

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee 04
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Special Educational Needs and/or Disability Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) service

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Cabinet Member: Frances Nicholson, Lead Member for Children and Families
Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

1.1. What is SENDIAS?

A free, confidential and impartial service providing information advice and support to parents, carers, children and young people (up to aged 25) about special educational needs and disability (SEND) .

The service is jointly funded by Somerset County Council, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Council for Disabled Children.

1.2. The ethos of the SENDIAS offer is to advocate for and empower parents and young people to have the confidence to challenge schools, health services and other agencies at an early stage in the process of finding the right support. This also ensures that more vulnerable families are informed and have an equitable part in the proceedings.

Where this works, agencies have a better understanding of their responsibilities under the SEND Code of Practice which reduces the pressure of the workload of the SEND Case work team and costs associated with mediation and tribunals decrease.

Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan process: The majority of SENDIAS support now centres around the EHC plan process and support to and attending mediation and SENDIST tribunals, which are costly and time-consuming to the local authority and families.

From 1.4.20 SENDIAS Support workers will work with schools and families to ensure that schools better understand their responsibilities and offer the right support where an EHCP is not appropriate. This work will prevent unnecessary requests for an EHCP which causes anxiety for families and creates delays and unnecessary costs in the system.

This early intervention will also avoid families needing to undertake mediation and legal processes which in turn will also save families and the system time, anxiety and cost.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

2.1. Members of the Committee are asked to consider and comment on:

The areas of success within the service:

- Improved partnership working- building relationships with families, schools and health and social care colleagues in order to offer a cohesive and effective approach
- Better support and tools to do the job – a newly designed website, up-to-date promotional material, an improved Local Offer and the Effective Support for Children and Young People with SEND and their families in Somerset document
- Successfully implementing National Standards which will attract future national investment into Somerset

2.2. The areas of challenge within the service:

- Increase in mediations/tribunals
- Increase in request for Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments
- Higher case loads

2.3. The future plans for the service:

- Investment into service through Children's Service Transformation – this investment creates new SENDIAS Support Worker posts in each area of the county and will provide early help to families by getting the right support from schools to deliver high quality and appropriate education to their children. The workers will also identify where the child's needs require more intervention than the school alone can give – and these children will be supported through the process to gain support from an EHCP by SENDIAS Area Co-ordinators. Additionally, the funding will create a new Area Co-Ordinator post to work in the areas of highest demand.
- A more strategic management approach
- Hearing the voice of the SEND child and young person more strongly.

3. Background

3.1. The service is underpinned by the 2014 Children and Families Act:

“Local Authorities must arrange for children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities for whom they are responsible, and their parents and young people with SEN or disabilities for who they are responsible, to be provided with information and advice about matters relating to their SEN or disabilities”

3.2. The service is externally funded to support it to meet the Minimum Standards for Information Advice and Support Services (IASS, sometimes known as SENDIASS). These were finalised were finalised in September 2018 and are the basis of future operational plans and linked funding in 2019/20 and beyond.

3.3. At the end of Quarter 3 Year 1 Somerset SENDIAS have completed some of the required standards including the recruitment of a Child and Young Person's Officer and the re-design of the website.

4. Implications

- 4.1.** Financial: SENDIAS receives funding from Somerset County Council, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group and The Council for Disabled Children in order to provide this free service. For 2020/21 until 2022/23, the service will be additionally funded by the SCC Children's Service Transformation.
- 4.2.** Equality & Diversity: SENDIAS seeks to deliver measurable improvements for all children and young people in Somerset with Special Educational Needs and Disability.. This incorporates the need to tackle inequalities and narrow gaps, paying suitable regard to the 2010 Equality Act's General Duty.
- 4.3.** Legal: Local Somerset Safeguarding Partnership (SSCP) arrangements are underpinned by the 'duty to cooperate' (Section 10, Children Act 2004) and there are no plans to repeal this duty. The SSCP holds its individual members to account for delivering their agreed contributions to the arrangements and reviews progress on a quarterly basis. SENDIAS report against these plans through the Local Area Improvement Network, which informs the SEND Improvement Board.

5. Background papers

- 5.1.** [SENDIAS website](#)
[Minimum Standards for Information, Advice and Support Services](#)

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author