

Review of the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (*SENDIASS*): Executive Summary

A formal review of SENDIASS was carried out June-August 2022 to ensure the service was effective, sustainable, and able to meet current and future local needs for the children, young people and families eligible for its services.

Methodology: The review was broad in scope, examining what is working well and what could be done differently. In addition to a desktop review of service performance and compliance with the national minimum standards, there was stakeholder engagement with young people, parents, and professionals through two public surveys and 18 focused conversations. The SENDIASS team and managers were informed and involved.

Findings: The review identified a number of findings which have informed the options and recommendations; some of the key findings are as follows. The permanent manager and other SENDIASS staff are trusted figures among many SEND families, and there was considerable uncertainty and case backlog in the early Spring following staff changes. Nationally, the Council for Disabled Children are promoting a more 'interventions-based' approach with case officer resource primarily focused on Level 3 and 4 cases, and the interim manager has strengthened triage systems to support this approach and reduce backlogs and delays. Data shows rising demand for the service, and the service has at times faced additional pressures due to weaknesses in other parts of the SEND system. SENDIASS now needs to engage in more strategic working, including clearer relationships and communication with other services across the SEND system to reinforce better provision and signposting for families; this should include a reintroduced SENDIASS Strategic Management Group to steer improvement and voice. There are also opportunities to refresh the website and social media to equip parents and young people with high-quality resources. Finally, joint commissioning with health and more regular performance monitoring will both help drive a continually-improving service.

Options: Three options were considered by decision-makers, with the costs, benefits and risks of each one presented. These options were: 1) Maintain the SENDIASS model in place prior to February 2022; requiring significant investment. 2) Continue to develop and build on the processes and practices installed since February 2022; requiring some investment but more streamlined processes. 3) Commission the service to an external provider; requiring testing of the feasibility of the current budget for the market, and a period of commissioning.

Recommendations: The medium-term recommendation was the adoption of Option 2, with a review against progress in July 2023; if progress against the short-term recommendations is not satisfactory, Option 3 would then be pursued. This recommendation was agreed.

The short-term recommendations included: a re-established SMG to hold the action plan; a clearer service offer for parents and disseminated to professionals; more partnership and strategic working; a full time Information Officer post, & a permanent Manager with minimal case holding; joint commissioning; a refreshed website and social media approach; more information sessions and resources produced; and agreements with parent carer groups and other SEND services detailing each service's role and potential partnerships.

As a result of the review, therefore, there will be the equivalent of one new full-time SENDIASS team member, a permanent Manager and strengthened SMG, and improvement in SENDIASS processes and strategic working that will see a stronger, more sustainable high-quality service available for every child, young person and family who needs it.