

**10 April 2012**

**New Art Gallery Working Group**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Councillor A. Harris – Leisure and Culture

**Report:**

**Purpose**

To receive the report of the New Art Gallery working group.

**Background**

The working group was established to consider a number of issues in relation to the New Art Gallery. This included consideration of its community engagement role, together with achievements, challenges and finance and funding.

**Recommendations:**

**That:**

- 1. The New Art Gallery continues to strengthen its links with activities held within local communities;**
- 2. Future events are considered by the New Art Gallery that have the potential to contribute both cultural and economically to Walsall;**
- 3. That innovative use of social media continues to be used by the New Art Gallery, particularly in attracting and retaining young audiences;**
- 4. The New Art Gallery continues its efforts to engage with local communities;**
- 5. The council considers supporting the re-opening of the New Art Gallery on Sundays.**

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## Chair's Foreword

The working group was established to consider a number of issues in relation to the New Art Gallery. This included consideration of its community engagement role, together with achievements, challenges and finance and funding.

I would like to thank all those who have assisted with the working group, including officers from the New Art Gallery.



*Councillor I. Azam  
Lead Member, New Art Gallery Working Group  
Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel*



*Councillor  
L. Rattigan*



*Councillor I  
Shires*

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## **Introduction**

During the 2011/12 Municipal Year the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel decided that they would like to explore a number of issues in relation to the New Art Gallery.

## **Terms of Reference**

The agreed terms of reference were to consider the following:

1. Achievements
2. Community engagement
3. Finance and funding
4. Challenges

## **Membership**

Councillor Imran Azam  
Councillor Lorna Rattigan  
Councillor Ian Shires

The working group's investigation was assisted by a number of witnesses:

Jamie Morris	Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services
Sue Grainger	Head of Libraries, Heritage & Arts
Stephen Snoddy	Director, The New Art Gallery
Jo Digger	Head of Collections, New Art Gallery
Zoe Renilson	Head of Education, New Art Gallery
Ioannis Ioannou	Audience Development Curator, New Art Gallery
Neil Lebeter	Archive Curator, New Art Gallery

## **Methodology**

In order to complete their work the working group met at the New Art Galley on 13 March 2012.

## **Report Format**

The report is a summary of the evidence the working group received along with comments and suggestions for future action.

# **The New Art Gallery, Walsall**

## **1. Achievements**

### **Tour of the gallery**

The working group undertook a tour of The New Art Gallery (NAG) which was opened in 2000 by the Queen

The gallery was built with £21 million of public funding, including £15.75 million from the Lottery and additional money from the European Regional Development and City Challenge

The Gallery houses the fixed Garman Ryan collection of sculptures and paintings by modern masters. This included a large selection of work by Jacob Epstein which was donated by his late wife Lady Epstein and her friend Sally Ryan. The temporary exhibition galleries on the third and fourth floor are dedicated to exhibiting the best of contemporary and historic art.

Since opening, the NAG has been visited by nearly two million people.

Officers explained that the NAG was short listed for the prestigious Sterling Architecture Prize in 2000.

### **Walsall Art Gallery – origins**

The working group heard that the original gallery began life on Lichfield Street in 1892. At the time of its opening the original Lord Mayor of Walsall noted the significance of the gallery in contributing to the cultural life of the town.

The gallery's collection was initially established through art clubs. The art clubs would make decisions as to which works should be purchased. Officers explained that some of the original collection was currently on display in the Town Hall and in the Mayor's Parlour.

### **Behind the Scenes**

The working group's tour started in the basement of NAG where the environmental control systems are situated. Without these systems it would not be possible to provide the conditions required to display international art collections the NAG is fortunate enough to attract. It was acknowledged that energy costs for the building are high. However, initial investigation of the cost of installing equipment to capture renewable energy indicated that this was currently prohibitive.

The working group were also shown the workshop where display cases and exhibition equipment is produced in house. Officers explained that preparation for exhibitions was supported by the provision of a high standard technical studio. Members were impressed that the NAG now undertakes the repair of gilded frames in house, with significant financial savings achieved.

## **Garman Ryan Collection**

Officers explained that the Garman Ryan collection was given to Walsall in 1973. Kathleen Garman, born in Wednesbury, met the great twentieth-century sculptor Jacob Epstein in 1921. After Epstein's death in 1959, Kathleen created an art collection with her friend Sally Ryan, granddaughter of American tycoon Thomas Fortune Ryan. Together they formed a collection of works by some of the greatest European artists including Rembrandt, Constable, Van Gogh and Monet, as well as those by lesser known artists from across the world.

The working group heard that the donation of the Garman Ryan collection, which has been on display since 1974, proved the catalyst for the development of the significant collection of art that exists at the NAG today. Following the donation a dedicated gallery curator was appointed and an annual budget of £700 provided to acquire works of art. While the budget did not support the purchase of high value works of art, it did permit the purchase of a number of limited edition prints from well known artists including John Piper and Michael Hill.

The working group heard that the gallery also acquired a number of paintings which illustrated life in Walsall at the turn of the twentieth century, including a number of paintings of public houses. Officers explained that the NAG was preparing to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the display of the Garman Ryan Collection in 2014.

## **Funding the acquisition of works of art**

Officers explained that, in recent years, the NAG has received funding from The National Lottery which provided £22.5k per year to help fund the purchase of £30k of works of art annually from 2000-2005.

## **Art Fund International (AFI) Award**

In 2007, the NAG, in partnership with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, together with the Ikon Gallery, were one of only five UK consortiums to receive the Art Fund International Award. The initiative is one of the most important and ambitious schemes ever launched by The Art Fund and £1m was allocated to each of the five successful partnerships to fund the creation of collections of international contemporary art over a period of five years.

The working group heard that the West Midlands Partnership, whose collection theme is *The Metropolis: reflections of modern urban life*, seeks to explore the diversity, dynamism and growth of the contemporary metropolis. Recent acquisitions include: Grazia Toderi (Italy), Christine Baumgartner (Germany), Miao Xiaochun (China) and Zhang Enli (China).

Members noted that in 2010 the AFI partnership acquired works of art to the value of £850k. The gallery itself only contributed £30k, while enjoying outright ownership from these acquisitions of works of art of £400k.

## **Other acquisition activity**

The working group heard that the NAG purchased twenty-two contemporary artworks through the Contemporary Art Society's Special Collections Scheme, including works by Martin Creed, Layla Curtis, Nina Saunders and Toby Ziegler. Officers explained that this was a national initiative which enabled fifteen galleries throughout England to build up collections of contemporary work. It was celebrated at the NAG with the launch of the exhibition *Out of Place*, curated by Deborah Robinson, Head of Exhibitions, in 2006. A supporting publication *New Art of View*, co-published by the NAG examined the role of museums in collecting contemporary art and featured contributions from Sheila MacGregor, Sir Nicholas Serota and the NAG's Director, Stephen Snoddy.

## **The Epstein Archive**

The working group heard that in 2006 the NAG acquired the Epstein Archive. The archive had been on loan to the gallery from Beth Lipkin, Kathleen Garman's companion, since 1999. In 2006 following her death, the NAG was able to purchase the Epstein Archive with financial assistance from the V & A Fund, Walsall Museum and Galleries Development Trust and with significant support from Jackie and Isabel Epstein. The archive is composed largely of photographs, manuscripts, sketches and correspondence between Jacob Epstein and his family and friends, patrons, buyers and galleries. Officers explained that it also contains significant information about Epstein and 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural developments.

## **NAG Archives**

The working group noted that the Archive Curator had undertaken a significant re-organisation of archive materials. This followed the installation of a space saving archive storage system. Officers explained that the archive and Archive Curator were in high demand to provide assistance to research projects from around the world, as well as local students. Some of this activity has generated income for the NAG. The working group heard that a close working relationship had been developed with Walsall College. It was also explained that the NAG appreciated the importance of developing strong relationships within the national and international art community. For example, this had recently led to the gallery being offered important historical materials which provided invaluable background to key aspects of existing art collections.



## New Ways of Working project

The working group heard that the 2009 New Ways of Working project attracted over £200k of outside funding to the NAG from a range of different sources including the Heritage Lottery fund, Arts Council England and the Museums Association. This was a two year project which saw artist Bob and Roberta Smith commissioned to work alongside the NAG Archive Curator to reveal the previously undocumented and unseen Epstein Archive to audiences in new and exciting ways.



Above: Image from the New Ways of Working Project

## **Floor 4 and Roof Terrace**

Officers explained that in 2006 Floor 4 of the gallery was transformed from a restaurant area into a new gallery space. This is considered a unique space with an 8m high ceiling and very large windows allowing spectacular views across central Walsall. It has enabled the gallery to present a programme of regional and internationally renowned artists including Richard Billingham, Phil Brooks, Elizabeth Rowe and Stuart Whipps, together with works from the Frank Cohen Collection.

The working group were pleased to that a nationally recognised artist, Sarah Staton, has been commissioned to develop the roof terrace. The brief includes the requirement to source plants and flowers from local nurseries.

## **Creative Development Team**

The working group met with the council's Creative Development Team (CDT) who are based on Floor 4. Officers explained that the CDT uses the arts and creativity to help local people find ways to express their ideas about specific issues through visual and digital arts, drama, dance, music, crafts and more unusual art forms. The CDT also supports local events and festivals and social enterprises. More recently the team has participated in a working group seeking to develop creative industries within Walsall.

## **Floor 3**

The working group heard that the *Life of the Mind* exhibition was held on Floor 3 between January and March 2011. This brought together many of the themes explored in the Epstein Archive into a wide ranging and ambitious contemporary art show. Officers explained that it featured some of the most important names in art, including Tracey Emin, Louise Bourgeois and Vincent van Gogh. The working group were impressed to hear that the exhibition was described by an independent Arts Council assessor as "one of the best curated shows I have seen in many years".

## **Working with other galleries**

The working group heard that since 2007 ten works from the NAG collections have been lent to international museums and galleries. Works by Lucien Freud have been lent for major exhibitions such as 'Lucien Freud: Drawings', currently showing in London and moving to New York later this year. Officers explained that Van Gogh's 'Sorrow' will be featured in a major exhibition about his years in Paris, organised by Denver Art Museum, USA. Works have also been lent to UK institutions for major exhibitions, such as 'Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill' at the Royal Academy in 2009, which featured three works from the Garman Ryan Collection.

## **2. Community Engagement**

### **Supporting local artists**

Officers explained that the Artists Studio was made available for three to four local artists each year through its residency programme. These were often artists who had developed their own artistic approach and the studio provided them with the opportunity to further establish themselves. The working group were impressed that this activity contributed to retaining artists within the region rather than lose them to London. This approach further strengthened the NAG's relationship with local colleges and universities, where these artists often teach. In addition, many of these artists have gone on to exhibit nationally and internationally.

### **Disability Arts Development**

The working group heard that during through 2009-11 the NAG partnered with a leading Disability Arts development organisation, Disabled Arts Shropshire (DASH) to create an innovative artist residency by Sean Burn, a disabled artist. Officers explained that Sean was in residency at the gallery over an eighteen month period and built links with disability groups in the area. The Outside IN programme was a national first to raise the profile of Disability Arts in mainstream galleries. The gallery hosted the national launch event in 2011 which was attended by prominent individuals from the gallery profession and the disabled arts profession. The working group heard that the partnership has increased the scope of all three partner's work and developed long term relationships. Sean's work was inspired by and successfully incorporated into *The Life of the Mind* exhibition and is now held within the gallery collection.

### **Education at the NAG**

The working group heard that over six thousand school children have visited the New Art Gallery since 2003. There have also been over 40,000 lifelong learning visitors in just the last four years.

The working group heard that the NAG's learning team designs, programmes, delivers and evaluates a comprehensive learning programme based on the Kolb experimental learning cycle across formal and informal learning throughout the whole year. (The Kolb approach is composed of four elements including concrete experience and observation of and reflection on that experience). This lifelong learning programme begins with attracting carers with new born babies through to octogenarians and beyond. It focuses on both the permanent collection and the temporary exhibitions programme.

Officers explained that the whole programme is accessible for everyone offering choice for visitors to engage at a level at which they are comfortable. Areas are also programmed and marketed to target specific audience groups across the community. For example tactile sessions are created for new parents and children aged up to two years old; structured formal education sessions and self guided resources for school groups; celebratory cultural events following different

religious calendars; as well as practical and critical skills for adults. There are also hands on family activities for all ages.

## **Formal Education**

The working group heard that the NAG had been successful in gaining the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge Mark in 2009, which it continues to hold. Members note that the formal education service achieved 100% satisfaction for 2010-11. The NAG undertook work with local schools as part of enhancing the role of art within the curriculum.

The working group heard that:

- 55% of visits were from schools within the Walsall
- At present there are eighty-four Primary schools and two academies in Walsall. 76% of these schools have visited the gallery in the last five years
- At present there are eleven Secondary schools and seven academies. 95% of these schools have visited the gallery in the last five years;
- At present there are seven Special schools in Walsall. 100% of these schools have visited the gallery in the last five years.

The working group agreed with the approach taken by the NAG to the provision of educational support to schools. This included Walsall schools not being charged, whilst those schools from outside the borough had to pay a fee.



Above: Working with local schools

## **Informal Education**

The working group heard that the gallery had established an excellent reputation for informal education. Officers explained that family audiences have grown tenfold

over the last five years. The programme also engages young people and lifelong learners through specific programming. Members noted that:

- the family programme is running at 100% satisfaction for 2011-12;
- 77% of family participants in family workshops have a WS postcode;
- In addition, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) make up 56% of participants in family workshops;
- 44% of participants are white British;

### **Working with local students**

In 2011, the NAG worked with a group of local young people from Walsall College. They curated their own exhibition *Behind Closed Doors*, on the theme of mental health. The young people participated in a series of curating workshops that introduced them to the collections. They selected work from the gallery's collection and made decisions about the exhibition's layout and installation. They also designed their own marketing and interpretation preview cards, e-flyers, labels and text panels.

Officers explained a further exhibition is currently being planned which will be curated by young people early next year inspired by the work of Damien Hirst. In addition to these projects the NAG deliver a series of free monthly workshops specifically designed to attract young people.

**The working group were impressed with the significant local engagement the NAG undertakes with students in Walsall, as well as the links its had established with a variety of educational settings.**

### **Outreach**

The working group heard that education and outreach were at the heart of the New Ways of Working project with Bob and Roberta Smith. Nearly 2,100 people actively took part in education and community workshops. The project has produced a major new educational resource, *Adventures in the Archives*, available on line and as a DVD. Officers explained that this resource will allow school children of all ages to discover the Epstein Archive for themselves, both in the gallery and in school.

### **Engaging with the local community: Audience Development Programme**

The working group heard that the NAG had led an annual programme of events and projects that aimed to bring families, adults and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds into the gallery. These cultural engagement events and projects have been very successful and well attended. They have also become part of the local community's annual calendar and include Diwali, Viasakhi and Black History Month. It also includes the Salaam Arts Festival organised in partnership with an array of local and regional organisations such as the Sikh and Hindu Forums, Black Sisters Collective, Islamic Village, Multi Faith Forum, Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail, Ethnic Advocacy, Refugee and Asylum Seekers Council and Aaina Asian Women's Group. In 2008 the NAG delivered a highly successful



project for the local African-Caribbean community that commemorated the bicentenary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slavery Act, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund.



Above: Community engagement



Above: Disability Arts Project

**The working group noted the variety of cultural events the NAG had undertaken. Members were impressed with the strong links between the NAG and the local community.**

### **Engagement**

The working group heard that the NAG had regularly commissioned and worked with artists whose practice has a strong engagement and participatory element. These projects include the KADN Kiosk, Chila Burman's *Ice Cream Van*, the collective of sound artists *Dreams of Tall Buildings*, Ming De Nasty's *Thousand Faces*, *Art Heist* and Simon Poulter's digital online project *Walsall Word Cloud*.

### **Home of Metal**

Officers explained that the NAG had been instrumental in the *Home of Metal* season of exhibitions and events in Birmingham and the Black Country. The project was undertaken in partnership with Capsule, the Black Country Arts Partnership, several local authorities and other regional organisations.

### **Generating income for the Walsall economy**

The working group heard that during the course of the exhibition and parallel events the NAG undertook a survey that highlighted that the programme in Walsall had generated £1,087,701.81 worth of economic activity. The survey was carried out using a new economic impact assessment toolkit introduced and supported by the Arts Council.

**The working group were impressed with the contribution that this event had made both culturally and economically. Members highlighted the potential value of similar future events.**

### **Other audience development initiatives:**

#### **The House of Fairy Tales**

Officers explained that in Autumn 2009 the NAG organised and delivered *The House of Fairy Tales*, a large outdoors weekend family event that attracted large community involvement, thousands of visitors and outreach workshops for young people. The event included an historical Halloween themed parade drawing local people to a theatrical fun fair, with live bands, art projects and performances. The working group heard that Gallery Square was transformed into a fairground with marquees and caravans, game booths, Halloween treats, comedy performances and other activities. The working group were impressed to hear that the Gallery enjoyed its busiest October ever and the event coincided with the opening of the *Exquisite Trove* exhibition, curated by artists Gavin Turk, Alice Herrick and

Deborah Curtis. More than 5,100 people visited the gallery and Gallery Square during the weekend.



Above: Image from House of Fairy Tales event

## Regional initiatives

The working group heard that regional initiatives included *The Big Picture*, a six month regional programme of events that targeted and successfully attracted people from the lower socio-economic groups. The project included a two-day family event which was attended by more than three thousand people.

A photography project was undertaken in partnership with Walsall College delivered by Stuart Whipps, as well as smaller scale events and activities.

The working group heard that *Explore* was a national project that enabled galleries in three regions of England to engage and work creatively with people with varied abilities. The NAG worked with two groups of local Asian people with severe learning difficulties on a series of workshops.

## Arts Nation regional campaign

Officers explained that the campaign aims to increase participation in the arts in the Black Country. The outcome of this project was a production of a dance film in the gallery spaces. More than seventy-five local amateur dancers participated in the video which was filmed in one take in March 2011.

## Social Media

The working group heard that the NAG has a relatively new website and a strong social networking presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube. Officers explained that it was intended to use digital technologies in the future to attract



new audiences. Integral to this is the planned installation of Wifi throughout the building which will be free to use for visitors. It is the intention of the gallery to develop a digital strategy to maximise cost effective methods of developing and engaging with its audiences in both marketing and programming terms. It is anticipated that this would present the opportunity to communicate effectively online, build an online profile, as well as encourage greater audience interaction.

**The working group welcomed the use of social media, particularly given its importance in attracting and retaining young audiences.**

### **Results of audience research**

The working group heard that the NAG's recent audience research had indicated high levels of satisfaction amongst visitors. A third of those questioned had never visited the gallery before. It was also noted that the NAG is attracting a large number of families who represent 37% of the total audience. The temporary exhibitions were the most visited (71%), followed by the Garman Ryan collection (62%). Around 11% of respondents visited the café and a similar percentage visited the shop. Officers highlighted that over one in five people were visiting the NAG on their own. Over half of all respondents indicated that they would be encouraged to attend in the future to see exhibitions by well known artists.

Other results included: a large majority of respondents (96%) were very or quite likely to recommend the NAG to their friends or family. Only 4% of respondents felt that the information about the exhibits were either difficult to understand or confusing. The working group heard that leaflets were the most popular source of information, followed by the gallery website. Brochures and labels next to the work were the most popular sources of information about the arts/ exhibits within the NAG. In addition 16% of visitors came to the gallery by chance.

- 68% of all respondents were 35 or over,
- 44% were female and 89% indicated that they were of a white background
- 20% of all respondents were retired,
- 46% were employed
- 5% indicated that they had a long standing illness or disability.

**The working group were impressed by the NAG's success as indicated by the results of the audience research. However, they emphasised the importance of ensuring that efforts to reach out to all local communities continued.**

### **Innovation**

The working group were impressed that the NAG was one of the first cultural organisations in the UK to take on a Creative Apprentice in 2009. They also developed a specific interactive area for younger visitors that seeks to bring international contemporary art to everyone in an accessible area. The DiSCO interactive gallery currently attracts over a third of all visitors to the venue.

### 3. Finance and Funding

#### Funding the NAG

The working group heard that the NAG receives funding from the following sources:

- Walsall Council: £1m (approx);
- Arts Council England: £940,000 (approx);
- Grants & sponsorship: £220,000 (approx);
- Programming/ education: £10,000 (approx);
- Trading & Services: £77,000 (approx);
- Endowment Fund: £20,000 (approx);
- Total: £2.2m (approx).

### 4. Challenges

#### Staffing the NAG

The working group heard that the number of staff at the NAG had fallen by five during the last three years. At present there was a total of thirty Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, comprising ten gallery assistants and twenty core staff. Budgetary pressures mean that the second re-structuring process in three years had recently been announced.

#### Opening hours

The working group heard that the financial pressures that exist at the NAG have resulted in the gallery having to be closed to the public on Sundays and Mondays.

**The working group were concerned that this would negatively impact on the NAG's potential audience, particularly at weekends. Members felt that as the gallery was not open on a Sunday it would restrict access to those who worked during the week and families. This would in turn limit the scope, for example, for young to become interested in the gallery and continue to make use of it during their education through to adult life. The potential for the gallery to act as a draw to the town to bring in shoppers was also identified, particularly with the redevelopments currently underway, including the construction of a hotel due to open in Autumn 2012.**

#### Turner Prize venue bid

Officers explained that the Turner Prize was now held at a regional venue every other year. It was held in the BALTIC, Gateshead, in 2011. It is intended to make a bid to hold the event at the NAG which will probably cost in the region of £200k. However, the current restricted opening hours were likely to harm the success of any potential bid.

The working group noted the significant benefit to the local economy of the regional Home of Metal Event which brought in over £1m to the Walsall economy.

Officers explained that it was likely that the Turner Prize would generate substantially more. This is due to the event exhibition lasting four months with national coverage which, based on the experience of the BALTIC, would result in a doubling of the number of visitors.

**The working group agreed that it would be important for the council to consider supporting the re-opening of the NAG on Sundays. This would be likely to provide significant potential financial benefits for the local economy, as well significantly increasing the opportunity for local families to gain from the enriching experience of visiting the NAG.**

## **Conclusion**

The working group agreed that it was important for the NAG to be placed at the centre of Walsall's local community life. The working group observed that sustaining this objective might require consideration of Sunday opening of the gallery. It was also critical that the NAG continued to be a key element of the curriculum of local schools, colleges and universities.

## **Recommendations**

**That:**

- 1. The New Art Gallery continues to strengthen its links with activities held within local communities;**
- 2. Future events are considered by the New Art Gallery that have the potential to contribute both cultural and economically to Walsall;**
- 3. That innovative use of social media continues to be used by the New Art Gallery, particularly in attracting and retaining young audiences;**
- 4. The New Art Gallery continues its efforts to engage with local communities;**
- 5. The council considers supporting the re-opening of the New Art Gallery on Sundays.**