

In attendance: Charles Bell (CB), Jill Miller (JM), Claire Simpson (CS), Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt (RGN), Leigh French (LF), Jane Topping (JT).

After initial introduction of our pre-prepared agenda, JM suggested that she would prefer discuss around the agenda rather than sticking to it. JM started by introducing the GCC strategy for the arts as described in the Best Value Review (Jan 2001) and admitted that there were gaps in the review due to resource issues.

CS said that although the Best Value Review is the framework used by the GCC, it had to be elastic as circumstances often change. CS explained that her role is to instigate the indirect delivery of visual arts facilities, the biggest of which at the current time is the development of the King Street/Briggait area of the city. CS operates with a hands-off approach and is eager to build on the good, healthy relationships already at work in the King Street/Briggait area.

JM added that the King Street development is a good example of the GCC's work.

CS added that the Best Value Review was principally a museum's review.

CB pointed out that the GCC isn't the SAC but that they do have a visual arts officer and this could be said to give the visual arts a privileged position as they do not have lead officers for any other artform. CB considered that the development of a visual arts policy has become more of a priority since the creation of the Best Value Review in 2001.

JM said that it was important to look at all the work that the GCC was doing for the visual arts, citing the RAW weekend and the Glasgow Art Fair as good examples of this.

RGN made formal introductions round the table. RGN explained that she was based in Glasgow because of the city's excellent infrastructure and large artistic community. RGN offered her support to the Best Value Review but added that there were a very small number of council run galleries mentioned in the review and that these galleries did not have a visual arts strategy. RGN wondered how the wider visual arts community and other organisations could become more involved and help to create such a strategy and added that Glasgow is home to 28% of Scottish artists and had previously been the envy of other city councils around Britain. Tramway in particular was seen as a benchmark. RGN added that Tramway is unique both in its space and in its ability to commission large-scale projects (akin to Baltic in Gateshead and Tate Modern in London) and could be used as a tool to promote tourism.

JM said that decisions had not yet been made regarding the future of Tramway hence the consultancy which was currently taking place. JM went on to say that the main achievements of Tramway were in the past and that changes had to be made for the future running of the space. Preliminary, anecdotal evidence would suggest that Glasgow is no longer the envy of other cities.

JM accepted that the way the public had become aware of the problems at Tramway had been harsh and that the option of Scottish Ballet taking over the running of part of the building was one of many options on the table.

RGN asked if there was a way that the council and the art community could discuss some alternatives for the Tramway.

CS said that it was important to be flexible when thinking about Tramway. The scale of Tramway is unique but also a problem and other ways of getting fresh investment into the building must be thought of.

JM added that GCC did not think that the Tramway was well respected any more and that its previous reputation should be built upon.

LF added that with sufficient resources the Tramway could be progressive.

JM responded that the Tramway already received a substantial amount of money.

LF noted that there was still no policy for the visual arts in Glasgow, no single vision in place for Tramway and asked how it would be possible for the Tramway to programme for diversity.

CB said that there was a difficulty stemming from the moment Tramway changed from being a temporary venue to a permanent one and that there was a problem keeping the building vital and exciting — not simply another city council building.

LF remarked that when the Tramway had a director and program it was a vital and diverse place. LF wondered how the Tramway could engage with the local community and where the resources were for this.

CB said that the new garden had been a big hit with the local community (and beyond) but that visitors were not lingering in the building.

LF said that the local community could be engaged in many ways, one aspect being community radio.

CB said that awareness of Tramway's activities within the building was low.

LF suggested a need for more co-ordination throughout Tramway to engage the local community and a wider audience.

JM said that *NVA* had been a very successful and that their project had been well led.

CB added that the audience had been well identified for this project and that audiences would benefit in the future if they were presented with more clearly defined projects.

JM said that *NVA* had been very exciting and that GCC was keen to explore similar projects. JM said that one of the major failings of Tramway was the difficulty of programming the building as a whole and that this problem was exacerbated by the poor state of repair of parts of the building and by resource issues (particularly that the bar is heavily subsidised and still losing money). JM added that as a local authority GCC has clear objectives when it comes to spending money. Firstly the excellence and quality of the project must be considered and secondly the number of people that would be affected by the project must be high. JM suggested the latter consideration to be Tramway's biggest problem at the current time.

RGN said that governance was Tramway's biggest problem, compared with the *NVA* Hidden Garden which was artist-led with no local authority involvement and engaged actively with the local community. Much could be learnt from this way of working.

CB said that things started to go wrong for Tramway at the time of major refurbishment as was no alteration of the internal structure. CB added that two years after the lottery bid was successful there was a review planned and that was what was happening now. Challenges were being identified and a new flexible way of working with the building must be found.

RGN suggested that the Tramway could be city council assisted rather than city council run and that perhaps a Trust for Tramway was the best way forward.

JM agreed in principle and held up The King's Theatre as a recent example of devolution with which GCC were extremely pleased. JM added that GCC's subsidy was still needed at Tramway and GCC was open to the idea of a Trust. However there was still the issue of resources for the rest of the building and so alternative management arrangements were being investigated for the Tramway. JM said that there had to be a good reason for the GCC to continue providing money for the Tramway and all spending must be in the best interest of Glasgow as a whole. JM asserted that £1million per year goes into the running of Tramway.

RGN highlighted the disparity between the overall budget for the building and that of the visual art programme (around £80,000) and said that the artistic community is keen to deal with GCC to help shape Tramway into something better. RGN added that the money which was currently being given to Tramway would go further if it was spent outside the current management structure.

CS said that it was exciting to hear that the artistic community wanted to be involved and assist in the workings of Tramway and a broader visual art strategy.

RGN asked if GCC and the artistic community could work together to develop a strategy for Tramway and if there could be a public meeting to discuss the matter.

CS admitted that communication issues did exist and that the Visual Arts Forum was not the place for such a debate.

CB said that the artistic community and the local community concerns should be discussed together although stressed that Visual Arts Strategy and Tramway are two separate issues.

JM said that the inclusive approach was essential.

RGN said that quality programming could be maintained while engaging with the local community.

CB said that there was now an education specialist (Christine McClandish) working in Tramway and that there must be a rethink of interpretative materials throughout the building enabling Tramway's activities to be appreciated by all.

RGN said that the education officer on secondment at Tramway from a primary school had only been involved in the performance aspects of the programme and has no specialist expertise in the field of contemporary visual art.

CB said that, as of the next exhibition, the education officer would also be involved with the visual arts and that schools had been involved from the start of her posting at Tramway.

CS said that formal education is only one aspect of the access issues surrounding Tramway.

CB said that the bar and restaurant was not up to standard due to the large number of uses to which the building was put. CB added that there needed to be a flexibility of approach in that area.

RGN used the Tate Modern and Baltic as good examples of the way in which artists could be involved with a space to improve issues of access and education.

JM said that hooks were needed to get people into Tramway.

CB said that the building should be used in as many ways as possible.

RGN said that resources were the biggest issue.

CB said that a planned explosion of activity was needed in the building.

RGN responded by saying that an overall vision for Tramway was needed to synchronise all these activities. This could perhaps be provided by appointing a director of the building.

JM said that Tramway 2 was getting big audiences on the opening night but then very little passing trade during the day.

RGN suggested that the Tramway could be made a more attractive place to visit with improvements to the bar or the addition of a bookshop/library.

CB suggested a 'What's going on in the building today...' sign and added that there needed to be more going on throughout the building at all times.

CS mentioned that the Tate has a permanent collection which continually attracts visitors. What could be Tramway's way around this problem?

JM said that resources were the main problem.

RGN said that the GCC and the artistic community could be involved in making Tramway better for the future and that the GCC could initiate a new era for Tramway at arm's length.

JM agreed.

LF asked where the programming resources were, and how the physical resources of Tramway could be made more accessible for the local community?

RGN said it was essential to get people through the door and then keep them there. Perhaps artistic involvement in a rethink of the design of the space (such as the restaurant) could achieve this.

JM said that GCC were aware of the issues relating to Tramway and that no decisions had been made regarding its future. GCC is open to alternative options for Tramway.

RGN asked what the bottom line was regarding Tramway.

JM said that the visual arts were the priority and that the building itself was important to GCC. Restoration of the building was extremely important to GCC and the Scottish Ballet lottery bid was not the only option for the Tramway. If the Scottish Ballet bid failed to go through, the future of Tramway will still be discussed (as was always the intention of GCC). GCC is thinking about the various options for the building but at the root of the issue is funding as half of the building needs to be renovated.

CB said that the feel of the Tramway should be improved with financial aid and should be thought about in the long term.

JM added that the whole city has to be considered when it comes to spending needs.

RGN asked if the artistic community could be part of the consultancy.

JM said that GCC were not against meeting with the artistic community and that GCC had been misconstrued on this issue, causing angst within the artistic community which could have been avoided.

RGN said that when representatives of the artistic community had written on the Tramway matter to a representative of GCC but there had been no response besides the sacking of two members of staff from the Tramway.

JM and CB both said that 'casual staff cannot be sacked'. JM also said that there could be no demonstrating against proposals for the Tramway within the work time of Tramway staff.

JT and RGN insisted that any actions had been taken outside of hours worked at Tramway.

JM continued that Ben Woodeson could discuss the matter with herself privately at any time. JM denied knowledge of the other member of staff who was sacked and considers Alexia Holt to be off sick for the time being.

CB gave a run-down of the upcoming program at Tramway:

- An exhibition by Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson in April 2004
- The MFA exhibition in June 2004
- An exhibition by Graham Fagen
- An exhibition curated by Ami Barak in Nov. 2004

JM said that CB has taken personal responsibility for Alexia's job.

LF suggested to invite collective consultation on an informed visual arts policy for Glasgow.

CB said that language had to be chosen carefully when discussing the issue of the future of Tramway, particularly in the media and that the restraint shown so far by elected councillors was commendable in the face of accusations of 'cultural vandalism'.

JM emphasised that other services such as schools were desperate for funding in addition to Tramway and that these services were important too.

LF said that the Executive had flagged Culture as an important issue but had yet to provide funding for instigating improvements.

RGN admitted that notions of exclusivity were a problem at the moment but partly a result of a self-fulfilling prophecy through consistent under-investment in marketing and outreach work. These worries could be addressed with improved access for the local community, a visionary director being appointed and increased involvement from the artistic community. The case of Tramway fits perfectly with Jack McConnell's philosophy of 'access to excellence': the excellence exists already but the access remains a problem.

CS stressed that the uniqueness of the Tramway was its strong point.

JM said that it was important to be sensitive to the feelings of elected members when it came to translation of information on the issue of Tramway. JM added that culture was an issue within all departments of the GCC and that the GCC must work with other parts of the service and use them as a tool for the arts.

CS added that the language used by the arts was different to the language used by elected members and that this should be considered. JM asserted that it is the job of Cultural & Leisure Services to act as a conduit in explaining the validity of the arts to the elected councillors in relation to other demands on resources.

JM said that Tramway must prove that it can be a resource for a number of GCC departments (such as youth justice) in order to get more money from new areas.

LF asked if there was to be any direct GCC drive for local communications initiatives, such as TV and radio.

CB said that GCC had backed away from that type of initiative.

JM said that more local people using Tramway was essential.

RGN asked if there was a time frame in place for discussion about and action for Tramway.

JM said that this was not a quick process and that an interim report on the findings of the Bonnar Keenlyside consultancy would be published in January 2004. All decisions on all lottery bids would be made by 13th January 2004.

RGN asked if there could be a visual arts meeting around this time to discuss the matter.

JM said that GCC were looking into the idea of a Trust for Tramway as one of many options for the building. In the future Tramway needs to be a more sustainable, more business-like building.

The meeting adjourned.

POST SCRIPT:

Alexia Holt has now left her job at Tramway.

A decision on the lottery bid is now understood to be postponed until October 2004.