

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LEISURE AND CULTURE

COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT **PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING**
CHIEF OFFICER:
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REFRESHING RE:FRESH

Re:Fresh supports the Council's priority to increase participation and improve health and well-being across all ages, and now has new look weekend junior swimming and family sessions at Daisyfield and Waves, incorporating fun inflatables. These have proved a popular addition to the free leisure programme. In the three months since the inflatables were introduced, session attendances have increased by 70%. Inflatables have also been a successful addition to the holiday programme of positive activities available across our leisure centres and were part of the Easter Holidays 'Off for Fun' offer too.

ARTS SERVICES

As part of the Pennine Lancashire Consortium Creativity Works, Arts have been successful in a grant application to Arts Council England for £99,500. The grant will cover a series of arts programmes across the districts for year 2012-13. Creativity Works is also pulling together a Creative People and Places bid for Pennine Lancashire which will bring in an investment into the arts of up to £3million over 3 years. We will know in June whether we have been successful.

As the development work on King William Street ends, the artwork has been installed for the planters. These are a series of glass panels with designs from children, young people and the wider community made into a series of colourful illustrations by glass artist Sarah Galloway. An exhibition of the artwork which inspired the designs is in the mezzanine gallery in Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery until June.

BLACKBURN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

Exhibitions are changing with two large shows due to start. The Northrop Loom factory is Blackburn's contribution to a set of exhibitions across the Northwest entitled 'Stories of the World'. All the exhibitions collectively tell the story of the region's global textile industry. This is a joint exhibition with Manchester Museums, the Harris Museum, Preston and Lancashire County Museum Service.

Structural building work required to refurbish Turton Tower, the borough's only Grade One listed building, has now started.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE

The Pilot Library Project at The Barlow Institute launched in February and has been very successful. The Library Service is contributing to the stock on offer but the service is operated by a group of very enthusiastic and well organised volunteers. This partnership is enabling previous mobile library users and other residents in the area to maintain access to a library service.

The grant funded Community Capacity Builders project closed at the end of March and was designed to establish a borough wide network supporting communities to become digitally active. In total, 57 local partner organisations signed up and 83 digital champions were trained to help get residents on line. So far 1308 residents have attended across 255 sessions. Some sustainability has been built in to continue the work on a smaller scale via some of the agencies and digital champions.

COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

Accrington Road is transferring under licence on 31st March and will be operated by the Community Association from that date. Greenfields is transferring under lease in the next couple of weeks. Attempts are being made to conclude the final agreement with the Barlow Management Committee. A steering group has been formed at Mill Hill and it is expected that a transfer will take place by July 2012. The consultation process for Bangor Street will be resumed in June 2012.

A training programme in partnership with the Community and Voluntary Service started on 29th March to support organisations to make the best possible choice about which governance model to adopt and to support any groups which are still struggling to complete their licences/leases.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The Youth Election results were declared on 21st March with over 36% of young people eligible to vote participating in the elections. The *Easter Off for Fun* programme ran for 2 weeks with programmes being delivered in Leisure and Community Centres plus outdoor venues. Trips and visits took place on the borough barge, *Bill Hunt*, plus residentials to Kentmere. Children with Disabilities accessed our Easter schemes at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre, and these included centre-based activities as well as various trips out. Wider diversionary programmes were delivered by the Targeted Youth Support Team throughout the school holiday period.

THEATRES AND EVENTS

The new look Blakeys has received excellent feedback with business improving by over 10% compared to last autumn. The number of functions and private bookings has also increased. The new stage arrangement has given King Georges Hall a useful smaller venue complimenting the larger

halls. The Utopia nights are selling out and there is a function or event in Blakeys every Saturday evening.

King Georges Hall has hosted a wide range of events over the last couple of months. Mike Harding sold out and the ballet Swan Lake was the highest attended ballet for several years. The popular Peppa Pig show sold 2,800 tickets over 3 dates. Martin Roscoe returned to play at King Georges Hall with the Halle orchestra and there was a variety of other events such as the Celebration of Dance by local schools and a Cathedral school choirs festival. Tickets are also going well for Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson playing "Thick as a Brick" also in April.

Darwen Library Theatre continued a successful run of events this year with Aladdin selling out at half term and a mix of comedy and music such as Lloyd Cole and James Byrne. The Mayor's Command Performance had to be re-arranged due to the snow but went ahead 3 weeks late. Hue & Cry has sold out, as has Blancmange. We have been able to add an extra date for Blancmange due to the demand.