

## Shropshire: Increasing IAS service efficiency without compromising quality

Shropshire is the largest inland county in England and is predominantly a rural county and is bordered by Cheshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Telford and Wrekin and the Welsh counties of Powys and Wrexham. It has a population of 320,000 approx, 22% of who are 19 or under, 25% are 60 or over and 32% educated to degree level. The total school population is 44,000 approx and there are 1837 EHCPs. Historically Shropshire has a higher than national average of EHCPs; 4.18% in 2017 and a lower than average number on SEN Support. This is being addressed by the LA with the introduction of Graduated Support Plans, i.e. non Statutory Plans and for some parents this is proving satisfactory.

The IAS Service is hosted by Citizens Advice Shropshire, an organisation with a reputation for supporting vulnerable people, so the services compliment each other. Fundamental issues such as operating all year round and attending tribunals (total of only 4 appeals registered for 2015-17) have been standard practice since the service was established in 1999.

### The challenge

There is a significant geographical difficulty requiring cross county working with up to 5 other counties and Wales where SEN law is very different and Education, Health and Care Plans do not exist in law. It can take 2 hours to drive from one end of the county to the other. This means that 2 meetings can take an Officer's whole day.

There are 129 primary schools, 20 secondary schools, 2 special schools, 1 resourced provision and one PRU (TMBSS) in Shropshire. 67% of the 129 primary schools are named on the designated rural schools list (2016) and 49 of them have less than 100 pupils on roll (Census data Spring 2017). 10 % of schools have 50 pupils or less. Shropshire IAS Service believe that this high number of small schools leads to an increased workload as there is a higher than average number of schools with limited experience of working with children with SEND.

Referral numbers continue to increase term by term requiring the service to continuously develop and evolve the way it works in order to meet demand.

The service cannot meet the Minimum Standards on core LA funding alone. The funding is insecure requiring the service to operate using fixed term contracts creating uncertainty within the team.

### Initial impact of IAS programme funding

The self-review was a time consuming task, however, the manager believes it was the most useful and beneficial strategic work ever undertaken for IAS Service. Its requirement to be completed meant time had to be prioritised which under ordinary circumstances would invariably have, even with the best of intentions, been diverted to other tasks.

There has always been a requirement to produce regular statistics for reports but only a brief analysis of the meaning behind the figures was considered, however, the self-review was the first time this data was

used as part of an in-depth analysis and full consideration could be given to the implications for Shropshire IAS Service.

It allowed for a true understanding regarding the gaps and priorities to be established. As a result a parent support group that was time consuming and often poorly attended in Shrewsbury was cancelled and replaced with the development of a parent training offer to be delivered throughout the county. This model includes availability of a drop-in service immediately after the training i.e. IAS Service staff being available for face-to-face work in areas that have previously found it difficult to access the service in person.

## Impact to service beneficiaries

The biggest impact of the review and development of the 2 year Plan has been the service offer to CYP. The requirement is for the quality of service to CYP to be of equal quality to that offered to parents but the number of CYP accessing the service is significantly low in comparison to the number of parents. This is partly because IASS, previously as Parent Partnership Services have traditionally been required to serve parents only but although the remit expanded in 2014 to include CYP the resources were not available to dedicate to these groups. Following the service review each IASS Officer has been allocated an area of responsibility as part of a Minimum Standard that require improvement and the CYP Lead is already making good progress in this area.

## Lessons learnt

Although the service Development Plan has always been updated on a regular basis, historically the service monitored standards with the LA and reported results to IASSN opportunities to review and consider service requirements and delivery was missed. The review highlighted the importance of being able to stop and really take stock of the current service arrangements. With funding from IASP work with CYP is being established and is beginning to take off. Sharing the load e.g. all officers leading on a different aspect regarding the Minimum Standards, means that all necessary areas of development can move forward simultaneously.

## How is the approach being sustained?

Shropshire LA showed its commitment to IAS Service by sending 2 commissioners to the CDC workshop held in October 2018. The local Parent Carer Forum has also agreed to offer support with delivery of the IAS programme.

IAS programme funding has been used to make the service is able to operate as efficiently as possible for the future.

Governance arrangements have been strengthened by re-establishing its steering group and again this will help the service evolve as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The service is endeavouring to sustain service delivery by reducing the need for in-depth casework by empowering parents by making more information available on the website and improving accessibility of training for parents by delivering it throughout the county followed up with face-to-face sessions.

Another increase in efficiency that has been introduced is by helping as many clients as possible without the need to record personal details thus reducing administration time spent on processing cases. Cases requiring casework are no longer routinely allocated to an Officer but are held centrally. A duty system is in

operation and the client is advised and updated by the officer on duty. However, some cases are still allocated if their circumstances require so e.g. complex, where it is known the school will not offer support without IASS input or when the client also has identified needs of their own.

The service is also ensuring it is in a good position to deliver on funding opportunities.

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