

Buckinghamshire: Promotion, Prevention, Prompt Response

Buckinghamshire County Council (Bucks CC) is home to more than 540,000 people with more than 20% being aged 0-15; a higher proportion than in any other county council in the UK. Currently there are more than 3600 EHCPs and appeals to SENDIST have more than doubled recently; 27 in 2014/15 and 58 in 2016/17.

Bucks IAS Service operates at arm's length from Bucks CC and offers accurate and up to date IAS around all matters relating to SEND. This is delivered face to face, by telephone and email support, as well as by attending meetings and delivering training.

Bucks IAS Service aims to empower its service users to understand the complexities of the law and local processes in order to self-advocate as far as possible.

Bucks IAS Service plays a key role in supporting local improvements by influencing local strategy and processes affecting its service users, whether provided by Bucks CC, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), educational settings or other organisations.

The challenge

To be successful, the SEND reforms require families and professionals to understand the law and its implications - this requires training and influencing. Bucks IASS calls this work **Prevention**, because it prevents families from struggling to exercise their rights and prevents professionals from non-compliance with the law.

The service still encounters families who have not heard of SENDIASS or do not use it – so more needs to be done to improve the **Promotion** of Bucks IAS Service.

Referrals to the service have doubled since 2014 requiring additional measures to be put in place to ensure a continued **Prompt Response**.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

Since 2014 Bucks IAS Service has developed and actively used annual business plans derived from the Quality Standards for IASS and from the service annual reports including evaluations from service users. The existing detailed annual report made the self-review exercise relatively straightforward. However, this is the first time consideration had to be given to reflect and include the requirements on the structure of the business plan from an external funder – in this case IASP. This made it more challenging to put together. It is also the first two year plan and the first to relate to the new Minimum Standards for IAS Service.

The funding allowed additional time to:

- Take advice from the IAS Service manager and commissioners about the IASP requirements – e.g. lack of familiarity with the terminology being used.
- Reflect on the recent past to produce the self-review report, which included tentative improvement priorities.
- Meet with and/or survey numerous parents, YP and professionals to consider improvement priorities. This time-consuming exercise felt like a luxury and on this scale would previously have not been possible due to time constraints but it was essential in order to shape the service priorities.
- Work as a whole team throughout enabling them to contribute and ensuring they were familiar with, and on board with, the new goals and requirements of the plan. This aspect proved beneficial in bonding the team and enabling them to have some control over what will be expected of them in the next two years.
- Take time to consider what had been learned and to put together a coherent plan with much more detail than previously possible – to such an extent that it should run like clockwork!

Impact to service beneficiaries

The joint working required has paid dividends in setting up new partnerships. This included:

- sharing Bucks IAS Service knowledge of using volunteers with the Early Help teams and planning to share a volunteer coordinator;
- creating an ever-stronger link with Buds disability service which now shares the building with Bucks IASS and will provide the service with expertise on accessibility, employment opportunities, law and benefits.

Lessons learnt

1. Having the basics in place including a knowledgeable, resilient and adaptable team and compliance with the previous Quality Standards provided a great springboard for the challenges of the IASP.
2. Working on meaningful co-production with service users and partners has meant a more effective service is emerging.
3. Make use of service “friends”:
 - FACT Bucks (the parent carer forum) and BCC value Bucks IASS highly
 - FACT Bucks has been a supportive and encouraging critical friend throughout
 - BCC has helped in many ways including enabling the service to develop its web content, quickly securing new arm’s length accommodation when the premises previously occupied by Bucks IASS was no longer available
 - the new commissioner being available to answer questions about funding bids
4. The complexity of the planning and bidding process is very daunting, but it is possible to get it done and worthwhile when it’s finished – don’t give up!

How is the approach being sustained?

Bucks IAS Service now has a detailed process and templates for future planning. This includes:

- cycles of co-production focus groups
- “100 new service users survey”
- “SEND reforms survey”
- Steering Group

Objectives included in the 2 year plan will be embedded in team members’ individual performance plans. The plan has built-in points of review and should naturally develop onwards as some challenges are reduced and new ones appear. A project management assistant has been factored in who will help to oversee the plan in the first year and assist in devising a new role to start in the second year which could potentially include support with strategic business planning.

Contact details

Sarah Smith

Team Leader

IAS Service

sjsmith@buckscc.gov.uk

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/education/bucks-sendias-service/send-information-advice-and-support-service/>