

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

1. WILLIAMSON ART GALLERY & BIRKENHEAD PRIORY

The Cabinet has decided to reverse the previously agreed budget option, to facilitate the exploration of a new management arrangement for the Williamson and the Priory through a service level arrangement with National Museums Liverpool. Discussions around these arrangements are currently taking place and will hopefully lead to new opportunities for the development of community galleries alongside the already existing gallery spaces. The Council will also work with the Friends Group and Members of the Strategic Shadow Board in developing ideas for the future.

2. FLORAL PAVILION

The Floral continues to provide a diverse range of entertainment for the people of Wirral. It has just had a very successful pantomime season with large numbers of visitors over the Christmas and New Year period. A review of the Floral's activities over the last 12 months will be completed by the end of March and this will inform the approach to be taken in planning the future programmes and operational requirements. The emphasis is on providing high quality entertainment, maximising income opportunities and reviewing current arrangements to ensure that they are cost effective.

As Cabinet Member I want to thank the staff for all their hard work over the last 12 months.

3. LIBRARIES

The proposed changes to our 15 Community Libraries began on Monday 2nd March which has seen the original proposal to reduce opening hours amended and increased up to 18 hours per week at each site. Our consultation with friends and users received over 220 responses as well as responses from our staff. I first want to thank everyone who responded and have helped us shape this significant change. It is an extremely positive outcome that we have been able to work with affected and interested groups and reach a proposal which mitigates the main concerns which were raised.

We will continue to work with service providers and other groups to minimise the disruption felt by people using these services. I am happy to see through the consultation process we received a

number of proposals to support the service both in general and at specific sites. We will now prioritise working with those people and organisations in an effort to further develop the service.

I can also report on just some of the many ongoing activities that our Library service continues to successfully provide;

Our Local History Week ran from 9th to 14th March and featured presentations from a number of speakers in a wide range of our libraries with a Local History Fair held at Wallasey Central Library.

We recognise how important reading from an early age helps, as our children learn and develop, so we have renewed our successful Book Start Partnership for 2015/16. This will continue to see our library service offering free high quality Book Start packs for all families with babies and pre-school children.

4. LEISURE SERVICES

At Guinea Gap we have converted the former Sports Hall, into a state of the art fitness suite which includes a host of exercise machines including cross-trainers, treadmills, rowing machines and exercise bikes. It has modern changing facilities, a free weights area and an adjoining studio for popular exercise classes such as Zumba, Kettlebells and Boxercise. The fitness suite will be formally opened on Monday 9th March. Staff consultation on the Phase 2 remodelling exercise has now opened with the proposed new flexible way of working, saving just under half a million pounds.

The improvements at West Kirby are well on the way and are due to be ready in the next few months. These improvements will include an expanded fitness suite, new studios and improved changing facilities.

5. PARKS & COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

The Service has secured Public Health Funding to update four play areas this year to encourage young children to get active - Earlston Gardens, The Puddydale, Oakdale Park and Eastham Rake. The new improved play areas will encourage and enable physically active play for a wide range of ages and abilities. After carrying out consultation at local schools and libraries to get input on what children would like to see in their local play area, two sites are now complete (Earlston and Puddydale) and the last two are under construction and due for completion before the end of March.

The Wirral Way Widening and Safety Improvements Scheme was one of several major access improvements to have taken place at Wirral Country Park this year. The Wirral Autistic Society were successful in obtaining Love Wirral and West Wirral Community Funding for the construction of new surfaced paths giving access to all the Dee Cliffs and the pond cluster and a donation of £200 in memory of a regular park user from his family allowed us to link up a section of path leading from the Wirral Way to the barbecue site.

Recently a path leading from the overspill car park onto the Wirral Way was created using monies from the Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society. This links to a path funded by them last year and over £10,000 of funding from partners has allowed us to continue to improve access at Wirral Country Park this year.

Finally, new machinery purchased has allowed the Rangers to undertake improvements to the Dee Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) grassland at Thurstaston and to bring it into a 'Favourable Condition', as well as meadow management at North Wirral Coastal Park and on Hilbre Island.