

CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE AND HERITAGE – COUNCILLOR WRIGHT

Libraries

The library service had a very busy final quarter of 2014, with many activities across several libraries including activities and games, storytelling and a Dr Who club. Dan Worsley, a local storyteller delivered seven sessions to 120 children. The service worked closely with the Grundy Art Gallery on the Big Draw which saw 52 children participating in drawing and storytelling activities.

To develop the library staff further there was a change in the way that the Christmas activities were organised. Each team leader was invited to submit a bid for their Christmas activities, resulting in an excellent diary of events. These included Christmas Caboodle, Lego Christmas grotto, a Dickensian Christmas and some festive family fun days. A special Bookstart Bears Christmas Caper was held to encourage the promotion and sharing of books and reading with pre-school children and their families. There are many benefits of the Bookstart scheme, all of which fit in with the Council's priorities.

Closer relationships are being forged with the marketing team at the Grand Theatre. They are providing libraries with free tickets for relevant shows such as Twelfth Night, Mousetrap and Regeneration that we can use as competition prizes. Library staff have been devising the competitions and marketing them across social media. This is having a huge positive impact via social media. For November 2014, the Facebook interactions doubled from 4579 to 8798.

The Twitter book club has been cited within the North West as an excellent example of social media practice. The average number of tweets per directed discussions has averaged 140. This method is a "high impact, low maintenance" approach to providing service.

Staff training has been completed for Universal Credit, which was rolled out at the Blackpool Job Centres on 8 December 2014. The library service has seen some demand already, both with simple access (helping the customer to get online), or complex (supporting customers with the application).

Grundy Art Gallery

The new Collections Manager for the Grundy took up her post on 12 January. This is a new position which is a joint venture between the Heritage Service and the Grundy Art Gallery. It is a fixed-term appointment for three years externally funded in its entirety by The John Ellerman Foundation.

Blackpool Council owns a number of nationally significant collections relating to our seaside heritage. There have been significant improvements over the last few years in the way in which these collections are stored and looked after. This new post will enable us to extend that good practice consistently to all of the collections meaning that we can safeguard the physical wellbeing of our nationally significant historic collections into the future. It will also enable us to know more about the collections by bringing together information through a unified computerised data base and improve public access to the collections both physically and virtually.

This new development is well timed as, although it is separate from the museum project, it compliments it perfectly as we need to know more about our own collections as we plan the new museum. The museum will also be the ideal place to display collections.

The Grundy has also welcomed two other new members to the team in January. The Education Officer post is being taken up by Hannah Gaunt who will be joining us having previously worked at the Milton

Keynes Gallery. LeftCoast are also funding a part-time marketing officer to work with the Grundy on promoting their exhibitions and public programme as part of the new audience development plan. An internship for the gallery, funded through LeftCoast and the national Creative Employment programme is also about to be advertised.

Arts

The award-winning 'Under The Town' Festival for 2014 saw four young people from Blackpool working towards their Gold Arts Award (the nationally recognised qualification), plan and deliver a fantastic showcase of dance, music, film and art. The event, held at the Spanish Hall in the Winter Gardens, welcomed almost 300 audience members. They were able to share in the high-quality work produced by young people taking part in the year-long Arts Award programme delivered by the Arts Service. Other talented young people were also given an opportunity to showcase their work. Twenty four of the young people involved in working towards their Bronze, Silver and Gold Arts Award will have their portfolios moderated by an external assessor in January 2015 and a special award ceremony will take place in the spring.

Grand Theatre

The Grand Theatre learned in October 2014 that its application for £700,000 to Arts Council England to support the refurbishment of parts of the theatre had been successful. Building works will begin towards the end of January 2015. The theatre will be open and trading as normal during the refurbishment, as the works mainly affect peripheral areas such as dressing rooms, offices and the foyer, but not the theatre itself. When the work is complete the theatre will be more accessible to wheelchair-users, have improved and rationalised dressing room layouts and added a new, small-scale workshop and meeting facility on the second floor. The Project Management is being delivered by Blackpool Council's Property and Asset Management Division, with Preston-based architects, Cassidy and Ashton and local building contractor, Parkinson's. The works are planned to be completed by the end of September 2015.