

Barnsley: Reviewing and planning service improvements to secure additional LA funding

Barnsley is a small town and as a region presents many challenges due to the high number of school exclusions, high numbers of Electively Home Educated and the attainment gap between SEN and no SEN pupils continue to widen. Barnsley has been hit very hard with the austerity cuts, one of the highest within the region. There are areas of significant deprivation and poverty, poor performance of schools at secondary school level with the majority of them being OfSTED failed category schools. That said Barnsley is a strong and resilient town and community and there is a huge commitment by the local authority (LA) to build stronger and resilient communities and achieve a good education for all.

Barnsley Information Advice and Support (IAS) Service faces significant challenges whilst supporting children and young people who have SEND and their families. The IAS Service in Barnsley is currently led by a part-time Service Manager (0.7 fte) and supported by 1x fte Officer and 1 x 0.5 Assistant Officer. All staff work directly with parents/carers, children and young people across the age range 0 - 25.

The challenge

The IAS Service's overarching aim is to provide high quality independent and impartial IAS to parents, carers, children, and young people who contact the service directly. This includes supporting children missing education, those adopted or looked after and those with additional needs associated with mental health in addition to or as a consequence of their SEND. The IAS Service reaches its population through a variety of routes, including a designated webpage on the LA website, an active face book page, a growing Twitter following, contacts with education settings from early years to post 16, the voluntary sector and local support groups, colleagues across health, education and social care.

Since the Children and Families Act (2014) was introduced, the IAS Service experienced a rise in the demand for support. This then doubled during 2016/17 and continued to grow between 2017/18, including an increase in the number of complex cases. For example, the IAS service has seen an increase in requests for support from parents/carers and young people where a child or young person is:

- unable to attend school due to anxiety or health reasons
- being permanently excluded or continually receiving fixed term exclusions
- on a long waiting list to access health services
- Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)
- in early years but not allocated an education placement
- without the offer of an education placement at key transfer phases as well as requests regarding mediations and tribunals.

Alongside this, the IAS Service has experienced the impact of funding cuts in the local area and the way the allocation of funding is delegated based on evidenced need.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

During 2018 funding via the Information Advice and Support (IAS) programme provided a lifeline to the IASS. The service Manager increased her hours to full time (an extra 13 hours each week for 6 months). The additional time was used to:

- review and develop further the current IAS Service offer
- create the comprehensive two year operational plan
- to design service improvements and
- complete the funding applications required for the next phase of IASP funding.

In addition to this it also enabled the IAS Service Manager to use the two year development plan to:

- inform the service development plan
- create a new service specification
- seek agreement for IAS in the local area with LA commissioning
- and then incorporate both sets of information into the service annual report.

The IAS service annual report was presented at senior strategy boards which resulted in the service being invited to write and present a business case to the council for additional funding to sit alongside the IASP funding to support the two year action plan.

IAS programme funding has allowed the IAS Service Manager to develop better links strategically and to embed the “in-house” service as a valued and respected part of the larger council organisation. This has been achieved without compromise to the impartiality of the provision of IAS in the local area.

Impact to service beneficiaries

During 2018/19, funding provided by the IAS programme has been used to review and develop the current IAS Service offer and develop the two year development plan from April 2019. This work, led by the service Manager was a team effort and was undertaken in partnership with the LA senior leadership team and through our AGM with key stakeholders across Barnsley. The process included using service feedback to identify strengths and weaknesses in the current service offer, and set out priority areas for the service Manager and team to take forward. This will enable IAS Service to deliver an enhanced service offer in our local area and to be more compliant with the new minimum standards.

In addition to this funding was used to increase the hours of the IAS assistant case officer who was tasked with developing further the service’s social media offer as well as manage cases at level 1 and 2 (of the IAS intervention levels) via the help line and social media communication channels.

IASP funding has also supported the implementation of casework for post 16 service users and enabled challenge to post 16 providers and practitioners when required.

On other major success for the IAS service because of the IASP funding has been the development of social media. The IAS Service Barnsley Facebook page receives numerous positive comments, it’s grown in its numbers of followers and has a huge reach with the information and advice posts we create.

Lessons learnt

During 2018/19, the review of the IAS Service identified a need and desire to develop the use of virtual IAS through technology and social media. The next step is to develop information and communication tools for young people so that they can make self-referrals when they need it. The service discovered that it had a valuable contribution to make strategically but that to be competitive in this area it is necessary to understand the local processes and procedures to ensure participation is based on the business needs of the LA. The IAS Service Manager learned that when facing austerity cuts the way forward requires being valued and recognised as a lead organisation. That can be achieved by good business planning and effective networking in the local area. The IAS Service Manager and information officer have had CPD opportunities through BMBC leadership development programme and this has provided them with the skills to manage the challenges presented through austerity cuts and to successfully plan using business approaches to compete for funding within the larger organisation.

How is the approach being sustained?

The LA has now committed additional funding for the IAS Service. This has meant the Service Manager is now full time and an additional full time case officer has been created. The strategic planning requirement under the IASP programme has helped raise awareness of the IAS service with the LA resulting in an allocated commissioning partner and a commitment to helping the service to draw down additional funding through the IAS programme and local resources. The planning intentions in the two year operational plan include targeted work to continue with business planning to secure funding from both the LA and the IAS programme. This will be used to engage service users as volunteers within a virtual service offer to reach more service users and build their resilience and confidence to self support and provide peer to peer support to other parent carers and young people.

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<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/special-educational-needs/sendias-advice-and-support-service/>