

Information, Advice and Support Service

SEND Information Advice and Support Service

Annual Report to Steering Group

June 2021

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SEND Information Advice and Support Service Report to Steering Group – June 2021

<u>Overview</u>

From 1st September 2014, Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide SEND Information Advice and Support Services as outlined in the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (0-25 years) 2015.* In September 2018, a new set of minimum standards were introduced as part of the Information Advice and Support Programme (IASP) which services are expected to meet, these standards are supported by the DfE and Department of Health and Social Care. They are based around four key areas:

- Commissioning, Governance and management arrangements
- Strategic functions
- Operational Functions
- Professional development and training for staff

These minimum standards outline clear expectations of SEND Information Advice and Support Services. They act to support both LA's and services themselves to ensure the quality of the service provided, and its impact for service users. They are also the basis for 2-year operational plans for 2019-2021 and linked funding in 2020/21.

The minimum standards can be read online, through the IASSN website.

Paragraph 2.19 of the Code of Practice outlines the key roles of the IASS:

To meet local needs, local authorities should consider providing the following forms of support through their information, advice and support service(s):

- Signposting children, young people and parents to alternative and additional sources of advice, information and support that may be available locally or nationally
- Individual casework and representation for those who need it, which should include:
 - support in attending meetings, contributing to assessments and reviews and participating in decisions about outcomes for the child or young person
 - directing children, young people, parents and those who support and work with them to additional support services where needed, including services provided by the voluntary sector. These services should include support relating to preparing for adulthood, including housing support, careers advice and employment support
- Help when things go wrong, which should include:
 - supporting children, young people and parents in arranging or attending early disagreement resolution meetings
 - supporting children, young people and parents in managing mediation, appeals to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability), exclusions and complaints on matters related to SEN and disability
 - making children, young people and parents aware of the local authority's services for resolving disagreements and for mediation, and on the routes of appeal and complaint on matters related to SEN and disability (see Chapter 11, Resolving disagreements)
- Provision of advice through individual casework and through work with parent carer support groups, local SEN youth forums or disability groups, or training events

In addition to the above, the Service also assists parents where their child has been excluded or is at risk of exclusion from school.

In its previous guise (Coventry Parent Partnership Service) the service was both wellestablished and well-regarded, both locally for service users and professionals, and further afield working with the national network of PPS's. As with the PPS, the SENDIASS receives its funding from the Local Authority (LA) but operates at "arms length" from it, to ensure parents have confidence in the impartiality of the advice, support and information provided by the Service.

The following report seeks to inform members of the Steering Group on the work and developments of the Service during the 2020/21 financial year.

Commissioning, Governance and Management

Finance:

2020/21: The baseline budget was set at £162,114 a slight reduction from the previous year. This was supplemented by the carry forward of IASP money (25k) and also an extra pot of funding from the IASP for 2020/21 (equating to a maximum of £27,882). This gave us a maximum budget of £214,996. It was predicted that this would again show a large underspend.

With the service operating on a working from home basis for the whole of this period (meaning a reduction in the number of associated costs, equipment, transport and resources), we reported an underspend, meaning that we would be able to carry forward £27,614 of the IASP money. We operated with 2 staff members down from April – November/December, with the loss of one IASS officer and the Children and Young Person's post. Given the uncertain nature of operations over the lockdown period, and the reduction in contacts over that period, it was felt that recruitment to these posts weren't essential at that time.

2021/22: Moving forward, the baseline budget was set at £163,523. This will be supplemented by a carry forward of £27,614 from the previous IASP funding as well as an additional £10k from the IASP funding for 2021/22. Overall this gives us a budget of £201,137 – it is likely that this will again show an underspend, meaning that we will request a carry forward of IASP funding to cover any shortfall in staffing budget moving forward.

Staffing:

As above there has been quite a change in the structure of the team over the past year, with the vacant posts being left until the start of the new academic year, as things were beginning to return to some sort of normality. In October, we were delighted to be able to appoint Larissa Kimberley to the vacant IASS officer post. Larissa had previously been performing the role of SENDIASS Administrator, which meant that role was vacant.

The CYP worker role was appointed to in October, with Nirmal Johal starting in November. Nimmi has had previous experience working in similar roles in SENDIASS services, and has been able to hit the ground running despite the difficulties of starting a new role in the current circumstances.

Just before the Christmas break, we also filled the vacant administrator post as we welcomed Jill Mandair to the team. Jill has practical early years experience and has been an excellent addition to the team.

Strategic Functions

Over the course of the year, the service has contributed in a number of ways to overall strategic functions in the context of local, regional and national developments.

<u>Local</u>

- The lockdown has unfortunately minimised the involvement of the service with our Children and Young People "AmbasSENDors" who have been unable to contribute in the same way as they had been able up to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Proposed involvement with NHS services has been delayed, and as the SEND board has only met once since April, opportunities for strategic involvement have been limited.

The mainstream group have contributed to a local review of lockdown via the "Big Lunch" initiative; a "back to school" questionnaire alongside Educational Psychology service; and given feedback on the recently expanded supported internship programme.

- There has also been work done with two groups of young people around the new SEND portal which is due to be launched in 2021-22. There were also focus groups held with parents about this too and a short guide produced to explain its purpose. This is hoped to enable more coproduction to take place in the EHCNA/annual review process.
- We continue to produce an e-bulletin which is distributed through an external mailing system, and through our own mailing list. This is on a 6 weekly cycle but is still very much an "in-house" production we have continued to get little or no information from sources across education, health and care (or indeed from service users).
- Continued to work with Public Health to monitor the parenting strategy across Coventry.
- Signposting other agencies, particularly health and social care, to publications/events aimed at staff from those areas around the reforms/EHC plans.
- Throughout lockdown, the service lead helped support the local response to the pandemic, including reviewing risk assessments for schools. He also contributed to a "critical incident response" group which included the creation and presentation of a "health and well-being for leaders" programme alongside the Educational Psychology service. This led to a hotline being set-up for parents/carers as a response to the increased demands of COVID, including home learning and managing behaviours. This may also have reduced the number of calls to the service in the May-July period.

<u>Regional</u>

Coventry IASS is a member of the regional West Midlands group for SEND IAS services, and service manager is currently the chair of this group. Coventry also has responsibility for the finance of this group as it works collaboratively in providing training opportunities for staff - as many of these opportunities are linked to enabling staff to network and share good practice, this has not really happened in 2020/21 for obvious reasons. The managers group meets on a quarterly basis through the year and includes involvement from the national network (IASSN).

<u>National</u>

Through links with the IASS network, the service has contributed to a number of Government consultations through this part of 2020, mainly to do with the impact of Coronavirus on young people during the lockdown. There has also been consultations held with regards to the impact of the SEND reforms, in line with the Education Select Committee's report on SEND.

The IASS Network, provides an online forum to support both managers and staff of services, which has been updated with input from Coventry SENDIASS.

Provision of Information & Advice and Supporting Individuals

Individual casework support

SEND Information Advice and Support Service operates an open referral policy. This provides confidential, impartial information, advice and support to parents/carers, children and young people of Coventry aged 0-25 years who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are excluded or at risk of exclusion from school. This remains a large and broad area for a service previously aimed solely at supporting parents/carers, with slightly increased staffing arrangements in place

Through liaison and partnership working the team provides active support to contribute to positive outcomes for children and young people. Dependent upon the individual characteristics of a referral for support the Service also works pro-actively on behalf of families across a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies to secure good outcomes.

Individual casework support around Special Educational Needs and Exclusion continues to be the core element of activity with Officers supporting parents at SEN support meetings, issues around exclusion, annual reviews and throughout the EHC needs assessment process. The service operates a "Duty Officer" system where parents can usually speak to an IASS Officer on the same day, although as referrals have increased, this has become slightly less likely.

For many families IASS continues to take on more of a key worker / co-ordination role, often for those who are socially disadvantaged, where parents themselves have significant needs or who are simply worn out with the constant demands of supporting the additional needs of their child.

Case work support necessitates staff being able to draw upon a range of competences and methods using a high level of interpersonal skill. At times it requires an amalgam of skills and abilities usually identified in areas such as counselling, negotiation, mediation, conflict management and advocacy.

Cases require a great deal of knowledge, patience, encouragement and understanding together with liaison across a range of statutory and voluntary agencies in an attempt to reach a resolution and effectively support the family.

Due to capacity issues and in order to maintain an element of control over the large number and complexity of cases presented to the Service the "casework criteria" which determines the level of IASS intervention is used consistently and is very well established. Contacts are generally recorded as either;

Casework – where full details of the case are discussed with a child/young person or their parent by an IASS officer;

OR

General enquiries – where generalised information is given either where an individual child/young person is not identified or to a professional working with them.

The casework criteria has been adapted nationally by IASSN, including an additional level focussing on tribunal. This is something which we are considering to change for 2021/22 to reflect the differing involvements around mediation/tribunal.

Presenting issues:

Some of the issues / pressures arising from casework support fall into the following areas:

- The difficulty in communication between parents and the LA's STAR Team especially around unreturned phone calls, "lack of evidence" with refused EHCNA requests and annual review paperwork.
- The long waiting times associated with a number of services, particularly where referrals have been made to specialist health services (including those with EHC needs assessments). This also includes the types of, and specificity of provision, outlined by health in EHC plans. This has been particularly difficult as health services have focussed resources on other areas during the pandemic.
- An increase in the number of cases which include young people who are not attending provision due to anxiety/mental health concerns.
- An understanding of latest government guidance, particularly with regards to changes to legislation during the pandemic.
- An increase in the number of formal disagreement resolution/SEND tribunal cases 50 in 2019/20, 91 in 2020/21.

IASS Casework Support Figures: 1st April 2020 – 31st October 2020

Yearly analysis



These figures show the levels of casework since the 2014 reforms.

Ongoing cases:				Number of contacts 2019/20 in brackets					
April	92	October	85	April	144	(325)	Oct	326	(368)
May	83	November	90	May	268	(338)	Nov	360	(413)
June	85	December	94	June	394	(424)	Dec	164	(230)
July	76	January	87	July	301	(287)	Jan	362	(366)
August	81	February	92	August	101	(105)	Feb	340	(303
September	90	March	94	Sept	380	(398)	March	444	(355)

The depth of this individual on-going casework across a range of agencies per case is difficult to break down from current monitoring resources. Many of the cases that IASS become involved in are complex and require significant liaison between a number of agencies over a period of time

to establish the issues and endeavour to seek solutions. They are monitored through termly reviews between the manager and officers.

The number of contacts helps to give a further layer of depth to work undertaken and reflects the increase in contacts with those ongoing cases. However it is still reliant on inputting of information into the system after every contact – this is likely to be under-reported due to the nature of some of the contacts and time factors in recording. For comparison, against the same time period last year, contacts have reduced from 3912 in 2019/20 to 3584 in 2020/21 (about 9%). The big drop offs here were in April (first lockdown) which saw 44% of 2019/20's number of contacts and December (second lockdown) which was 71%.

Response time: April 2020 - March 21

From April 2020, 100% of calls had a response within the 2 day service standard (an increase of 0.3% on the previous year). The same day response has improved hugely this year (73% overall), possibly due to the fact that there has been a reduction in overall number of calls. This figure is only slightly below our "optimistic target" of 75%. However, this is not necessarily reflective of customer experience on this front – more contacts now receive information, advice and support at the initial point of contact before contact from the duty officer. This is very difficult to log from figures on the database.



Type of SEN

The breakdown of areas of SEND as the primary area of need is very similar to the previous year. There have been a slight increase in the percentage of cases relating to SEMH and ADHD/ADD. Given the circumstances, it is somewhat surprising that more have not come under the mental health/anxiety area, but a lot of these cases have tended to be related to ASD.



Since the implementation of the SEND reforms in 2014, we've seen a gradual shift towards more statutory related referrals. Last year this equated to 52% of referrals – this year that has gone up again to 59%. This is reflective of the



Having seen an increase in primary age referrals in the previous year, referrals have been consistent across the age groups in the current academic year.

Service User Feedback

Following continual discussion about the most effective way of achieving increased numbers of feedback, we have introduced (hopefully) a more effective way of gathering feedback from service users through "Let's Talk". This is an engagement website which enables us to have the

questionnaire hosted away from the main council website, and direct people straight through to it from email signatures. One change implemented this year is the quarterly request for feedback from all those that have used the service in the previous three months. It was felt that this would be a way of capturing views form service users who may have used the service as a one off or accessed short term support.

Customer satisfaction continues to be very high, in both evaluating referrals and also of parent sessions. We have still not achieved the volume of feedback which we would like; the aim from previous steering group suggestions is for 30% of referrals – based on current figures this would probably equate to something like 180 responses per year.

Feedback has again been very positive, with 95% finding the information advice and support we gave to be very/quite helpful and neutral fair and unbiased. 86% also felt that the support provided had made a large/great deal of difference.

spok I've her.	on't know the name of the lady I ke to today but I felt better than felt in weeks after speaking to I felt heard and understood and chankful she called me today." ent	I have accessed the service on many occasions as a new SENDCo and every time I get in touch, I feel really fortunate to have access to such knowledgeable and experienced professionals. I know that my SEND families feel the same way too. Without a doubt, the service works as a partnership to support our school.	
man gave	d no advocate or legal rep to hage my appeal, this service e me the confidence to navigate appeal independently. ent	Whenever I call or email, I know that will be listened to sensitively, and signposted to possible solutions. I truly value the support and advice, and it strengthens the decisions I make for the children and families in my school SENCO	

The full feedback report can be seen in appendix 1.

Information, publicity and communication

Ebulletin/mailing list - The e-bulletin continues to be a prime source of information communicated to service users and other organisations. This was originally set up to work alongside the Local Offer, incorporating updates from across education health and care. However, it remains an almost entirely SENDIASS production, with only occasional input from other agencies. The bulletin is distributed to 2316 subscribers (increased by 4%)

The mailing list is held through our casework management system, and includes both service users and professionals. This currently lists almost 973 parents/carers, and also covers all schools and colleges, Family Hubs, and a variety of health professionals.

Website/social media - The new standalone website continues to suffer from delays. It is still under construction and should be online by the end of 2021. This will feature two sites, one for general information about the service and a redesign of the CHYP Shop website into a similar design (whilst keeping to the style which the young people who helped design it initially). The new site will be at <u>www.covsendiass.co.uk</u>, with <u>www.thechypshop.co.uk</u> continuing as the Young Person's site (and a link between the two). This will help to solidify the arms-length nature of the service.

Our Facebook page continues to grow in its number of followers and has increased its reach by 39% in the period (977 current followers). Its primarily used to highlight SEND IASS events (being a popular point of referral for parent sessions held by the service) and local information, and continues to be a source of direct questions by service users.. It's feed is also linked into

the Let's Talk page, and will be linked into the website (this should help to update "latest news" without having to duplicate work).

We have 339 Twitter followers, which has increased by only 6% in the same period. It is felt that this platform is more useful to the service to find out information from other agencies, than it is for communicating to service users. Many of the followers are schools, and some will share SEND IASS tweets, which obviously means a potential wider audience.

Information leaflets – Our popular "Your guide to..." booklets around SEN topics continue to be available both electronically and in hard copy for service users and professionals, although this year has seen a general move towards more electronic access. We have created some simple information sheets around other key areas of interest, based on queries dealt with through casework. This has also led to some joined up working with other areas, particularly in relation to the changes throughout the pandemic towards SEN services available through education, health and care. There continues to be

Events –In 2020/21, we have been slightly hampered by the impact of working from home, meaning that we have not been able to offer face to face sessions for service users. This has created both barriers and opportunities for service users compared to our usual offer. For some, the pandemic has offered greater flexibility in working patterns, meaning that they have been able to attend some of the daytime based sessions that have been run, including the coffee mornings.

We have maintained our links with the One Voice group, and the LA, to support joint events, although this has again been hampered by a lack of face to face opportunities.

As noted above, the service Coffee Morning continues to offer service users the opportunity to meet with other parents and discuss issues on a monthly basis. It has been held this year via online meetings that has worked successfully. As there were additional opportunities for attendees to ask questions – verbally or through the chat function – an additional member of staff was deployed to support which also enabled more information/signposting to be shared as the meeting continued. There is no fixed agenda, which is generally driven by the group, but ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to talk and support each other. Attendance has continued to vary over the course of the year, with a high of 15 and a low of 4.

Parent Training/information Sessions – We've continued to provide information sessions for parents on a monthly basis where possible, and they have again been well attended and cover a range of special interest areas.

As part of the response to the pandemic we arranged a couple of sessions with Louisa McGivney from the Complex Communications team in Coventry to look at ASD strategies/understanding, and also made some resources around returning to school (preparing for a return to/change of school in September). These resources were focussed on the impact of the confidence of young people in the pandemic but can continue to be used in the future for those in transition.

One of the difficulties of putting on sessions during this period was that many of our usual partners across the sector were already using online communications to present information and support. For example, in previous years Contact have delivered the Brighter Beginnings sessions for parents with children with SEND 0-8yrs over the course of 5 weeks – they have now developed this online and as the information presented is more generic, rather than localised, can be delivered to more people more flexibly. Hence, they are not currently able to offer any face to face training in local areas. As organisations move more towards an online model, it may become harder to attract them to provide these sessions in the future (for free!) which may mean that continuing sessions in this format may impact the service budget.

Networking and Collaboration

This is one area which has both seen positives and benefits from the pandemic. Whilst the Service have traditionally visited a variety of groups, services and events to promote the services provided by SEND IASS, so many of these opportunities have been stopped over the course of the year, meaning less opportunity to present the services on offer to potential users/referrers.

However, the service would not have been able to continue to offer the level of service for which it strives without the use of technology during this time, specifically Microsoft Teams. This has enabled new staff members to meet with a variety of professionals across the local authority and beyond, and access more meetings without the concern of travel time etc. This has been key to maintaining visibility and providing support. It may also have made the service more visible to other services within the authority, although this has still seen some confusion between the role of SEND IASS and other services with SEND in the title.

The chat function has also offered an extra opportunity to get quick answers from professionals where queries have not been answered directly to service users. Whilst SEND IASS does not want to become the "middle person" in getting answers from professionals to service users - giving the impression that we have a direct line through to people which is not available to parents/young people – it does give another avenue to speeding up some processes (or more importantly, stressing the need for communication!)

Termly SENCo meetings continue to be attended by the service to raise specific issues and inform of any new developments/events etc.

Parent/young people's Participation

Families of Woodfield Group - The group has been well established and continues to be supported by IASS with the school having identified two members of staff (Primary & Secondary) to support the group and liaise with senior managers at the school. The school has now been taken over by the Sidney Stringer MAT, but initial conversations have suggested that this should not affect the running of the group.

The group has been difficult to engage during the year, mainly due to the lack of face to face opportunities. The prospect of online meetings has not been well received/accessible for a number of members, which has meant that it has been very difficult for the group to meet. We are hopeful that once restrictions ease, that the group will continue.

Children and Young people

The previous CYP officer, Eloise Heneghan, left at the end of the previous reporting period which created a period of uncertainty around the groups which had been set up for CYP – AmbasSENDors and SEND shadow board. However, given the lack of opportunity during April - September 2020 to engage pupils face to face, or even for the vast majority, through their schools that the groups would remain on hold until the post was recruited to.

Some of the young people in the AmbaSENDors group, had indicated that they did not want to engage online, so only a small group of young people engaged in the activities that were presented to them. These were generally just catch up sessions, but as all the group were engaging in their learning online at this time, all meetings were generally short (about an hour) meet ups. Some of these had specific roles – the Big Lunch activities around isolation, discussion around supported internships – but given the general lack of strategic discussion in this period, were just opportunities to keep the group together.

The SEND Shadow Board were also unable to continue during this period, mainly due to the make up of the groups. Trying to link 6/7 settings together with multiple representatives from each over an online session was going to be very difficult, and one of the huge positves of the group was the interaction between the youngsters. As the SEND board have only met once during this period, there was also no direct correlation between the groups, which was te whole purpose to begin with.

After Nirmal Johal took on the role in November – having been interviewed by young people via an online interview - she has tried to engage both the groups in activities as well as expand the number of young people involved in strategic engagement and consultation. There has been a number of engagement opportunities involving young people with national and local consultations – one of these, for the National Children's Bureau (NCB) on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people involved youngsters from mainstream and special schools, enabling us to develop links with schools that we previously had not engaged. This will hopefully enable us to engage with them again in the future.

It had also been hoped that we would be able to look at some "teach the teacher" sessions with Ernesford Grange secondary school around ASD during the spring term. However, those plans were affected by the 2nd lockdown after Christmas, and it was felt this would be better being done face to face with the young people. Some of the young people identified for that were able to support the development of the Local Authority's SEND portal, which will enable young people to contribute to an EHCNA request. This consultation was done alongside the AmbasSENDors which provided a number of considerations for the final product.

Some of the young people that took part in that consultation were also involved in Jan/Feb '21 in a review of mental health services in the city through Peopletoo, who had been brought in to carry out some consultations. This originally set out to capture views of young people who had used the Crisis service, but young people were encouraged to talk about their wider experiences of these services too. Whilst this was useful in looking at a longer term view of services, many of these types of review are with regard to specific services, so unless the young people have used them, it's difficult to make specific comments.

Moving forward, one of the areas that we would like to develop will be around peer-peer support by young people with SEND, especially around areas such as transition into new settings. This can be across both specialist and mainstream settings, and was particularly highlighted due to the enforced lack of opportunity for transition into new settings, which created a lot of anxiety in a number of young people.

We still do not see a huge amount of young people who are actively seeking IAS from the service. Those cases where direct work is done with the young person tends to occur from an initial request from a parent, which over time becomes a supporting role to the young person. This is something that hopefully will continue to expand.

Professional Development and Training

Staff involved in case work are all trained through IPSEA's legal training – 100% of long-term staff through to Level 3 (the highest level). The new members of staff have completed level 1 and some of level 2 – the aim is for all members of staff to be trained to level 3 by the end of their first year with us (this is sometimes dependent on the availability of the "face to face" modules)

All staff have refreshed their safeguarding training, in line with the IASS Safeguarding policy.

All staff receive regular termly casework review with the manager, allowing them to discuss progress of cases assigned to them. This also helps to identify areas which may need further training for staff members across the service.

How well are we doing?

SURVEY RESPONSE REPORT

01 April 2020 - 31 March 2021

PROJECT NAME: SEND Information, Advice and Support Service



SURVEY QUESTIONS



Question type: Radio Button Question

Q2 How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?



Q3 How neutral, fair, and unbiased did you think we were?



Question options

4 - Very fair and unbiased

0 - Very unfair and biased

9 - Quite fair and unbiased

2 - Neither biased nor unbiased

1 - Quite unfair and biased

Optional question (41 response(s), 0 skipped) Question type: Radio Button Question

Q4 What difference do you think our information, advice and support has made to you?



Q5 How likely is it that you would recommend the service to others?



Q6 Overall, how satisfied are you with the service we give?







Optional question (40 response(s), 1 skipped) Question type: Radio Button Question





Question type: Radio Button Question





Question options



Optional question (40 response(s), 1 skipped) Question type: Radio Button Question