SENDIASS Annual Report 2024–2025

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1. Introduction

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) plays a vital role in empowering children, young people, and their families by providing free, impartial, and confidential information, advice, and support. This annual review reflects on the work undertaken by the service during the 2024–2025 period, highlighting key achievements, service data, and the voices of those we support.

This year has been marked by continued collaboration with families, schools, local authorities, and partner organisations to ensure that children and young people with SEND have access to the support they need to thrive. The report outlines how SENDIASS has responded to emerging needs, adapted to changes in policy and practice, and maintained a strong commitment to inclusion and equity.

We hope this review provides a transparent and informative overview of our service's impact and direction, and we welcome feedback from all stakeholders as we continue to improve and evolve.

2. Key Achievements

During the 2024–2025 reporting period, SENDIASS has made significant strides in supporting children, young people, and their families. Our work has focused on accessibility, empowerment, and collaboration, and we are proud to highlight the following achievements:

- **Expanded Outreach and Engagement**
  We increased our visibility across the community through targeted outreach events, school visits, and online engagement. This resulted in a 20% increase in new service users compared to the previous year.

- **Improved Access to Information**
  Our updated website and new digital resources have made it easier for families to access clear, up-to-date information about SEND processes, rights, and support options.

- **Training and Capacity Building**
  We delivered training sessions to parents, carers, and professionals, covering topics such as EHCP processes, mediation, SEN support.

- **Enhanced Co-Production**
  We worked closely with our parents/carers and young people to co-produce new guidance materials and ensure our service reflects lived experiences.

- **Positive Feedback and Recognition**
  Feedback from families and professionals has been overwhelmingly positive, with many highlighting the empathy, clarity, and professionalism of our team.

Quality Standards Framework for Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS)

The **Quality Standards Framework (QSF)** outlines national expectations for delivering impartial Information, Advice, and Support Services (IASS). Its primary aim is to enhance parental confidence by promoting consistent, high-quality practice.

Barnsley SENDIASS uses the QSF to assess its compliance as a local IASS provider. These standards guide the service's development planning and serve as a benchmark for evaluating performance in line with local commissioning arrangements.

SENDIASS in Barnsley evolved from the former Parent Partnership Service and has been delivered as an in-house provision. Between 2014 and 2025, the service successfully secured additional external funding to expand capacity and support developments aligned with the **Children and Families Act 2014** and the **SEND Code of Practice 2015**. This period marked a significant shift in the service's remit—from offering SEN-related IAS to parents of children aged 2–16, to providing SEND-related IAS to children, young people, and their parents/carers aged 0–25.

In 2021, the **SEND Ofsted/CQC inspection** recognised Barnsley SENDIASS as a highly effective service for families.

Service Structure

Barnsley SENDIASS is situated within the **Children's Commissioning** service area. Staff operate under the council's **hybrid working arrangements policy**, delivering support from:

- Central offices at **Westgate Plaza**
- Various **Family Hubs** across the borough
- Remote locations, offering both **face-to-face** and **virtual** interactions based on the needs of families and the service

Following recruitment and selection processes in 2023, the service has maintained a fully staffed structure since **June 2023**. The current team profile is as follows:

- **Director for Children's Commissioning**
- **SENDIASS Service Manager** – Full-time
- **SENDIASS Case Officer** – Full-time
- **SENDIASS Case Officer** – Full-time
- **SENDIASS Assistant Case Officer** – Full-time
- **SENDIASS Case Officer** – Part-time (0.5 FTE)

Budget

Barnsley SENDIASS is centrally funded to support **4.5 staff roles** and the associated operational costs. The service benefits from:

- Ongoing support from a **finance officer**
- Regular **budget monitoring meetings**
- Access to council resources including:
    - **Communications and IT support** for virtual and social media engagement
    - **Family hubs and libraries** to facilitate IASS delivery in local communities

A **rigorous training schedule** ensures staff remain up to date with local policies, including **information governance**, **safeguarding**, and other compliance requirements.

At the end of the financial year, the service recorded an **underspend** due to staff vacancies in early 2024. This enabled:

- The addition of **one full day of Case Officer capacity** throughout the year.
- The **professional development** of the Assistant Case Officer through a **one-day-per-week secondment** into a Case Officer role.

The Role of Barnsley SENDIASS to Families

Barnsley SENDIASS is in place to ensure the council fulfils its statutory duty:

"The local authority must ensure children, young people and parents are provided with information and advice on matters relating to SEN and disability." SEND Code of Practice 2015 – 2.17

To support the council in meeting this requirement, the service provides Information, Advice and Support (IAS) aligned with casework intervention levels. More details about these levels can be found on the Council for Disabled Children's website.

The intervention levels are summarised as follows:

- **Level 1 – Information:** Information and signposting via helpline, email, website downloads, presentations and training.
- **Level 2 – Information and tailored advice:** Booked phone call or virtual meeting, exchange of emails. More complex or high-level information shared
- **Level 3 – Support:** Agreement completed, case worker allocated, liaison with other agencies, face-to-face meetings or home visits, support with forms, giving views, preparing appeals.
- **Level 4 – Intensive support:** Any or all of Level 3, plus representation for parent, child or young person at meetings, appeals (including exclusions) and CETRs. Ongoing and intensive casework or advocacy that includes representation.

Barnsley SENDIASS, in collaboration with the council, delivers the service in accordance with the minimum standards for an IASS.

Service review outcomes show alignment with several requirements outlined in the minimum standards. A comprehensive audit of both processes has been conducted to inform future service development planning. This audit is reported to the SEND Partnership Board, the Service Strategic Management Group (SMG), and contributes to the national audit of IASS for the Council for Disabled Children (CDC).

The audit uses RAG rating system via the SEND Partnership Board process:
- **Red**: At risk
- Yellow: Priority area for development
- **Green:** On track

To access the full document, please email SENDIASS@barnsley.gov.uk. It is also published on the website alongside the service development plan.

3. Service Data

Referrals and Requests for Impartial Information, Advice, and Support

Barnsley SENDIASS reports quarterly data into the **Local Area SEND Data Dashboard**, which now contains a full financial year of service activity. This dataset highlights:

- The number of casework interventions and their subcategories
- Primary areas of SEND
- Referral sources
- Figures for appeals
- Staff casework activity by role within the service

This data is also shared strategically through **partnership arrangements** and the **Service Strategic Management Group (SMG)**.

According to the CRM system, a total of **2,588 interventions** were recorded across **1,700 cases** during the 2024–2025 period. These interventions span **Levels 1 to 4** of the casework intervention model.

Notably, data trends over the past three years show a **continued rise in the number of cases requiring support**, reflecting increasing demand for SENDIAS services.

Here's a visual interpretation and summary of a quarterly (Q4) snapshot of SENDIASS data reported into the SEND Data Dashboard, broken down into key categories:

📊 1. Intervention Levels

- **EHCP IL 2/3/4**: 247 cases — the largest category, indicating high engagement with EHCP-related support.
- **SEN Support IL 2/3**: 158 cases — substantial support at SEN stage.
- **Referrals/Triage IL 1/2**: 177 cases — showing strong initial contact and triage activity.
- **Dispute Resolution & Tribunal IL 4**: 115 cases combined — reflects significant involvement in formal resolution processes.

🎓 2. Education Phase

- **KS3 (Secondary)**: 250 cases — highest intervention phase.
- **KS4**: 115 cases.
- **KS2 & KS1**: 209 combined — strong presence in primary education.
- **Post-16 & Post-18**: 40 cases — lower but still notable.
- **Unknown**: 85 — suggests a need for improved data capture.

🧩 3. Intervention Subcategories

- **Triage New Referrals**: 166 — most frequent activity.
- **Placement Issues**: 134 — a key area of concern.
- **SEN Support Stages**: 92 — reflects ongoing support needs.
- **General EHCP Advice**: 39 — consistent demand for guidance.
- **Complaints, Health, Social Care, Transitions, Transport**: lower but diverse needs.

🧠 4. Primary SEND Types

- **SEN (General)**: 231 — broad category.

- **ASD**: 217 — second highest.
- **No Assessment**: 108 — highlights gaps in formal identification.
- **SEMH**: 88 — significant emotional/mental health needs.
- Other categories like ADHD, Sensory, Physical Difficulty show varied but smaller volumes.

📣 5. Referral Sources

- **Used Service Before**: 569 — strong repeat engagement.
- **Social Care Professionals**: 36 — key external referrers.
- **Word of Mouth & Web Search**: 58 — community awareness.
- **Unknown**: 49 — again, data capture could improve.

⚖️ 6. Tribunal & Mediation Cases

- **Tribunal (Placement)**: 37 — dominant issue.
- **Mediation (Placement)**: 23 — aligns with tribunal data.
- **Refusal to Assess/Issue**: present in both categories.
- **DDA & General Advice**: low but present.

👥 7. Staff Case Work

- **Case Officers**: 178 — highest workload.
- **Assistant Case Officers**: 172 — closely matched.
- **Manager**: 135 — substantial involvement.

The data shared offers a rich picture of the SENDIASS service's activity and impact. Here are the **key implications** across several dimensions:

📌 1. High Demand for EHCP and SEN Support

- **EHCP-related interventions (247)** and **SEN Support (158)** dominate the caseload.
- This suggests a **sustained need for statutory and non-statutory support**, particularly around navigating the EHCP process.

- Implication: Continued investment in staff training and resources for complex casework is essential.

🎯 2. KS3 as a Critical Pressure Point

- **KS3 (250 cases)** is the most common education phase for interventions.
- This may reflect the **transition from primary to secondary**, where needs become more pronounced or support becomes harder to access.
- Implication: Targeted outreach and transition planning at this stage could reduce escalation.

🧩 3. Placement and Triage Are Key Themes

- **Placement issues (134)** and **triage of new referrals (166)** are the most frequent subcategories.
- This indicates both **high initial demand** and **ongoing challenges with suitable placements**.
- Implication: Strengthening early intervention and placement planning could reduce tribunal and mediation cases.

🧠 4. ASD and General SEN Are Most Common Needs

- **ASD (217)** and **General SEN (231)** are the most cited primary needs.
- **No Assessment (108)** also stands out, suggesting gaps in formal identification.
- Implication: There may be a need for **better diagnostic pathways** and **awareness training** for professionals.

🔁 5. Strong Repeat Engagement

- **569 referrals from previous users** shows high trust and reliance on the service.
- Implication: This is a positive indicator of service quality but also suggests **ongoing unmet needs** in the wider system.

⚖️ 6. Tribunal and Mediation Focused on Placement

- **Placement issues dominate both tribunal (37) and mediation (23)** cases.
- Implication: There may be systemic issues with **placement availability or suitability**, requiring strategic review.

👥 7. Staff Workload Distribution

- **Case Officers and Assistant Case Officers** handle the bulk of the work, with the **Manager still heavily involved (135 cases)**.
- Implication: Consider reviewing **caseload distribution** and **managerial capacity** to ensure sustainability.

🧩 8. Data Gaps

- **85 cases with unknown education phase** and **49 unknown referral sources** highlight areas for improvement in data collection.
- Implication: Enhancing data quality will support better service planning and reporting.

This quarterly data capture has been cross-checked for reliability against data collected in the previous three quarters (Q1–Q3), ensuring that the findings are consistent and comparable. Therefore, the recommendations arising from the critical analysis of the full data set for this financial year can be considered reliable and provide a sound basis for identifying potential next steps for the service.

☑ Recommendations

- ✓ **Increase training and resources for staff handling EHCP and SEN Support cases**
- ✓ **Develop targeted transition support programs for KS3 students**
- ✓ **Enhance early intervention strategies and improve placement planning processes**
- ✓ **Improve diagnostic pathways and provide training to professionals for better identification of SEND needs**
- ✓ **Maintain high service quality while addressing systemic gaps to reduce repeat interventions**
- ✓ **Conduct strategic reviews of placement processes to minimize tribunal and mediation cases**
- ✓ **Assess staff workload distribution and consider additional support for managerial roles**
- ✓ **Implement improved data capture protocols to reduce unknown entries and support better analytics**

Information and Publicity

Barnsley SENDIASS actively promotes its services and engages with families through a variety of channels and events, including:

- Attendance at **local information events** and **school parent meetings**
- Regular **live chat sessions** via social media
- Monthly **drop-in sessions** at Family Hubs across the borough

The service is further promoted through:

- **Social media platforms** – Facebook, Twitter, and more recently, YouTube
- **Local networking** opportunities
- **Barnsley Council's Local Offer**

- A dedicated **SENDIASS section** on the Barnsley Council website
- The **National IASS Network website**

Social Media Engagement Analysis – Facebook

1. Strong User Engagement

- The service is **successfully engaging** with both service users and wider audiences via Facebook.
- **Live chat sessions** are particularly effective, with **high popularity** among parents, carers, and the SENDIASS Management Group (SMG).
- There is **community-driven demand** for more sessions, indicating that these are seen as valuable and supportive.

2. Positive Community Sentiment

- Feedback suggests a **positive atmosphere** in the parenting community surrounding these sessions.
- This reflects well on the service's ability to foster trust, openness, and support through digital channels.

3. Analytics Snapshot

- A one-week snapshot showed:
    - **19,000 views** on published posts.
    - **3,000 reaches**, which typically refers to the number of unique users who saw the content.
- These figures suggest **strong visibility and engagement**, especially for a niche service.

4. Feedback Loop

- The fact that both users and internal stakeholders (SMG) are requesting more sessions shows that the platform is not only engaging but also **responsive to user needs**

🎓 Training

All Barnsley SENDIASS staff undertake training through the **National IASS Network** to ensure they are equipped to fulfil their roles effectively. Key training achievements include:

- Completion of **all three levels of legal training** (or currently in progress)
- Successful completion of **mandatory training** required for compliance with Barnsley Council's governance arrangements

🤝 Networking and Collaboration

The **SENDIASS Service Manager** plays an active role in local and regional collaboration by:

- Attending and reporting to **IASS regional meetings** to represent both the service and the local area
- Participating in **local working group boards**
- Contributing to **local area project work** as required

Informing Local Policy and Practice

The SENDIASS Service Manager is a key strategic partner in the local area and contributes to policy and practice development through:

- Regular attendance at the **SEND Partnership Board** and other strategic boards
- Submission of **highlight reports** detailing service progress and areas of challenge for oversight and scrutiny
- Providing service data to the **SEND Data Dashboard**
- Preparing reports for the **Service Strategic Management Group (SMG)**
    - These meetings are formally minuted
    - Reports and minutes are published on the **SENDIASS website**

🔍 Monitoring of Service

Barnsley SENDIASS participates in the **national evaluation of Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS)**. This includes completing a **national benchmarking survey** that assesses service performance against the **Minimum**

Standards Framework. The data is collated by the **National IASS Network** and reported to the **Department for Education (DfE)**.

Locally, the service is monitored through:

- **Three SMG meetings per year**, where reports are produced and scrutinised
    - Minutes from these meetings are published on the SENDIASS website
- A **Service Development Plan**, which is regularly reviewed against the minimum standards and also published online
- An **annual survey** to gather feedback from service users

📋 Annual Survey – What Our Families Have Said About the Service

Each year, Barnsley SENDIASS conducts an **annual survey** to gather feedback from service users about the Information, Advice and Support (IAS) they have received. While feedback is collected continuously throughout the year, this survey provides a structured approach to **quantitative and qualitative data collection**.

📊 *Key Findings from the 2024–2025 Survey*

- **Ease of Contact**
    - 89% said the service was *easy to get in touch with*
    - 11% said it was *fairly easy* to contact the service
- **Helpfulness of IAS Provided**
    - 100% reported the IAS was *very helpful*
- **Impartiality of the Service**
    - 98% felt the service was *neutral, fair, and unbiased*
    - 2% felt it was *reasonably neutral, fair, and unbiased*
- **Impact of IAS on Families** *(multiple responses allowed)*
    - 25% said the service *helped them*
    - 21% said it made them *feel more confident*
    - 26% said they *got the information they needed*
    - 25% said they *felt supported to have their voice heard*
- **Overall Satisfaction**

- 98% were *very satisfied* with the service
- 2% were *somewhat satisfied*

- **Likelihood to Recommend**
  - 100% said they were *very likely* to recommend the service to others

Here is the **word cloud infographic** created from the qualitative feedback shared by families in the Barnsley SENDIASS annual survey:

What It Shows:

- Prominent words like **support**, **amazing**, **helpful**, **Sarah**, **Chloe**, and **SENDIASS** reflect recurring themes of appreciation, emotional impact, and staff recognition.
- Phrases like **"above and beyond"**, **"beacon of light"**, and **"great advice"** highlight the value families place on the service.

Thematic Findings

Analysis of family experiences in the local area has identified several recurring themes:

- **Increased parental pressure**: Parents and carers of children with SEND are facing heightened challenges and are becoming more reliant on support services.
- **High demand for specialist placements**: Requests for specialist educational placements remain significantly higher than for mainstream options among children with EHCPs.
- **Emotional strain and resilience**: Many parents and carers report emotional fatigue, which is affecting their ability to cope and advocate for their children.
- **Transition challenges**: Key phase transitions, particularly from **Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3**, continue to be a difficult period for children and young people.
- **Interrupted education**: Children and young people are missing education due to:
    - School attendance issues
    - Exclusions
    - Partial timetables
    - Elective Home Education (EHE)
    - Delays in accessing specialist provision
- **Financial hardship**: Families are increasingly experiencing financial poverty.
- **High tribunal appeal rates**: There is a notable volume of appeals being made to tribunals.
- **Communication barriers**: Reciprocal communication between service users and providers remains a challenge, hindering joint decision-making.
- **Independent assessments**: Parents and carers are seeking independent assessments to support their children's needs.
- **Use of Right to Choose**: Families are using the **Right to Choose** process to access quicker assessments for **ASD/ADHD**.
- **Digital access difficulties**: Parents and carers face challenges navigating technological systems to access information about their child or young person.

4. Next Steps for Performance Management

Barnsley SENDIASS continues to act as both a **strategic and operational partner** within the local area. The service contributes to the **SEND Data Dashboard** and prepares reports for the **SEND Partnership Board when**

requested. Within these board meetings, SENDIASS also engages in **critical analysis** of reports from other SEND partners.

Planned next steps include:

1. **Sharing operational and strategic insights** to support local policy and planning developments
2. **Active participation in the SENDIASS SMG Board** to ensure ongoing review of partnership arrangements
3. **Providing data that reflects the lived experiences** of children and young people, and the outcomes achieved
4. **Annual collection of service user feedback** to inform and shape the evolution of IASS in response to local needs

These activities support compliance with the **Minimum Standards Framework for SEND IASS**, specifically:

- **1.2 & 1.7** – Commissioning, governance, and management arrangements
- **2.3** – Strategic functions

Service Overview

Barnsley SENDIASS has continued to strengthen its identity as a key partner within the local area, developing a strategic relationship with the SEND Local Area Partnership (LAP) and reporting regularly through senior leadership governance arrangements.

Service staff take pride in their achievements during this reporting period and value their roles as employees of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC). They benefit from a wide range of internal professional development opportunities.

Staff attendance and overall service delivery remain stable. Team members appreciate opportunities to reflect on their practice and have matured collectively as IASS professionals. This year, their reflections highlight:

- **Increased confidence** in their roles
- **High motivation** to deliver the best outcomes for families
- A strong commitment to **balancing service pressures** with rising referral volumes

- A thoughtful approach to **prioritising service activities** in response to growing demand

5. Contact US

If you require any further information about this report, please don't hesitate to contact:

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