



Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 002718
Date 31 August 2018

Art Work

Request:

I would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I am writing to ask for details regarding local authority owned artwork.

Please provide:

- 1) The total number of works of art owned by the local authority?
We have approximately 17,000 items in the collection. 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.

Information about future exhibitions can be found on our website.
<http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/>

We are a museum and art gallery service and the number includes a large number of items of specific historical and local interest and a large collection of fossils bequeathed to the Council.

- 2) The most up to date figures that the local authority has concerning the value of any and all works of art owned by said authority?
Your request for information has now been considered and the City of Wolverhampton Council is not obliged to supply the information you requested for the reasons set out below.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires City of Wolverhampton Council, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you, the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states the fact,

- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies:

In relation to your particular request, the following exemption applies:

Section 31 (1)(a) – The Prevention or Detection of Crime

We can confirm that the Council's collections are insured for £10,000,000 in total.

We are unable to provide any further details regarding the value of individual works or groups of works in the collection. In the interest of the security of the artworks in our care it is the service's policy not to reveal any insurance values of individual or groups of works held in the collection. Therefore, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 we have withheld this information, as we consider that the exception under Section 31.

To further explain our reason for applying this exemption is because freely publishing the value of collections of artwork in the care of the council facilitates easy identification of the most valuable items or collections, which increases the risk of theft or vandalism to those items.

When assessing whether or not it is in the public interest to disclose the information to you, despite the exemption being applicable, we took into the account the following factors:

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Public interest considerations favouring disclosure

The Council gave careful consideration to the arguments for and against disclosure. When considering factors which would favour disclosing the information, the Council had to assess whether disclosure of the information would:

- Allow for more informed debate on the issue;
- Promote accountability and transparency for our decisions and in our spending of public money; and
- Assist the public to understand and challenge our decisions.

Whilst we acknowledge that there is a general public interest in the value of artworks held in public collections being freely available and in disclosing information that promotes accountability and transparency in order to maintain that confidence and trust, however in this case we feel that this interest is outweighed by the need to protect these artworks from theft and vandalism

Public interest considerations favouring withholding the information

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.

Balance test

Having taken into account the arguments for and against disclosure, the Council decided that the public interest in this case is best served by maintaining the exemption and by not disclosing the information requested, at this stage.

The Council considers that the possible benefits of disclosure are outweighed by the real risk would prejudice City of Wolverhampton Council's ability to operate a high quality art gallery. If disclosure leads to damage or theft of artworks, this would be counter to the interests of benefactors and potentially discourage future donations or loans from benefactors and create potential for the withdrawal of items currently loaned to the service by individuals or organisations.

This would be to the detriment of the quality of the collection as a whole, going against the interest of the public in City of Wolverhampton Council maintaining the strongest collection possible and being prejudicial to the operation of the Art Gallery.

In addition, if our insurance company feels we have acted detrimentally to the security of any artworks we hold, this could lead to increased premiums and therefore a negative impact on the budget of the service, also against the interests of the general public.

- 3) A copy of any audits carried out concerning local authority owned art work?
No recent audits have been of the collections. All collections information is held on our Collections database CALM and this is used as the mechanism for recording movement of objects and other information about all collections items. It is up-dated constantly by curatorial and collections staff.