

## Bradford: Reviewing and planning service improvements

The Metropolitan District of Bradford is part of West Yorkshire and includes the City of Bradford and a large surrounding area including among others the towns of Keighley, Shipley, and Bingley. It has one of the fastest-growing populations with over a quarter of the population being Asian. The city has one of the highest percentages of South Asians in the UK. Bradford has the third highest percentage of the under 16 population in England. The number of referrals for education, health and care (EHC) Assessments increased from 520 in 2014-2015 to 843 in 2016-17, representing an increase of 62.1%. The number of children and young people with EHC plans in 2018 was 3,530, an increase of 64.6% (from 2,145) since 2014.

Bradford SENDIAS Service is an outsourced service delivered by Barnardo's and serves children and young people 0-25 and their parents and carers, within the Bradford District, offering advice and support on a full range of SEND topics, including provision in schools, EHC assessment processes and reviews, transitions, exclusions, transport, specialist provision/support services, appeals, local policies etc. Support may be provided via telephone, 1-1 or on a group basis according to need.

Bradford IAS Service aims to empower children, young people and families by providing them with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions for themselves.

### The challenge

Historically the IAS service has existed on short-term contracts and roll overs from the local authority. This has led to uncertainties around funding with 50% of the contract previously being made up by the SEND reform grant and not base budget. Furthermore the IAS Service has been commissioned solely by the local authority (LA) education department and not jointly commissioned with social care and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGS).

To date there has been a perceived lack of interest and input from the LA previously with very loose, short-term contracts and limited contract monitoring. Whilst some may appreciate a more relaxed approach this has been experienced as a negative by the proactive and dedicated IAS Service staff, who instead would prefer some direction and constructive feedback as part of the on-going self-evaluation of the service, in addition to contract stability.

This has naturally had an impact on staff morale and turnover due to uncertainties, funding cuts and several restructures. The current reduced structure consists of 2.4 FTE in 4 part time posts. The need level in Bradford is high, with many complex cases, and limited capacity means a waiting list is in operation. The service is therefore required to prioritise the most complex cases for face to face casework, providing tiered support in the form of telephone advice and fact sheets to lower level enquiries. The preference would be to offer more group sessions and training to these service users as a middle ground but there isn't the capacity to develop or deliver this. The restructure also meant the loss of a designated young people's worker resulting in insufficient manpower to promote the service specifically to this group; therefore the numbers of young people worked with are low.

## Initial impact of IAS programme funding

Funding provided by the Information Advice and Support programme has enabled the IAS Service to carry out a full service review against the new minimum standards by providing backfill for management time and some additional staffing hours to support with management tasks.

Although the service has always been proactive in terms of planning, the reality was the team trying to do its best with the limited resources available. Although aware of the gaps there was simply lack of capacity (and not lack of willingness) to address these. The funding has enabled the service to adopt a “magic wand” approach to future planning i.e. what would the ideal scenario for the IAS Service in Bradford look like. This has allowed aspirations for the service to be identified, not just gaps, and an opportunity to actually plan out how these can be achieved.

## Impact to service beneficiaries

The impact of this more strategic planning is that it has put the IAS Service on the LA agenda, and as a result of sharing the bids and operational plans commissioning have already been in touch to look at the service spec going forward and a contract monitoring plan for the next 12 months.

Communications with the LA commissioning department has improved and there is a new commitment to build stronger relationships in the future as a result.

The aspirational planning model has given the team more confidence in thinking outside the box for the future and for the first time has enabled the service to plan developments over a two year period rather than just one. This puts the service in a stronger position to secure a longer term contract when the service contract will be up for renewal/put out to tender again next year.

## Lessons learnt

Whilst completing the IAS Service review it became apparent there was already a good understanding of the service’s strengths and the areas for improvement. In the process of strategic planning alongside the review it clearly identified that the current level of LA funding is undoubtedly insufficient to run a compliant service and is being subsidised by Barnardo’s whilst still having gaps to fill. This was also seemingly recognised by commissioners.

The whole process has brought Barnardo’s services together to share good practice and compare experiences, providing opportunities for joint planning, peer support and a more consistent approach. This has been a key lesson learnt and something I think could have happened much sooner.

## How is the approach being sustained?

The LA have now recognised a lack of awareness and investment in the IAS Service and are keen to work collaboratively to develop a more robust service specification going forwards. The IAS Service is now in the process of establishing strong governance arrangements, including regular contract monitoring meetings, a management steering group with representatives from health, education and social care, and further developing the parent steering group which feeds into this. The CCG are working with the LA to look at joint commissioning. No funds have yet been identified; however they have recognised their responsibility as in the Code of Practice to jointly commission the service.

The whole process will enable Bradford SENDIASS and Barnardo's to apply longer-term thinking and a well thought out action plan to support future tenders and offer strategic support to the LA to develop a service specification which reflects the minimum standards. All of this means Bradford IAS Service will be more proactive and better equipped to offer a broad range of support to children, young people and families.

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<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/bradford-sendiass/information-advice-and-support.htm>