Events Strategy
- Early Evening and Night-Time Economy Strategy

In 2021, Rochdale was designated as one of two ACE Priority Places in Greater Manchester, driving a significant increase in investment from £315k to £1.25m over three years. This was followed in 2022

by securing DCMS CDF funding, supporting the renovation of Touchstones Museum and Gallery, the development of a Creative Innovation District, and the establishment of Rochdale’s Cultural Compact.

This investment enabled the launch of the Rochdale Creates brand and website in 2024 and expanded cultural activity across the borough. It also supported the development of Rochdale’s Cultural Education Partnership, established in 2022 to improve access to arts and cultural education, remove barriers to participation and support wellbeing and employability among children and young people.

To deliver this evolving strategy and investment programme, RDA established its Culture and Placemaking team in 2023, embedding culture within broader regeneration activity and strengthening cross-sector collaboration. The team led the successful ToC bid on behalf of the Cultural Compact and played a central role in programme delivery.

The impact of this approach is reflected in annual Creative



Industries Survey findings,⁴ which show substantial improvements in confidence across the sector between 2023 and 2026. Confidence in the strength of local cultural partnerships increased from 60% net positive to 87%, confidence in the quality of local cultural leadership rose from 39% to 75%, and confidence in the sector’s capacity to deliver cultural activity increased from 37% to 90%. These improvements were mirrored in feedback from Cultural Compact members, which consistently highlighted higher levels of trust, stronger relationships, and a greater willingness to work collaboratively.

ToC built on the increased collaboration and was underpinned by Rochdale Creates’ two-year, ACE-funded Place Partnership programme (launched in 2025), which provided

the core infrastructure, partnerships and funding required for delivery, while securing resources for legacy activity beyond the programme year.

The year also aligned with significant local and international milestones. Rochdale’s role as the birthplace of the Co-operative Movement placed it at the centre of the UN International Year of Co-operatives, including hosting an international conference that attracted global delegates.

In addition, 2025 marked the centenary of key cultural institutions: Champness Hall, Curtain Theatre and St John’s Baptist Church as well as the reopening of Heywood Civic in February 2026, further strengthening the borough’s cultural infrastructure. The ToC programme built on these foundations - the history, talent and creativity were already here; ToC was merely its moment to shine.

▲ FAB Youth Arts Festival
Credit: Chris Payne

⁴ Creative Industry Surveys delivered annually with The Audience Agency from 2023 onwards, open to anyone working, volunteering or studying in the cultural, heritage and creative sectors in Rochdale borough.

Impact PEOPLE



Attendees at Common Walls Festival
Credit: Alan Hamer

‘Pioneering Creativity’ highlights the role of arts and culture in bringing communities together, enabling people from different backgrounds and ages to share experiences and learn across cultures. Reflecting Rochdale’s heritage as the birthplace of the Co-operative Movement, collaboration and co-production were central to the ToC programme.

“You didn’t force me to come out of my comfort zone, you made me want to leave it”

- Community Participant, Breaking Barriers Young Company

The programme prioritised participation and local talent, creating opportunities for residents and creatives to contribute to and shape cultural activity across the borough.

The programme placed local artists at its core, supporting their development, visibility and progression. Local creatives were directly involved from the outset, with the ToC announcement made at the Rochdale Borough Culture Network (RBCN) AGM in February 2025 by Councillor Neil Emmott, Leader of Rochdale Borough Council and GMCA’s portfolio holder for culture.

This approach created opportunities for local artists to lead and shape the programme. Hayley Garner (AYLO), co-founder of the Butterfly Effect, curated the award-winning Common Walls mural festival and was recognised as Rochdale’s Creative of the Year at the 2025/26 Culture Awards. Poet Sammy Weaver was appointed Rochdale’s first Poet Laureate, delivering a borough-wide programme of activity, while Rochdale Music Stories supported local artists to develop recording and performance careers, including opportunities to perform to large live audiences.

Engagement extended across diverse communities, including HMP Buckley Hall, PINC College,

a special education college, and RBC’s Friendship Group, a group for new arrivals to the borough. A strong emphasis on co-curation ensured that activity was accessible, inclusive, and reflective of Rochdale’s communities.

“I’ve painted murals all over the world, but nothing compares to painting in your hometown”

- Hayley Garner (AYLO), lead artist for Common Walls

Participants contributed to a wide range of creative outputs, including:

- **65 residents** created life-sized cardboard animal puppets for THE HERDS in Heywood (see page 71)
- **96 local poets** were published in two borough-wide anthologies ‘Weaving Words’ and ‘Poems to Save the World’ (see page 26)
- Community participants developed skills in performance, craft and storytelling, learning to breathe fire as part of Fire Flies for Ignite Festival, and sharing personal experiences for Stories We Tell (see page 59)
- Residents exhibited work in public gallery spaces and contributed to international artist commissions, including Shilpa Gupta’s sound installation ‘You Are The Place’ (see page 42)

79%

of local creatives surveyed in the Creative Industries Survey 2026 were actively involved in the ToC programme

1,374+

artist employment opportunities, of which 85% were freelance over at least 3,097 artist days

92%

On average, 92% of attendees across the ToC programme agreed that the event they attended improved community cohesion



Feel Good Family Picnics

Feel Good Family Picnics is a series of four free, family-focused events delivered across Rochdale borough during July and August. Hosted in parks across the four townships, the programme brought high-quality cultural activity directly into local communities.

Each event offers a consistent programme of performances and activities, including theatre, puppetry, circus, music, dance and storytelling, with over 20 free attractions per day. The 2025 programme, themed around co-operation, celebrated Rochdale’s cultural identity and heritage, aligning with the ToC

programme. International work was also introduced for the first time, expanding the scale and diversity of the offer.

Originally developed in 2023, the programme was designed as a touring festival model to increase accessibility and ensure cultural provision reached communities across the borough. Delivery across parks and green spaces enabled engagement with local residents in familiar and accessible environments, while also providing opportunities for wider public service engagement at a local community level.

The programme was delivered by RBC and RDA in partnership with Without Walls Consortium, with support from Premier Kia, Flexile Funds and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

▲ Feel Good Family Picnic, Littleborough
Credit: Alan Hamer

“Lovely smiles, laughter in the air and different people mixing together in harmony! No friction or conflict!”

- Audience member

Across the four events:

- 17,000+ attendees engaged
- 85 artists participated
- 40 volunteers supported delivery
- 10 early career placements were offered, providing hands-on experience in event production

“The Feel Good Family Picnic is such a joyous event and I was proud to see our parks filled with so many people enjoying the fun and making memories. Thank you to the organising team and all the staff involved, the volunteers who helped deliver such a great event, the performers and also the friends groups and volunteers who support these parks all year round. It was a fantastic showcase of teamwork and had a genuine sense of community spirit.”

- Mayor of Rochdale Janet Emsley

The programme successfully demonstrated the value of accessible, high-quality cultural activity in building community cohesion, increasing civic pride and improving perceptions of place. Its touring model ensured equitable access across the borough, with opportunities to adapt the offer to each locality, while the scale and quality of delivery positioned it as a key component of Rochdale’s cultural offer.

“Love meeting with my family here to picnic and connect, each year I look forward to it and want it to continue”

- Audience member

The programme will continue as a biennial event, returning in 2027. Future development includes introducing targeted commissions for local cultural organisations, particularly those working with children and young people, to further embed the programme within the borough’s cultural ecosystem.

94%

of audience respondents agreed that the event increased pride in Rochdale

97%

of audience respondents agreed that the event was good for Rochdale’s image

97%

of audience respondents agreed that the event improved community cohesion

“We had a lovely family day without worrying about the cost.”

- Audience member

▼ Feel Good Family Picnic, Middleton
Credit: Alan Hamer





Side by Side

Touchstone's inaugural Side by Side Festival further demonstrated the commitment to co-creation. Delivered as a week-long programme in the newly renovated Town Hall Square, the festival repositioned Touchstones, temporarily closed for refurbishment, as a civic cultural platform within the public realm. Working with partners and artists, Touchstones supported community groups to co-develop and programme activity for the festival.

The project specifically aimed to engage people who experience barriers to cultural participation, including those affected by chronic loneliness. By opening up accessible, public spaces and embedding co-

creation, the festival reimagined the role of the civic gallery as an inclusive and community-led space.

Supported by a range of funders, including ACE Creative Lives, Art Fund and The Big Give, Side by Side was shaped by the people of Rochdale borough. The programme brought together performances, workshops, exhibitions, and events, created and led by local communities.

Side by Side successfully demonstrated a collaborative model of cultural delivery, increasing participation among underrepresented groups, and strengthening community ownership of cultural activity. The festival has established a framework for ongoing annual delivery and continued community engagement.

3,000+

attendees

10

community groups
co-designed the
programme

33

local artists employed

▲Side by Side Festival
Credit: Alan Hamer



◀ Rochdale Culture Awards, Legacy
Award winners: M6
Credit: Chris Payne

Culture Awards

As a culmination of the programme's focus on local talent, ToC concluded with Rochdale's first Culture Awards. Delivered in partnership between Your Trust, RDA, RBC, Rochdale Town Hall, Culture Co-op and RBCN, the event celebrated the individuals and organisations that underpin the borough's cultural offer.

Awards recognised achievement across categories including Cultural Legacy, Young Creative of the Year, Cultural Event of the Year and Community Group of the

Year. Reflecting the programme's commitment to championing local voices, community representatives were included in the judging panel, ensuring a participatory and inclusive approach to decision-making.

The awards themselves were created by local artist Babs Smith of Ebor Studio, drawing inspiration from the architecture of Rochdale Town Hall and the light that creativity shines on everyday life. The event has established a strong foundation for an annual celebration of Rochdale's cultural sector.

66%

of local creatives surveyed in the Creative Industries Survey 2026 stated that ToC has increased their profile

▼ Rochdale Culture Awards
Credit: Chris Payne



Poet Laureate Programme

As part of Rochdale's ToC programme, a specialist steering group, including local poet Elizabeth White, Mayor Janet Emsley and Councillor Tricia Eyerton, appointed the borough's first Poet Laureate, Sammy Weaver, to deliver a borough-wide programme of workshops, events, exhibitions and publications in partnership with RDA and Rochdale Borough Libraries.

The programme was funded by ACE, Flexible Funds and all five Rochdale townships, and aimed to expand creative writing opportunities, support local poets, increase access to cultural activity, and strengthen connections between communities and place.

The programme delivered:

- 20 school workshops engaging 617 pupils across 12 primary schools
- 10 community workshops reaching 138 participants
- 5 spoken word events attended by 275+ people
- 6 poetry exhibitions in 5 libraries reaching 3,000+ audiences
- 96 poets published across two poetry anthologies

Workshops explored themes of identity, belonging and place, encouraging participants to reflect on their relationship with Rochdale through creative writing.

Young People and Talent Development

To ensure strong engagement with young people, the steering group appointed two Young Poets in Residence, Sasha Mostafa and Alende Amisi, to work alongside Sammy Weaver. Both created original work, performed at events and developed professional skills through mentoring, workshops and commissions.

The programme supported their progression into paid creative work, including commissions for major events, while helping them build confidence, facilitation skills and experience in creative practice.

Young Poet Experience: Alende Amisi

Alende's journey as Rochdale's Young Poet in Residence is deeply connected to his own experience of growing up in the borough after arriving from the Democratic Republic of Congo as a child refugee in 2006.

▶ Sammy Weaver,
Rochdale Poet Laureate
Credit: Chris Payne



Sammy Weaver
Credit: Chris Payne



Starting life in a new country brought challenges, but Rochdale borough's schools provided a welcoming environment where teachers nurtured his confidence, encouraged his creativity and helped him find his place. It was through inspirational teachers at St Cuthbert's RC High School, that he discovered a love of poetry and literature. What began as a personal outlet and "a tranquil escape" soon became a lifelong passion. While he had written extensively before being appointed, the role gave him an opportunity to explore poetry on a deeper level.

As Young Poet in Residence, Alende was able to build on those early foundations, immersing himself in communities across the borough and using poetry to connect with people from different backgrounds.

Reflecting on the role, he said: "Being able to fully immerse myself with diverse groups of Rochdale was an opportunity I had to take, for me that's the beauty of Rochdale and I wanted to dive deeper into that." The experience marked a turning point in his development as a writer:

"My experience as a young poet has been quite a revelation for my own growth. I discovered avenues of life in which I could explore through poetry. It became less about how I feel and what I see and more so about how I capture history, culture and people."

He credits the support he received through Rochdale's education system and wider community with helping him develop the confidence

▲ Sasha Mostafa, Sammy Weaver and Alende Amisi
Credit: Chris Foster

to pursue poetry professionally. Through the programme, he formed lasting friendships and gained opportunities that shaped both his personal and creative journey:

"The RDA have done wonders to my life, they gave me opportunities people dream of, and friendships I'll treasure."

The experience also deepened his appreciation of Rochdale's unique identity, helping him see the borough not only as his home, but as a place with a rich history of community, social justice and cultural pride.

"I've come to see Rochdale as a place with a powerful moral and cultural identity. From its co-operative history to its links with the Cotton Famine and support for emancipation, there is a long tradition here of ordinary people standing for something bigger than themselves. That has changed how I see the town. It is not just a place with history; it is a place with conscience."

Schools and Community Impact

The schools programme delivered strong educational and wellbeing outcomes. Of the participating pupils aged 9–11:

- 96% stated that they enjoyed the workshops
- 78.8% reported improved wellbeing
- 89.8% felt more creative

Teachers also reported increased confidence in delivering poetry and creative writing, with several schools engaging in arts activity for the first time.

"The children enjoyed the experience and have continued to write their own poetry at home."

– Teacher

Community workshops engaged diverse groups including U3A, New Pioneers and HMP Buckley Hall, helping to strengthen inclusion and social connections. One participant from HMP Buckley Hall has since established their own poetry workshops in prison and is looking to self-publish their own book, demonstrating the programme's lasting impact.

"It's really good to have events like this and an opportunity to meet different people."

– Community workshop participant

"A wonderful workshop with good guidance!"

– Community workshop participant

Community workshop participants reported:

96%

wanted more workshops like the one they attended

85%

agreed that the workshop deepened their understanding of poetry

77%

agreed that the workshop made them feel more connected to their local place and community

98%

agreed that the workshop was an opportunity to be creative

Events, Exhibitions and Publications - Extending Participation, Visibility and Legacy

A series of themed spoken word events provided local poets with opportunities to perform alongside professional writers, while attracting new audiences to local libraries. The final anthology launch event featured a performance by renowned poet Tony Walsh.

The programme exceeded initial targets and delivered:

- 34 performance opportunities
- Positive impact: 100% of respondents wanted more events of this kind
- Civic pride: 86% of respondents reported increased pride in Rochdale

“Absolutely fantastic event... certainly broadened my horizons.”

- Audience member

“It was joyous... absolute magic.”

- Audience member

Six exhibitions across borough libraries showcased work by workshop participants, the Poet Laureate, Young Poets in Residence and local writers, helping to increase both visibility of locally created work and accessibility for poetry. They also strengthened the role of libraries as cultural venues and encouraged wider public engagement with the programme.

The programme produced two published anthologies, 'Weaving Words' and 'Poems to Change the World'. Originally, one anthology was planned. However, the volume and quality of work produced led to the creation of a second publication dedicated to young people and their families, enabling more poems to be included and creating a resource that could be shared with schools.

'Weaving Words', launched at the final spoken word event hosted by Tony Walsh in March, grew from an anticipated 80 pages to 120 pages, showcasing the work of 69 poets from across the borough. 'Poems to Change the World' was launched in May and featured poems from 67 local poets, many of them primary school children. Both books include illustrations commissioned by local artists, and photos from the ToC year.

The 6 exhibitions:

51

Poets featured

126

exhibition days

3,000+

audience members reached

▼ Young performer, poetry anthology launch
Credit: Chris Foster Photography



◀ Councillor Janet Emsley and Poet Tony Walsh, poetry anthology launch
Credit: Chris Foster Photography

Lasting Impact

The poetry programme successfully expanded creative writing provision, increased participation, and strengthened cultural engagement across Rochdale borough. It built confidence and creative skills, created progression pathways for artists, enhanced the role of libraries as cultural spaces, and strengthened pride in place through storytelling and creative expression.

As a direct result of the programme:

- Rochdale Borough Libraries are applying for funding to continue creative writing and performance programmes;
- Learning from the project is informing the future library strategy and delivery plan;
- Rochdale Central Library has established a semi-permanent exhibition space for cultural displays;
- The three commissioned poets have secured further poetry workshop commissions;
- The poetry exhibition continues to tour across the borough;

→ Both anthologies are available to borrow or access as e-books through through Rochdale Libraries and can also be purchased from libraries and local shops.

There are also plans for the exhibition boards to be permanently displayed in libraries and other cultural venues. Schools have requested copies of the anthologies as teaching resources, and conversations are ongoing about how poems can be adapted into future projects and artworks. One poem featured in Poems to Change the World had already inspired a mural at the Common Walls Festival, while one local poet has established a Community Interest Company to continue creative writing engagement across the borough.

Perhaps most significantly, the programme has strengthened pride in Rochdale. Feedback shows that both writing and listening to poetry about the borough has increased participants' sense of connection to place. It has also helped challenge perceptions of poetry, demonstrating that it is accessible, relevant and something that everyone can take part in.



Young People

Engaging children and young people was a central priority for ToC, responding to a recognised gap in cultural provision despite Rochdale's relatively young population with 1 in 5 residents aged under 16.

The programme, led by Rochdale Cultural Education Partnership, focused on empowering young people to shape Rochdale's cultural future. Activity built on existing provision, increasing access to high-quality cultural experiences while developing skills, confidence and pathways into creative careers.

A range of targeted programmes enabled meaningful participation and collaboration.

PLACED Youth Placemakers

RDA partnered with PLACED to equip young people with the skills to help shape the future of Rochdale town centre. Through schools, workshops and a live development brief, the programme introduced students to careers in the built environment and engaged 369 young people in exploring ideas for their town centre's future of the participants:

- 90% reported developing new skills
- 95% expressed interest in future participation
- 100% reported improved understanding of careers in the built environment

▲ PLACED Youth Placemakers
Credit: PLACED & Wedge Collective

"A year ago, I never would've imagined that something which started as a 4-day programme would completely change the direction I see my future going in. PLACED Academy was my first real introduction to architecture and the built environment industry, and it's now become something I'm genuinely passionate about pursuing. It opened my eyes to how much the spaces around us can affect people, communities and everyday life - and since then, I've wanted to be part of shaping that."

exploring the countless career possibilities. Hopefully, I can continue being involved with the Academy in the future!"

- Aizah Khan, PLACED participant

"PLACED's programme helped me improve my social & communications skills. We had so many opportunities to speak to professionals which potentially might lead to me getting work experience."

- PLACED participant

That's why seeing our work displayed outside Rochdale Town Hall as part of the FAB Festival feels surreal. Hundreds of people walk through that area every day, and knowing something we created together is now part of that space is such a proud moment... It's definitely an experience that's stayed with me and meant a lot to me, accelerating my restless ambition to keep

Young Producers Inspire

Delivered by Cartwheel Arts, Your Trust, Brighter Sound and Breaking Barriers, this programme equipped 26 young people and emerging producers with practical event production and leadership skills. Participants gained hands-on experience in event programming, delivery and project management, with some progressing into paid or freelance work.

Across all ToC programmes:

282+

creative learning sessions for children and young people

5,909+

children and young people engaged

90+

individual school engagements

1,550

year 9 pupils engaged at two Creativity in Careers events



◀ FAB Festival, Teenage Market
Credit: Chris Payne

“I was able to push through difficulties... I’m quite a shy person, but I’ve worked at it and I think everything has gone well.”

– Stories We Tell Young Company participant

“I completed the programme with increased confidence and a much clearer understanding of what it takes to produce a live music event from start to finish.”

– Stories We Tell Young Company participant

Young Poets in Residence

Two young poets were commissioned to contribute to Rochdale’s ToC poetry programme, developing original work reflecting the ToC year and supporting wider engagement through workshops and activity.

Rochdale Teenage Markets

RDA joined the nationwide initiative in 2024 to transform Rochdale borough’s town centres with the creativity of young people and support the next generation of creative entrepreneurs. Six teenage markets were held across the borough during the ToC year, featuring 83 young makers and performers, full of stalls selling homemade goods people and performances from talented young people.

The stallholders said that the opportunity “was inspiring” and that they “felt very included and really enjoyed the experience,” adding that “it grows entrepreneurial spirit.”

Stories We Tell Young Company

Five young creatives contributed to the development of the immersive public artwork ‘Stories We Tell’ by Breaking Barriers, gaining experience in collaboration and production.

FAB Steering Group & Media Lab

Young people also played a central role in shaping major programme activity. To support the development of FAB Youth Arts Festival, a steering group of 15 young creatives (aged 13 – 18) was recruited through an open call. The group contributed to the festival’s design, including branding and commissioning decisions, while participating in creative development sessions and partner visits. The group continues to meet regularly, establishing a model for ongoing youth engagement.

Alongside this, the FAB Media Lab provided training in digital content creation. Delivered by Sharp Futures and Rochdale Youth Services, the programme equipped participants with skills in social media production, editing and responding to client briefs. Participants applied this learning by producing live content from FAB Festival for Rochdale Creates.

Further details of both programmes are included in the next case study.

“This experience has completely changed my outlook on myself as a creative... it was the gentle push I needed to realise that my creativity is both useful and valuable and can be taken seriously by creatives who are more experienced than me.”

– Stories We Tell Young Company participant

100%

of Teenage Market stallholders said they would either take part in more markets, sell more items or continue their business further.

FAB Youth Arts Festival

FAB (Freedom, Art, Belonging) Youth Arts Festival was the final event of Rochdale’s ToC year, and attracted over 1,500 attendees. Designed with and for young people, the two-day festival showcased local talent through a diverse programme of performance, visual arts, and participatory activity.

The festival combined high-quality creative work with opportunities for participation, ensuring young people were central to both programme delivery and audience experience. A dedicated schools’ day extended engagement and broadened reach.

The festival was funded through GMCA and Flexible Funds, with sponsorship from Hopwood Hall College and support from Rochdale Town Hall. REEL Cinema offered reduced cinema tickets for teenagers, one of the successful cross-sector collaborations in ToC.

Youth Leadership

A key feature of FAB was its youth leadership. The youth steering group shaped core elements of the festival, including branding, programming priorities, and selecting the commissioned work. This ensured relevance and strengthened young people’s ownership of the event.

Participants reported increased confidence, improved skills and a stronger sense of agency, with the model now informing future youth engagement activity across the borough.

88%

of audiences reported increased pride in Rochdale because of the event

▼ FAB Festival, Rochdale Music Service
Credit: Chris Payne



Commissions and Creative Development

A targeted commissioning programme, funded through RBC's Flexible Funds enabled local organisations to co-create new work with over 340 young people:

→ **Butterfly Effected – Youth Voices:**

Young people developed skills in mural practice, resulting in a public artwork and progression into further opportunities

→ **Ebor Studio – Good Shout:**

Supported young creatives to lead an exhibition including three different art forms, fostering ownership and peer learning

→ **Global Grooves & Nigerian Community Association – Carnival Connections:** Delivered workshops culminating in a youth-led parade exploring identity and heritage

→ **PINC College – Metamorphosis:** Produced a short film with neurodivergent young people, improving wellbeing and engagement

→ **Rochdale Music Service:** Delivered a full-day programme of performances and workshops by and for young musicians

→ **Skylight Circus Arts – Youth Circus Takeover:** Built performance, leadership and teaching skills by hosting a day of workshops and performances led by young people



These commissions prioritised both creative output and skills development, strengthening confidence and collaboration.

▲ FAB Festival, Skylight Circus Arts
Credit: Chris Payne

'Being part of this project was a total turning point for me... I've since brought my own spray cans and I'm practicing every day. Truly grateful for the jumpstart.'

- Youth Voices Participant

'The highlight of the project was being in an environment where my creativity was encouraged rather than ignored. It really pushed me out of my comfort zone and boosted my confidence massively.'

- Good Shout Participant

On the event day I noticed one of our young people... seeing them beaming with smiles after they'd taught trapeze was fantastic - next generation of circus teachers!'

- Skylight Circus Arts staff member

▼ FAB Festival, Good Shout Ebor Studio
Credit: Ebor Studio Group



Wider Programme Delivery

Additional activity expanded opportunities for skills development and participation using funding from Rochdale Creates' Place Partnership programme:

→ **Inspire Young Producers:**

showcased programme outcomes and delivered hands-on craft workshops

→ **FAB Media Lab:** Enabled 10 participants to create live digital content for the festival

→ **Rochdale Teenage Market:**

Supported 30 young people to sell their crafts and to develop entrepreneurial skills

Participants reported improved communication skills, confidence and increased ambition to pursue further opportunities.

Festival Programme and Reach

The festival brought together multiple programme strands into a vibrant event, showcasing young creatives from across the borough. Alongside commissions and youth-led work, activity included performances, workshops, exhibitions and public art installations.

→ **Hayley Garner (AYLO)** delivered a large-scale mural as a continuation of our Common Walls festival, inspired by the thoughts and aspirations of over 100 children from Healey Foundation Primary School and the FAB steering group.

→ **The Square Gallery** was taken over by the PLACED programme outcomes and Hopwood Hall College, who also run Saturday Art Club.

90%

of audiences reported an increased sense of community because of the event

63%

of children and young people who responded to the survey had visited more than 5 festival programme activities

▼ FAB Festival, Music Workshop
Credit: Chris Payne





- Following on from the ToC poetry project, the exhibition in Number One Riverside was adapted to display poems by children, young people and the two Young Poets in Residence.
- The two Young Poets in Residence were commissioned to host four poetry workshops as part of the festival.
- The Culture Awards Exhibition remained in Rochdale Town Hall, including the Young Creative of the Year category, allowing the Young Creatives' work to be celebrated.
- The short film from Side by Side, which was created by young people with Touchstones was shown at FAB Festival, celebrating young people's contribution to ToC.

Feedback highlighted the festival's inclusivity, vibrancy, and strong representation of young people's creativity.

FAB Youth Arts Festival successfully addressed a recognised gap in cultural provision for young people by embedding them at the centre of programme design and delivery.

It strengthened skills, confidence, and creative identity while increasing access to high-quality cultural experiences.

The festival also developed local capacity, equipping organisations with experience of co-creating work with young people and establishing replicable models for youth-led cultural delivery.

Key learning includes:

- The need for longer lead-in time to support deeper co-creation
- More targeted marketing to maximise reach and visibility
- Improved coordination across programme elements
- Greater alignment between programme design and audience targeting

Despite these challenges, FAB established a strong foundation for future delivery. Plans are under review to continue the festival, building on its success and further embedding young people within Rochdale borough's cultural offer.

▲ FAB Media Lab with SHARP Project
Credit: Helen Thackray



► FAB Festival, Hopwood Hall Square Gallery
Credit: Chris Payne

Impact PLACE

Culture plays a central role in shaping place identity, strengthening community pride and attracting visitors. As set out in ‘Pioneering Creativity’, when deployed strategically it can redefine perceptions, support regeneration and stimulate cultural tourism. Rochdale’s ToC programme built on the borough’s heritage and growing cultural assets to enhance its profile locally and nationally.

Bringing World-Class Work to Rochdale

Alongside supporting local talent, the programme prioritised attracting internationally recognised cultural work to the borough. This approach aimed to draw new audiences, demonstrate Rochdale’s ability to host high-quality cultural experiences, and raise aspirations among residents and creatives.

Projects were carefully selected to ensure meaningful engagement with place, working with local communities and heritage assets to ensure a strong Rochdale identity within each project.

Shilpa Gupta: You Are The Place

“This is the best thing I’ve seen in Rochdale.”

– Audience member

As part of Manchester International Festival 2025 (MIF), RDA co-produced and hosted ‘You Are The Place’, a major new work by internationally acclaimed artist Shilpa Gupta.

Developed in collaboration with Rochdale communities over 18 months, the installation transformed indoor football pitches into an immersive sound and light environment. Drawing on stories of home, movement and belonging, contributions from local residents,



including recent migrants and asylum seekers, were translated into multilingual audio (representing the eight most spoken languages in the borough), recorded by local community choirs and produced at Voltalab Sound Studios.

The resulting installation combined personal narratives with large-scale visual presentation, bringing community voices into an internationally significant artwork.

“...crying at the stories from children at the Shilpa exhibit in Rochdale.”

– Audience member

Over 780 people attended, with 62% travelling from outside the borough, demonstrating Rochdale’s ability to attract external audiences through high-profile cultural programming.

The project successfully balanced international quality with local relevance, embedding community voices within the work while raising Rochdale’s cultural profile. Discussions are ongoing to present the Rochdale-developed content in national venues.

“It’s absolutely beautiful. I welled up when I walked in. All the best festival work is in Rochdale.”

– Audience member

This programme of activity strengthened Rochdale’s reputation as a place capable of hosting internationally significant cultural work. It enhanced perceptions of the borough and demonstrated the value of place-based collaboration in delivering high-quality cultural experiences.

▲ Shilpa Gupta Choir rehearsal visit by Andy Burnham (GM Mayor)
Credit: Chris Foster Photography

▼ Shilpa Gupta, ToC preview event
Credit: Chris Foster Photography





Rochdale Music Stories

'Rochdale Music Stories', launched as part of ToC, celebrates the borough's musical heritage while championing emerging local talent. Funded by ACE projects funding and delivered by RDA in partnership with The Stockport Music Story and Voltalab Sound Studios, the project brought together established legacy and new creative voices.

109 local artists were commissioned to reinterpret tracks from the archives of Cargo Studios and Suite 16, producing a studio-recorded compilation album. The paid opportunity was open to artists across genres, ensuring representation of Rochdale's diverse music scene.

The launch programme attracted internationally recognised artists with links to Rochdale's music

history, including Clint Boon (Inspiralt Carpets), Peter Hook (New Order, Joy Division), Andy McCluskey (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) and Martin Moscrop (A Certain Ratio). Participating local artists benefited from professional recording, inclusion on a vinyl release and the opportunity to perform to a sell-out audience at Heywood Civic following its reopening. Many subsequently secured additional performance opportunities beyond the borough.

The project will continue with a 'Homecoming' concert in August 2026, featuring Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Peter Hook and A Certain Ratio performing in Rochdale Town Hall Square. The event is expected to attract over 5,000 attendees and generate more than £300,000 in direct revenue, alongside increased spend in the local economy. Local artists involved in the project will be featured as invited

▲ Rochdale Music Stories artists, Voltalab Sound Studio
► Top right: Peter Hook & Clint Boon Middle Right: PoolEra & Andy McCluskey (OMD)
Bottom Right: Jennifer Reid
Credit: Karen McBride

guests, with one artist selected to perform on the main stage. RDA also supported the development of Spotland Live Music Festival, a new multi-venue event at Spotland Bridge Mill in March 2026. The inaugural, sold-out event attracted over 500 attendees and created additional performance opportunities for local artists. The festival is expected to continue annually, with plans to expand its scale and reach.

Impact and Legacy

'Rochdale Music Stories' strengthened the borough's cultural identity as a music destination, connecting its heritage with contemporary talent development. The project has:

- Increased visibility and professional opportunities for local artists
- Attracted high-profile artists and audiences to Rochdale
- Strengthened Rochdale's reputation within the regional and national music sector

Future development will extend the programme's impact through:

- Commercial release of the album to raise national and international profile
- Creation of a permanent music heritage offer, including exhibitions, trails and public markers
- Expansion of live programming across the borough and collaboration with other Greater Manchester areas



Further ToC highlights included a performance from nationally acclaimed poet Tony Walsh at the 'Weaving Words' anthology launch, a free Manchester Camerata performance at Rochdale Exchange Shopping Centre as part of their Here We Are festival, and the inaugural UK & Ireland Folk Album of the Year Awards at Rochdale Town Hall, delivered by Sound Roots and supported by RDA. The awards were live streamed to an international audience of over 10,000.

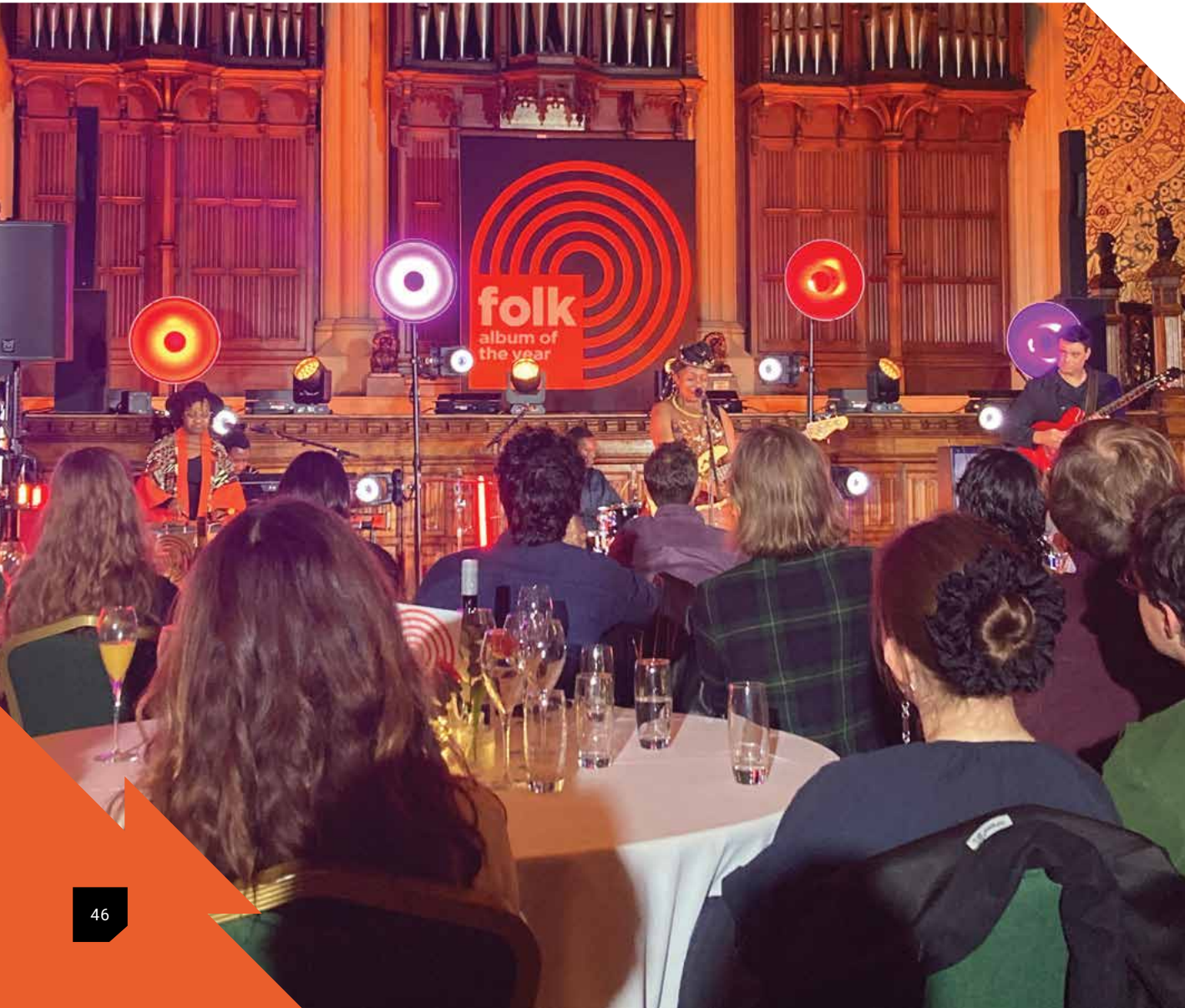
The award-winning Common Walls festival transformed Rochdale's streets through large-scale murals by international artists (see page 51),

while Rochdale Central Library hosted the national tour of Nick Sidle's KFOR and Kosovo +25 photography exhibition, marking the 25th anniversary of NATO peacekeeping in Kosova and highlighting the importance of community cohesion.

Collectively, these events strengthened Rochdale's ability to host high-profile cultural activity, increased visibility and visitor appeal, and contributed to a more positive place narrative. They demonstrated how international programming can be successfully delivered alongside a continued focus on local talent and community participation.

91%
of respondents to the 2026 Creative Industries survey stated that Rochdale being ToC increased their pride in Rochdale

▼ UK & Ireland Folk Album of the year event
Credit: RDA



Lasting Infrastructure

A key objective of ToC was to deliver lasting cultural infrastructure, ensuring the programme would have sustained impact beyond the programme year. Investment in physical assets, public spaces and engagement initiatives has strengthened Rochdale's cultural offer and created new opportunities for participation, production and presentation.



Rochdale Town Hall

The reopening of Rochdale's Grade I listed Town Hall and surrounding square in 2024, following a major restoration programme, was central to the delivery and legacy of ToC.

The venue now operates as an accessible, multi-use civic and cultural space, hosting key events including the CDF symposium and Rochdale Culture Awards, alongside a wider public programme. Activity on the square, including Flight of Fancy, Ignite Fire Festival, Street Eat and Feel Good Family Picnics, further activated the site as a focal point for cultural engagement. The restoration has re-established the Town Hall

as a key cultural anchor, increasing access to high-quality events while reinforcing the role of heritage assets within Rochdale's cultural identity.



◀ Station Gardens ToC Gallery
Credit: Culture Co-op

Outdoor Galleries

As part of ToC, two new outdoor exhibition spaces were introduced to increase visibility of local creativity and activate public spaces.

Station Gardens ToC Gallery, transformed construction hoardings on Drake Street into an open-air exhibition featuring 24 artworks selected through an open call by Culture Co-op and curated by a panel of local Cultural Pioneers. The display included commissioned poetry and student work from Hopwood Hall College and Rochdale 6th Form College, creating an accessible cultural gateway between the station and town centre. Plans are in place to expand the model across the borough.

"This gallery is more than just an art installation, it's a symbol of what's possible when we put culture and community at the heart of regeneration. By giving local people a voice in the selection process

89%
of event attendees across ToC agreed that the event they attended increased pride in Rochdale

◀ Rochdale Town Hall Photography
Credit: Chris Foster Photography

and by showcasing home-grown talent I think we're really showing how public art has the power to connect, inspire and transform."

- Councillor Sue Smith

Rochdale Square Gallery, launched in August on Rochdale Town Hall Square, introduced a permanent exhibition infrastructure with six double-sided display units. The space provides a high-profile platform for artists and organisations and supports a rotating programme of exhibitions.

These initiatives have embedded culture within everyday public spaces, increasing accessibility, visibility and opportunities for local artists, while contributing to place activation and regeneration.

Broadfield Park Slopes

The reopening of Broadfield Park Slopes behind Rochdale Town Hall reconnected the town centre with a significant heritage site, supporting both environmental restoration and cultural engagement.

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the programme combined archaeological investigation with community participation.

The Rochdale Big Dig engaged over 500 participants and uncovered significant historical remains, including 17th and 18th century dwellings and earlier artefacts. Ongoing activity includes further excavations across the borough, volunteer programmes



and pathways into employment within the heritage sector.

The project also delivered targeted engagement programmes with Petrus, a local homelessness charity and community hub:

→ **Slopes Stories:** engaging with their service-users to create more positive connections to the site, collect their stories and support improved wellbeing among participants

→ **Youth Social Prescribing:** a programme delivered with Petrus to Hopwood Hall College students to improve youth social prescribing and co-create events for the Heritage Open Days Festival 2026

A new green volunteering scheme and biodiversity initiatives, including a planned Bioblitz, support the long-term sustainability of the site. Several of the volunteers have gained paid employment in the heritage sector, and others continue to be deeply involved through voluntary roles and self-organised groups.

This project, along with the restoration of Rochdale Town Hall, continues to position the town's heritage as central to its cultural offer.

▲ Broadfield Park Slopes Project, Big Dig 3.0

Credit: Alan Hamer

The Broadfield Park Slopes project delivered:

22

work placements in heritage skills and archaeology

1,094.5

volunteer hours

7

volunteers engaged in archaeological research programme

Heywood Civic

The reopening of Heywood Civic in February 2026 represents a significant enhancement to the borough's cultural infrastructure. Funded by ACE capital funding and RBC, the venue managed by Your Trust provides a renewed focus for community arts, performance and participation.

The upgraded facility supports an expanded accessible programme of cultural activity, including theatre, music and workshops, as well as becoming the new home for Cartwheel Arts. It has already hosted key events such as the sell-out 'Rochdale Music Stories' performance and a showcase organised by the Inspire Young Producers group.

The adjacent development of Peine Square introduces additional outdoor space for cultural programming.

"We are proud to have supported the redevelopment of Heywood Civic Centre through our Capital Investment Programme... I'm sure that the fantastic programme of events will encourage more people to visit Rochdale borough where they can see the cultural energy of the town for themselves."

- Jen Cleary, Director North West, ACE

Heywood Civic strengthens the cultural offer in the township, increasing access to cultural activity and supporting local participation, skills development and visitor engagement.

▼ Heywood Civic and Peine Square

Credit: Alan Hamer





Common Walls

In September, Common Walls International Mural Festival transformed Rochdale town centre into a large-scale open-air gallery, showcasing world-renowned and local artists through a series of permanent public artworks.

Across the festival week, 12 large-scale murals curated by Rochdale artist Hayley Garner (AYLO) were installed across key sites within a 30-minute walking route. The wider programme included artist talks, mural tours, workshops, a paint jam and urban sports activations, creating a dynamic and accessible cultural offer for all ages.

The festival responded to identified demand for public art and a need to strengthen cultural provision, particularly for young people, while demonstrating the potential of creative placemaking to revitalise the built environment.

Delivery and Approach

Mural sites were strategically selected by RDA and Hayley, in partnership with planners, Rochdale BID and building owners, focusing on highly visible spaces that would benefit from activation. Artists were commissioned from a mix of local and international backgrounds, with works informed by community engagement to reflect Rochdale's identity and diversity.

Two murals were co-created with community groups, including

projects with Culture Co-op's Islamic Arts group and Cabasa Carnival Arts, working with local women to explore lived experiences through visual storytelling.

Alongside the mural programme, the festival weekend activated the town centre through performances and participatory activity, increasing footfall and encouraging exploration across sites. A dedicated festival map and QR codes supported audience movement, while partnerships with Rochdale BID ensured local businesses benefited from increased visitor spend.

Participation and Skills Development

The festival engaged 37 paid artists and created opportunities for volunteers and early-career creatives from a range of diverse backgrounds within Rochdale borough. Several participants progressed to further opportunities, including five volunteers who went on to develop their own murals with the lead artist. Another volunteer worked with Hayley during the festival to design and paint her own mural of a pigeon which went viral on social media and subsequently

18,000

attendees in the first week

93%

of attendees travelled to Rochdale specifically for the festival

£1.36mil

economic impact

◀ Common Walls Mural by SMUG

Credit: Alan Hamer

“It’s nice to get north Manchester into the spotlight... there’s a lot of creative people and a lot of community spirit here. It’s something I’m proud of.”

- Common Walls Attendee



led to her being interviewed by BBC Radio Manchester.

“I’ve always been into painting and quite creative, and this was happening on my doorstep, so I thought I’ve got to give it a shot... I just stood back and there was my pigeon [Mural] nestled in the middle of world famous artists and I was like WOW!”

- Emerging Mural Artist

Audience feedback demonstrated a strong positive impact. Of those surveyed:

- 98% wanted to see more murals in Rochdale
- 96% reported increased pride in Rochdale because of the festival
- 96% said the festival improved Rochdale’s image

- 94% spent more time in the town
- 90% reported improved community cohesion because of the festival

“VERY cool vibe! Rochdale is like being in Manchester.”

- Common Walls attendee

“I came from London and it was worth it!”

- Common Walls attendee

“It’s only my second time in Rochdale and it feels really exciting. I can’t wait to come back!”

- Common Walls attendee

“Vibrant, exciting, a counter to more divisive things going on.”

- Common Walls attendee

▲ Common Walls, Cabasa Arts
Credit: Alan Hamer

◀ Common Walls Festival, artist live painting
Credit: Culture Co-op

Common Walls delivered significant cultural, social and economic impact, strengthening Rochdale’s identity as a creative destination while increasing visitor numbers and dwell time.

The murals provide a lasting transformation of the town centre, with 96% of attendees agreeing they improved Rochdale’s image. The project has shifted perceptions of underused buildings, demonstrating how existing assets can be reimagined through culture.

Legacy activity includes:

- A permanent mural trail and digital map
- Integration of murals into local education and arts programmes
- Continued visitor engagement through guided tours
- Ongoing mural commissions, including murals at FAB Festival

The programme has also led to the development of a mural support framework with RBC and partners, ensuring future investment maintains quality and respects heritage.

Common Walls has received national recognition, including the 2026 Pineapple Award for Activation: Events, highlighting its success as a placemaking initiative.

Common Walls demonstrates the power of public art to transform place, increase civic pride and generate economic value. While temporary in delivery, the festival has created a permanent cultural legacy, embedding creativity within Rochdale’s public realm and strengthening its reputation as a cultural destination.

▼ Common Walls, Insane Mural
Credit: RDA

“It’s really brightened up the town.”

- Common Walls attendee





◀ CDF National Gathering 25
Credit: RDA

Highlighting Rochdale as a Place

Rochdale has a strong global identity rooted in its co-operative heritage. The ToC programme built on this foundation to foreground the borough's history, landscape and diverse communities. A key aim was to present a confident and authentic narrative, celebrating Rochdale's unique character and countering negative perceptions.

The programme prioritised representation and inclusivity, ensuring activity reflected the borough's diversity and engaged both residents and visitors from a wide range of backgrounds.

enabled participants to explore Rochdale's approach to cultural placemaking and regeneration. RDA, on behalf of the Cultural Compact, offered a networking event for attendees in partnership with the Hampton by Hilton, and various walking tours around the town.

Hosting the symposium positioned Rochdale as a leader in place-based cultural development and provided a platform to showcase its strategic approach. It also demonstrated the long-term impact of CDF investment in shaping the borough's cultural infrastructure and delivery capacity, crucial for delivering the ToC programme.

CDF National Symposium

The CDF National Symposium, held at Rochdale Town Hall in March 2025, marked the beginning of the ToC year with a nationally significant sector event.

Almost 200 delegates attended, including policymakers, funders, cultural leaders, academics and practitioners. Alongside the main programme, site visits and tours

"Amazing 24 hours in Rochdale [...] I marvelled at the Lancashire industries wrought into the very fabric of the incomparable Rochdale Town Hall the most beautiful & sublime building."

– CDF Gathering attendee

"Inspiring and informative Cultural Development Gathering-25 in the amazing venue that is Rochdale Town Hall. So much going on in Rochdale – a great cultural place with amazing sunsets!"

– CDF Gathering attendee



Culture Quest

Culture Quest was a family-focused initiative designed to increase awareness of Rochdale's cultural offer. Delivered through Rochdale Cultural Education Partnership, the programme combined a digital and printed map of 25 cultural locations with a summer engagement challenge.

"Excellent way to get to know Rochdale."

– Culture Quest participant

"Each family could make it work for their family."

– Culture Quest participant

Culture Quest significantly increased awareness and exploration of Rochdale's cultural assets, encouraging new patterns of engagement and supporting longer-term participation. Its inclusive and accessible approach provides a scalable model for future audience development activity and is being expanded for the 2026 summer holidays.

"There were so many beautiful places that we don't know."

– Culture Quest participant

355

children visited at least one location

2,264

adults engaged with the digital or printed guide

86%

of surveyed families visited a new cultural location

▲ Culture Quest map
Credit: Helen Thackray

Merhaba Festival

Merhaba Festival ('welcome' in Arabic) held in August on Rochdale Town Hall Square, celebrates world music, food, arts and culture, with a particular focus on Islamic and global cultural traditions. Ten different food stalls lined the town square, with an artisan market providing a platform for Muslim creatives to showcase and sell their work. Music performances happened throughout the day with a mix of international and local artists and a range of world music from across the Islamic community.

Developed in response to community feedback, the festival aimed to address a gap in cultural provision by providing a platform to celebrate Islamic culture and broader cultural diversity within the borough. It also sought to challenge negative perceptions of Rochdale by showcasing the strength and richness of its communities.



Co-creation and Delivery

The festival was co-created through Culture Co-op which, following an open call, established a group of 12 Cultural Pioneers representing South Asian, Black African and Arabic communities. This group acted as the steering panel, shaping the festival over a two-year period and leading its delivery.

In 2025, the Cultural Pioneers commissioned and delivered an installation artwork, from concept through to delivery, working collaboratively with the selected artist. This approach ensured the programme reflected community perspectives and priorities.

Alongside performances and markets, the festival included workshops delivered by local arts organisations, live art

5,500

attendees

12

artists engaged

17

volunteers involved

110+

workshop participants



◀ ▶ Merhaba Festival
Credit: Chris Foster

demonstrations and participatory activities. The programme also supported local creatives, including a commissioned interactive artwork by Alina Akbar.

Further engagement was delivered by RDA through a partnership with The Foodie Kitchen, which supported refugees and residents to develop skills as food vendors, with three participants progressing to establish their own businesses.

“It’s important to bring people together, especially with what’s been going on recently. There’s just been a lot of strife and separation going on. So I think it’s really cool to just see different cultures, have different people coming together and having a great time and just really, re-emphasizing that there’s more that brings us together than drives us apart.”

-Merhaba attendee

“What’s around us today is so many stalls, so many people, different races, different backgrounds, but one purpose, you know it’s all humanity. You know, it doesn’t matter what your backgrounds and races are. Young people, children, adults, everyone’s out.”

- Merhaba attendee

“It gives people a sense of ownership of their own community, and it gives them pride in Rochdale.”

- Merhaba attendee

“It’s about community cohesion. It’s important to bring the community together. We understand each other better and we all raise ourselves up.”

- Merhaba attendee

“I think it showcases a lot of what Rochdale’s about”

- Merhaba attendee

“The festival has brought the communities together and is sharing that peace and everything that we have in common with each other. So you know, we’re stronger together. Well done to the Merhaba Festival.”

- Merhaba attendee

Merhaba Festival successfully addressed a gap in cultural provision, creating an inclusive platform that reflects Rochdale’s diverse communities. It strengthened community cohesion, supported local creatives and contributed to a more positive and representative place narrative.

The festival has demonstrated strong growth and increasing attendance, including visitors from outside the borough, indicating its potential as a sustainable cultural event within Rochdale’s annual programme.

Merhaba is expected to continue annually, with Culture Coop stating their ambitions to develop it as one of the borough’s core festivals. Future plans include refining the programme offer, exploring contemporary additions to the music lineup, and maintaining a strong co-creation approach to ensure it remains relevant to local communities.



Peter’s Field National Tour

ToC supported a special performance of Peter’s Field in Middleton, a musical project by Sound Roots, created with Sean Cooney, exploring the story of Sam Bamford from Middleton and his involvement in the Peterloo Massacre. The show was developed in the previous year, involving local communities in the research and creation of the piece.

The 2026 performance launched a national tour, helping to share Rochdale’s cultural stories beyond the borough and contributing to its wider profile.

Stories We Tell

Commissioned for ToC, ‘Stories We Tell’ is an immersive audio-visual experience developed from stories, images and recordings shared by Rochdale residents. Created and

delivered by local organisation Breaking Barriers, the project invited audiences to explore the town through binaural soundscapes and projected visuals, transforming familiar spaces through storytelling.

The project engaged 340 participants in its development and delivered six school workshops. The final experience reached 1,257 audience members, with 78% travelling specifically to Rochdale, demonstrating its success in attracting external visitors.

The project combined community storytelling with innovative digital delivery to create a culturally distinctive visitor experience rooted in place. It strengthened local identity, amplified community voices and contributed to a positive place narrative, celebrating Rochdale and the people who make it. The work has also attracted media coverage and will be remounted in autumn 2026 as an engagement tool for council staff, demonstrating the ongoing value of storytelling in shaping understanding of place.

▲Stories We Tell
Credit: Alan Hamer



Heritage Open Days

Rochdale participated in Heritage Open Days (12–21 September 2025), a national festival run by the National Trust, celebrating England's history, culture and architecture. Coordinated locally by RDA, the programme provided free access to heritage sites, many of which are not usually open to the public.

The borough-wide programme aimed to increase visitor numbers, support the local economy and strengthen Rochdale's identity as a cultural and heritage destination. It also sought to increase community pride by celebrating local stories and engagement by enabling

residents and visitors to explore Rochdale borough's history.

Delivered in partnership with local organisations and volunteers, the programme included building openings, guided tours, heritage trails, exhibitions, and talks. Activity focused on bringing Rochdale's history to life in accessible and engaging ways.

Audience feedback highlighted strong positive impact on community engagement and perceptions of Rochdale:

“We will spend more time here”

- Heritage Open Day attendee

2,690

attendees

294

volunteers engaged

▲ Heritage Open Days tour, St Mary in the Baum

Credit: RDA

“I’m not from Rochdale. I’ll be coming again after today’s tour. It’s been so interesting.”

- Heritage Open Day attendee

“As an Iranian woman I am proud about how much you fought for you democracy, like Peterloo.”

“A very positive development for the town.”

“Superb tour - I’m thrilled to have been able to attend.”

Heritage Open Days successfully increased access to local heritage,

attracting both residents and visitors and encouraging further exploration of the borough. The programme strengthened civic pride, supported a positive place narrative and demonstrated the value of heritage-led engagement in connecting people to place.

The volunteer-led model ensured strong community ownership and supported a collaborative approach to delivery.

Rochdale will continue to participate annually in Heritage Open Days, building on its success to further promote the borough's heritage assets and grow audiences. The festival provides a sustainable model for ongoing engagement, supporting both cultural participation and the visitor economy.

94%

of attendees agreed the event enhanced community cohesion

100%

of attendees agreed the event improved Rochdale's image



▲ Rochdale Pioneers Museum
Credit: RDA

Heritage Open Days tour, St Mary in the Baum

Credit: RDA

Impact PROS- PERITY



ToC created a significant opportunity to strengthen Rochdale’s visitor economy, enhance its evening and night-time offer, and support skills development and employment pathways. The programme positioned culture as a driver of economic growth, helping to reshape perceptions of Rochdale as a destination to visit and invest in. The aim was showcasing a cultural offer that was ambitious and resilient, rooted in growing prosperity in Rochdale for the years to come.

Broadening the Definition of Culture

A key ambition of the ToC programme was to broaden perceptions of what culture is and who it is for. Alongside a strong programme of arts activity, the year celebrated culture through heritage, creative industries, food culture, and STEAM

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), recognising that cultural expression exists in many forms and is relevant to all communities. This approach enabled the programme to engage new audiences by connecting culture to people’s everyday interests, experiences and identities. Events such as the Rochdale Science Extravaganza, Touchstones’ Dumpling Day and the PAK

► Street Eat 2025
Credit: Rochdale BID



Kashmiri Film Festival showcased the diversity of the borough and demonstrated how culture can be explored through science, food, film, history and innovation, as well as the arts, which in return can facilitate the communication of complex concepts. By embracing a wider definition of culture, the programme celebrated the rich mix of communities, traditions and talents across Rochdale, helping more people to see themselves reflected in the cultural offer and encouraging greater participation across the borough.

Culture as a Catalyst

The programme embedded culture within the wider local economy by working in partnership with non-cultural businesses. Key BID events, such as Street Eat, the Ale Trail, and The Baum’s Indie Baum Music and Beer Festival, were integrated into the programme, expanding reach and encouraging cross-sector collaboration. Collaborations

with the local colleges, hotels and other businesses increased the reach of the programme.

Local businesses were actively engaged through targeted initiatives, including distribution of programme materials via pubs and the development of SIGNO, a ToC beer created in collaboration with five local brewers. The project extended Rochdale’s visibility nationally, with the product reaching Westminster.

The programme also attracted £60,500 in sponsorship from thirteen businesses, demonstrating growing business confidence in Rochdale’s cultural offer.

Internally, ToC strengthened collaboration across RDA and various RBC departments, as well as establishing ongoing partnerships with regional media and communications outlets, including Roch Valley Radio, Rochdale Observer, Manchester Evening News, Heart Radio and Marketing Manchester. This has led to sustained improvements in local and regional coverage and marketing alignment beyond the programme year.

£60,500
sponsorship attracted

£5.5mil+
million estimated
leisure spend
generated

£245k+
of advertising
value generated

87%
of 2026 Creative
Industry survey
respondents stated
the strength of local
cultural and creative
sector partnerships/
collaborations
increased in 25/26

Training and Development Activities

A key priority for ToC was to ensure a lasting prosperity through investment in skills, talent development and access to opportunities across the borough.

“It’s been tough after graduating but this has given me purpose. We’ve only known each other for two weeks but you’ve been so welcoming”

- Side by Side volunteer

“The whole journey was eye opener for me and my family”

- Kashmiri Productions volunteer

Volunteering was embedded across the programme, providing opportunities for residents to contribute to delivery, develop transferable skills and build confidence and networks. Volunteers supported event operations, audience engagement and feedback collection. In some cases, they gained hands-on creative experience, including mural painting at Common Walls and archaeological research through the Broadfield Park Slopes project.

Regular professional development opportunities for artists were delivered, including networking events delivered through RBCN and a series of Music Mixers from RDA. These sessions facilitated peer exchange and provided access to industry insight from established professionals, including Pete Marshall (Doves) and and Laura White. Across partner activity, more than 30 professional networking events formed part of the ToC programme.

785+

Volunteers involved

60%

of creative industries survey respondents stated that in 25/26 the skill level of their volunteers increased, while 40% remained the same

160+

workshops or training sessions for adults

4,767+

people engaged in workshops

Side by Side festival volunteers
Credit: Alan Hamer

Additional financial support was provided by RBCN and managed by Cartwheel Arts through small grants, ACE match funding and two rounds of GM Arts Access Bursaries, helping local creatives overcome barriers to participation in training, networking and career development as well as supporting them to deliver their own projects.

Across the ToC programme, partners embedded learning and development in their projects.

Targeted training programmes also addressed identified skills gaps. Through Cartwheel Arts’ Crafting Heritage project, four artists with lived experience of migration completed an intensive eight-week training programme, equipping them to deliver creative work in schools and community settings.

In response to local demand for technical production skills, RDA, Sound Roots and Your Trust partnered with Factory Academy to deliver ‘Event Ready’, a week-long training course at Middleton Arena. Eight participants developed practical technical skills and gained experience through shadowing and placements across live ToC events.

These initiatives strengthened local capacity by equipping residents, volunteers and artists with skills, experience and professional networks. The programme supported progression into employment, increased confidence and established pathways for continued development within Rochdale’s cultural sector.

90%

of Creative Industry survey respondents stated the skill levels of them/their employees increased in 25/26

83+

placements or apprenticeships offered as part of ToC

Broadfield Slopes Project, Big Dig
Credit: Alan Hamer



Perceptions and Visitor Attraction

ToC events attracted over 213,000 live audiences, with at least 141,100 additional digital engagements. Audience data across ToC events demonstrates a strong positive shift in perceptions of Rochdale. Almost a third of attendees travelled from outside the borough, indicating success in attracting new visitors and increasing Rochdale's regional profile, while remaining relevant for local audiences. Feedback highlights the impact of cultural activity on changing perceptions and encouraging repeat visitation.

Audience Development and Inclusion

Audience benchmarking undertaken by The Audience Agency suggests that Rochdale borough's wider cultural programme, with the majority of data included in the report stemming from ToC events, is reaching a broader and more diverse audience than in previous years. Survey data indicates:

- A higher proportion of 16-24 year olds from Rochdale engaging with cultural activity than in previous benchmark years, a generally harder to engage age bracket.
- Increased representation from Global Majority communities amongst Rochdale audiences.

- Engagement from D/deaf, disabled people and those with long-term health conditions increased from 12% to 19%.
- A higher proportion of under-35s attending from outside Rochdale compared with previous years.
- Increased engagement from LGBT+ audiences, particularly amongst visitors from outside the borough.
- Greater participation from audiences across Rochdale's wards, alongside growing reach across Greater Manchester and the wider North West.

These findings suggest that ToC has not only increased audience numbers but has broadened participation amongst groups traditionally underrepresented in cultural activity while also attracting new visitors to the borough.

94%

of ToC attendees across all events agreed that the events they attended were good for Rochdale's image

91%

of Creative Industry survey respondents agreed that Rochdale being ToC has increased the profile of Rochdale

▼ Feel Good Family Picnic, Heywood
Credit: Alan Hamer



Stories We Tell
Credit: Alan Hamer

Increased Inward Investment

The programme significantly increased inward investment across the borough. Alongside the modest cultural programme budgets held by RDA and RBC for strategic events and projects, ToC helped RDA secure significant additional investment, including £50k direct ToC funding from GMCA, £220k from the Place Partnership Fund towards ToC related activities (committed before the ToC announcement), and support from Heywood Town Board's Pride in Place funding for THE HERDS. Most delivery funding came from partners, who contributed their own resources and secured over £1.1million in additional project funding and substantial in-kind support as well as £60k+ in sponsorship. This again highlights the crucial role of strong partnership working in the year's success.

"Even though I'm not from here, it made me feel so proud and inspired by such a wonderful community... I think every town and city should have something like this... It genuinely made me want to spend more time in the town and discover more about it."

- Stories We Tell attendee

"It's a good way to put Rochdale back on the map. Haven't been back here for 35 years!"

- You Are The Place attendee

ToC strengthened Rochdale's reputation as a cultural destination, increased visitor numbers and contributed to a more positive and confident place narrative.

100%

100% ACE funding success rate for main ToC programme projects

£1,136,211+

additional budget invested by partners

84%

of Creative Industry survey respondents felt that public funding for cultural and creative sector in Rochdale increased in the 25/26 year



The cohesive programming approach for the year strengthened partners' fundraising efforts, with all ToC related ACE funding applications being successful, reflecting the strength of local partnerships, infrastructure and delivery capability.

Collaboration across cultural organisations has strengthened, enabling more coordinated and ambitious programming. The programme demonstrated Rochdale's ability to deliver high-quality cultural activity at scale and provided a strong foundation for future investment.

Alongside capital developments, ToC reimagined the use of existing spaces, transforming libraries into exhibition venues, the Town Hall into a performance space and commercial properties into canvases. This flexible approach has broadened the borough's cultural infrastructure and increased opportunities for cultural engagement.

As a result, cultural programming is now being embedded into wider strategies across services including libraries and green spaces, reinforcing its role within Rochdale's long-term regeneration plans.

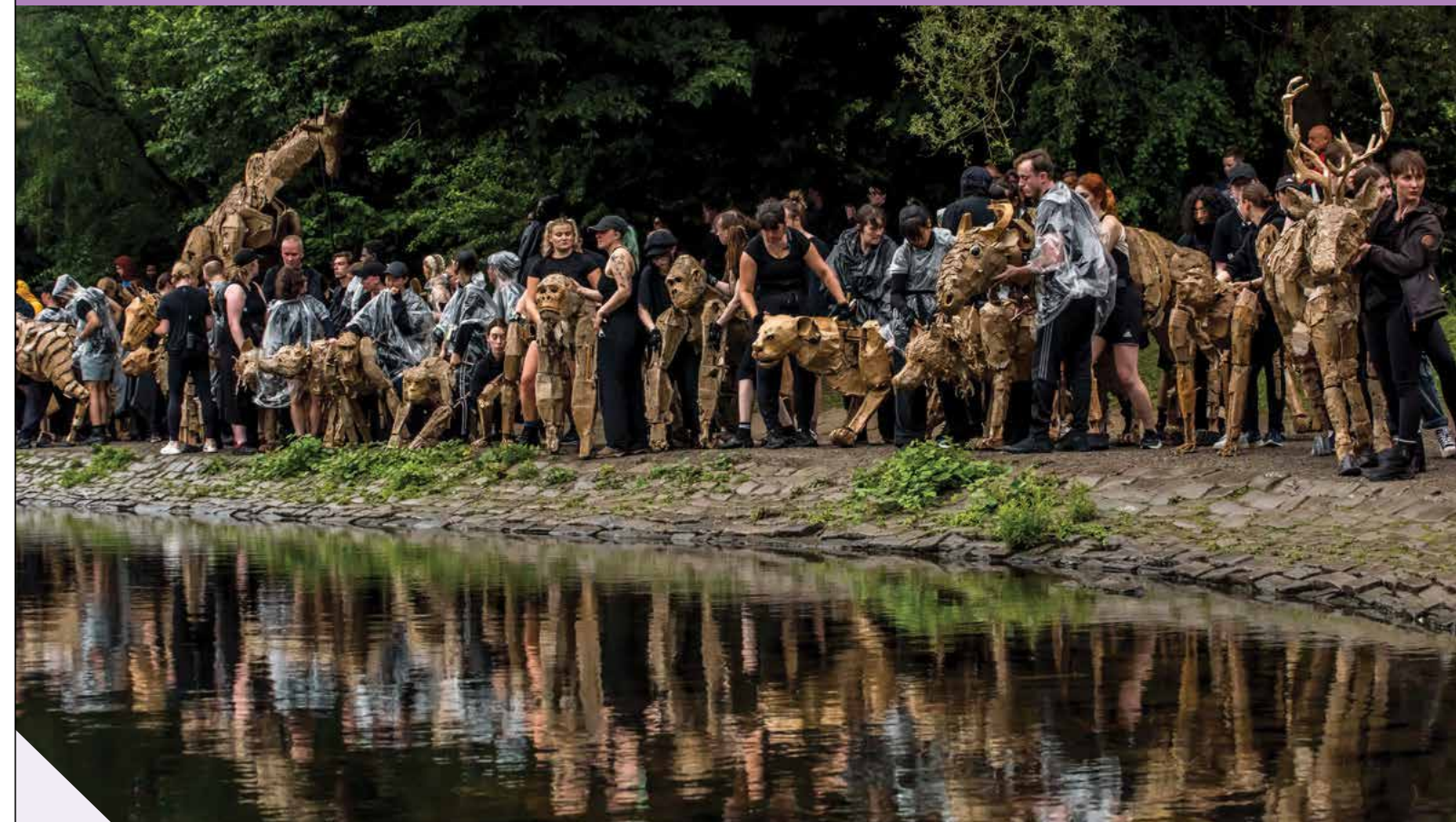
ToC has positioned culture as a core component of Rochdale's economic and regeneration strategy, increasing capacity, attracting investment, and supporting sustainable growth in the cultural and visitor economy.

94%

Creative Industry survey respondents stated that in 2025/26 their confidence in the creative sector in Rochdale increased (6% remained the same)

◀ RISE Inavate's indoor football pitch transformed into venue for Shilpa Gupta's 'You Are The Place' for MIF25

Credit: Chris Payne



The HERDS

THE HERDS, a large-scale international artwork by The Walk Productions, is a visual dramatisation of the climate crisis. Featuring 70+ life-sized animal puppets travelling 20,000km from Central Africa through Europe, the project highlights the impact of environmental change.

Delivery and Approach

In July 2025, RDA hosted THE HERDS in Queens Park, Heywood, as part of MIF 2025. The event marked the first time MIF activity extended beyond Manchester and Salford, bringing a major international cultural commission to an area that has historically had lower levels of cultural investment.

Produced in partnership with Factory International, the project combined international artistic direction with a locally embedded approach. The performance moved through residential streets before culminating at Queens Park, encouraging audiences to encounter the work organically rather than as a traditional procession.

▲ The HERDS, Queens Park Heywood

Credit: Chris Payne

Local musicians from Global Grooves accompanied the performance, while additional programming, including a live outdoor performance by Riot Jazz Brass Band, extended audience engagement. RDA also worked with local businesses to maximise economic benefit, encouraging extended opening hours and additional activity.

Community Engagement

- A strong participatory element was central to delivery.
- 65 participants engaged in puppet-making workshops in Heywood
 - Engagement included local groups such as LinkAbility, PossAbility, PINC College and community organisations
 - 8 school-based sessions delivered by Cartwheel Arts
 - 2 community sessions delivered by Cartwheel Arts

A fringe event, Let's Go Wild!, hosted by the Pioneers Museum, engaged over 200 participants, building local awareness ahead of the main performance.

Six Rochdale residents were also selected as puppeteers, participating across the three HERDS locations as part of the MIF programme.

'Magical to see the puppets... I'm not local... I came from Salford to see it. We thoroughly enjoyed it!'

- Audience member

"It's really cool that we're getting involved in festivals... we didn't used to do a lot in Rochdale did we so it's nice."

- Audience member

"We're so happy that we've found something here... it's amazing."

- Audience member

"I found this experience to be a one of a kind... so fun, immersive and engaging. Blooming brilliant."

- Audience member

"This was an incredible event. The community of Heywood were so happy to have The Herds visit us."

- Audience member

THE HERDS significantly increased participation in cultural activity in Heywood, strengthened pride in place and demonstrated the demand for high-quality, large-scale events in the borough.

The project:

- Attracted new audiences, including visitors from outside Rochdale
- Increased footfall and local spend through extended programming and business engagement
- Raised Rochdale's profile through its association with an internationally recognised work
- Encouraged repeat engagement with wider ToC activity

The event also shifted perceptions of public space, with Queens Park becoming established as a location for large-scale cultural activity.

9,500
attendees

65%
local attendance from
Rochdale borough

24%
attendance from
elsewhere in Greater
Manchester

52
artists engaged

► Left: THE HERDS workshop Heywood
Credit: RDA

► Right: THE HERDS Queens Park Heywood
Credit: Chris Payne

THE HERDS has created lasting impact across place, participation and future programming:

- Increased visitor confidence and likelihood of return visits
- Strengthened partnership with Factory International, creating opportunities for future collaboration
- Inspired further public art activity, including a planned nature-themed mural project in Heywood
- Influenced wider programming, with increased attendance at subsequent events such as Feel Good Family Picnics
- Sparked further conversations with local park teams in the council on how to utilise these spaces

more, with conversations about more regular programming on the Queen's Park Band Stand.

- The event also informed future planning for co-produced work, highlighting the need for:
- Longer lead-in times for large-scale delivery
 - Increased production capacity
 - Continued investment in ambitious, high-impact events

THE HERDS demonstrated the value of bringing internationally significant work to local communities, showing how large-scale cultural experiences can transform perceptions, animate public spaces, and positively contribute to economic and social impact.

92%
of audiences eported
increased wellbeing

94%
of audiences would
attend similar
events again

94%
of audiences said
the experience was
new and different



LEGACY



Ignite Fire Festival
Credit: Alan Hamer

ToC delivered a programme that combined high-quality art, heritage, community participation and economic impact, successfully strengthening Rochdale’s cultural offer and place narrative. The programme increased confidence in the borough as a cultural destination and demonstrated the value of culture as a driver of regeneration, with targets exceeded despite limited direct investment from GMCA.

The programme has created a strong foundation for long-term growth. Investment in key assets, including Rochdale Town Hall, Heywood Civic, Broadfield Park Slopes and the borough’s public art programme, has embedded culture within Rochdale’s physical and civic infrastructure. These developments, alongside future milestones such as the reopening of Touchstones in late 2027, position culture as a central component of the borough’s ongoing transformation.

Legacy has been embedded across all activities. Alongside capital improvements, the programme established new and sustainable cultural initiatives, including the Square Gallery, Rochdale Culture

Awards, FAB Youth Arts Festival, Rochdale’s Comedy Festival and Side by Side. These provide a framework for continued delivery and audience engagement.

The programme has also delivered individual outcomes, with participants progressing into employment and ongoing creative activity. Examples include young producers securing work opportunities, local artists continuing to develop their careers, and sustained community-led activity emerging from projects such as HMP Buckley Hall’s poetry programme.

ToC has demonstrated the effectiveness of key programme models, informing future borough-

► Square Gallery
Credit: RDA



wide strategies and strengthening partnership working across the sector. While long-term shifts in perception and civic pride will continue to develop over time, there is clear evidence that participation in arts and culture is already contributing to increased pride in Rochdale.

“Had a really interesting day at the Cultural Development Gathering 25... Good to hear about Rochdale Development Agency’s work, so much has progressed ... Rochdale Creates, and the Cultural Compact work is impressive.”

CDF Symposium attendee

“As I stood in Town Hall Square at the end of the tour and looked about, I was overcome with the beauty but more by the stories voices snippets of lives I had just listened to and thought what a flipping amazing place.”

- Stories We Tell attendee



Learning and Next Steps

ToC has established Rochdale as a borough capable of delivering high-quality, large-scale cultural programmes. This has strengthened trust across the sector and informed ambitions to build on this success.

Future activity will continue to take a borough-wide approach, ensuring cultural provision is accessible across all communities. A second benchmarking report from The Audience Agency will assess impact and inform future development.

Culture is now embedded within wider place-based investment and regeneration activity, including Pride in Place boards, Middleton's Mayoral Development Corporation and the Atom Valley development. Stronger links between culture and these programmes will continue to support long-term growth.

The programme has also strengthened relationships with businesses and sponsors, creating a platform to increase private sector investment and support future delivery.

Key challenges remain around capacity and coordination. Strengthening support for partners, clarifying delivery roles, and building organisational resilience will be essential to sustaining momentum. Evolving regulatory requirements, including anti-terror legislation, also highlight the need for increased support for voluntary organisations delivering events.

Learning from the programme highlights the importance of longer lead-in times, increased strategic support and coordinated governance to maximise impact. Emerging Greater Manchester structures provide an opportunity for stronger collaboration and shared learning across boroughs.

Next Steps:

- Sustain and scale successful programme models
- Strengthen partner capacity and delivery frameworks
- Increase investment and sponsorship and deliver commercial models
- Embed culture within regeneration and place strategies
- Expand opportunities for children and young people

ToC has exceeded expectations and established a clear direction for future growth. Its legacy will continue to shape Rochdale's cultural, social and economic development in the years ahead.

◀ Fusion Extreme at Common Walls Festival

Credit: Chris Foster Photography

Thank you & Acknowledgements

Our communities.
Our artists.
Our freelancers.
Our volunteers.
Our audiences.

Cultural Compact Partners & deliver partners

- Action Together
- Altus Education Partnership
- Breaking Barriers
- Cartwheel Arts
- Culture Co-op
- Hopwood Hall College
- M6 Theatre Company
- Rochdale Borough Council
- Rochdale Borough Culture Network
- Rochdale Cultural Education Partnership & its partners
- Rochdale Development Agency
- Rochdale Town Hall
- Sound Roots
- The Growth Company
- Your Trust

Additional delivery Partners

- ACE Lips
- Aviva Studios & Manchester International Festival
- Brid's Cross Brewing
- Brighter Sound
- Broadfield Park Community Primary School
- Cabasa Carnival Arts
- Champness Hall
- Climate Leadership Training

- Cooperative Heritage Trust
- Co-operatives UK
- Curtain Theatre
- Defiance Distillery
- Ebor Studio
- Elder Archaeology CIC
- Factory Academy
- Five Ten Twelve & the CDF network
- Fusion Extreme
- Global Grooves
- GM Arts
- Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service
- Greater Manchester Young Archaeologist's Club
- Heartstone
- Heritage Open Day Partners
- Heywood Civic
- Inspiring City
- International Cooperative Alliance
- Kashmiri Productions
- Living Well
- Manchester Camerata
- Manchester University
- Middleton Arena
- Mill About
- Minerva Heritage
- Municipality of Schio, Italy
- Nigerian Community Association
- Petrus
- PINC College (Rochdale Campus)
- Pioneers Museum
- PLACED
- Place for Youth & The Teenage Market
- Positive Steps
- Rochdale BID
- Rochdale Exchange Sopping Centre

- Rochdale Library Service
- Rochdale Music Service
- Rochdale Operatic Society
- Rochdale Science Extravaganza
- Rochdale Sixth Form College
- Rochdale Ukrainian Centre & Choir
- Rochdale Youth Service
- Royal Exchange Theatre
- RISE Inavate
- Serious Brewing Company
- Sharp Futures
- Skylight Circus Arts
- Sonic PR
- Spray Days
- St Chad's Church
- St John's the Baptist Church
- Stockport Music Stories
- Studio Bokhego
- The Audience Agency
- The Baum
- The Butterfly Effected
- The Engine Room, Middleton
- The Oxford
- Touchstones
- Twisted Mule Brewery and Tap House
- University of Manchester CAHAE Department
- Voltalab Sound Studios
- Wakey Wakey Brew Company
- Walk the Plank
- What's Occurin
- Whitworth Valley Brewing
- Without Walls Consortium

Funders

- Arts Council England
- DCMS
- GMCA
- Heywood Town Board
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Rochdale Borough Council
- Rochdale Development Agency
- Rochdale Townships
- UK Government

Sponsors

- Amber Taverns Ltd (Hogarths)
- Better
- Business Cloud
- Casey's
- Hopwood Hall College
- JD Wetherspoon (The Regal Moon)
- Perfect Circle
- Premiere KIA
- Rochdale BID
- Simkiss
- Trade Centre UK
- You Fibre

Supporters

- All Across the Arts
- Hampton by Hilton
- Marketing Manchester
- Real Rochdale
- REEL Cinema
- Rochdale Observer
- Rochdale Style Magazine
- Roch Valley Radio
- The Royal Toby

Report compiled by Rochdale Development Agency & Julia Brookes, Manchester University Master Placement student.

Designed by Keir MB Studio

Glossary

ACE	Arts Council England
BID	Business Improvement District
CDF	Cultural Development Fund
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
GM Arts	Name, short for Greater Manchester Arts
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
MIF	Manchester International Festival
RBC	Rochdale Borough Council
RBCN	Rochdale Borough Culture Network
RDA	Rochdale Development Agency
ToC	Town of Culture



Riot Jazz at THE HERDS
Credit: Chris Payne

 rochdalecreates.co.uk

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