

Chief social worker says waiting lists for ASN kids are next pandemic

Midlothian's chief social worker has called for a national review of services for children with suspected additional support needs warning it will be the 'next pandemic' to hit the country.

Joan Tranent says 200 new children are being added to the waiting list for neurodivergent assessments each quarter – 800 a year – in Midlothian alone with many 'ageing out' before they are even seen.

And she says the situation has become worse since the Covid pandemic.

Mrs Tranent was speaking as she prepares to retire from her role after more than two decades working in Midlothian and East Lothian.

The Bonnyrigg native came into social work after watching her mother work on a children's panel and deciding to move into care.

She was almost 30 when she qualified as a social worker in 2001 and began her career.

In 2005 she joined East Lothian Council as a team leader before moving in 2011 to Midlothian Council as a service

manager before being appointed head of children's services in 2014 and taking up the post of chief officer for children's services, partnerships and communities in 2020.

She said: "It is a great job and worthwhile especially because it is a small local authority. It has changed into a very different job over the years with IT making the biggest difference, allowing us to work more closely with colleagues in health and other services.

"But the staff are the biggest asset and remain the most important part of the service."

Mrs Tranent points to the improvements the council has made to its services over the years including a housing project for care experienced young people who are given a permanent tenancy when they leave care.

The project currently has provided homes for more than 30 people who are supported in moving to independent living in them.

And her staff, like her, were on the frontline throughout the Covid pandemic coming into the office every day to ensure the county's most vulnerable residents are receiving the care and support required.

However she said the impact of Covid on families can be seen in the huge rise in the number of children being referred for neurodivergent assessment.

She said while the number of children being referred for camhs assessments, which deal with mental health issues, is publicly discussed, there is a silence around the numbers requiring tests for suspected additional support needs or ADHD.

Mrs Tranent said: "The neurodivergent waiting list for children is going up with 200 new names added every quarter and children ageing out who are never seen and it is not being

reported.

“It is the next pandemic.

“It can be someone with low level autism or ADHD or displaying a set of behaviour skills that spark concern. I don’t know if parents are as robust.

“This is not unique to Midlothian it is across the country and we need a national review to set out a national model. We need staff trained in it and key education support for assessments.”

Mrs Tranent retires officially in October.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter