

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 12th January 2016

SUBJECT: Bury Sculpture Centre

REPORT FROM: Tony Trehy
Head of Arts, Museums and Tourism

REPORT STATUS: The report is in the public domain

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Bury Sculpture Centre was conceived as a cultural use for the Bury Library space vacated by changes in that Service. While it was given the separate identity of the Sculpture Centre, with its rationale drawn from Bury's long term development of the Irwell Sculpture Trail, operationally, its identity is primarily a marketing tool. It operates entirely as an extension of the Art Museum spaces. All functions of staffing, programming, utilities/building operations are integrated with the existing Service arrangements for the Arts in Bury.

The physical changes to the library space were primarily reinstatement of architectural features especially the floor, decoration, gallery lighting and extension of security systems. This cost £75,000 from the Council's capital programme and £26,000 from the Arts Council.

A Business Plan was prepared as part of the Arts Council bidding process and this can be made available to members on request, but the reality of operating the Centre means most sections of it are now out of date.

2.0 ISSUES

2.1 Exhibition Programme

The Sculpture Centre has hosted 4 exhibitions since opening in May 2014:

Lawrence Weiner – New York Conceptual Sculptor
Remix – New work from China and the UK (part of the Manchester Asia Triennial Festival)
New Narrative & Reader – Contemporary Finnish Art
Hilary Jack – The Late Great Planet Earth

In 2016, the programme will consist of
Auke de Vriers (Netherlands)
Jayne Dyer (Australia)
Riiko Sakkinen (Finland)

Overall the artistic programme has been well received by its audience and by the arts media. Exhibition reviews are available on request.

2.2 Finance

The financial rationale for the Sculpture Centre was that the existing operating costs of the vacated library space in terms of utilities, lighting, heating, security etc., would be factored into the running costs of the whole Gallery/Library complex. Staffing of the Centre has been achieved through adjustment in the rotas and visitor reception points within the gallery/museum. Operation of the Sculpture Centre was assumed to have an overall neutral budget effect with exhibitions supported from the existing art exhibition budget plus external funding.

The concept of an international programme was as much a financial driver as an artistic one, based on analysis that such a focus would open up external funding sources not usually accessed by local authorities. International embassies and foreign cultural agencies have specific funds available to support presentation of their national artists abroad.

This model of working had initial problems related to the scheduling of the Centre's opening and programme. With the decision to proceed with the Centre being confirmed in December 2013, capital works began in January 2014 with the exhibition space ready and open in May 2014. However, because of the speed of implementation and lack of an identity/track record with the funding agencies, the first two shows took place without external support – putting pressure on the overall Arts Service budget. This was accommodated within the departmental budget.

The Centre is now increasingly getting into synch with foreign bidding timescales with the Finnish exhibition attracting support from the Finnish Institute and the Finnish Embassy in London and received grants worth £5400. The direction of travel for the funding of the programme through increasing external funding continues positively with the next exhibition from the Netherlands attracting confirmed funding £18,000 from Dutch funders and £3000 from the Henry Moore Foundation.

As mentioned above, the Sculpture Centre does not operate independently from the Art Museum. A budget code has been set up for the Centre but this is mostly low level spend on small items of equipment, travel or hospitality for opening events. Expenditure on this code stands at £606.

Analysis of spend on the exhibitions can be extracted from the Arts Museum codes, giving an indication of the budget split; however, the integration of practice in programme and spaces makes this an inexact science.

The Lawrence Weiner display cost approximately £3000 – made up of artist's fees and hand-painting of the works onto the gallery walls.

Remix cost approximately £9500 with the centrepiece of Richard Wilson's 'Butterfly' (reconstructed airplane) costing £8000. These costs were largely transportation and artist's fees.

The Finnish Contemporary Art show in total cost approximately £15,000 but it is difficult to isolate the spend specific to the Sculpture Centre because the exhibition was spread across all the gallery spaces. This cost was over-budget due to last minute changes introduced from the Finnish side and unexpectedly high transportation costs. Important lessons were learned in this large scale project which will be applied to future exhibitions to ensure a more rigorous control of spend.

2.3 Visitors

The Sculpture Centre only has visitor counters on the internal door from the Library and the external door onto Silver Street. Visitors entering from the Gallery foyer are counted manually. The visitor figure is therefore an estimate across these entry points, indicative rather than rigorously counted:

May - Dec 2014: 34106 (Gallery figure for this period was 38625)

Jan - Nov 2015: 44995 (Gallery figure for this period was 49224)

Neither the Gallery nor the Sculpture Centre records/analyses visitors directly by demographic or distance travelled. In the past targeted audience survey projects have been undertaken usually as part of the Service's partnership with the Audience Agency or in Greater Manchester wide initiatives.

2.4 Analysis of Bury Sculpture Centre's Social Media activity

Overall marketing of the Sculpture Centre is integrated into the Art Museum's promotion and publicity activities. However, in support of the Sculpture Centre's marketing a social media presence has been developed.

2.4.1 Group Statistics

Over the 18 months analysed there were 2,234 interactions with Bury Sculpture Centre on social media by 1,618 unique users resulting in the Sculpture Centre's content being displayed on the screens of pc's, tablets and smart phones almost 326,724 times. In total 737 new followers or 'fans' were acquired to Bury Sculpture Centre's social media accounts. For comparison, Art Museum followers number 3500.

2.4.2 Twitter Statistics

Demographics of those who followed Bury Sculpture Centre on Twitter in the 18 month period are split 39% Male and 61% Female. The majority of users are from the UK with 83%, the remaining 17% of users come from Spain, The United States, Turkey, Finland, Italy, Malta, Serbia, Canada and Colombia. Over this period the Sculpture Centre was directly mentioned by other users 397 times and its content was re-tweeted 310 times.

2.4.3 Facebook Statistics

Impression demographics of those who engaged with Bury Sculpture Centre through Facebook were 40% Male and 60% Female. The majority of users are from the UK with 92% and 8% came from countries such as Finland, the United States, Taiwan and Japan. The most prominent age group engaging with the Sculpture Centre were 25-34 year olds with up to 17,600 impressions, followed by 35-44 year olds with up to 15,800 impressions.

2.5 Visitor comments May 2014 – Nov 2015

There is a visitor comments book in the Sculpture Centre (and in various other locations in the complex). A review of comments related to the Centre indicates

Positive	89
Negative	16

The majority of comments are very general. Most negative ones are about the coffee shop closing. Representative examples are:

15/7/15 - 'Great exhibition, well worth a visit. Not many chances to see contemporary Finnish Art.'

11/10/14 - 'Amazing – thought provoking exhibitions. Particularly the 'handbag film' and David Blandy – relateable stuff. Also great staff!'

4/4/15 - 'Wonderful to see such a great and beautiful building being put to good use'

31/7/15 – 'wonderful exhibits, lots of space. Especially loved the Finnish art work'

8/4/15 – 'Sculpture gallery is an expensive waste off space'

24/4/15 – 'Shame we had to lose most of the library for this'

19/2/15 – 'Miss the coffee shop, used to bring my granddaughter here because of it. Pity we could not subsidise this instead of the total waste of tax pay money that is the sculpture area'

3.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Sculpture Centre was established as an extension of the Art Gallery Service with the intention of offering an international programme to local people while contributing to the cultural offer within the borough's visitor economy, delivered with a neutral budget effect. Within the limits of existing resources, the Centre is delivering the international programme and is on target to remain in budget.

Contact Details:-

Tony Trehy

Head of Arts, Museums and Tourism

Bury Children, Young People and Cultural Services

0161 253 5869

t.trehy@bury.gov.uk