Annual Report

September 2019
Introduction

Wokingham SENDIASS offers impartial information, advice and support relating to all aspects of SEN and Disabilities, including Health, Social Care, and Personal Budgets. We support children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and disabilities and their parents.

The information, advice and support that we offer are firmly based in the law and the SEND Code of Practice. We provide unbiased information and advice about Wokingham Borough Council’s policies and procedures and about the policy and practice in local schools and other settings.

Support is provided through a mixture of training and workshops for parents, telephone or email support, face-to-face meetings with parents or young people, support in meetings with education, health and social care professionals. We can offer support from initial concerns that a child or young person may have SEND through to requesting and maintaining an Education, Health and Care Plan, advising on the right of appeal through the SEND Tribunal system and support if a child/young person is at risk of, or has been excluded from school.

Currently the SENDIASS team is staffed by 1.68 FTE and we have recently recruited 2 further staff for a 1 year fixed term: a 0-25 co-ordinator to develop the youth service (0.5FTE) and a second assistant (25 hours per week term time only). We currently have 3 volunteers to support the lower level cases with a clear line of supervision from our permanent staff and to assist with some admin tasks.
Summary of activity September 2018 – August 2019

Case Work

We have continued to experience a high demand for our service. Prior to the SEND reforms in 2014 our case load was approximately 75. Figures for open cases are currently 100. Numbers of new cases each year have risen steadily over the last 5 years. There has been a significant increase again this year as we saw double the usual amount of referrals in January – February (59 this year, compared to 30 in the previous year.) In common with many services nationwide caseload is also increasing in complexity, so that each case takes more time.

In 2018 we experienced an unforeseen delay in recruiting a new assistant following the retirement of a member of staff. As a result we had only 1 member of staff during the period July – November 2018 and were consequently unable to respond to everyone within the timescales that we would usually adhere to. A decision was made to send messages to parents apologising for the delay and suggesting other sources of support. We continued to monitor messages carefully so that urgent cases could be prioritised. Efforts were made to rectify the situation as quickly as possible and once a second member of staff was recruited in November our response times returned to our usual timescales.

Over the course of the year we have had a total of 252 new cases (last year’s figure was 216). The graph below indicates a rise in the number of cases open at any one time, due to the increase in demand and also in the number of complex, lengthy cases.
This year we have worked on an unprecedented number of tribunal and mediation cases (15 Tribunals and 17 dispute resolution). This is due in part to the pressures on school places and the SEN department being unable to source places that meet a child’s needs and/or comply with parents’ preferences. These pressures also led to a particular growth in complex tribunal or mediation cases during January and February, as there were a number of Year 6 children who were not allocated a place by the legal deadline of 15th February, or were unhappy with their allocations, due to a lack of suitable spaces. Each of these cases takes a significant amount of preparation time to assist parents to understand their entitlements and gather the information needed to present their case clearly. In the past the service may have only been involved in 1-2 tribunals at a time and 1-2 mediations. So we have not only experienced a rise in the number of cases in total, but also in the number of highly complex and time consuming cases. See Appendix 1 for further information on intervention levels for cases. Our hard work in this area has been very worthwhile: so far, none of the cases that we have supported intensively have gone to court: all have been resolved in advance.

We have also seen an increase in the number of cases which are related to poor Mental Health, particularly anxiety and school refusal. Previously we have not tracked these figures but they had been included in other categories of work. Since July we have tracked new referrals that are as a result of Mental Health Issues.

We still face challenges with following up cases in a timely manner. We strive to prioritise the more complex cases. However, we know from experience that whilst a percentage of cases that we are unable to follow up will require no more support, there are also a number that will reach crisis point and, either contact us again later with much larger problems, or will not contact us again as they have reached a point where they cannot see which way to turn. As of 31/8/19 we had 42 outstanding actions to complete on casework, dating back to May, so this is still an issue for us.

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We continue to ensure that cases are closed once a piece of work is complete, rather than having some families who remain open to us for long periods of time. This enables us to record each piece of work that is done and will also enable us to gain feedback from users more effectively and to measure the impact that we have. It also ensures that the team is able to focus on the outstanding action backlog.

Further analysis of case work can be found in Appendix 1.

Training and workshops:

We have not completed any training courses to parents in the last 12 months. The process of training parents in the transfer process from statements to EHCPs concluded in spring 2018. Since then we have been working on devising new training courses. Part of our current project plan has been to devise 3 new parent courses jointly with Reading and Bracknell, covering EHCPs, Annual reviews and SEN support. This is now nearly complete and we hope to begin delivering these courses over the winter.
Attendance at events:

We have attended the following events in order to promote the service to users:

- Local Offer Live, formerly CAN Day (September)
- Addington Opportunities Evening (November)

Ofsted Inspection

During March Sendiass were involved in the Local Area Inspection of SEND, taking part in preparation meetings and focus groups as required, assisting the parent carer forum to ensure participation of parents in the process and preparing information for our own service’s part of the inspection. The inspectors were complimentary about the service.

‘The special educational needs information advice and support service is held in high regard. Officers in this small and expanding team work diligently to signpost parents to help them to access provision and additional support. Parents talked positively about the work of this service to help them find their way through the complicated processes involved in SEND.’
Service Development: Progress against 2018/19 Action Plan

1. Firmly establish the use of our volunteers in order to increase the availability of support.
   It has proved hard to match up the availability of volunteers with the time that support is required at meetings. As a result we are thinking differently about how we can make use of them. Recently volunteers have begun to collect feedback from service users, have helped with some administrative tasks, assisted with the website design and assisted parents with completing EHC applications. Unfortunately only 3 of our original 6 volunteers remain: two had to stop due to personal commitments. The third is now employed by the Sendiass service. Her volunteering training and experience enabled her to quickly assimilate into her new role. We are very grateful for the support they give to the service.

2. Develop our youth offer, by employing a dedicated youth worker, with proven experience of engaging with young people, to develop the service to young people initially for at least 1 year, 10-15 hours per week, term time only.
   We have recently recruited a 0-25 co-ordinator for 18.5 hours per week, initially on a 1 year contract, to develop this area of our service.

3. Continue to expand our use of the database to ensure that we are able to evidence demand for the service, predict future demand and demonstrate our impact.
   Work is ongoing. We are now able to clearly demonstrate the rise and fall in demand for the service at a simple level, but are beginning to collect more detailed information on the type of work we are carrying out.

4. Improve our procedures for collecting feedback on the service. We introduced a satisfaction survey last year, which ensured that we are able to provide information that is requested nationally. However, participation has been low and we need to look at ways to improve this. One of our volunteers contacts each service user as a case closes, checking that everything is now resolved and asking them to answer a few simple questions (see Appendix 2 for results). We also have an online survey that can be sent to those who cannot make contact with, or who do not want to answer the survey by phone. This has significantly improved the response numbers.

5. Ensure we have a clear ring-fenced budget for the service and a Service Level Agreement with the local authority (and possibly health) so that everyone is clear about what we need to provide.
   We now have a clear ring-fenced budget and are currently working on the Service Level Agreement with the help of the commissioning team.

6. We have recently been successful in applying for a grant from the Information, Advice and Support Programme. The purpose of the grant is to enable us to conduct a detailed self-review of the service, including measuring our compliance against new Quality Standards (published November 2018) and to develop a 2 year service operational plan.
   Our service review and development plan was completed in September. We were successful in applying for funding for further grants to aid us in the completion of the tasks in the first year of the development plan. This is an ambitious plan but will transform the service and give it a firm
foundation on which to build further. There are 5 components to the grant, each covering a different area of development:

1. **Service contribution.** This has allowed us to increase our staff capacity to ensure case work does not suffer whilst development work takes place. We have recruited an assistant for 25 hours per week term time for 1 year.

2. **Supporting strategic functions.** The aim of this work is to meet the minimum standard for commissioning, governance and management, more specifically to develop a Service Level Agreement, establish a ring-fenced budget, establish long term staffing needs for the service and to improve our data collection and reporting to ensure we can evidence impact and future need.

3. **Supporting core functions.** We wish to improve our compliance with the minimum standard which requires that we provide a service to 0-25 year olds. We have completed the recruitment process for a dedicated Children and Young People’s lead to ensure time and resource is protected for this work. Our 0-25 co-ordinator joined us this month and will spend the year establishing the most effective way of supporting children and young people and will develop a service that can specifically meet their needs.

4. **Enhancing skills/supporting CPD.** Our training needs within the service have increased due to having 3 new members of staff. Much of this fund will be used to support their initial training. We have spent some time establishing a core training programme for staff and introducing peer to peer support through group supervision. We have taken opportunities provided by nationally available training on relevant topics, eg Local Government Ombudsman, Supporting children with ASD, PPEP Anxiety in Children and Young People.

5. **Supporting innovation.** We have used part of this fund, alongside a capital fund to begin work on the development of a stand-alone website. This will enable parents to access information and advice on a range of SEND related topics at a time that suits them. We hope that it will also reduce the number of simple enquiries, freeing staff time to work on more complex cases. The funding has also been used to develop training courses for parents. This will increase their knowledge and confidence and once again will reduce the number of individual enquiries we receive on popular topics.
Action plan for next 12 months

Our action plan will focus on continuing work on our 2-year development plan:

- Establish a service level agreement with LA/clinical commissioning group based on minimum standards.
- Agreement of long term staffing requirements required to meet SLA and recruit into agreed permanent posts.
- Continue work on data collection, reporting and analysis.
- A clear, separate, youth service offer established, initially focussing on 14-25 year olds. We hope that some of our young service users will begin to contribute to the further development of the service.
- Create a stand-alone website accessible to all service users, including the development of a section specifically for young people.
- Develop our use of volunteers, training them to complete a wider range of tasks to ensure we are able to offer the support needed by parents. Aim to begin recruiting a further set of volunteers within the next 12 months.
- Deliver our new training courses to parents, adjusting and improving them in response to feedback and consider what further training is required by parents and professionals.
- Increase range of leaflets available to parents.
- New staff and volunteers complete mandatory training requirements.
- Increase ongoing training and development, both externally and learning more about what services are available locally for children and young people with SEND.
- Increase availability and accessibility of the service through increasing the attendance at drop-in sessions and offering a limited number of out of office hours consultations.
- Once the website and service for young people is established we will increase our publicity ensuring that more people are aware of the service we offer. There are still many more parents and young people that could benefit from our service but have not heard of us. Once some of our larger projects are complete we will be able to work on improving our service reach and have the capacity to respond to the increased demand that will bring.
- Establish the use of social media.
Appendix 1: Further analysis of casework

The following analysis is based on new referrals received between 1 September 2018 and 31 August 2019, and comparison with the previous 12 month period.

Number of referrals by age of child

![Graph showing number of referrals by age of child for 2017/18 and 2018/19.]

Number of referrals by disability

![Graph showing number of referrals by disability for 2017/18 and 2018/19.]

Children and young people with communication and interaction as their primary need continues to be the predominant group, consistent with the SEN population within Wokingham.
There has been a significant rise in our work on tribunals this year. There has also been an increase in work concerning placement, either for those wanting help seeking an alternative placement or those unable to access appropriate placements. Many of our tribunal cases have also been primarily around placement issues.

**Intervention levels**

Following advice from the IASSN we record intervention levels, which are defined as follows:

- **Level 1:** Phone or email support – single intervention
- **Level 2:** Phone or email support over a period of time. This may include support at a meeting, a home visit, or liaison with other agencies
- **Level 3:** Provision of support at or for a series of meetings over a period of months; ongoing support through statutory process (eg EHCP); assistance with preparation for exclusion appeal.
- **Level 4:** Intensive support during legal processes, eg Tribunal

The chart below shows cases that have closed at some point during the last 12 months at each level and the average time each case has taken. Level 3 and 4 cases can both require a significant amount of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of projects</th>
<th>Average time (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our current open case load is divided as follows. We have a large amount of level 4 cases. Currently only the service manager has received appropriate training to support Level 4. In addition we have some very complex level 3 cases which require a significant amount of attention. Our future service developments aim to reduce the amount of support required for level 1 and 2 so that we can focus more of our attention on levels 3 and 4. We are concerned that sometimes we are unable to give the detailed support that some of these cases need, because of time constraints and trying to ensure that everyone can access some advice and support.
Appendix 2: SENDIASS Survey Results

Parents are asked to complete a survey when we close a case. The following are the most recent responses given in the 12 months from 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2019.

**How easy was it to get in touch with us?**

![Pie chart showing responses to how easy it was to get in touch with SENDIASS.]

- 54% responded 5 (very easy)
- 28% responded 4
- 11% responded 3
- 7% responded 2
- 7% responded 1 (not at all easy)

**How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?**

![Pie chart showing responses to how helpful the information was.]

- 67% responded 5 (very helpful)
- 19% responded 4
- 9% responded 3
- 5% responded 2
- 5% responded 1 (not at all helpful)

**How impartial, fair and unbiased do you think we were?**

![Pie chart showing responses to the impartiality of the service.]

- 74% responded 5 (very)
- 18% responded 4
- 9% responded 3
- 5% responded 2
- 5% responded 1 (not at all)
What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you?

Overall how satisfied are you with the service we gave?

How likely is it that you would recommend this service to others?
Comments from some of our parents:

I felt very supported. Sendiass found a clause we could use if we felt the school weren’t listening. This gave us more confidence.

It has been a long emotional journey. I’ve been through many tough assignments at work but this was by far the toughest. A massive thank you to Sendiass. You have helped us so much and kept us sane in our darkest hours.