

staffordshire: developing a sustainable IAS Service offer fit for the future

Staffordshire is a two-tier authority with a population of 867,000 people living across the 1,000 square miles of the county spread across eight districts. The county boundary of Staffordshire incorporates Stoke-on-Trent which is managed by a unitary authority and has a separate IASS. Staffordshire has 400 statutory maintained schools which includes 23 special schools. The number of school age children is 122,904 of which 11,754 (9.6%) are identified as pupils under SEN support. The number of children with EHCPs is 4,077 (3.3%). The total number of pupils in Staffordshire with SEN is 15,831 (12.9%). (Data source: DfE National Statistics – SEN in England: January 2018 (Table 15)).

Staffs IAS Service provides an individual casework service for parents, carers, CYP including support for parents to participate in decision-making about their child; early disagreement resolution, mediation support and appeals to tribunal.

Its mission is to support parents, carers and YP with their journey through Education, Health and Social Care systems, by providing free, impartial, accurate and confidential information, advice and support and promoting independence by empowering them to express their views, understand and exercise their rights in legal matters covering all aspects of the SEND statutory requirements and Health and Social Care.

The challenge

Since November 2016 the service has undertaken a review by the LA. This led to the service being retained by Staffordshire County Council with added responsibility of working with CYP, with the same level of resources. The increase in demand by service users since the reforms in 2014 and changes in staffing have resulted in additional workload pressures for the team, with limited capacity to deliver face-to-face meetings, this is being addressed through the operational plan. The service helpline remains responsive and the call back rate stands at 100% within the 48-hour requirement.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

Through the IAS programme funding the service manager has been able to dedicate time to the development of a service self-assessment in partnership with parents and professionals. This highlighted strengths and areas for improvement for the service required to support the local SEND community. This in turn supported the creation of a CYP 's engagement plan, which commenced in November 2018 and will be delivered to March 2020 initially. The first activities commenced in a special school setting to capture the voice of CYP, to influence positive change in the SEND system.

The funding has also enabled the IAS Service Manager to allocate time to the development of two-year operational plan with a focus on collaborative working to enable joint commissioning, to strengthen the strategic partnerships with health and social care and to plan further engagement work to extend the reach to CYP with SEND across the county. It has enabled the service manager to dedicate time to work on the strategic planning and engagement activities and developing relationships with the LA and the CCG. It

has provided the manager with dedicated time to engage with the parent, carer group, which has established good partnership working to take place. This partnership will support the next phase of the project and the development of joint commissioning with the LA, Health and Social Care.

Impact to service beneficiaries

The funding enabled an additional fixed term officer post to support the increase in demand from parents for casework activity. The officer is also the dedicated lead on the delivery of the CYP's engagement plan activities which is in operation across South Staffordshire working with CYP to capture their views on the SEND system. This work will continue and roll out across the county during the next 12 months. The service has also been able to develop a new website which is fit for purpose and separate from the LA. There is more work to do as the website is constantly evolving to ensure current information is available for service users.

Lessons learnt

During the first year it became clear the additional resource was needed in order to allocate sufficient time to develop relationships with professionals in settings who work with CYP with SEND, to enable the service to capture the voice of CYP. Although working with a special school proved successful, engagement with the Early Years sector proved more difficult in getting parents to engage. Different strategies into ways of effective engagement are still being explored. The relationship with the CCG remains strong, the Social Care partnership element is an identified area requiring further development in order to enable collaborative working. Added value for the work done so far has been evidenced in the recent Ofsted\CQC SEND Local Area Inspection, which identified the effectiveness of the SENDIASS service but reinforced the need for more face-to-face engagement; this is being addressed through LA and IAS contribution.

How is the approach being sustained?

Through continuous collaborative working and delivery of the operational plan, the service strategic business planning will be sustained. The manager is working with the LA Commissioner of service to ensure governance arrangements are in place for the IAS Service through the LA SEND Partnership Board, which has raised awareness of the service with the LA and key strategic partners. The manager is supporting the parent, carer group Voice for Change and ensured they have parent representatives on the SEND Partnership Board supported by the service manager, hosted by the LA. They are also members of the Service Advisory Group.

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