

**Wirral Council**

**A STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR  
LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES**

**A Report  
By Strategic Leisure Limited**

**October 2008**

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## **SECTION II - SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CULTURAL SERVICES**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 Wirral Council appointed Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) in June 07, to prepare a Strategic Development Plan for the future provision of Leisure and Cultural Services in Wirral. The appointment of external consultants to undertake this work was approved by Cabinet earlier in 2007, as a result of discussions about corporate priorities, and short and longer term financial savings facing the Council.
- 1.2 In reviewing the current services, Wirral Council recognises that people in Wirral place a very high value on the provision of leisure and cultural services. The Cabinet in Wirral also recognise the value of cultural and leisure services in relation to economic benefit (attracting investment to a region) ,addressing health by tackling obesity and improving health, promoting social cohesion, tackling anti-social behaviour, improving sporting standards, and supporting initiatives to improve access to literacy and numeracy through access to IT. Cabinet further recognise the opportunities to be considered through extended partnerships for provision, as set out in the Local Area Agreement (LAA), and that there is potential for leisure and culture to have a higher profile and greater role in such approaches to service delivery.
- 1.3 In order to realise the full potential of the value of cultural and leisure services for the Borough, it is necessary to review the extent, nature and delivery mechanisms of existing Wirral Council Cultural and Leisure Services to bring the facilities and services into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and comparable with similar provision in other authorities and in the private sector.

### **Vision for Leisure and Cultural Services in the Future**

***'Through integrated management, deliver high quality multi-purpose facilities, concentrated in strategic locations to benefit the whole community of Wirral'***

### **Background Context and Justification**

- 1.4 The initial concept for the way in which Cultural Services could be delivered in the future is based on a number of fundamental factors. These are:
  - Cultural Services have an intrinsic value and make an important contribution to quality of life
  - Wirral's Cultural Services could contribute significantly more to identified corporate and policy objectives, if the outcomes of the services were more clearly defined
  - There is a need for the delivery of Cultural Services to be effective and relevant at local level
  - Given the ad hoc development of Cultural Services in the past there is an opportunity to review the infrastructure and assets of the service
- 1.5 Other relevant factors include the fact that the Council needs to make significant revenue savings, and that Cultural Services is one of several services within the Council which has a substantial asset base. Given that community expectations and needs have changed over the years, the reliance on buildings, many of which are in a poor condition, wrongly located and unfit for purpose, now needs to be challenged and other delivery options considered.

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- 1.6 In order to ensure quality and sustainable provision, Cultural Services need to be part of a more integrated Council-wide approach; its key partners in this respect are Adult Social Care, Health and Children and Young People's Services, and the key links between provision are:
- The local implementation of 'Youth Matters', and the local responsibility for youth provision
  - The initiatives to improve health and address current health inequalities in the Borough
  - The Extended Schools agenda
- 1.7 The fundamental driver for this approach is that Cultural Services is one element of a range of community-based services, which provide for local people during the course of their lives.
- 1.8 Given that Cultural Services provide for adults, young people and those with specific needs, there is an obvious correlation with Adult Social Care who focus provision on the needs of the most vulnerable in the community, Wirral PCT who focus resources on prevention of illness (increasingly on a personal self-care basis) and management of specific medical conditions, and the Children and Young People's Department who provide both universal and specialist support to children and young people.
- 1.9 These three key partner services all utilise Cultural Services to contribute to delivery of their policy objectives, because of the value of cultural provision e.g. physical activity, access to IT and information, community buildings etc. These existing linkages and partnerships provide the basis on which to integrate service delivery further through shared use of physical assets.

### **Geographical Areas**

- 1.10 Planning for Children and Young People's Services is already undertaken on the basis of four main areas in the Borough - Birkenhead, Wallasey, North Wirral and South Wirral. These four areas are then further divided into 11 Community Fora Areas (roughly two wards per Community Forum Area). This approach is also used by Wirral PCT, and is being adopted by Adult Social Care as their agenda of co-working develops.
- 1.11 The Strategic Asset Review is based on seven areas. Cultural facilities need to align as much as possible with other public facilities and recognise local links but this approach may not apply to all types of cultural provision given the specialist nature of some services.

### **Specialist V's Universal Provision**

- 1.12 Within Cultural Services there is both specialist provision e.g. swimming pools, golf courses, indoor tennis, reference/bibliography services, art galleries, museums, sports

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pitches, which require specific spaces and infrastructure to ensure safe, publicly accessible services. There are also services such as community centres, information services, book lending, sports development activities (aimed at general participation), which require less specialist space because the specialism is in the actual service delivered i.e. it relates to the human resources, rather than the physical building.

- 1.13 There is significant opportunity for these services to share use of a building with other services e.g. Adult Social Care, Youth Services, Health etc, because delivery of the services is about bringing the specialist input to the building, not about providing a specialist environment. The Community will access these services at the local point of delivery, but all of these services could be delivered from a single, multi-purpose space. Adopting a shared approach to the use of buildings also provides the opportunity for extended services which cannot currently be achieved due to lack of human and financial resources.

### **Effective Integration and Partnership**

- 1.14 Building on the above, shared use of physical assets provides further opportunity in terms of partnership, integration and professional understanding between service providers. For the community, it would provide the opportunity to attend a session run by the PCT on healthy eating on a budget, participate in a pilates class, attend a luncheon club, and borrow a library book from the same building. Whilst older people, or those not at work may access such provision predominantly during the day, integrating service delivery would enable library services to be available into the evening and weekends, while the same building was being used for a youth club session, community meetings and other activities.
- 1.15 This approach, whilst requiring more detailed thought and consultation, clearly identifies benefits in terms of service delivery to the community, and would deliver greater value for money than does the current approach of many separately managed, single function buildings.
- 1.16 Adopting this approach is also likely, in the longer term, to contribute significantly to social cohesions and community involvement, through the development of social capital at local level. More services, delivered locally will be more accessible, and therefore overall participation is likely to increase.
- 1.17 These local multi-purpose facilities would act as satellite facilities to the fewer, more specialist provision at borough wide and area level.
- 1.18 The three strategic considerations therefore inform the proposed approach to 're-provision' of Cultural Services:
- **Alternative venue(s)/(location(s) for service delivery**
  - **Alternative service provider(s)**
  - **Investment in replacement provision i.e. new/refurbished facilities**
  - **Using existing resources (principally buildings) more efficiently**
- 1.19 The future delivery of cultural services may therefore look different, and involve different partners, but the services will still offer the same scope of provision.

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### **Cultural Services - Analysis of Current Provision**

#### **Libraries and Public Halls**

- 2.1 The Wirral Library Service comprises 24 library facilities (23 full time and 1 part-time), some of which are stand alone, and others e.g. West Kirkby which are part of other buildings. Not all libraries are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act because of difficulties with their design and layout. There is also one satellite site at Thornton Hough Women's Institute. A Schools' Library Service operates from the Acre Lane Education Centre, and is run on behalf of the Children and Young People's Department to provide resources and support for the benefit of all Wirral school children. Details of the Libraries provided are included at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The Beechwood Library incorporates the only public toy library in the Wirral; extensively used by early years groups, the toy library is well stocked, and provides on-site areas for play, as well as a social area for parents and children.
- 2.3 The 3 Central Libraries are Birkenhead, Wallasey and Bebington. Birkenhead Library was closed in June 2007 due to problems with the roof. It is now fully re-opened following extensive repairs and refurbishment, but further investment is still required.
- 2.4 The Libraries are generally warm, welcoming spaces, with obvious commitment to the delivery of a quality service. There are brightly coloured wall displays, excellent local information and helpful staff.
- 2.5 The majority of the libraries are open 35 hours or more per week, (including Saturdays); the majority of the libraries, except the central libraries are closed at lunchtimes. Libraries open less than 35 hours per week are Beechwood (34.5), New Ferry (12.5), and Thornton Hough(1.5). Only three Wirral Council libraries (Ridgeway, Seacombe and Woodchurch) are open on Wednesdays.
- 2.6 All Wirral Council libraries provide the same services, as summarised below, but the range and scope of these services generally diminishes with the size of the facility. As well as book lending all libraries provide some form of IT service (there are a total of 401 PCs that are being replaced, in a phased programme) and a range of audio visual services. These include music, spoken word and DVDs. Borrowings for spoken word items and DVDs are generally quite popular but music loans have fallen with the rise of digital music and greater access to the internet where tracks can easily be downloaded. These are fast changing areas for which libraries need to be able to adapt their provision.

#### **Library Services**

- Book lending
- Book request service and Inter Library loan
- Internet and computer access
- Fax and photocopying services
- Adult learning courses
- Children's books and activities

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- Reading Groups for adults and children
- Reference and Information services
- Family and Local History
- Newspaper and magazines
- CD and Music Loans (in some libraries only)
- DVD hire (in some libraries only)
- Community Meeting Rooms

- 2.7 The Library Service has set up over 50 book groups for library customers, encouraging wider reading and community cohesion.
- 2.8 There is access to the reference services from all sites but the major collection is held at Birkenhead Central Library. The Archive service is very popular with increasing interest in family history and local history. The Archive service has now been incorporated into the Corporate Information Service, so is technically no longer part of the Library Service, but there is still liaison between them.
- 2.9 The Library Service also operates a Home Reader service, comprising 2 vans that are hired in, plus one other that is based at Bebington. This is seen as an important service that provides for customers who cannot access the specific library facilities and is particularly popular in care and residential homes.
- 2.10 The Schools Library Service (SLS), which is based at the Professional Excellence Centre, Acre Lane is different from the Public Children's service which is focused on an individual child's reading and literacy support. The SLS provides curriculum material and teacher support largely for primary and junior schools.
- 2.11 The Library Service is also responsible for 6 Public Halls. These are operated independently from Community Centres, with a different pricing structure; the Public Halls are generally used for events such as conferences, weddings and small theatrical productions. All premises are licensed for alcohol.

### **Community Centres**

- 2.12 There are 19 Community Centres provided through Wirral Council Community Services. The facilities record 356,204 visits per annum, with provision of 45,539 hours of activity. There are 140 groups operating from Wirral Council Community Centres. Appendix 2 sets out a summary of existing community centre provision in the Borough.
- 2.13 Wirral's community centres developed in the 1980's from facilities originally provided for children's play at venues such as Gautby Road and Livingstone Street (both in Birkenhead) and Leasowe Adventure Playground. Provision was extended through funding from a range of initiatives and in 1986 five new centres were added at Pensby, Greasby, Noctorum, Woodchurch and Leasowe as part of a government initiative.
- 2.14 In 1993 / 1994 a number of social services buildings (Delamere, Kylemore, Windsor and Liscard), were transferred enabling community centres to be developed in areas previously without community provision. Further transfers in 1997 resulted in the public halls at Grosvenor Ballroom, Wallasey and Westbourne Hall West Kirby becoming

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community centres and in 1998 Beechwood Sport and Recreation Centre also became community managed.

- 2.15 During this period a new community centre was built at Moreton and New Ferry Village Hall was developed in partnership with the National Playing Fields Association. More recently community centres have been developed at Hoyle Road, Hoylake and Vale Park in New Brighton, and the most recent new build, Overton Community Centre.
- 2.16 There are now 19 community centres, one community recreation centre and one adventure playground (now transferred to Children and Young People’s Department) operated throughout the Wirral by the community services section in conjunction with local people.
- 2.17 These 21 buildings are widely diverse in nature and structure, ranging from single roomed halls to multi room facilities. Many of them are not purpose built community centres, but have been developed from existing buildings e.g. Hoylake was previously a school.
- 2.18 The Children and Young People’s Department operates a full time play service based from a number of community centres. The recently published Play Strategy recognises the provision but further consideration needs to be given to how this can deliver best value for money.

### Arts and Heritage Services

- 2.19 There are 8 key Wirral Council facilities; all are in Birkenhead except for the theatre in New Brighton. Five facilities are interlinked through a heritage trail and are all within walking/tram ride distance of each other. All apart from the Williamson Art Gallery have been developed (or are being developed, e.g. Floral Pavilion) as a result of regeneration and economic development. The Birkenhead facilities were all invested in and developed as part of the Hamilton Quarter Regeneration project during the mid to late 1980’s.

**Table 1 - Arts and Heritage Facilities**

| Facility                                   | Location         | Service and level of local, regional and national significance.                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Pacific Road Arts Centre - Arts</b>  | Birkenhead       | Arts facility for small and medium scale touring, community venue has grown in use to 80,000 visitors per annum.                                          |
| <b>2. Floral Pavilion (Theatre) - Arts</b> | New Brighton     | A performance venue for large scale touring and community performances. Conference venue added to the original provision – local and regional.            |
| <b>3. Birkenhead Priory</b>                | Birkenhead       | A 12 <sup>th</sup> century scheduled Ancient Monument that was the beginning of the Wirral social history – of local, regional and national significance. |
| <b>4. Wirral Museum</b>                    | Hamilton Square, | A fine Arts and Crafts building, with strong links to Wirral’s industrial history. Part museum, part                                                      |



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| Facility                                                            | Location                  | Service and level of local, regional and national significance.                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (Birkenhead Town Hall)                                              | Birkenhead                | community and hire facility. Grade 2* listed - Local and perhaps regional                                                                                                                        |
| 5. Taylor Street Transport and Tramway Museum, and Heritage Tramway | Taylor Street, Birkenhead | A mixed collection of buses and trams involving specialist groups – Local.                                                                                                                       |
| 6. Egerton Bridge                                                   | Birkenhead                | A lift bridge used in the old docks – Local                                                                                                                                                      |
| 7. Shore Road Pumping Station – Giant Grasshopper                   | Birkenhead                | A station for pumping water out of the tunnels of historical interest and importance – Local and regional                                                                                        |
| 8. Williamson Art Gallery                                           | Birkenhead                | A purpose built art gallery of historical significance. A good collection of older artist work and other artefacts relating to the area – local, strong regional and some national significance. |

### Sports Facilities and Sports Development

2.20 The Sport and Recreation Services include:

- Sports and Leisure Centres
- Sports Development Services

### Sports and Leisure Centres

2.21 A brief description of each of the centres is set out in the table below.

**Table 2 Sports and Leisure Centres**

| Facility                          | Location               | Facilities and Comments                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Bebington Oval                 | Bebington              | Set in an 85 acre site. Swimming and learners pool upgraded for use by elderly and disabled people, extensive renovation of changing and access. Major indoor and outdoor site catering for the whole of the Wirral. |
| 2. Europa Pools                   | Birkenhead             | Opened in 1995. Leisure pool and 25m 6 lane pool, small health and fitness suite.                                                                                                                                    |
| 3. Grange Road West Sports Centre | Birkenhead (Claughton) | Converted 1902 'Drill Hall'. 6 court hall. Secondary Hall. Home to trampoline club and centre of excellence. Office base for Sports Development                                                                      |

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| Facility                                  | Location   | Facilities and Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           |            | function. Small 'free-weights room. Close to specialist sports college (Park High).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>4. Guinea Gap</b>                      | Seacombe   | Split site. Victorian swimming pool, separate indoor hall (converted drill hall). Wet side refurbished 20 years ago to create rectangular training tank and freeform pool. Separate MUGA. Serves local community.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>5. Leasowe Recreation Centre</b>       | Wallasey   | Built in early 1970's, partly refurbished in 2004. 6 lane 25m pool, 6 court sports hall, gym, 3 squash courts, studio, grass pitches, adjacent to PFI school with community facilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>6. West Kirby Concourse</b>            | West Kirby | Built in 1974. Ahead of its time when constructed as it incorporates a leisure centre, library, one-stop shop, youth centre and health centre.<br><br>Adjacent to other 'public sector' buildings including a fire station and sheltered accommodation. Facilities include 'L' shaped swimming pool, 6 court sports hall, fitness suite (converted café), large studio, 3 x squash courts, bar/café and activity rooms. |
| <b>7. Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre</b> | Bidston    | Built in 1995 part funded by LTA. 6 indoor and 7 outdoor courts. STP. Additional 4 court sports hall. Recently converted fitness suite. Studio/Crèche. Grass pitch. Five a side courts under development.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>8. Woodchurch Leisure Centre</b>       | Woodchurch | 1970's leisure centre and theatre. 25m pool and separate learner pool. Adjacent to BSF school and existing new school sports centre. Discussions with potential partners/Tranmere Rovers. Theatre in poor condition and other public areas in need of investment. M53 acts as a barrier to people from the East of the Motorway.                                                                                        |

### Sports Development

- 2.22 The Sports Development Unit delivers significant community benefit for a relatively small investment. The service is integrated with leisure facilities and with community agencies, other partners and stakeholders. The wide range of activities, events and programmes are targeted at areas of greatest need and contribute to the Council's wider agenda and priorities. The service is however vulnerable to cuts being both non-statutory and non-facility based. Many of the people delivering the service are on externally funded fixed term contracts. The Sports Development Unit focuses almost exclusively on indoor sports facilities and there is scope for developing further

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involvement in the Parks and Countryside Service. It has good partnership programmes with Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Health Service and Police.

### **Parks and Countryside Services**

- 2.23 The Service is responsible for managing and maintaining 1,505 ha of land across 272 sites. In addition to the extensive stretches of beautiful coastline; this comprises a broad range of open space provision. The Service has an established hierarchy of provision which was established in the 1991 Parks and Open Spaces Development Plan. The 2007/08 Parks and Countryside Service Plan set out comprehensive objectives for service delivery. Management plans are in the process of production for 166 parks and open spaces. The service currently has 32 parks Friends Groups and holds two parks friends forums each year. A Parks Partnership has been established to represent the friends groups and a Parks Champion has been designated.
- 2.24 There are 41 Allotment sites (1,689 plots), 60 Parks, 6 Country Parks, 7 Local Nature Reserves, 27 Natural Areas, 4 Golf Courses( 3 x 18 hole and 1x 9 hole), 24 Sports Grounds, 70 Playground areas( 45 within parks and 25 standalone ) and a number of natural open space areas in the Borough.
- 2.25 There is a Beach lifeguard service that covers the coast between West Kirkby and Seacombe whilst the beaches are managed in conjunction with the Ranger Service and Parks staff. The Service also manages the Crematorium, 9 cemeteries and 7 closed churchyards.
- 2.26 Wirral Council provides some very high quality parks and open spaces for the benefit of the local community. The Wirral Council has achieved 8 Green Flag Parks. Birkenhead Park, the world's first urban park has undergone a £11.5m upgrade to restore the Park to its former glory; the improvements will also ensure the Park continues to be a major events venue.

### **Golf Courses**

- 2.27 There are 14 golf courses on Wirral, 4 of which are municipal facilities. The four courses are:
- **Arrowe**
  - **Brackenwood**
  - **Hoylake**
  - **Warrens**
- 2.28 The service operates at a surplus, but has recently fallen short of the ambitious income targets set by the Council. The municipal golf market generally in the UK is declining as private sector courses become more numerous and accessible. If the golf courses in Wirral are to remain a net financial contributor, the decline in attendances will need to be arrested and the service will need to be continuously monitored and promoted with additional investment in the infrastructure of the courses.

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### Key Issues for Cultural Services

2.29 Table 3 below summarises the key issues in each of the existing Cultural Service areas, which are a result of the factors described above, and need to be addressed strategically to deliver the identified future Vision.

**Table 3 Key Issues for Cultural and Leisure Service Areas**

| SERVICE AREA                | KEY ISSUES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sport and Recreation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed portfolio, many poor quality</li> <li>• Too many built assets</li> <li>• Traditional facility mix (except Concourse Leisure Centre)</li> <li>• Significant maintenance backlog</li> <li>• High staffing costs – (high proportion of expenditure)</li> <li>• Changed expectations of customers</li> <li>• Increasing competition</li> <li>• High support costs</li> <li>• Potential spiral of decline through lack of investment</li> </ul>                                                                           |
| <b>Libraries</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many built assets</li> <li>• Many buildings in poor condition, some exceptionally so, some buildings not fit for purpose</li> <li>• Significant capital investment needs</li> <li>• Insufficient revenue resources</li> <li>• High staffing costs – (high proportion of expenditure)</li> <li>• Inadequate Book Fund</li> <li>• Investment in ICT required</li> <li>• High external support costs</li> </ul>                                                                                                           |
| <b>Arts and Heritage</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some buildings not fit for purpose and some not used to capacity</li> <li>• Need for capital investment</li> <li>• Lack of revenue resources</li> <li>• High staffing costs, particularly the bars service</li> <li>• Focus of service? - the service includes both built and non-built assets and assets, plus the collections</li> <li>• Investment in the Floral Pavilion effectively makes this the key Wirral Council facility in the Borough for the arts and entertainment</li> <li>• High support costs</li> </ul> |

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| SERVICE AREA                 | KEY ISSUES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Community Centres</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some buildings poor and unfit for purpose</li> <li>• Significant need for capital investment</li> <li>• Inconsistency in the ability of Joint Management Committees</li> <li>• Insufficient revenue resources</li> <li>• Some overlaps and duplication in provision with other Wirral Council services e.g. Youth Service, Adult Social Care</li> <li>• Unclear Service Focus</li> <li>• High support costs</li> </ul>                    |
| <b>Parks and Countryside</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant need for investment - capital and revenue</li> <li>• Variations in quality of provision</li> <li>• Poor Grounds Maintenance standards</li> <li>• Inadequate revenue resources</li> <li>• Uneven distribution of provision across the Borough</li> <li>• Failing infrastructure in parks and open spaces</li> <li>• Buildings in poor condition</li> <li>• Perceived lack of security</li> <li>• High support costs</li> </ul> |

2.30 Analysis of the above main key issues identifies a number of common themes in relation to Cultural Services as follows:

- Service priorities and target outcomes not defined or uniformly communicated
- High costs, variable usage
- Too many poor quality buildings, not fit for purpose
- Staffing costs high proportion of expenditure
- Significant need for capital investment
- Inadequate revenue resources
- Changing expectations and increased competition
- High support costs charged centrally

2.31 The overall impact of these key issues is Cultural Services which:

- Are unable to address corporate priorities
- Have an unsustainable financial position
- Are reactive not responsive

2.32 In order to realise the identified Vision for Cultural Services there will need to be:

- Clear political leadership
- Significant change in the way services are provided and managed
- Strategic planning for the Wirral in relation to facility location, accessibility and service provision (hierarchy of provision)
- An agreed development plan
- Agreed service output and priority areas for provision and targeting

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- 2.33 It is also important to note that in addressing the issues facing Cultural Services, Wirral Council has an opportunity to start considering the same challenges both in relation to other departments and at corporate level. This is particularly relevant to asset management and provision, which now has a new corporate direction and mandate.
- 2.34 There are a number of critical areas in which action will be needed to realise and implement the Vision for the future; whilst the Vision will not be delivered overnight, there will need to be specific action taken in terms of the following, to facilitate wider change and eventual achievement of the Vision.

### **Actions Required**

- Re-provision (fewer but better facilities, used to optimum capacity, and/or shared with other compatible community provision)
- Re-aligning resources (to ensure resources are prioritised and allocated to deliver required outcomes)
- Alternative delivery options (services could be delivered at alternative venues, or by agencies other than Wirral Council)
- New and extended partnerships (this could also involve training and capacity building to facilitate service delivery through new and existing partnerships)
- Inter-directorate approach and communication (improved communication and understanding of roles, responsibilities and asset requirements, could improve effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery across a number of service areas, including culture and leisure)
- Improved quality- facilities and service delivery

## SECTION III - THE VISION FOR FUTURE PROVISION

### The Vision for Future Cultural Services Provision

*‘Through integrated management, deliver high quality, multi purpose facilities concentrated in strategic locations to benefit the whole community of Wirral’*

- 3.1 The above Vision for Cultural Services means achieving change in two main areas – the provision, use and development of the buildings used to deliver the services, and the means by which the services are actually delivered. In terms of **Facilities**, there is an opportunity to provide fewer, better quality buildings, which are fit for purpose i.e. facilities are appropriate for delivery of the services they provide. If fewer buildings are provided, and they are better quality, the revenue costs will be less, which means investment can be made to ensure they are fit for purpose. Many buildings in the borough are not fully utilised by the services which are currently responsible for operating them, because of the way in which services, including Cultural Services, are delivered. There is a real opportunity to continue to deliver the services, but by combining several functions within one building, the building is used more effectively, and operating costs can be reduced. This approach also makes it easier for the community to access a range of services in one location.
- 3.2 In relation to the actual **Services**, there is significant potential for their development and delivery to be more integrated through internal, cross-departmental partnerships, based in the same buildings. This will facilitate the development of further external partnerships, benefiting a number of services. More integrated services will be more effective, and both in terms of delivery, and their revenue and capital requirements. Based on the identification of the outcomes that need to be achieved by the services, it will be possible to allocate appropriate resources, human and infrastructure.
- 3.3 The rationale for this approach is a combination of factors, including changed and increased community expectations, the need for services to be both strategic and sustainable, and the drive to reduce costs while ensuring operational effectiveness.
- 3.4 It is also important to note that in addressing the issues facing Cultural Services, Wirral Council has a significant opportunity to start considering the same challenges both in relation to other departments and at corporate level. This is particularly relevant to asset management and provision. The opportunities identified for this cross-departmental approach are detailed in Section II of this report.
- 3.5 The fundamental concept for the future Vision of the Cultural Services is that the services will clearly contribute to the three main identified priority policies/strategies of the Council, by providing better quality, but fewer, more strategically located facilities. This will improve access, and increase the partnership working at local level, because some services may be provided from existing buildings which are not fully utilised by other services. The provision of fewer buildings will reduce revenue costs, and facilitate investment in the services and infrastructure where it is most needed, including the potential of some new build.
- 3.6 The key partners within Wirral Council for Cultural Services are Adult Social Care and Children and Young People’s Services; working together, all services may be able to utilise existing buildings more effectively, and deliver an improved and extended service to local people.

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- 3.7 Wirral PCT includes a Community Health Development Team which already works in partnership with some parts of Cultural Services, and uses some community centres for service delivery. The 'Health Trainers' initiative presents a significant opportunity to further link service provision, particularly in relation to the physical activity and health agenda.
- 3.8 Adult Social Care is currently undertaking a review of its Luncheon Club provision, the majority of which is funded by the department, but delivered at community centres across the borough. The review of community centre provision should therefore be linked to the Luncheon Club review.
- 3.9 Children and Young People's Services are currently undertaking two relevant service reviews. The first relates to Youth Club provision and its future delivery, which could be linked to the future provision of community centres. The second is the ongoing review of primary education in the borough (four rounds of Primary School reviews of which two have been completed, and the third is being consulted on in Autumn 2007), plus the changes happening in the 22 secondary schools, which is likely to result in an increased number of Foundation Schools.
- 3.10 Bringing services together, operating from fewer, but better quality buildings is a significant change, but a critically important opportunity for the local community. This approach will facilitate increased accessibility i.e. longer opening hours, and provide a means of integrating service provision. The latter will bring together both communities and professional service deliverers and in so doing, increase understanding of local needs, partnership opportunities, and the most effective use of all available resources.
- 3.11 On the basis of the above, there is opportunity to do things differently, without ceasing service provision, and there is also a need to do things more effectively, to a better quality, given the revenue pressures faced by Wirral Council. Implementing the Vision will require a process of re-shaping the current estate, or asset portfolio, of Wirral Council.

### **How Could Cultural Services be Delivered in the Future?**

#### **Principles for Future Provision**

- 3.12 The principles for future provision and delivery of leisure and cultural services, which also reflect the Corporate priorities and the Council's strategic objectives, are:
- **Re-provision** (fewer but better facilities strategically located, used to optimum capacity, and/or shared with other compatible community provision; no more single function buildings) i.e. multi-purpose, multi-function community hubs, based on a clear hierarchy of provision
  - **Improved accessibility** to facilities and services for the whole community of the Wirral (based on activity, opening hours, and pricing policies reflecting local need, and a safe and clean environment)
  - **Re-aligned and targeted resources** (to ensure resources are prioritised and allocated to deliver required outcomes)



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- **Implementation of alternative delivery options** where appropriate (services could be delivered at alternative venues, or by agencies other than Wirral Council)
- **New and extended partnerships** (this could also involve training and capacity building to facilitate service delivery through new and existing partnerships)
- **Increased community involvement in the management and operation** of community spaces
- **Improved quality** of both facility and operational service delivery (based on more effective and efficient use of resources, reflecting local needs)
- **Inter-directorate approach and communication** (improved communication and understanding of roles, responsibilities and asset requirements, could improve effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery across a number of service areas, including culture and leisure)

### **Service Outputs**

- 3.13 Given that there are a number of different elements to leisure and cultural services, which are delivered through a range of resources (people, buildings, partnerships etc), it is important to identify the desired outputs from each element, so that resources can be appropriately aligned. The following recommended outputs for each element of the services also reflect the Corporate priorities, and the strategic objectives for the Council.

### **Sport and Recreation**

- 3.14 The identified outputs from the sport and recreation service are provision of:
- A network of strategically located specialist and community sports facilities, accessible to all
  - Maximised opportunities for participation in a range of activities to improve health, and encourage social cohesion
  - Opportunities for all to learn and develop new skills to reach their full potential
  - Safe, clean and well-maintained sport and leisure facilities
  - Partnerships with other providers of services to the community (education, health, youth services, adult social care etc) to encourage use of facilities and services, especially for hard to reach groups and individuals

### **Libraries**

- 3.15 The identified outputs from the library service are provision of:
- A wide range of books for lending, reference (main libraries only), and bibliography use
  - Life Long Learning opportunities for all
  - Community access to IT, including the Internet
  - Specialist support for research, local history and education
  - Information and advice relevant to the local area, and wider region
  - Publicly accessible, neutral spaces, co-located with other community services
  - Access to Wirral Council and National Government information

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### **Arts and Heritage**

3.16 The identified outputs from the arts and heritage service are:

- The provision of performance spaces for both professional and amateur groups
- The promotion and development of arts programmes for the Borough
- To provide access to specialist art and historical collections relevant to the Wirral
- Conservation and preservation of historical and /or specialist material unique to the Wirral
- To develop interpretative material reflecting the value and importance of collections
- Provision of publicly accessible space for local and touring exhibitions

### **Community Services**

3.17 The identified outputs from community services are:

- To support a network of community managed across Wirral
- Development of community networks by working with established and developing groups to form community anchor organisations that will be the driving force in community renewal
- To assist and empower local communities in development of sustainable facilities
- Partnership working to enable tailored activities, services and support to improve the health, well being, education and employment needs within localised communities
- To promote community cohesion

### **Parks and Countryside**

3.18 The identified outputs from the parks and countryside services are provision of:

- A network of high quality open spaces, play areas and parks, recognised through quality awards and standards i.e. Green Flag and the establishment of a quality standard for the Wirral's Parks and Countryside Service
- A new hierarchy of facilities recognising facilities according to their sub-regional, district-wide or local significance
- Opportunities to improve community health and well-being and sustain the Boroughs rich and varied habitat and wildlife value
- Community engagement and involvement through management of parks and green spaces
- A service delivery model which adopts a more functional approach with teams specialising on the management and maintenance of the coast, countryside, parks, cemeteries and golf rather than an area based integrated grounds maintenance service
- A service which focuses on managing and maintaining the parks and countryside facilities and moves away from offering a grounds maintenance service to Housing Trusts, Schools and other external agencies
- Greater use of Section 106 planning agreements to provide funding for improvements to existing parks

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- 3.19 Having explained the concept for future provision and delivery of Cultural Services, the following paragraphs set out initial thoughts on what this could mean in each of the specific service areas. It is important to stress that at this stage these are only ideas, and there remains the need for more detailed consultation and consideration of the practicalities at local level.

### **Cultural Services Delivery**

#### **Library Services**

- 3.20 Library services are a statutory requirement of local government; the only such element within Cultural Services. The library service therefore needs to be comprehensive, but it is not necessary to provide all elements of the service in every library facility.
- 3.21 The concept for the future of the service is to change the focus from buildings to community provision, based on fewer better quality and more accessible services and facilities. Libraries role as access points for information on local and central government and providing Life Long Learning Opportunities for all should be emphasised in any re-provision. Their co-location with other community services will help provide publicly accessible, neutral spaces for communities.
- 3.22 As with other leisure facilities there will be a hierarchy of provision with one central library providing a full range of facilities and extended opening hours including Sunday. A number of satellite libraries open 6 days per week and then a range of community provision appropriate to its location and with an emphasis on outreach to local communities. This would include development of the existing 'home books' service for elderly uses and 'books on prescription' being developed with the PCT.
- 3.23 Libraries will need to make further use of new technology both to allow users to self-issue and return books and to assist with monitoring the collections. Libraries, whether free standing or part of co-located facilities should be recognised as centres for internet access supported by corporate investment and closely linked to Wirral Council's provision.

#### **Community Centres**

- 3.24 The future provision of community centre services is critical to the development of the multi-function/multi-purpose building concept, because community centres provide space in which other activities and services can be delivered. This does not however imply that Wirral Council has to retain the management of all existing community buildings.
- 3.25 There are a number of existing community centres which should be managed by their JMCs (Joint Management Committees) now given the capability and capacity of these local organisations. Other existing Wirral Council community centres, which could be managed in the same way in the future, if given some capacity building support in the short term, and in some cases, some investment in the built asset.

#### **Arts and Heritage Services**

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- 3.26 Based on our initial assessment, there are a number of opportunities for changing and improving the current service e.g. reducing buildings, replacement facilities, facility relocation, moving provision, making better use of existing space, shared provision, alternative delivery means/management etc. In considering these options it is important, however to be clear about the givens for provision i.e. the new Floral Pavilion, which is a borough wide facility.
- 3.27 There are a number of immediate priorities to be addressed in ensuring the arts and museum service is more cost effective, and fit for purpose for the long term. These are:
- Rationalising the Service, particularly on the museum side and reducing the number of facilities. This does reduce costs but there will be costs relating to undertaking this and costs to improve the remaining services Rationalising the museum facilities: Currently the revenue and capital budget for this service is too small to maintain a high quality service. The buildings need development and the staff resources are spread too thinly, with only one, the leader of the service coming from a professional background.
  - Developing the rationalised museum service: Once a decision has been made on which museum facilities will exist in a new structure, an improvement plan for these facilities needs to be drawn up to enable them to increase income and usage, and undertake more projects that can help the council meet its priorities and customer needs.
  - Making a decision on the future of Egerton Bridge and Shore Road Pumping Station
  - Investigate the contracting out of the bar services to identify the financial impact on the overall service.
  - Appointing an Arts Development Officer with Arts Council England support and appointing a Museums' events/education officer.
  - A review of staff roles needs to happen across both the Arts and Museums side with the ambition of being able to appoint an Arts Development Officer and a Museums Events/Education Officer. In addition the museum team needs to have more professional support.

### **Sport and Recreation**

- 3.28 The work of the Sport and Recreation Section is predominantly based around providing quality facilities within its leisure centres and trying to encourage more people to play more often. There is a need for fewer, but better quality sports and leisure facilities, which provide more effectively for the overall Wirral community, whilst addressing existing deficiencies in provision i.e. good quality water space, pay and play fitness facilities, and community accessible all weather pitches. There will be a need to invest significant sums of capital money over the next 5 to 10 years to improve, maintain and address existing deficiencies in provision.
- 3.29 The onset of the programmed BSF funds will require a co-ordinated approach with the Children and Young People's Department to ensure there is a strategic and integrated development of sports facilities and activity programmes across Wirral which meets the demands of not only the schools, but the local communities. The Sport and Recreation Section will also continue to work closely with the Partnership Development Managers on the delivery of curriculum led sports and more specifically on the 5 hour Children and Young People's Sports Offer and on the specific projects within the SPAA.

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- 3.30 The Sports Development Unit will be working closely with the Sport and Physical Activity Alliance (SPAA) over the next two years to deliver targeted projects within the community. This, together with the development of the 'Youth Sports Nights' project and sport specific governing body project work, means that there will be a more integrated approach towards sports development linked to existing resources.
- 3.31 A key partnership for the section will be with the Health Promotion Unit within Wirral PCT on specific programmes within the Sport and Physical Activity Alliance aimed at increasing physical activity and reducing obesity. The section should also develop links with the PCT in terms of capital projects that foster and embed joint initiatives and targets within core delivery.

### **Parks and Countryside**

- 3.32 The future of parks and countryside is predominantly about improving the quality of existing facilities. Wirral has already achieved eight Green Flags, one Green Pennant and one Green Heritage Award, but in order to continue to increase and extend this achievement it will be necessary to change the way that parks and open spaces are maintained. The Parks and Countryside Service needs to move away from the remnants of the integrated area-based grounds maintenance service that operated under the era of compulsory competitive tendering to a more functional approach with specialist teams managing and maintaining discrete elements of the service.
- 3.33 The Council's Tourism Strategy has highlighted the importance to Wirral of the Coast and Countryside. It is therefore recommended that a specialist Coast Team be established to manage Wirral Country Park, Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve, the North Wirral Coastal Park, beach cleaning and the lifeguard service. A separate Countryside Team should be established to maintain the remaining country parks and nature reserves. A Golf Team should be established to manage and maintain the 4 municipal golf courses and a Cemeteries Team should be established to maintain cemeteries. The remaining staff within the Parks and Countryside Service should be restructured to form a Parks Team operating from two rather than four depots and will be responsible for the remaining parks and open spaces.
- 3.34 The existing service specifications should be reviewed and aligned with the new functional teams and staff and financial resources should be allocated to the new teams as appropriate to ensure that the desired outcomes can be achieved in terms of quality. The new structure will enable the Parks and Countryside Service to focus more on the needs of tourists and local communities and to work more closely with Friends groups and other user groups.
- 3.35 This service also has asset management issues to address e.g. existing sports pavilions, many of which are in a poor condition. Given the approach to future overall provision of cultural services, it also makes sense that wherever possible, built assets are shared, to maximise usage. There are two main options for the existing buildings in the parks; these are transfer of buildings to local sports clubs or community groups, who, with some support could become responsible for the day to day running of the facility, including opening and closing, cleaning etc. This approach works where one club, or a partnership of clubs takes responsibility for the sports pavilion/changing

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rooms they use on a weekly basis. Investment to improve existing buildings will be required before such club lease arrangements could be put in place.

- 3.36 The second option involves increasing the use of the building by community groups, when it is not hired to sports clubs. This approach only applies to buildings that have appropriate space for other uses than changing. Increased usage will increase revenue, which could be used to re-invest in the built infrastructure of parks and gardens. . Investment to improve existing buildings will be required before such community use could be developed.
- 3.37 It will also be important to consider the future role of the Friends of Parks, who may be able, with some support, to take an extended role in relation to management of some parks/gardens/open spaces, for the benefit of the local community.
- 3.38 Future delivery of parks and countryside should involve an extended partnership approach, given the nature of the provision. It is also likely that following more detailed discussion of the integrated concept for other elements of Cultural Services, that there may be additional recommendations to link parks and gardens provision, and specifically sports pitches with the multi-functional site approach.