

Appeal for ex-rail workers

NETWORK Rail is appealing for former signallers in Essex to return and help keep vital train services moving.

The rail operator is appealing for former professional signallers to help during the coronavirus crisis.

A spokesperson for Network Rail said: "Network Rail is working hard to keep signal boxes and control centres open round the clock. This allows key workers such as doctors and nurses to travel to work and means essential food and medical supplies can be transported across the country on freight services."

David Davidson, Network Rail's head of operations for Anglia, added: "We're appealing for signallers who've retired, moved on to other careers or left the railway to help us keep signal boxes and control centres open."

Email Retired Signallers EasternRegion@networkrail.co.uk

Schoolboy launches online discos to cheer up classmates



Sonny Tyler on the wheels of steel

A SEVEN-year-old has launched a weekly virtual disco to keep his classmates' spirits up during the coronavirus shutdown. Sonny Tyler took inspiration from his DJ dad Terry, who turned the cancellation of his gig work in Harlow into a positive by launching Facebook Live parties. Keen to put smiles on the faces of his friends at Freshwaters Primary Academy, Sonny asked his dad to teach him the ropes. The Year 2 pupil quickly picked up the skill and launched an online disco. Proud mum Katy, a learning mentor at fellow BMAT school Sir Frederick Gibberd College, said: "My husband DJs in his spare time, but all of his work has been cancelled due to the coronavirus, so he decided to run them from our living room! 500 people watched and sent their requests for songs. It was wonderful. "Sonny said he wanted to host a party for his friends. My husband showed him how to queue the songs up and what buttons to press. "About 87 people joined in. We had other parents sharing videos of their children dancing in their living rooms. "Sonny said he wanted to make his friends smile as he misses them. I am really proud of him."

Contract extended for special needs

Extra £2m cost until improved model brought in

By Piers Meyler

AN EXTRA £2 million is set to be spent on urgently needed special needs provision in Essex – until the current "not fit for purpose" system is replaced.

The extension to the contract with Provide CIC for speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, is to run for a further 17 months until August 31, 2021, with a total anticipated cost of £2 million.

The extra money will mitigate the increase in children with education, health and care plans.

The numbers cared for under the contract – currently 14 per cent of the total number of plans issued by Essex County Council – is expected to rise from 7,723 in 2017 to 11,600 in 2022.

The number of therapy hours provided is expected to more than double.

The council has admitted the delivery of its special needs and disabilities (SEND) provision is "not fit for purpose".

"It is fragmented, with access and pathway dictated by postcode. Demand outweighs capacity



A special needs contract has been extended by 17 months

across the county. There is not enough capacity or resource to deliver consistent training to schools and early years settings on a countywide footing," a report concluded.

This has resulted in duplication of costs, recruitment and resourcing issues and ultimately problems and gaps in the delivery of the services and outcomes for children and young people in Essex.

Instead, a joint pathway for

the delivery of a therapy service that ensures children receive the appropriate therapeutic support and intervention in the right setting at the right time, is being developed, and is expected to be in place for summer 2021.

The current contract with Provide CIC initially commissioned 12,631 hours of support for 870 individual pupils and whole school support for six enhanced provisions set within mainstream schools and five special schools.

But over the last two years demand has increased, and the service now supports around 1,251 pupils with 18,760 hours of direct therapy.

As a result, it is anticipated that the spend for the proposed extension period will need to increase to approximately £2 million to maintain the service.

A statement to cabinet said: "The preferred option is to extend the contract with the current supplier by 17 months.

"Upon cessation of the extended contract, a new model of provision aimed at earlier intervention will be introduced from September 2021."



Citizens Advice Waltham Forest announces emergency changes to services

Citizens Advice Waltham Forest has announced that face-to-face advice services in Waltham Forest will be suspended for the foreseeable future from Monday 23rd March 2020.

People who have already booked appointments should not attend and will be contacted by telephone for advice.

There are a number of ways people can continue to get advice during this time.

- General advice will be given via our Adviceline which people can reach by calling 0300 300 1175. This is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, calls are charged at local rate.
- People can chat online to an advisor by visiting our website at citizensadvice.org.uk/contact-us.
- People looking for advice on consumer issues (e.g. issues related to products or services you've purchased) can contact the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133 or chat online to an advisor on our website.
- Anyone seeking to make a new claim for Universal Credit should call the Universal Credit Help to Claim line on 0800 1448444.
- For information, advice and support about Direct Payments, contact our Direct Payment Support Service on 020 3233 0275.
- SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability, Information, Advice and Support Service) can be contacted by calling 020 3233 0251 or visit www.walthamforestsendiass.org.uk
- Fee Paying Immigration Service – call 020 8509 6432
- Pension Wise – call 0203 3233 0250 or book online via www.pensionwise.gov.uk

Waiting times for these services may be slightly longer than usual as we adapt to our new patterns of working.

Suna Panayiotou, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Waltham Forest, said:

"Citizens Advice is here to give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward in these difficult times. You can find frequently updated advice on a range of issues related to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak at citizensadvice.org.uk/coronavirus.

"Unfortunately, we have taken the decision to suspend face-to-face services for the foreseeable future to support the government's latest guidelines.

"We'll continue to offer advice over the telephone on our Adviceline. People looking for advice can also chat to an advisor online at the Citizens Advice website.

"We are looking into other ways in which we can help people to get the advice that they need during this period."