

# SEND

## Weekly Newsletter

9 January 2019



Issue 23

# Looking ahead to a year of promise



## Claire takes the lead

As part of our development and restructure of services we're delighted to have appointed Claire Merchant-Jones to the new post of Strategic Lead for SEND.



Many of you know Claire through her management of the Transitions Team. She brings a wealth of knowledge, particularly within the post 16 sector, a determination for improvement, along with a passion for Inclusion.

Claire will work as a critical link between the operational side of the service and the Senior Management function across the local area to improve the experience for the children, young people and families across Somerset.

Welcome to the first edition of the year — we hope you had a lovely Christmas and are looking forward to 2019.

**This promises be a great year of progress for the Local Area SEND Casework Function as we at Somerset County Council and our partners strive to improve SEND services for all.**

There has been a restructure in the Council casework team, and part of this means new posts have been created — some have been filled, some are still awaiting the right candidate.

**That means in total the casework team is more than doubling—from 13 to 27.**

Four new posts have been created at a senior level to support the casework development, two posts of SEND Operational Manager have been created, advertised and remain vacant following interviews. A further recruitment drive will take place this month and we'll update you on how that goes in this newsletter.

As part of the restructure two posts of SEND Inclusion Managers were created to support significant areas of development.

We're pleased to announce these have been filled. Many of you will already know the successful candidates who have both been promoted from within the casework team.

We're sure you'll join us in congratulating Anna Woodward and Poppy Tuck on their promotions. Poppy will take the lead on Partnership, Engagement & Equality, whilst Anna will lead on improving Customer Service.

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## Here's to a promising New Year

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Casework Officers have been re-designated as Senior Assessment and Reviewing Officers, and we're very fortunate to secure funding to enhance the casework function with 10 new posts at Assessment and Reviewing Officers. These are fixed term until March 2020, but we hope with this additional capacity our focus on operations and making a difference can increase. We have recruited four so far—welcome to Demi Richardson; Paul Curran;

Annette Berry and Charlotte Bigby. At the end of term, we said goodbye to Teresa Avery who has left the team to return to teaching at Sky College. And at the end of February, it's farewell to Michelle Sercombe who is taking up a similar post in a neighbouring authority closer to home. We wish these colleagues all the very best for their future. The restructure will continue to be supported by our SEND Consultant Lisa Savage who will remain with us until the end of March 2019.

## Duty Line is a success

A SEND Duty Desk was implemented at the start of September 2018 following feedback from families in the Local Area.

And we're pleased to say this has been hugely successful — we have received a lot of positive comments which is great, thank you. So far there have been over 2,300 calls received.

**You can reach the Duty Desk on 01823 359720.**

Don't forget if you have SEND queries, you can also contact Somerset Direct on 0300 123 2224 or the local SENDIAS Service on 01823 355 578 or email [SomersetSENDIAS@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:SomersetSENDIAS@somerset.gov.uk)

## How will changes make it feel different for families?

Feedback from parents and the annual parent survey has told us the experience families in Somerset received from the casework team in recent years has been variable and needs improving.

The role of the caseworker is quite unique as the job title does not reflect the actual functions of the role. A caseworker is not a social worker or someone who works directly with children, young people and their families and this is often misunderstood.

So we felt the need to change job titles in our restructure replacing caseworker with Senior Assessment and

Reviewing Officers and Assessment and Reviewing Officers. These are more in line with the work of the SEND Team, whose prime function is to co-ordinate new assessments of special educational needs ensuring that where an Education, Health, Care Plan is required a good quality plan is issued within the statutory 20-week timeframe, and ensuring annual reviews of plans are held in a timely manner, and processed within the recommended guidelines. With our re-focus and increased capacity, we hope we can establish good

relationships with our families from the start of an assessment, and where possible ensure continuity of officer throughout the process. We will be collating feedback at the end of the assessment process in order to further improve our services and we would appreciate your support in this. If we are doing something wrong we need to know— we can't improve otherwise. Similarly positive feedback is just as important. If you receive a final EHCP for your child, please do take five minutes to complete and return the evaluation forms within the pack.

