

## **Report of the Cabinet Leader Councillor Pat Hackett**

I have announced that I intend to retire later this year after 26 years. I was first elected in 1994, and it has been my pleasure and my privilege to serve the people of this borough, including for most of the last year as Leader of a thriving council such as Wirral which has moved forward decisively in many areas, laying the foundations for a bright future for our borough.

One area I am particularly pleased to see significant progress is in Children's Services. The 2019 Ofsted inspection reported that the quality of services for children has "improved in all areas" particularly to help those at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, significant work to drive improvement in the fostering service, which has resulted in an increase in the number of foster carers approved to provide a home for children, and staff turnover and numbers of agency workers have reduced considerably leading to an improvement in stability of the workforce and meaning that children have been experiencing greater continuity and improved care.

Last year saw Wirral declare a climate emergency. This means that now and in the future all key Council decisions will require officers to consider their impact on the environment and climate change, across all services. Climate emergency plans include a new Tree Strategy which will see far more robust protection of our existing trees and a massive programme of afforestation across the borough, a new policy for encouraging the growth of wildflowers and planting for much endangered pollinators on public and private land including along hedges and verges, a review and update of the Council's procurement policy, reflecting the climate emergency, for example a shift away from meat in catering and a ban on all SUP and proposals for electric vehicle charging points.

One of the major highlights of the last year was Wirral's role as the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture. I was fortunate enough to be Leader of the council during the all-new Wirral Food and Drink Festival which ran over two days, as well as the evening performances by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Lightning Seeds, The Christians and China Crisis, all hosted in Birkenhead Park.

The Borough of Culture programme also saw Wirral host two major cycling events. Britain's cycling stars descending on Wirral in May when Birkenhead hosted a stage of the OVO Energy Tour Series for the first time, and an estimated 10,000 people turned out to line the streets around and watch the action around Hamilton Square. The last September we hosted both the start and finish of Stage Five of Britain's biggest professional cycle race, the OVO Energy Tour of Britain.

A major maintenance programme began in the summer of 2019 with close to £5 million being spent on maintenance and repairs to our roads – a massive undertaking: our highways form the largest, most valuable and most visible public asset within the council's control.

In addition, work started on the second phase of the LED replacement programme, this is the largest scheme that has been undertaken by the council and will dramatically improve Wirral's street lighting by improving safety and future-proofing the network. At the end of the two-year programme 26,000 streetlights will have been upgraded with LED lighting. Wirral has more than 35,000 streetlights and once complete, the streetlights will help to cut carbon emissions by 1,346.34 tCO<sub>2</sub> per year.

Wirral Growth Company – the 50:50 joint venture between Muse Developments and Wirral Council – has continued to make excellent progress with two major consultations seeking views on proposals for a major overhaul of Birkenhead town centre, including up to 280,000 sq ft of offices, a leisure centre, and a new home for Birkenhead Market.

In addition, the building work began on three major residential sites at Wirral Waters, which are set to breathe new life into 500 acres of former dockland and transform it into an internationally recognisable destination. Regeneration business, Peel L&P, has received £6m funding from Homes England to assist with the necessary site remediation work across all three residential projects, including Wirral Waters One, House by Urban Splash and Belong Village. The grant, which is one of the biggest ever HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) grants to be awarded outside London, will go towards essential remediation, infrastructure and public realm work, including cycling and pedestrian routes, to support the new homes.