

Review of the Arts Service - Consultation Report

April 2020

Background

On 20 January 2020 the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Cabinet approved a review of the Arts service. It was agreed that the review would include a consultation on how this service is delivered in future. There were three elements to consider as part of the consultation, they were:

- meeting the objectives of the Arts Strategy;
- ensuring the service is sustainable and cost neutral to the Council; and
- identifying potential future uses of Art Central Gallery.

The [Cabinet Report](#) provides more background information on the service and how it is currently delivered.

Methodology

The consultation ran from Monday 3 February until Monday 23 March 2020. Prior to the consultation launching on the Council's website a list of stakeholders was drawn up to inform them of the consultation and invite their responses. There was a dedicated consultation page on the Council's website, which set out the background for the consultation, the three elements to be considered and

the ways in which stakeholders could respond to the consultation. There was an online survey to capture feedback, hard copies of this survey were also available from libraries and Art Central Gallery. Stakeholders were also invited to submit their views in writing to the Council. Some stakeholders, such as the 50+ Forum and Friends of Art Central Gallery were informed of the consultation at their meetings.

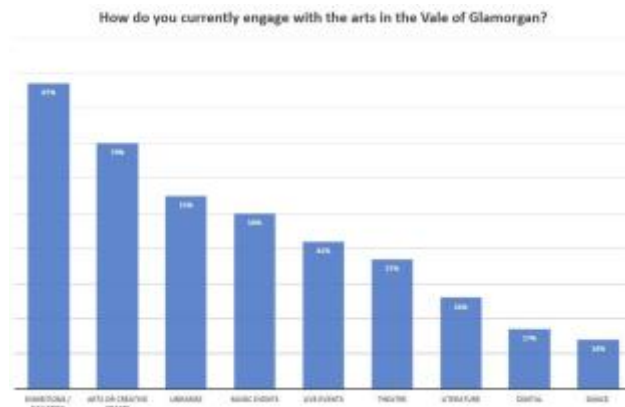
Responses

There were over 300 responses to the consultation, the majority of which were responses to the survey (294).

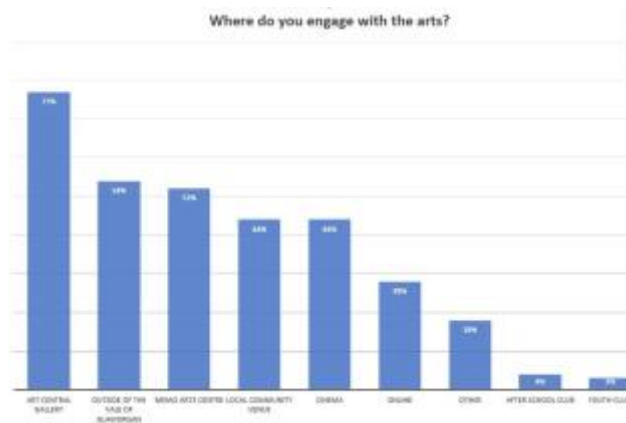
Profile of Respondents

Of the 294 people who responded to the survey:

- 67% of respondents are female, 33% are male;
- 60% of respondents are aged 55 - 74;
- 24% are 35- 54, 7% are 75+, 7% are 25 - 34, 2% are 18 - 24 and 1% are under 18;
- 80% of respondents are not limited day to day because of a disability, illness or mental health condition;
- 13% are limited a little, 4% preferred not to say and 3% are limited a lot;
- 50% of respondents described their national identity as Welsh, 38% identify as British;
- 86% of respondents described their ethnic group as white;
- 47% of respondents stated that they have no religion, 35% identified as Christian; and
- 76% of respondents identified as heterosexual or straight, 16% chose not to disclose their sexual orientation and 8% identified as LGBT+.



1 - Question 1: How do you currently engage with the arts?



2 - Question 2: Where do you engage with the arts?

The first two questions asked how and where respondents currently engage with the arts either in the Vale of Glamorgan or elsewhere. These were multi-choice questions, allowing respondents to select more than one answer. The majority of respondents engage with the arts through:

- exhibitions;
- arts and creative crafts;
- at libraries; and
- music events.

The majority of respondents engage with the arts at:

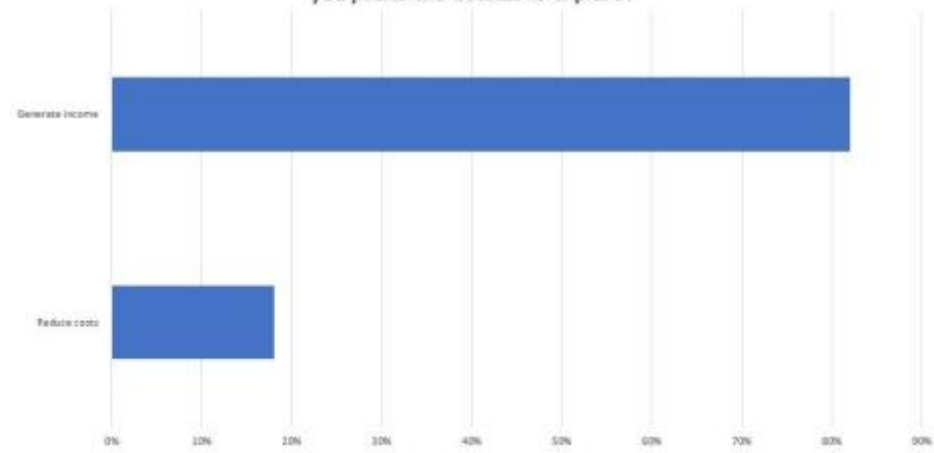
- Art Central Gallery;
- Memo Arts Centre; and
- Outside of the Vale of Glamorgan

The next question asked respondents for suggestions on what the Vale of Glamorgan Council could do to enable a greater number or wider group of people to take part in, enjoy and work in the arts.

There were a number of comments around better marketing and promotion of events and exhibitions at the gallery as well as the following frequent suggestions:

- wider offering of events and exhibitions;
- more workshops and activities with artists who are exhibiting;
- hire the space for events with the exhibitions in situ; and
- work more with schools.

The arts service and art central gallery currently costs the Council between £120,000 - £130,000 per year to operate. To ensure it is sustainable in future which option would you prefer the Council to explore?



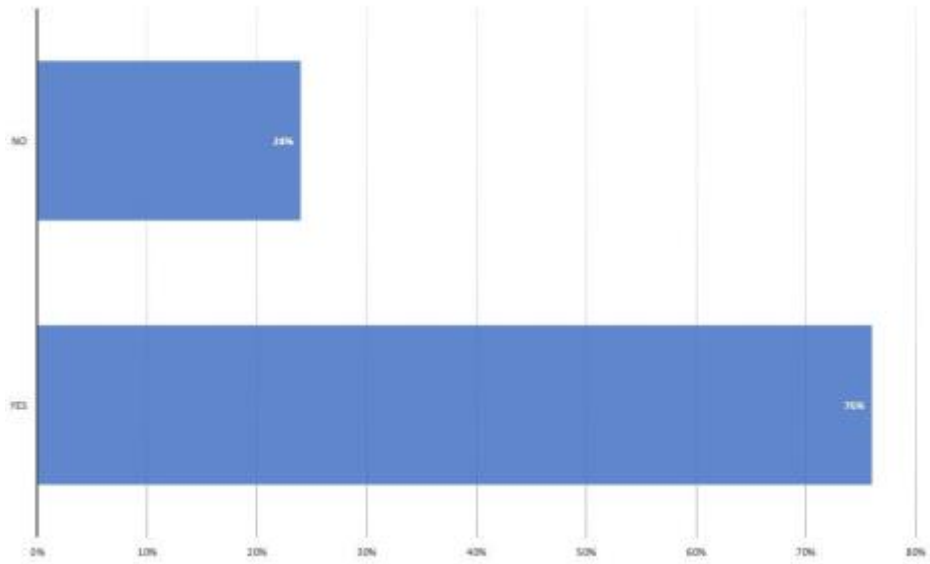
The vast majority of respondents (82%) would prefer the Council to look to generate income rather than reduce the running costs of Art Central Gallery.

Respondents were then asked if they had any more comments on the above question. There were a few suggestions around income generation, including:

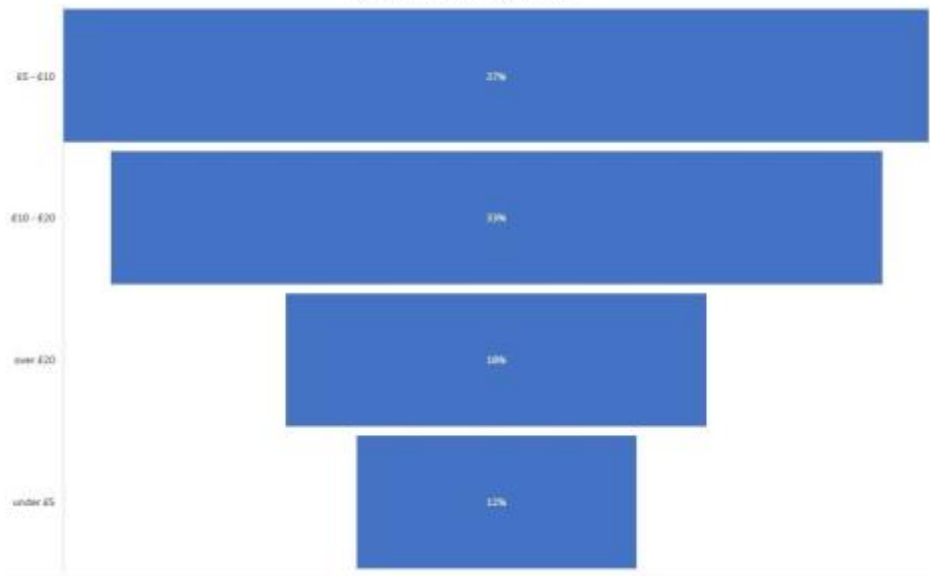
- a donation box;
- a small entry fee for exhibitions and events;
- set up as a trust and apply for grant funding;
- use volunteers;
- hire the gallery as an events space;
- sell artwork and take a small amount of commission;
- sell cards / postcards of local artists work; and
- coffee shop / gallery like the Washington in Penarth.

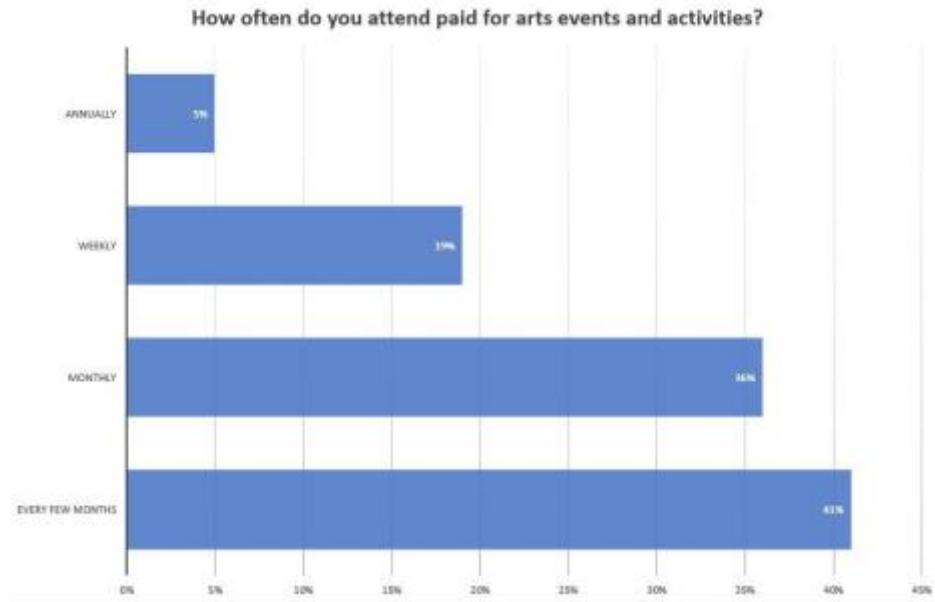
The next set of questions asked respondents if they currently pay to attend arts events; how often they attend paid for events or activities; and how much they usually pay.

Do you currently pay to attend arts events?



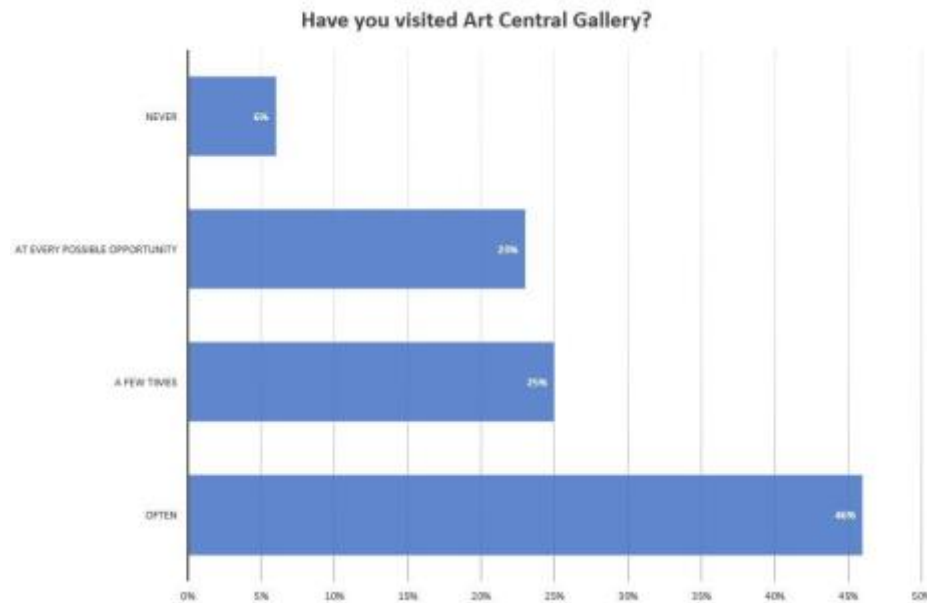
How much do you usually pay?





- 76% of respondents pay to attend arts events
- respondents attend paid for arts events or activities monthly (36%) or every few months (41%).
- respondents usually pay between £5- £20 for activities or events (70%)

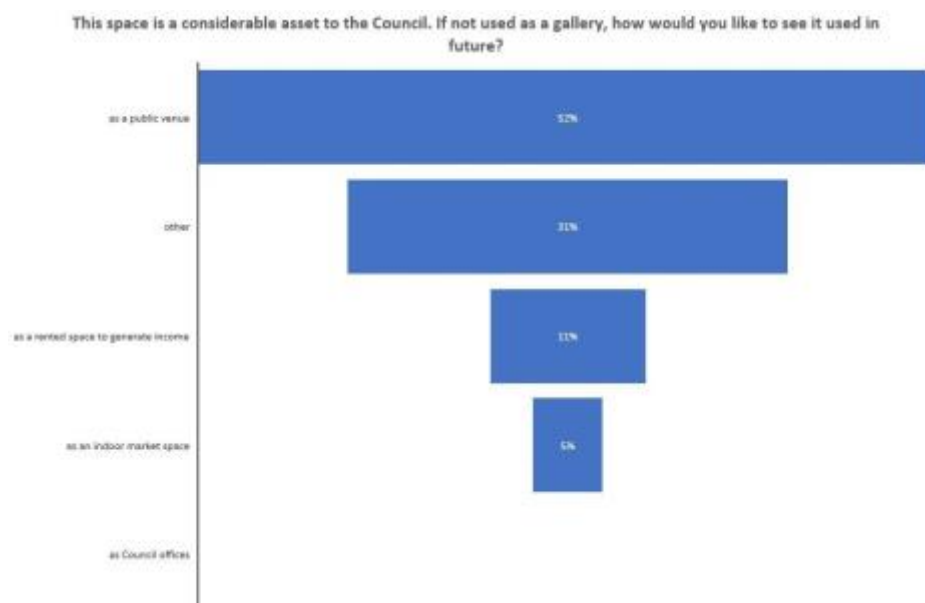
Respondents were then asked about Art Central Gallery as an arts space.



The next question stated that Art Central Gallery is in a desirable location on King Square in Barry and is a large space, approximately 244m square (approximately). Respondents were asked if they felt this was a good use of this space?

92% of respondents answered yes.

Respondents were then asked, if not as a gallery, how would they like to see this space used.



of the respondents who selected 'other' and added additional comments, the majority would still like to see this space used as an arts space or retained as a gallery. Some also added that the space could have flexible use and be used as a gallery as well as a rented space to generate income.

Finally respondents were asked if they had any additional comments for consideration.

The majority of comments were in support of keeping Art Central Gallery as an arts venue in Barry. Some suggested that the running of the Gallery could be improved and others suggested that if cost savings were required perhaps a similar model to the community libraries could be developed for the Gallery. Overall respondents felt that it is vital to retain an Arts service and that the Arts have an important role in the well-being of residents.

Written responses

In addition to the responses to the survey, the Council received 7 written responses, three of which were letters which have been added as appendices to this report. All of these respondents wrote in favour of keeping Art Central Gallery as a Gallery for the benefit of Vale residents and the wider community. They wrote about the space being purpose built as a Gallery and one of the best exhibition spaces in Wales. They also stated the benefit that visual arts can bring to people's well-being and that a value cannot be placed on this. There were some suggestions about fundraising and applying for grants in order to provide more financial support for the Gallery.

Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee

The consultation was also considered at a meeting of the Council's Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee on 13 February 2020. The [minutes](#) from the meeting reflect the nature of the discussion as

well as the feedback from members of the public who had registered to speak. The minutes also reference a report by Unison which was tabled at the meeting. This report has been added as an appendix to this report.

The first speakers outlined their concerns about the financial element of the consultation. The second speaker also made the point that the Arts will play a vital role in the new curriculum and the need for the service to work closer with schools. The third speaker made the following suggestions:

1. Split the officers from the Gallery as responsibility was too much for one person;
2. The formation of a Management Committee which should be well represented including Elected Members and representatives from all activities including tourism;
3. Create a hub at the Art Central to showcase exhibitions;
4. Stop buying exhibitions which could be rented out more cheaply; 5. Increase activity at the Art Gallery by holding more workshops and events.

The fourth speaker spoke of the Gallery as one of the best spaces to exhibit visual art in South Wales and suggested that there was a need to manage the Arts Development Service differently but that it should remain with the Gallery the most important asset as its hub.

The fifth speaker spoke about Art festivals in Barry and the benefit of community groups working together.

The sixth speaker spoke about the wide range of cultural venues across the Vale of Glamorgan and the need for these venues to work together in a Vale-wide Forum to plan events and share knowledge and resources.

The final public speaker spoke on behalf of the Art Central Friends group. The Friends feel that there is an opportunity to develop a creative economy that would enhance the experience of residents and visitors and improving further what the Vale could offer.

Following a discussion with committee members it was recommended that the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee supports the future use of Art Central and urges for an approach to develop and enhance the facility to deliver a multi-use art space.

Summary

- Central remain as a venue for the arts in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- A number of respondents have also suggested that the space could be hired as an events space (with exhibitions in situ or between exhibitions) in order to generate income.
- There are a number of comments about promoting the space and its events and the need for more marketing in order to increase footfall
- There are also a number of suggestions about collaborating and community groups working together, possibly to manage the space, but also to pull together a programme of cultural events across the Vale.

- It is recommended that all of the above points be considered when developing a business case for the future of Art Central Gallery.

Appendices

Art Central response J Hutt



FAO Cllr Kathryn McCaffer

Dear Kathryn,

I am responding to the Vale of Glamorgan Council's consultation on how best to deliver Arts as a service and consider how this may relate to the use of Arts Central, which I have supported as the Vale of Glamorgan's Assembly Member ever since its inception. Art Central is a brilliant gallery which has attracted world class artists and provides a vital role in the Vale of Glamorgan's Arts, Culture and Education policy, and service delivery.

I am sure you will acknowledge that Arts Central is a real asset for the Vale and the way forward is to increase and develop this facility which many regard as one of the best art spaces in Wales. Exhibitions for students, training facilities for teachers and students all potential for development. Indeed this could well be developed as a place that people visit and it becomes an important attraction. The development of Margate as place to go to see art exhibitions, which shows how this can be achieved.

I have been proud to speak at the openings of many exhibitions at Art Central, including Cardiff and Vale College's Annual Student Art Show

The present climate offers a number of opportunities for this space. The new Curriculum for Wales offers great potential for much closer work with schools and opportunities can also be taken to make contact with the health service to develop the potential that art can give to improve health.

Barry Arts Festival and other arts organisations in the Vale are also important for the future of Arts Central.

A major publicity campaign to tell people about the centre and continue to keep a high level of publicity of all events and A What's On newsletter for centre activity and wider arts activity in the Vale would be very helpful. If we could establish the centre as the first point of Arts contact in the Vale that would be a really important catalyst for development.

There are undoubtedly a number of organisations which need to be engaged with a view of developing a wider management structure which would bring the various partners together. This wider structure may well open other opportunities for funding. The Arts Central Friends group has undertaken magnificent work on a voluntary basis for years and the strength of commitment by these volunteers must be acknowledged and reflected in future arrangements.

Barry Arts Festival and other arts organisations in the Vale are also important for the future of Arts Central. This cooperation could well lead to specific events being developed late evening openings specific talks. Concerts have also been a feature of Arts Central Programmes and this could be developed with the many music festivals and choirs operating in the Vale of Glamorgan.

The potential to develop and extend this Centre are exciting and wide reaching. The consultation offers a very exciting opportunity to take forward one of the most important civic and cultural assets of the Vale of Glamorgan as a centre point for an accessible Arts Strategy reaching out to the whole county and marking the town of Barry as a destination point for art and cultural tourism in Wales.

I hope my observations on this consultation are helpful and will be taken into account.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

Jane Hutt AM

Vale of Glamorgan

The value of the Arts Service and Art Central Gallery in relation to the cost to the Vale of Glamorgan - Unison

This paper sets out the value that the arts service provides against the costs that the Vale Council commits to resourcing it. It maps out what will be lost in wider benefits if support for the service is 'reduced or made cost neutral' to make a short term saving.

What the Current Arts Service Offers

- Accessible Gallery with varied programme
- Public Art
- Community arts activity
- Educational activity, including activity relating to the new National Curriculum
- An arts strategy that reflects the corporate strategy and the Council's objectives

- Advocacy and support for the arts, artists and the creative industries

This paper sets out the value that the arts service provides against the costs that the Vale Council commits to resourcing it.

What the Arts Officer provides:

- Programming and management of Art Central Gallery
- Marketing the arts and Art Central Gallery
- Works with Art Central Friends a voluntary organisation that supports the gallery
- Advise to external groups and individuals
- Advises and supports Council departments e.g. Planning for Art in the Public Realm projects
- Facilitator for connecting artists and arts organisations with community groups
- A point of contact for volunteer organisations, arts groups, individuals and professional organisations in the Vale
- Connection to region/nationwide projects and funding (Holocaust Memorial Day; International Women's Day; A2:Connect; Arts Connect; Creative Learning in the Arts; Criw Celf; Forte Music Project; music workshops in schools; Night Out Theatre and opportunities in communities, schools workshops, etc.)
- Hosting, managing and supporting events for adult learning, the council's events and initiatives, art central friends, schools and other groups.
- Creating a lifelong learning pathway connecting the lives of citizens in the Vale working with groups such as the 'Fifty Plus Forum' Dementia and mental health organisations, Gwanwyn Festival amongst others.
- Delivers arts projects and workshops in schools

Art Central Gallery

The gallery is the largest of its size in the local and wider area and provides an essential platform for artists at all stages of their careers. Its programme offers the community access to a wealth of ideas and topics, opening routes to lifelong learning, self-development and cultural engagement. For young people in the Vale, it creates an insight into the visual arts as a viable career. There are opportunities to meet professional artists and hear talks about projects and careers. The creative industries are one of the key economic growth areas in Wales, it is important to show pathways into creative careers for those who might have the potential to develop in these areas. The gallery has supported small independent industries, artists, groups and organisations. The gallery has always generated an income through sales and commissions. It operates the Arts Council of Wales Collectorplan scheme, which

enables a wider opportunity for the purchase of art and craft's on a pay monthly basis, without risk to the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

The Arts Development Officer manages the gallery with support from Art Central Friends a volunteer organisation with over 180 registered members. The Friends provide financial support for an annual series of artist talks. They support the gallery openings (open to the public) with refreshments and volunteer help. The Friends give many volunteer hours to the gallery, in supporting invigilation, marketing and assistance with the installation and removal of exhibitions.

The gallery programming reflects and celebrates the diversity of the community.

The gallery programming reflects and celebrates the diversity of the community. It has shown showing almost 170 exhibitions, in its fourteen-year life. The programme is a balance of independent artists, groups and organisations that are from the professional, community educational and creative industries. The gallery programme also includes historic exhibitions Adult Learning award evenings, talks and other events. The gallery programme marks annual national and international events for the Council such as Holocaust Memorial Day and International Women's Day. This year's programme will mark LGBT History Month and an exhibition for people with Dementia and other mental health issues.

The gallery attracts regular visitors from both the local and wider community, schools groups and teachers, tourists, including the 'Fifty Plus Forum' and tourists from all over the world. The visitor books contain thousands of positive comments and compliments on the quality of the venue and the excellence and content of the exhibitions, which can be a community, schools or professional show. Cultural Tourism is a significant contributor to the Welsh economy. The value of visitors to the venue are also likely to contribute to the local economy with secondary spend in in the area within the retail, catering, leisure and hospitality businesses.

Public Art or Art in the Public Realm

As per the adopted Vale of Glamorgan Public Art Strategy (2003), and the Public Art Supplementary Planning Guide 2018, the arts development officer has a key role to play in advising the planning service on projects where section 106 monies are set aside for the development of public art, under the Vale's percent for art scheme. Public Art, or art in the public realm, has an important role to play in place making, in creating coherent, safe community spaces and in reflecting the history and aspirations of the area. While external consultants have an important role to play, an embedded officer can advise and support the council at the earliest opportunity, allowing for more successful project planning and creating the context, for external consultants and project managers to deliver effective projects. When artist working in this field are engaged to develop a public art project, as part of the developmental process they are required to engage with the local community and schools to contribute to the design ideas, take ownership of a project and become part of the developmental process. It enables those participating in the process to closely engage with the arts specialists and realise alternative routes to creative career opportunities.

Community Arts Activity

Despite a very small arts revenue budget, the arts officer works with other council departments and external arts collaborators and partners to effectively ensure best use of budgets and staff time/resources for community arts projects and activity. The arts officer acts as a first port of call for individual artists' groups and arts organisations wishing to undertake projects in the Vale, acting as a conduit to venues, potential partner organisations providing advice and information about arts funding support. In partnership with the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), the arts service supports the ACW - *'Night Out Theatre Scheme'*, this scheme enables local groups to organise affordable professional theatre arts performances and musical events in their local community without financial risk. It empowers the local community to learn about organising and promoting event and has a particular strand that encourages young people to do the same, delivering high quality, professional, participatory events and activities in their area. The arts service also supports music in schools projects. Over the past five years the arts service in partnership with other local authority arts services has been operating The Forte music project. Collaboratively funded by the arts services with additional funding from the Arts Council of Wales of £40K per year (200K over five years) the project provides an annual programme to support young people who wish to develop a career in the professional music industry. The young people have performed at local events in the Vale and other regional local authority areas.

Educational Activity

The Vale of Glamorgan is part of the A2 Connect network of organisations and schools, preparing teachers for the new creatively led national curriculum. Arts Central has acted as a venue for teacher training for the ACW's - Creative Learning Programme and has supported the arts champions meetings, school class visits and has hosted Criw Celf sessions. Criw Celf is a development project for pupils showing an aptitude in the arts. Young people are able to work with arts professionals in a range of arts disciplines to learn new skills for career development and further educational opportunities. Again, this project is regionally funded between five local authority arts services and Arts Active Trust (A2:Connect). It has received funding from the Arts Council of Wales to the sum of £270K over three years at £90K per annum.

The new National Curriculum for Wales, developed by the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales who have over the past five years committed £20 Million pounds to improve literacy and numeracy in schools via creative learning through the arts. Central to the programme is also the 'Lead Creative Schools Scheme' where schools engage with creative professionals in order to explore creative approaches to teaching and learning, improve attainment and develop the skills of teachers. Another strand is the ACW - 'Go and See Fund' where schools can visit high-quality arts events in galleries, theatres, arts centers and other venues. We have seen schools engage in gallery activities at Art Central. The gallery's programme of artist's talks and lectures and professionally delivered workshops offers a soft route into to Life Long learning and self-development. Through A2Conect, Vale schools have also visited theatre events and engaged in performance activities via the creative learning programme, aiming to inspire arts activity in the classroom.

The network has developed educational programmes for creative learning through the arts in schools.

For the past five years, the Vale's arts development officer has led on a management board to steer the direction of 'A2: Connect - The Arts and Education Network for the Central South Area of Wales'. The network has developed educational programmes for creative learning through the arts in schools. The five local authority arts services, in partnership with 'Arts Active', a charity organisation based in St David's Hall, Cardiff makes up A2: Connect. The network has secured £850K of Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government funding over the past five years. The partnership has delivered professional arts training for teachers and educational arts workshops for pupils across the region, developing case studies for the delivery of cross-curricular expressive arts education learning for the new national curriculum in Wales. The organisation is currently developing a strategy to apply for further funding deliver this service more widely over the next few years.

The Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales have recently announced a further investment of £3m of National Lottery funding to extend these schemes to support the creative learning process over the next two years. Thereafter, the new curriculum will come in to being for ages 3-19 years, 2022 (primary) and 2026 (secondary). The expressive arts dance; drama; music; literature; the digital and visual arts will play a fundamental role integrating into the core subject areas in a pioneering learning process for the new curriculum.

Arts and wider Strategies

The Vale of Glamorgan Council has an adopted arts strategy. The 'Arts and Cultural Strategy: An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale', reflects the Council's Corporate Plan objectives, and sets out the vision for arts and culture in the area. The strategy is influenced by current legislation, found in the Welsh Governments Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which identifies, 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language'. The arts strategy also reflects the Welsh Government 'A Light Springs Through the Dark: A Vision for Culture in Wales. The Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act requires public bodies, including local authorities, to deliver a cultural programme, valuing the arts alongside sport, recreation and the Welsh language. Today the arts are no longer seen as a luxury, but instead are viewed as intrinsic part of a healthy local economy, to enhance the environment and impact on social, cultural well-being and health. The Vale's art strategy stipulates that: *'sometimes the arts can be seen as a luxury... the council firmly believes that they are a fundamental part of everyday life, with the ability to enrich the lives of our citizens, promote our culture and facilitate strong communities with a bright future'*.

Given the right resources and support, the arts can development service could more effectively: deliver an arts provision that can look at generating: additional income; seek new opportunities for increasing sales at Art Central Gallery; effectively market the arts and gallery services; develop existing and new partnerships; widen access and increase arts experiences and opportunities; continue advise and support the arts community; increase the cultural tourism offer; continue to develop opportunities for learning and arts in relation to the new curriculum and local community arts participation and learning.

While there may be a short term saving in cutting the arts service such a cut would have longer-term implications in relation to:

- the economic development of the Vale (through support into careers in the arts and creative industries – volunteers and interns have gone on to careers in the arts or other areas).
- would impact on the success of future public art projects and community engagement
- Would cut off a point of contact for community groups and professional independent artists and arts organisations wishing to develop projects in the Vale, to the benefit of tourism and local businesses.
- Support for the arts community in the Vale of Glamorgan
- All options for funding an arts and cultural programme required by the Welsh Government Well-being and Future Generations Act, including the loss of the Arts Connect and A2 Connect partnerships and other Arts Council of Wales funded regional and community schemes.
- The arts Council of Wales Collectorplan scheme, operated by Art Central gallery creates opportunities to generate income making buying art affordable, while helping to support artists working in Wales and more...

Income generation

Alternative support to generate income for the arts service can be explored through other sources

One officer operates and delivers the arts service and Art Central Gallery. A better-resourced arts service could attract significant additional funding into the Vale through grants, sales of work, accessing national projects and programmes. It takes time to develop and generate any significant money with few resources. The arts sector is more than often deprived of money so generating significant sums from arts community users is difficult. Funding through applications is time consuming and can be challenging without the necessary human resources. It can be challenging, particularly when it is a local authority trying to source external funding, as options are limited.

The recent 'provisional' settlements by the Welsh Government (WG), to the Vale of Glamorgan Council for 2020/2021, of additional funding will hopefully, relieve the pressure off statutory services. This in turn might enable the council to retain non-statutory but important provision in the Vale as well as the Council Tax windfall that could also support the arts service and Art Central Gallery.

Art Central Gallery has always been generated income through commission from the sale of artworks and in the past year, via venue hire charges. The opportunity for a percentage of Section 106 monies from developers to be used to support the gallery, in exchange for a programme that create debate around art in the public realm and invites community feedback on proposed public art projects. Income generation for the arts via the creative industries, film and Television recharges. Where the Vale generates income via the creative industries at present, none of the money is allocated to the development of the arts service. This money generated through the arts and therefore, it's suggested that it could be top sliced and a percentage redirected to the arts service and used for the development of community arts and Art Central Gallery.

With a dedicated member of staff to effect sales at Art Central gallery, the venue could potentially generate more revenue from sales and commission, when artwork is available for sale. An annual open art exhibition, with modest entry fees, open to amateur and professional artists in the Vale, would also generate income to support the gallery programme.

It has been suggested in previous reports that a *Creative Café*, (devoid of competition with local businesses,) could be developed to create opportunities for local people to visit, particularly for those who might be vulnerable or isolated, to come together to learn new skills, talk, participate and attend creative cultural arts activities and opportunities. The creative programme can encourage communication and develop community, health and wellbeing. Held in a welcoming environment creative activity can address some of the strategic social issues the council is aiming to address.

The Cabinet Report for the Council's Revenue of Monday 3 February 2020, identifies an additional £6.626M for the new financial year. The increase identified in part as relieving cost pressures for the Council, particularly within the Learning and Skill Department, where the Arts Development Service and Art Central Gallery is currently situated.

In addition to the Welsh Government increase, the Council has also proposed an increase in Council tax (in Band D Only) of 4.5% that is likely to rebalance the budget. This increase was suggested as a source for funding a museum in Barry at a 0.2% cost recovery rate for £150K.

The report, to reshape and review the delivery of the Arts Service and Art Central Gallery was produced prior to, knowing about the significant Welsh Government budget and other additions. The arts service and art central gallery could also benefit from these increases.

In continuing to keep 'the status quo' the arts service can continue to support and programme Art Central Gallery, a venue the council can be proud of supporting, continue to develop and deliver the Council's Arts Strategy and to advise and support the arts community in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Information links:

Vale of Glamorgan 'Arts and Cultural Strategy: An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Enjoying/Arts/Arts-Strategy-2017-2022.pdf>

Vale of Glamorgan Council's Corporate Plan

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/achieving_our_vision/Corporate-Plan.aspx

Welsh Governments Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/well-being-of-future-generations-wales-act-2015-the-essentials.pdf>

Welsh Government 'A Light Springs Through the Dark: A Vision for Culture in Wales

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/arts-and-culture-vision-statement-light-springs-through-the-dark.pdf>

Public Art Supplementary Planning Guide 2018

<https://valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Our%20Council/consultation/Draft-Public-Art-in-New-Development-SPG-2018.pdf>

A2: Connect - <https://a2connect.org/>

GALLERY CONSULTATION - R Connell Letter

To the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for the Arts.

(Neil Moore, Lis Burnett, Kathryn McCaffer.)

Support letter, ref. – The Future of The Art Central Gallery @ Barry Library.

Dear Vale Officers,

Over 15 years ago Art Central through the efforts of the Vale Council and VOGA (Vale of Glamorgan Artists) was established. It has earned a worthwhile reputation with high quality art works and exhibitions on the great themes of our times.

Now under some pressure the gallery's future is up for debate. To clarify the way forward it should be noted the older curative world is passing and in its place are new forces. One critic has commented that the future of Art is Black. Why not? Another critic has railed that Art was made by men for men and women were second class citizens in all of it. Their voice is now being heard. And the gender minorities are in full flow. Art Central is a trumpet to blast out these new concerns. Where else can artists go? Yes, there are small spaces: disused shops, garages, artists open studios and the odd pub but those places lack the SPACE and LOCATION which Art Central provides in the Vale.

Look at the bigger historical picture: when society was successful great art followed. The Egyptians produced the Pyramids; the Italian Renaissance had Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel. 17TH century Holland was the richest country in the world and produced Rembrandt. 19th century Great Britain produced Turner and France the Impressionists. When society supports the arts they flourish. When society goes into decline for whatever reason the arts wilt and shrink. The closure of The Washington Gallery in Penarth had a detrimental affect on the town. The withdrawal of support for the Art Central gallery will cut off Barry Town and the Vale Council's option for a first class venue for promoting arts activities. The Council now has to fight for the gallery and all it stands for in these challenging times.

The general tone of the public consultation document shows concerns about funding the gallery. Perhaps the Vale Council could look to funding a **fundraising manager**, to provide Art Central finances. Such a post could be part time and from the charity sector. Such professionals exist and they can well connect with the business and commercial world. Also, funding could be accessed from the Welsh Arts Council to fund certain projects and exhibitions.

I hope that the future for Art Central's gallery is positive and wish all concerned well in the forthcoming deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Richard O'Connell, Artist and Tutor.

Vale of Glamorgan Art Consultation - J Hicks

Vale of Glamorgan Consultation

Temporary exhibition spaces in Wales are rare. When a new build or a building conversion happens it is usually for a concert hall, theatre, hospital, sports stadia and in Cardiff the Millennium Centre and Synedd for example. After the design and then the build, there is always the afterthought, how nice it would be to put some art on the walls in the foyer, in the corridors, or on the balconies. Immediately these inadequate facilities are then designated galleries.

What makes Barry so unusual is a purposely designed gallery was considered and brought to fruition. This gallery was soon recognized and believed to be one of the best exhibiting spaces in Wales. It put Barry on the map for the U.K and has developed interest from within Europe.

Visual Art has always been considered the 'poor sister' of art disciplines by artists and institutions. Recently it has been acknowledged that engagement with the arts is a valuable asset for health, physical and mental. Making art is encouraged by health practitioners, sociologists, historians, educationalists, artists etc. but when it comes to showing people the creative abilities of the citizens of Wales, there is little opportunity to do so or the will to make purpose built exhibition spaces

The value of a purpose built art gallery to members of the public, exhibitors and art based organisations cannot be measured in purely financial terms, it has become an established fact that art benefits all, whether it is the practice of art, the study of art or engaging with the art of others.

Art Central is successful, it is 'fit for purpose', it is well known locally and well used by art groups in the community.

Art can be valued as a unifying force for members of the community, the gallery should be an opportunity where learning about art enriches and educates groups and individuals. Suggesting that an art gallery which has one successful exhibition after another should or could be turned into a café or an indoor market is in itself wasting the resources of the Vale of Glamorgan. This would not be good value for ratepayers, the initial investment of a purpose built gallery is thrown away in the 'hope' that a café or indoor market may be successful, but the success of any new venture is not guaranteed. Art Central is successful, it is 'fit for purpose', it is well known locally and well used by art groups in the community.

The Gallery and exhibits relate to people's lives both currently and historically and applies to both practitioners and attendees. Art addresses events in the circle of life and therefore should be accessible to all. The challenges are to move far beyond projects that are specifically funded giving accessibility to every day practice. Art must be made accessible to all people, children and adults should have the opportunity to continue to engage and gain valued and spiritual experience.

The Vale could be the forerunners in making this a centre of excellence reaching the abled and disabled. Imagine a sensory perception area using touch programs for visually impaired. Art reflects a need and should reach people by whichever means, thus attracting a broad range of visitor from far and wide.

Art is part of everyday life, the car you choose, your sofa, cookers, furniture, dinnerware, everything you can think of and yet you do not value it or want to keep a provision to show it. If coffee or a market is the limit of your vision then it is a very sad day for Barry and all the organisations who currently and may use it in the future.

Women's Art Association of Wales are annual exhibitors ever since the gallery opened and are regular visitors. Our members come from all over Wales and all agree it is the BEST space available anywhere a true JEWEL in the Vale's crown.

To close Art Central would be a major loss to Wales and all of the people that have engaged with it and the generations to come. It would be a very detrimental move, to the town, to the county and to Wales.

Yours sincerely

Jilly Hicks Chair

For and on behalf of the Women's Art Association Wales