

Blackpool: Engaging and developing a service plan that works for the IAS service and the community

Blackpool is a sea side town and unitary authority in Lancashire. It has a proud history and huge strengths to build on, but recognises that not all children and young people get the life chances they deserve. The IAS service in Blackpool is well established and offers the full range of statutory services to the community it serves. In doing so it aims to ensure that children, parents and young people are treated fairly and equitably with a service focus on providing the right level of support at the right time.

The challenge

The census data for Blackpool in January 2018 tells us that there are 18,996 school age children of which 3,037 are identified as having a special educational need. This equates to 16% of the total school population. There are currently 555 pupils known to have an Education, Health and Care Plan. This figure does not include plans in place for those in the early years or in post -16 provision.

In Blackpool, the national average split of pupils with EHC Plans is 47% in mainstream and 53% in special provision. So in Blackpool the split equates to 21% in mainstream and 79% in special provision. The total percentage of pupils receiving SEND support is currently 18.9% compared with the England average of 14.6%.

Blackpool has had a good track record producing EHC Plans within the legal time scales. However, there is a recognised issue in terms of a lack of mainstream inclusivity in the town. There are a higher number of disabled children and young people in comparison to other local areas as well as increased levels of transience and deprivation.

Overall, Blackpool is not an affluent area and has a high number of parents who depend on a higher level of support from the IAS service. The high demand from those seeking information, advice and support from a small but professional IAS service presents understandable challenges for the service core team.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

Additional funding has enabled the IAS to spend dedicated time on improving the overall profile of the service offer, both within the local authority and externally with key stakeholders. It has also helped to increase the hours of the staff team who work directly with parents, carers and young people. This has also resulted in those being supported by the service not needing to progress their case to tribunal.

During 2018/19, the service has been able to utilise additional time to reflect upon, and recognise what the IAS service has achieved so far as well as being able to develop new priorities for IAS service improvements, in a more targeted and planned way. Time has also been allocated to review service users' data which has helped to identify community groups who are not currently accessing the IAS service and need to be prioritised for inclusion within the service improvement plan.

Time allocated for strategy and planning has meant that as a service we have been able to hold timely conversations with key professionals across the authority and seek buy-in to service improvement plans. As a result, the local authority commissioner now has a better understanding of the purpose, remit and value of the IAS service, which is reflected in their contribution to the new operational plan and improvement priorities. The stronger and healthier relationship with the commissioner has also ensured that the IAS service is now an integral part of the Council's business agenda.

Impact to service beneficiaries

Despite experiencing a busy and challenging year, we have been able to use the time to further build relationships and engagement with local parent groups and other key stakeholders. Stakeholders have been consulted on the development of the website and proposed new marketing materials for the service. Feedback from service users identified a need for the IAS service to extend its business hours to operate one evening per week. This change will be implemented with effect from 4th March 2019.

Lessons learnt

During 2018/19, the IAS service team has learnt that improving the profile of the IAS service, developing supportive relationships with the Parent Carer Forum, the local authority and other key stakeholders and then devising a structured operational plan that meets the needs of Blackpool, will be invaluable for the long term whilst ensuring sustainability.

How is the approach being sustained?

Our end aim is to ensure the IAS service in Blackpool remains an integral part of Blackpool's Local Offer and there is an ongoing commitment from the local authority to support the service moving forward. This will involve working closely with the local authority commissioner as the service implements its new operational plan as well evidencing where the service has been able to achieve improvements. In so doing, the service will seek to strengthen the current governance arrangements in order to build a local authority-wide commitment to support the IAS service for the long term.

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