



Bournemouth and Poole : Building a service offer for the future

Both Bournemouth and Poole SENDIASS have traditionally been separate services covering two local authority areas. However, following a recent Local Government Review (LGR) a new council is being formed to bring Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch together from April 2019. (BCP).

Since the Children and Families Act (2014) was introduced, SENDIASS in Bournemouth and Poole have grown and developed its service offer immensely, whilst also experiencing a noticeable increase in the number of children, parents and young people approaching SENDIASS for information, advice and support.

Between 2014-2018, Bournemouth and Poole had both been supported with additional funding provided by the Independent Support programme. Funding was used to support the transfer work from statements to EHCPs and help the local service to develop its offer in line with the new statutory requirements. Funding was also used to improve staff skills, knowledge and understanding of the reforms so the service itself was able to respond and support the 0-25 age range and offer advice on a range of complex SEND issues.

The challenge

Primarily, Bournemouth and Poole SENDIASS have struggled with capacity issues due to the significant increase in requests for support since 2014. This has been compounded by a reliance on fixed term employment contracts which has then had an impact on staff retention and the ability to effectively plan and develop the service offer for the longer term.

However, by collaborating and conducting a self-review on the current service offer, a task set and supported by the IAS programme, Bournemouth and Poole were able to jointly reflect on their achievements, challenges and identify areas of commonality. Furthermore, the self-review task helped services to quickly identify the long term benefits of a designated in-house IAS service manager who would strategical lead work across the new council and support and strengthen the service offer from April 2019.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

During 2019/20, funding provided by the IAS programme has enabled effective strategic planning to take place which has then helped to develop and agree a new service offer for the future. Funding has helped to create a platform and premise for early talks with local authority commissioners and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) on joint commissioning, well in advance of when the new BCP service becomes operational from 1st April 2019. That work has then informed the strategic direction of the service and the operational 2-year plan developed by the joined services.

Funding to enable space and time for strategic planning and engagement activities with stakeholders has also helped to raise the general profile of SENDIASS as a statutory service, with the local authorities, other family local services, parent groups and the wider community. Planning has also helped the IAS service manager to develop their own strategic and engagement skills, which will go on to benefit the new BCP

(Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) service and the offer to children, parents and young people for the longer term.

The outcome of planning this year has already led to an agreement being reached about the new BCP service offer and structure with key stakeholders - resulting in early recognition of what the service must achieve to be fully compliant and accessible. It has also led to an agreement to move staff on fixed term contracts to a permanent employment arrangement. This commitment by the local authorities will enable more continuity, stability and resilience in the new BCP service going forward.

Funding through the IAS programme has enabled the service in Bournemouth to have a dedicated children and young people's development officer during 2018/19, who will then support the new larger council area from April 2019. Funding has also helped the service to develop and improve how data is collected by the service and then used to inform and improve service priorities and improvements.

Impact to service beneficiaries

The development of the new Minimum Standards, which are a concise update to the Quality Standards, and the opportunity for senior managers and their local commissioners to attend an IASP workshop, has certainly increased knowledge and understanding of SENDIASS and what needs to change.

The services have also begun to get more involved in discussions at the highest strategic levels across the authority. This is also raising the profile of SENDIASS across education, health and social care services. For example, with Christchurch joining Bournemouth and Poole as one single council from April 2019, the service manager has been able to be part of strategic and operational discussions with Dorset colleagues to agree a mechanism and ensure a smooth transition to the new BCP service for those who require ongoing support.

The newly developed SENDIASS 2-year operational plan was finalised in consultation with Parent Carer Forums (PCF) within Poole and Bournemouth to good effect. In fact, relationships with parents have been strengthened during 2018/19 because the IAS service manager has been able to spend more time facilitating parent led focus groups, in conjunction with PCF. This has involved developing and agreeing appropriate information pathways linked to the journey of the child or young person. There are now ongoing aspirations to develop a youth forum to enable the views of young people to influence the SENDIASS service offer and its commitment to the community it serves.

Lessons learnt

SENDIASS have learnt that it has been necessary to raise awareness of the statutory requirement for joint commissioning with the CCG. The new Minimum Standards have helped healthy conversations to happen that make it clear where responsibilities sit between education, health and social care. It has also been essential to gain strategic 'buy in' as early as possible to service design and ensure that strategic commissioners, have a clear understanding of the requirements and duties around delivering a compliant SENDIAS service, whilst recognising the demand and resource needs.

How the approach being sustained?

The strategic planning requirement under the IAS programme dovetailed with and complimented planning during the LGR and provided the driver and structured approach for a wide ranging strategic review across a new council area.

The work undertaken has helped to build the foundations for change through the joint self-review exercise and the development of a forward look 2 year operational plan. The opportunity to apply for further funding through the IAS programme, to help put the operational plan into action, will enable us to target funds to support projects where the service and its service users will benefit in the longer term. Because we have a forward plan in place we are able to identify early on where longer term council funding may be required. Having strong links with strategic leads and commissioners now means we can raise issues early on and look to mitigate potential risks to service delivery before they materialise.

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