

# David takes over as head of Children's Services

By Katie Macleod

**E**arlier this year, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar appointed a new Head of Service for Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer. "It's a challenging, wide ranging and hugely exciting role," says David Gibson, who relocated to Lewis from Edinburgh to take up the position.

David's role sees him take responsibility for Children's Services, which is part of the integrated Education and Children's Services department; as chief social worker, he also oversees aspects of adult services. The Head of Service works with Early Years, Learning Support, Extended Learning, Education Psychologists, and Social Work, as well as with the Children's Services Partnership, which has been developed over the past 18 months in conjunction with third sector providers including Western Isles Foyer, Action for Children, and Harmeny Education Trust.

"One of our main tasks is to continue the effort to move towards a Children's Services model of anticipatory care and early intervention," he explains. "What that means is that we want to offer support as early as possible a stage to children and their families, which will allow us to avoid the need for greater intervention in the future."

"One of the key areas we're going to be concentrating on is anticipating need from the early year pre-school stages onwards, and working closely with our colleagues in health in order to achieve that. We're building on the work which is already in place, hopefully providing an easily accessible, seamless service to families across the islands"

Although he has only been in the role since February, David

had already been working alongside the Education and Children's Services department in the islands for a number of years, thanks to his previous position as Head of Care at Harmeny Education Trust in Edinburgh. One of his reasons for moving to Lewis to take on the role as Head of Service was what he describes as the "huge potential within the Western Isles," as well as "obvious the commitment and passion about doing the right thing for children and young people."

"The people I've been dealing with really do have the child's best interests at heart, and are committed to exploring imaginatively how we achieve those within the small rural communities that make up the Western Isles. That commitment was very significant in my decision to take this on."

Looking to the future, David says the department is working towards "a model which allows us to offer a service early on, and proportionately, to children and families. We want to empower children and their families and enhance their involvement not just in their direct care, but in how we develop and shape the service we offer more generally. I'd hope we have transparent and understandable systems in place that add to people's understanding of what we do. I want to see empowerment of young people taking control of their own lives and becoming responsible citizens."

"I'm also very committed to increasing and making full use of the learning and development opportunities for staff, because that will help drive the service forward," he adds. "Internally we need to have a learning and development culture where we're always looking at what we can do next to improve the service, or what new services we need to develop to meet changing needs, coordinating a seamless service between education, social work, and health."