



Felix Gilding is the new senior send commissioning manager, leading on SEND commissioning in the Family & Health Services commissioning team.

He told us about the work of the team:

I joined the team in March this year and quickly found what a wide-ranging role the team has in supporting many of Hertfordshire's services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Our focus on SEND children's social care also includes how we involve health and education to provide all round support. Examples include the county's personal care offer for SEND children, therapy services (physio, speech and language) and independent special schools.

We're incredibly passionate about the services that we support because of their importance for some of the county's most vulnerable people. It's also an area of work that is especially important to me, having grown up as a young adult with SEND in Hertfordshire - it is a real privilege to help our local community.

What sort of work do you do day to day?

The day to day life of a commissioning team is certainly a fast-paced and varied one! On the one hand it involves shaping how Hertfordshire's children's SEND social care is provided and ensuring that there is a range of high-quality services available which meet families' needs in the here and now. During Covid-19, this has included financially stabilising our homecare providers and helping our overnight short breaks services receive specialist training.

But commissioning is not just about making sure that current services work well, it's also about bringing new services to life in response to changes in people's needs. This has been especially true with Covid-19 which has offered an unprecedented challenge. Providers, brokerage, operations and commissioning have risen to this together over the last 10 weeks. One of our achievements that I'm most proud of is the 'Sunshine Suite', a specialist setting to provide emergency support for SEND children with Covid. We were able to re-shape the building and deliver advanced infection control training to staff, launching the site within 4 weeks thanks to successful collaboration with our local NHS partners, care providers and property colleagues.

How has Covid-19 changed the way you work?

Like all teams at HCC, Covid-19 has fundamentally changed our work and how we approach it. The scale of the challenge, as well as the lack of any precedent, has meant that we have had to be creative and quickly launch new ways of providing our service. Our work on the Short Break Local Offer is a good example of this. In 'normal' times local charities would deliver the Short Breaks Local Offer by running a series of events and activities, such as playschemes at a local special school. However, because of COVID and social distancing regulations, we were unable to provide the playschemes as usual. So, we adapted our Short Breaks Local Offer countywide for the Covid world, offering digital activities, providing advice lines for SEND families and establishing safe socially distanced activities. We are now adapting and enhancing our Short Break Local Offer further for the summer.

For queries about 0-25 Commissioning email csfcommissioning@hertfordshire.gov.uk.