

# Annual General Meeting Chair's Report 2019/2020

January 2021

## **Introduction**

In line with Open Data Manchester's (ODM) financial calendar, this report would usually cover the 12-month period from 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020.

However, it would be remiss to omit that, at the time of writing in January 2021, the world is still in the midst of a global pandemic, which in the UK has already contributed to the deaths of more than 80,000 people.

It is under the shadow of this that much of ODM's work has taken place during the financial year 2019/2020 - and yet - these many challenges have also prompted change within our organisation that may be here to stay.

## **Immediate response**

Organisationally and personnel-wise, the impact of Coronavirus had already started to be felt in March 2020.

That our usual work practices and programmed events would be vectors for spreading the virus, and that the safety of colleagues, the community and those that we work with is paramount, meant that by the end of the month we had halted all offline work and started developing an online events programme.

The 'new normal' for us, where everything is being done online through collaborative platforms and seemingly endless video calls, has revealed the limits of what can be done here, but has also surprised us with what online working allows us to do, especially regarding events and training.

Our participants are no longer bound by proximity to Greater Manchester or accessibility challenges concerning physical events, so moving our programme online has allowed us to reach a larger community, and enabled more people to share their skills with us.

## **Taking the community online**

As the first national 'lockdown' took effect in the UK, we began online Watercooler Chats, for anyone to drop-in, talk with others and keep connected. The chats were notionally data related, but this was often the last topic on people's minds.

The skills of the Open Data Manchester community are many and varied and it is with this in mind that the Pick N Mix series was developed. It offered an online selection of tasty training delights, led by the community for the community, including generous volunteers from the UK Data Service, PyDataMCR, Her+Data MCR and many more. Each

week, people were invited to try out new shared skills, such as coding using Python, building databases or making music from data.

Originally intended as a series of eight sessions, their popularity prompted us to extend the original series and run a second, follow-up in the Autumn. It was great to see some regular faces from the community, but also those from Singapore, Canada and the US too.

The weekly sessions developed a regular audience, with some participants then attending the subsequent Virtual Data Expedition run in partnership with 360Giving - mirroring an in-person event we ran with Manchester City Council in the first two months of 2020.

Moving events online has created an opportunity to engage a broader group of people than previously, and so we'll be continuing our online programme if and when we emerge from the shadow of COVID-19. That means we're already planning Pick N Mix season three and more data expeditions for 2021.

## **The Declaration for Responsible and Intelligent Data Practice**

In September, we launched the Declaration for Responsible and Intelligent Data Practice. Co-designed with public, private, academic, and voluntary and civil society participants over 18 months, it is a shared vision of what best practice in data should look like.

With 23 principles covering nine themes, it offers a pathway to making good decisions regarding the design and application of data technology. It has already gained support from public- and private-sector organisations, and we will be developing tools and governance for the Declaration in 2021.

### **Supporters**



## **Lexicon of Experience**

Data is political, it represents the world from the standpoint of the people who design its structure. This can lead to systematic oppressions that only start to manifest themselves when decisions, either by human or machine, are made.

Our Lexicon of Experience work looks at how data is captured and can misrepresent or not-at-all represent the experiences of voiceless or marginalised people. The project has evolved from our Mapping Mobility work and we will be developing it further through 2021.

## **Financial stability**

We are fortunate to continue our relationships with Luminate and the Coop Foundation, and their support has offered us much-needed stability during this tumultuous year.

It has allowed us to develop our organisational foundations, and increase the size of our team, as well as our income from other sources. We have been involved in a number of grant-funded programmes, as well as developing our commercial work, with surpluses going back into our core programme.

## **Key partnerships**

Over the past 12 months, we have worked with the City of Izmir in Turkey in partnership with the International Finance Corporation to assess: the maturity of the city's use of data, the needs of the data re-use community, and to develop an open-data strategy and roadmap.

Closer to home, we have undertaken a consultation on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to understand how to make local open data more usable and, following on from previous work for the European Commission's Digital Cities Challenge, we will be working with a number of European cities to help them develop their open-data programmes for the Intelligent City Challenge in 2021.

## **Our Streets Chorlton**

We kicked off the 'Our Streets Chorlton' project alongside partners WalkRideGM, Groundwork Greater Manchester and Sustrans.

Funded through the National Lottery Community Fund's new Climate Action Fund, it is an ambitious project to encourage people to drive less and use less environmentally damaging modes of transport.

Through 2021, we will be working with a local school, shopping area and residential neighbourhood, collecting data from a variety of data sources, including measuring air quality and traffic flow.

Most importantly, we will be working with residents, developing a cohort of community traffic surveyors and data gatherers, and running workshops to help people understand and use the data collected.



Data helps us understand more about our environment and this year saw us start two further projects in this area, one looking at waste and recycling, and the other about how sharing energy data could drive energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

### **Recycling standard**

Working with Your Disposal, and building on previous work creating an open data standard for waste movements, we're developing a prototype data standard for household waste recycling centres and an open dataset built on this standard. The project aims to make it easier for local authorities to publish and share information on recycling centres, helping to promote better recycling facilities for all.

### **Carbon Co-op**

Since 2012, we have been interested in the potential of cooperative organisations to enable people to look after and share their data more effectively.

We're now working with the Carbon Co-op to develop a model for small, energy cooperatives to collect, pool and share their members' data. This is being done to test new ways for data to be used to help reduce our reliance on fossil-fuel-generated electricity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Through this work, we have also been developing relationships with civil-society organisations in India and the US.

## **ODM grows**

As we shifted to online working, it quickly became apparent that we were in danger of burning ourselves out as we tried to pivot our programme, fulfil the work we had already committed to and also develop new funding streams.

In May, we welcomed to our team Kirsty Styles as a part-time Communications Manager and Nathan Khadaroo as a PhD researcher, working with us on Our Streets Chorlton.

It was also decided that in December 2020 we would employ Sophie Walker as a part-time Project Manager for six months.

## **Internal transformation**

We have continued to develop our communications strategy, which led to the redevelopment of our website, along with a community forum that allows people to ask questions, share knowledge and develop their practice.

Although COVID has meant that we have had to invest in a number of collaborative and remote working tools, our dependence on 'big tech' proprietary systems has reduced. Most of our office systems have been migrated over to EU-based, OnlyOffice, which uses an open source code base. It is also free to non-profit organisations.

In line with our ethical objectives, we have also moved our online hosting to a more suitable provider. Sheffield-based Web Architects provides internet-based services for socially responsible groups and individuals, using free, open-source software wherever possible, in a manner that aims to minimise fossil-fuel usage and ecological impacts, and which also provides sustainable, local employment.

## **Before Coronavirus**

It feels as though we have packed in a year's worth of activity since the onset of the pandemic, but the six months prior to March were also busy too.

As well as the regular Open Data Night programme, in partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, we ran two workshops on the newly released Indices of Deprivation, along with a follow-on event taking a critical look at such methods of community measurement.

At the beginning of March, as part of Open Data Day, we ran a hack event to create a real-time dashboard of the carbon emissions of flights coming in and out of Manchester Airport, introducing people to a wide variety of datasets, both useful and otherwise.