

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Phill Brightmore
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Leisure and Recreation
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	David Armstrong – Corporate Director for Delivery Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment to Members of the Council on matters relevant to his portfolio.

1 LEISURE & CULTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Members will be aware that we continue with our detailed review of all leisure, culture, parks and library services. Since taking on this portfolio I have been determined that every option on the table is fully investigated. I am unequivocal in my view that we find the best, most sustainable model of delivery for these vital services.

They are all unique, they are all valued and they all play a massive part in delivering our 20 Pledges and improving the quality of life our residents enjoy. That's why I will not accept or propose any option which does not allow these services to improve, to adapt to meet more modern needs, and thrive into the future.

We continue to review the external analysis we have had completed, alongside the many excellent ideas and suggestions we have received from hundreds of local people and of course our own dedicated workforce. I hope to start bringing forward initial proposals soon, which we will then use as a basis for more conversations and consultations with everyone who has an interest in these important services.

While this work is ongoing, it is equally important we keep maintaining our services to the highest possible standard. Therefore, I am pleased we have begun recruiting staff to enable our services to improve and become more commercial. I have also been delighted to confirm a series of major investments into our services in the past few months, totalling more than £2 million.

We have seen improvements at Woodchurch Leisure Centre, allowing for more swimming classes and instruction to take place. Woodchurch is well-loved by those who use it and in a central location which makes it ideal to become the main focus of our swimming education – a key skill which is also an excellent form of exercise.

I know some people were concerned about a possible reduction in service at Woodchurch Leisure Centre and I was pleased I was able to find an opportunity to take that proposal off the table. Woodchurch Leisure Centre will be remaining open as before, but we must encourage more people to use it.

I was also delighted to be able to deliver an investment of almost £800,000 to create a new artificial grass football pitch at Leasowe Leisure Centre. This shows yet again how we are focused on finding ways to develop and improve our leisure services.

Junior football participation has grown rapidly in the last 10 years, including boys' and girls' grass root teams, and the aim is to create a centre of excellence for girls' football in the region. As well as responding to increasing demand for football pitches this will also support our efforts to encourage more people to exercise from an earlier age and stay healthy for longer.

Another major investment is happening in the well-loved West Kirby Marine Lake. This is a landmark location and it's vital that people understand this council is investing and not abandoning the assets our residents' value. The West Kirby Marine Lake is of local, regional, national and international importance when it comes to water sports.

More about the [Woodchurch](#), [Leasowe](#) and [West Kirby](#) investments can be found on the Wirral Globe website.

Our parks were once again in the spotlight recently as 26 were winners of the prestigious Green Flag award. Taking their place on the list this year are Walker Park, Prenton and Meols Parade Gardens. The 26 nationally recognised awards mean the borough once more has the most Green Flags of any local authority in the North of England. The management of Birkenhead Park in particular is now being used as a model of best practice for the UK, and I hope all Members will join me in congratulating our staff for their continued excellence.

This international award is a sign Wirral's green spaces boast the highest possible environmental standards, are beautifully maintained and have excellent visitor facilities. The beauty of the parks highlights the hard work and dedication of the staff and members of the public who volunteer their time to keep them to this award-winning standard.

Along with its green flag award, Birkenhead Park has once again retained its Green Heritage status for its work on keeping the grade I listed parks historic characteristics at such a high standard.

Once again, this outstanding result showcases Wirral as home to some of the country's best parks and open spaces. I'm immensely proud of our parks as I'm sure residents are too. The credit for this incredible achievement should be shared by our dedicated staff but also the local heroes who give up their time to keep their local park such outstanding areas of natural beauty.