



## Milton Keynes: An IAS Service that does not standstill – building on 4 years’ of growth

The Borough of Milton Keynes continues to be a net importer of families; a rich community of diversity – culture, race and language. There are areas of both affluence and deprivation together with all the challenges that large communities face. Milton Keynes is set to double in size over the next 30 years to half a million residents.

The IAS Service has seen a very modest growth in capacity from 2 part-time employees in September 2014 increasing to 5 part-time employees and 2 volunteers by September 2018 totalling less than 3 FTE staff. The IAS Service delivers information advice and support to parents, carers and children and young people (CYP) from 0-25 covering the required remit from SEN Support to supporting at SEND Tribunal appeals. The IAS Service is led by a part-time service manager and until September 2018 was a term time only service.

Since September 2014 the IAS Service has worked hard to become a respected and high profile team working collaboratively with external colleagues where appropriate, particularly the Parent Carer Forum as well as the specialist teaching and educational psychology teams, to improve outcomes for CYP in the Borough.

The reach of the IAS Service continues to increase by around 45% year on year. The team members focus on the core remit while also each leading on an individual project. The annual SEND Information Day is an example and 2019’s event saw over 500 people attending and has become an important resource for families and professionals alike.

### The challenge

The main challenge has been capacity due to core funding of the IAS Service remaining static for some years now. However, the funding received via the Independent Support initiative and more recently the Information Advice and Support (IAS) Programme, has enabled a modest growth in the team thus strengthening the infrastructure moving forward.

Although the SEND Information Day offers a valuable range of workshops for parents and CYP, delivering any additional training to service users and professionals has been difficult.

Other challenges faced include not having an independent website presence to distance the service from the local authority (LA). The perception of some parents regarding the impartiality of service delivery is sometimes a challenge, evidenced occasionally by comments via social media and feedback received directly.

Historical negative perceptions in the LA of the previous IAS Service, that bears no resemblance to the current service, still occasionally occur. The service is confident that such uninformed beliefs under scrutiny would dissipate.

Another challenge related to the management of the budget. In line with the new minimum standards, this now lies with the service manager enabling appropriate management and use of funds. A significant delay in being able to utilise ring fenced funds resulted in a “catching-up approach” to spending. This was frustrating but now feels less the case and going forward full use of this opportunity is on target. Sustainability is a major challenge – the motivation to implement significant change versus the concern of unsustainability longer term. Building in resilience and succession planning for staff changes and new developments, are key in addressing this.

## Initial impact of IAS programme funding

As a part-time service manager the prospect of major change and expansion was daunting. This strategic planning period has been vital to change the management structure to enable planned changes to take place moving forward.

The self-review of the service was an important task to undertake and has enabled a deeply reflective analysis to take place. Gaps in delivery were identified while at the same time reflecting on what had been achieved in the time since 2014 was also an important part of this process.

2 senior posts have been created allowing for some of the day-to-day operational activities to be devolved. For example, delegating the management of the service referral pathway (advice line/emails) and some projects eased the pressure on the service manager. Changing the direct reporting responsibilities also freed up time for the service manager to focus on the development of the service in line with the development plan and strategic functions. There is and will be an increased focus on the digitalisation of the service to increase smarter working and greater accessibility for service users.

There is a benefit to the team as a whole with increased development of skills and opportunities for the future. For example, project management courses are planned for the two senior members of the team as well as internal management training. The casework team have been and will continue to be encouraged to widen their experience and knowledge as further opportunities arise.

The opportunity has allowed for increased creative and strategic thinking to explore the needs of potential service users and develop a “prevent agenda” through training and targeted support. An example has been to explore other funding opportunities leading hopefully to joint commissioned service delivery which has not been achieved before.

## Impact to service beneficiaries

With the review and proposed development of the service, has come a real sense of working effectively in collaboration with other services and teams to enable greater impact. A realisation and acknowledgement that by joining forces there is an opportunity to work more efficiently within the wider LA both from a financial perspective as well as other resource perspectives.

Working to a development plan with clear minimum standards has enabled greater understanding for third parties to see the potential for partnership working. It has led to increased clarity for the team around opportunities and service delivery moving forward. An important benefit for the team is to feel it is a part of that journey and to contribute to the need for change now and moving forward.

A clear strategic plan will evolve that addresses identified risks should they start to materialise, allows for new opportunities that arise, reflects staffing changes and demand from service users, will allow for a

more sustainable and needs led service delivery. Succession planning will be robust and vulnerabilities will decrease with the new infrastructure and direction.

## Lessons learnt

Planning takes time. Working in partnership with others takes a great deal of discussion and collaborative thinking. Consider the strengths individually and collectively within the team and utilise them. A good team dynamic leads to a lively and creative ethos as well as a supportive team environment. Be confident in your strengths and acknowledge your successes regularly!

## How is the approach being sustained?

The IAS Service in Milton Keynes is to be supported effectively by an Advisory Service comprising service users and professionals prepared to share their expertise and vision for the future. To continue to work in partnership with the Parent Carer Forum – PACA MK (an independent forum for parent carers of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs in Milton Keynes) and other key stakeholders.

Sustainability strengthened by continued recognition of the value of the service across the LA as well as the CCG and continued efforts to explore additional funding moving forward.

The importance of evidencing the impact on the community will play a vital part in ensuring the above is achieved. Data gathered will need to be accurate, timely and of value showing evidence of positive outcomes for CYP with SEND.

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