

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Chris Meaden
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Leisure, Sport & Culture
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Clare Fish, Strategic Director, Families & Well-Being

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

1. LIBRARIES

The Summer Reading Challenge is a national creative reading programme organised by The Reading Agency and the UK public library network and is for children up to age 12. Our libraries help support reading in new ways, combining free access to books with social activities and a creative online element. Children taking part in the Challenge read more over the summer, choosing for themselves from a wide range of books in the library. Every year the Challenge has a new theme for the 2014 Challenge was *Mythical Maze* and is the sixteenth annual Summer Reading Challenge and Wirral Libraries has participated in the scheme since the outset. This year on Wirral 7472 children joined the challenge, 4127 fully completed the challenge and we gained 408 new library members. This is an increase in numbers completing the challenge and joining the library over the previous year. The service was still able to offer 315 summer activities and it was really encouraging to see 17 young people (aged 14–18) volunteer as summer reading support in nine of our libraries. In the recent national return it showed Wirral second highest performing in the North West and I thank everyone for their help in achieving this and hope all participants enjoyed the experience

Birkenhead Reference Library Displays – we ensured a number of the authority’s Treasures are on display at Birkenhead Reference Library to commemorate November as the month of remembrance in this significant centenary year of the First World War. They include war diaries, memorabilia and recently bound copies of the London Illustrated News for the war years. These have been well received by our services users and my thanks to our staff in ensuring the Libraries help commemorate this poignant anniversary.

Wirral Libraries large range of literary and cultural events has continued and held the annual Bookfest for Wirral in October with a wide range of talks showcasing both national and local authors, poets and historians. My thanks to all those who supported this popular event and they were well attended well received and enjoyed.

Chris Salmon Poetry competition was launched on 15th September. This year’s theme is “Light” and the closing date is 15th January and I encourage all aspiring poets to submit an entry to this highly worthwhile event.

Our investment in technology in Libraries helps meet the budget challenge all services face. One key example is our self-serve technology (called RFID) which has most recently been rolled out to Bebington and Birkenhead libraries with seven sites now having it. We will install it at Wallasey Central in the New Year. This does require our book stock to be tagged and I am pleased that this is undertaken with the help of Wirral Autistic Society as part of the "Step into Work" programme. To show effective it can be Rock Ferry Library has 89% of their book transactions through the RFID kiosks, which exceeds expectations nationally of 80% self-serve versus staff issue and this importantly allows our staff to concentrate in helping users and visitors with more detailed tasks.

2. LEISURE SERVICES

Guinea Gap Redevelopment – the 5-a-side pitches are due to be handed over to Wirral Council on 28th November 2014, and will be open for general public use as soon as possible thereafter. The new Fitness Suite (the refurbishment of the Sports Hall) is due to be handed over to Wirral Council on 19th December 2014, and is planned to be open for new customers the first week in January 2015.

West Kirby Concourse – work is due to start on the new Fitness Suite, mid January 2015 and is due to be finished around Easter time.

Golf – Wirral Council has now formally withdrawn from the joint golf procurement exercise with Cheshire West and Chester, due to value for money concerns. Officers have now been tasked with bringing a further report back to Members on the future delivery of municipal golf in Wirral, following detailed consultation with golf user groups and organisations.

RLNI – the Council is still in discussions with the RNLI in terms of transferring the Beach Lifeguarding service, in readiness for the new summer season.

3. BONFIRE NIGHT FIREWORK DISPLAYS

This year's council bonfire night and firework displays took place at 8 of Wirral's Parks (Birkenhead Park, Central Park, Mersey Park, Woodchurch Leisure Centre, Mayer Park, Upton Park, Lingham Park and Leasowe Adventure Playground). The firework displays were enjoyed and appreciated by large numbers of people at each location with a number of compliments for some spectacular and enjoyable shows. We also received very positive feedback from the emergency services for the borough's commitment to putting on the events and community safety. The cost of the displays is less than £20 thousand pounds in total. We received a lot of compliments congratulating us on the organisation and running of the displays, an example of which is "Thank you so much for the marvellous firework display last night at Mayer Park. Please don't ever think to discontinue these annual displays. We are a couple of seniors. As well as loving fireworks, we also appreciate the excuse to get out of the house on a November night, to use the excellent Merseyrail service and to mingle with a lot of younger folk all having fun. Thank you again to all concerned".