

Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 000070
Date 13 April 2016

Art

Request:

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and I would be grateful for any guidance you can give me concerning my query below. To assist you with this request I am outlining my query as specifically as possible.

The request concerns the ownership and value of art in your council and its galleries.

I would be thankful if you could provide me with data within the time frame of 1st May 2010 to 1st April 2016 for the following query:

1.
 - a) How many artworks are owned by your council?
 - b) What is the total value of these artworks?
 - c) How many of these artworks are in storage? (Can be given as a percentage)

2.
 - a) Of the art galleries or art museums run by your council, how many artworks do each individual art museum or art gallery own?
 - b) What is the value of these artworks?
 - c) How many of these artworks are in storage? (Can be given as a percentage)

3.
 - a) How many of your artworks have been sold in this time frame?
 - b) How many artworks have been bought in this time frame?

Many thanks for your request for information on the display of our collections. Wolverhampton's Visitor Economy Service has approximately 20,000 objects in its collection across all three museum sites; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Bantock House Museum and Bilston Craft Gallery. Although difficult to give precise figures approximately 5% of this collection is on display at any one time and approximately 10% over the course of a year. Alongside this, collections are accessed by the public through stores tours, which are run both as general explorations of the stores and on focused events on particular collections, and through booked visits to see particular works. 68% of our collections are also available online through <http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/collections/> and <http://blackcountryhistory.org/>.

The learning and community engagement team also provide access to objects from the collection, particularly our under displayed archaeology and fossil collections,

through mini displays, school sessions, family workshops and reminiscence groups. Works that have not been displayed in exhibitions have therefore still been accessible to and accessed by the public. Some items for reasons of conservation are necessarily limited to short periods of public display. The collections rotate regularly and our reserve collections are available to view in our store by appointment. Items from the gallery are also at times loaned to other galleries for specific exhibitions and on a similar basis the Art Gallery can receive loans from other galleries for specific exhibitions.

The permanent base of the collections is the Art Gallery although items from the collection are displayed at our other sites including Bantock House and Bilston Craft Gallery. All of the collections are owned by the city council so we do not make a distinction for each site.

In the interest of the security of the artworks and artefacts in Wolverhampton City Council's care, it is our policy not to reveal any insurance values of objects in the collection. Therefore, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act") Wolverhampton Council has withheld this information, as we consider that the section 31 exemption applies.

To further explain our reasons for applying of this exemption:

Section 31 (Crime prevention)

We are applying this exemption because providing the exact value of objects and artworks in the care of the council facilitates easy identification of the most items or artworks, which places them at increased risk of theft or vandalism.

In not providing the requested information we have considered the balance of interest as set out in section 2(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Whilst we acknowledge that there is a public interest in the value of objects and artworks held in public collections being freely available, in this case we feel that this interest is outweighed by the need to protect the collections from theft and vandalism. We also feel that it is our responsibility to take whatever actions best protects the objects and artworks held in our care and donated to us in good faith by the public.

In applying this exemption we make no assumption as to your own interest in this matter, but we are mindful that if we release this information to the public domain we will be unable to control who has access to it.

We can confirm that the service currently insures the entire collection to value of £10 million, however this is not reflective of the market value of the collection.

No collection items have been sold during this time. I can confirm that 39 items have been purchased during this time period. These have been acquired with a combination of funding from the city council. The Friends of the Arts and Heritage Service and Grant Aid from grant giving bodies including the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund.