

# **Response to independent review of SENDIASS Frequently Asked Questions (last updated Friday, 20 January 2023)**

## **Independent review**

### **Why was an independent review of SENDIASS undertaken?**

As a result of Ofsted/CQC inspections in 2018 and 2021 which found significant weaknesses, Birmingham is under a statutory direction in relation to its SEND services.

Under that direction, the Secretary of State for Education appointed John Coughlan as SEND Commissioner. In his first report to the Secretary of State last year, the Commissioner made 18 recommendations, one of which was that the council should commission an external review of SENDIASS. This was because in his initial work with partners Mr Coughlan received a wide range of comments about SENDIASS in Birmingham – some very favourable, some much less so. He was also concerned about evident confusion about the purpose of the service and that there had been a number of previous failed attempts to review the service.

The council (and the DfE) accepted all of the Commissioner's recommendations and the National Children's Bureau (with the support of the Children's Disability Council) was asked to undertake an independent review of Birmingham SENDIASS.

The National Children's Bureau provides support to SENDIASS across the country and is nationally recognised as leaders in this area. The National Children's Bureau was consulted by government departments in the construction of the national minimum standards so is well placed to evaluate compliance with these standards.

### **How was the review done?**

The National Children's Bureau has an established methodology for assessing compliance with the national minimum standards. This methodology is to:

- Work closely with the local authority team to review current working and governance processes and the requirements going forward.
- Review local data and information, including reports gathered by the Council for Disabled Children as part of the Independent Advice and Support Programme over the last 4 years.
- Work closely with SENDIASS service staff, in order to understand practice, service demands and quality assurance mechanisms.
- Review current structures and practices against the national minimum standards for SENDIASS Services, highlighting achievements and areas for improvement.
- Develop an action plan that both the local authority and Service can use moving forward in order to implement the findings of the audit.

The review was focussed on assessing compliance against the national minimum standards, rather than how much the service is valued by families.

### **What did the review find?**

A redacted version of the review is [available on the council's website at this link](#). The review found that Birmingham SENDIASS is not compliant with the majority of the national minimum standards and urgent improvements are required.

### **Has the council accepted the findings of the review?**

The review was independent and evidence based. The council has accepted the findings of the review and has committed to improving SENDIASS and ensuring compliance with the national minimum standards.

Birmingham parents and carers deserve a compliant SENDIASS service and the council has a legal duty to ensure this is delivered.

## **Funding for SENDIASS**

### **How does the funding for Birmingham SENDIASS compare with SENDIASS in other areas?**

It is difficult to quantify the funding as Birmingham SENDIASS carries out family support work in addition to their core service.

In the review the NCB reviewer took into consideration the funding for the core SENDIASS permanent staff and quoted that Birmingham SENDIASS is funded at £0.53 per pupil.

If we take into account the agency staff currently working for SENDIASS, the funding equates to £2.37 per pupil.

The England average is £1.20 per pupil. The highest is £3.31 per pupil and the lowest is £0.49.

### **Is the funding for SENDIASS being reduced?**

No. There is no reduction in staffing or funding for SENDIASS. The model will look different as family support will appropriately be delivered via Birmingham Children's Trust.

## **What happens next?**

### **Is SENDIASS being closed down?**

No. Local authorities are required to provide a SENDIASS.

SENDIASS will play an ongoing and key role in Birmingham's SEND system, in accordance with the minimum standards.

### **Will SENDIASS be outsourced?**

The council is considering the findings of the independent review and a report will be considered by Cabinet on 14 February 2023 about the best way to deliver the improvements that are required.

Outsourcing is one option and there is evidence elsewhere of that model being successful in delivering what should be an advocacy service. We have looked at best practice nationally and many of these services are delivered through not-for-profit organisations.

## **Family support**

### **Will we still be able to access family support?**

Yes. The family support work will be moving over to Birmingham Children's Trust where appropriate family support oversight can be provided.

### **Will my SENDIASS worker change?**

The majority of SENDIASS workers are agency staff. As such, there is a potential for these to change, as has happened in the past when workers have moved to new assignments.

We have advised all the current SENDIASS staff that there will be no reduction in staffing levels. Any change in management arrangements will not affect service for families.

Robust arrangements are in place to ensure continuity of service for families.

If any families have a query about their SENDIASS worker, they should email [SENDIASS@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:SENDIASS@birmingham.gov.uk)