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If Devo Manc was an
animal, what would it be?

A baby giraffe – wobbly and vulnerable-looking, but it will grow tall and strong.

Francesca Gains, Head of Politics, University of Manchester

The Giraffe

by Sarah Butler

It turned up one day, outside Sports Direct: a baby giraffe in the middle of the Arndale Centre, blinking its huge eyes in the fluorescent lights. It was taller than the tallest security guard who hurried from each corner of the shopping centre. They stood in a circle, gazing up the giraffe's long brown and yellow neck to its jutting mouth, a thick red tongue reaching out to lick the lettering of The Perfume Shop.

It was a health and safety nightmare. But a cute one, even the most hard-bitten of the security guards had to admit that, with its long legs and thick eyelashes. It wasn't trying to hurt anyone – it was simply curious, and a little clumsy. It looked like a cartoon animal, always about to fall, its hooves slipping on the polished tiles, its nose bumping up against the glass shop fronts.

Members of the public started to gather. Some offered it food – handfuls of popcorn, chocolate chip cookies, crisps. The giraffe lowered its head and gently lifted their gifts with its tongue, pulling them into its mouth and seeming to smile in thanks. Kids pulled at their parents' hands and asked if they could take it home. Shopkeepers came out and stroked its soft fur. 'It's adorable,' people said. 'It's so wobbly looking.' 'It needs looking after.'

People searched for its mother, but she was nowhere to be found. Calls were put out on local radio and TV, but it became clear that the giraffe was on its own. 'So, it's up to us,' the people said. 'It has come to our city, so we must take responsibility.' They set up a committee of people from across the region – politicians and traders, tenants and transport executives, young people and old. There were those who scoffed – such a large and disparate group would never be able to work together, they said; decision-making would be too slow, too tortuous, nothing would get done. But as it turned out, there was something about the giraffe that made people want to pull together. The committee met and talked and listened and planned and between them they worked out a strategy to help the giraffe. They taught it to navigate the city and its regions. It learnt to shop wisely in the markets, to step carefully on the streets, to find what it needed in the library, to


look out for bikes and to always carry an umbrella.


And as the giraffe grew taller and stronger, the committee grew better organised and more effective. As the giraffe lost its wobbly uncertainty, the committee gained in confidence – they started to dream big and allow others to do the same. As the giraffe learned to open its mouth and fill its lungs and call out, the committee found its own, multi-faceted voice amplified across the city.

This is one of three stories by Sarah Butler which explore what Devo Manc might be and mean for the city. Sarah met with a range of academics working on Devo Manc, as well as other residents and campaigners in Manchester. She asked each of them: If Devo Manc was an animal, what would it be? Their answers inspired the three stories.

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The Manchester Urban Institute (MUI) aims to contribute to the realisation of more inclusive and just cities that are both environmentally and socially sustainable for the current and future generations through world-leading research, engagement/impact and training activities. For more information, please visit the MUI website.

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The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account-funded hub brings together work from across the University of Manchester on Devo Manc. More information is available at:

<http://www.mui.manchester.ac.uk/devo-manc/research/>

Sarah Butler explores the relationship between writing and place through prose, poetry and participatory projects. Recent writing residencies include writer-in-residence on the Central line; at Great Ormond Street Hospital; and with people living in temporary accommodation in East Manchester. She has two novels published by Picador in the UK and with fourteen international publishers: *Ten Things I've Learnt About Love* (2013) and *Before The Fire* (2015).

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