

## **Dorset SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)**

**Annual Report 2023-2024 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024)**

*Please refer to Appendix A for a list of acronyms and their meanings.*

### **Introduction**

Dorset SENDIASS is a free, impartial service for children, young people, parents and families requiring confidential information, advice and support about SEND.

The aims of the SENDIAS Service:

- Provide a high quality, impartial, accurate and confidential service, which is at arm's length to the LA
- Provide advice relating to the relevant legislative frameworks by an IPSEA trained member of staff
- Ensure that service users understand their rights, roles and responsibilities
- Empower children, young people, parents and families to take an informed and active part in decision-making in order to pursue desired outcomes
- Contribute to partnership working with providers of education, alternative provision, training, supported employment, health and social care
- Ensure service users' views are heard and understood
- Influence the future shaping of services for users through strategic partnerships and links

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022, Family Action, a charity delivering a wide range of family support services nationally, was contracted by Dorset Council to take over the delivery of Dorset's SENDIAS service in order to ensure that an impartial, compliant and effective service is provided.

### **1. Staffing**

#### **a) The team**

At the end of this financial year in March 2024, we had 2 Case Officers (0.8 + 0.6), 1 Triage and Information Officer (0.4), 1 Project Lead (0.8, increase from 0.6), a Services Lead (0.6) and an Operational Manager (0.2) in post.

The team has faced significant staffing changes during the financial year. Consequently, after a four month leave of absence, the Project Lead resigned at the end of January 2023 and was replaced in April 2024 by a highly experienced SEND specialist. A full time Case Officer, after a three month leave of absence, took flexi retirement moving to a 0.8 week since March 2024. Our Triage and Information Officer took personal leave for the final month of year end. We are in the process of readvertising a FT 1.0 Case Officer/Young Person Officer vacancy.

A Services Lead was appointed in July 2023 and has focussed on service delivery, staff stability and recruitment whilst covering the Project Lead role. The budget has been reviewed in order to further fund a full time Case Officer in light of recent staffing changes and the continuing increase in demand for our service. Despite substantial team capacity issues, a new IASSN working model ensured continued positive feedback from service users and response times remained within target.

All staff have completed the initial mandatory Family Action training and are trained in IPSEA Level 1, 2 and 3 (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) legal modules where relevant for their roles; these have been completed by attending the IPSEA webinars including refresher courses.

## **b) Supervision**

Each staff member has a six weekly, 90-minute supervision session and a monthly case audit within a case overview meeting. In March 2024, all staff completed the Family Action appraisal process. In between these times, there are team meetings, team briefings and peer support sessions. The team work remotely, but maintain open and fluid conversations around case challenges, working positively together to maintain an efficient and creative outcomes led service.

## **2. Case work**

### **a) Work with families**

During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, **1,198** families contacted our service (1,125 in previous financial year) – an increase of 73. The average working days to first response was 2 days, despite peak periods which caused some strain on the response times.

If an enquiry is marked as 'Closed Successfully', there has been information, advice or signposting provided that has been accepted by the service user as meeting their needs. There were **1060** Initial Enquiries closed successfully – an increase of 84. **51** families did not respond after three attempts to contact them and 4 were unavailable for further support.

A case marked as 'Converted to Case' means that further, ongoing, Level 2, 3 or 4 intervention is needed from the service. There were **82** enquiries converted to cases (a downward trend of -67 due to a new working model, from 149 the previous year).

All support given by the Case Officers is based on their IPSEA training, knowledge of the SEND processes and experience of the Dorset County pathways. This support is accurate, impartial, confidential and at an arm's length as a service from the LA.

From December 2023, Family Action presented a new working model for SENDIAS Services to trial. The team had previously followed a format of enquiries mainly transferring to active caseloads through to resolution, which could mean more than a year of support if the case went to tribunal. It also meant holding a high case load for officers at the same time as dealing with increasing initial enquiries. The revised working model predominantly focusses on telephone and email support in the form of an advice service for enquiries. Cases become active according to the Minimum Standards if intervention is level 3 or 4; cases are complex; or families need additional support, such as parents having learning needs or children and young people being in the care system. The new model successfully ensured consistent service delivery, despite challenging team capacity issues over the past financial year. It also supported team mental wellbeing and reached more families in a timely manner, enabling enhanced outcomes.

## **b) Safeguarding**

All staff are fully safeguarding and child protection trained. Some staff also have completed L3 safeguarding training from the Local Authority in addition to that provided by Family Action.

The DSL role was initially taken over by the Operational Manager in the absence of a Project Lead, and handed to the Services Lead in March 2024. Safeguarding remains a standing item during team meetings and supervisions to ensure oversight of risk assessed cases.

There have been 4 safeguarding incidents referred to CHaD (including 1 out of area when a child moved to Wiltshire) and these have been followed up by the DSL in order to ensure a satisfactory outcome.

Sadly, in the summer of 2023, there was a death of a young person who was active with our service, leading to a safeguarding audit by the Operational Manager and close liaison with Dorset Council's senior management in the East District.

There were 62 families requiring Risk Assessments during the financial year, of which 2 are still red active cases and 4 amber active cases as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. 2 red cases were closed to Dorset SENDIASS (1 young person's death; 1 child moved out of area and followed up with social care in another county). 54 amber cases were safely managed to be closed to SENDIASS during this financial year.

This is a significant increase in risk assessments from 23 the previous year, which could be attributed to an improved system of trigger points and record keeping, coupled with rising complex cases in terms of mental health and children missing education. A rigorous review system and case closure procedure remains in place. Red risk assessments include cases where children are missing education without any eyes on them; mental health crisis or escalation; or those that have been referred to social care, including cases involving children in care and children currently under a Child Protection order. Special alerts are placed on accounts to inform the team of crucial information, such as social care status, suicidal ideation or attempts, high risk vulnerability, or parents needing support with learning or mental health.

## **c) Data Protection/ GDPR**

All cases comply with Family Action's Data Protection Policy and there has been no breach of confidentiality at a level that requires reporting to the ICO.

During an Initial Enquiry, staff gain service user's permission (parents/carers, or a child/young person) to hold and keep data on InForm, Family Action's case management system.

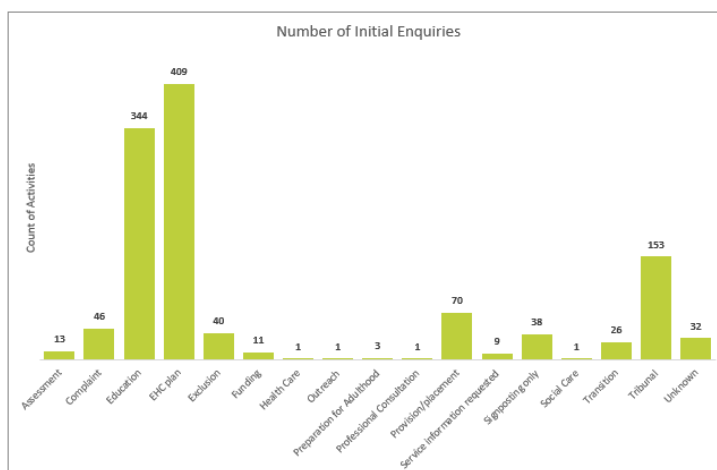
Confidentiality and information sharing is discussed, after service users have read the Privacy Notice, which is signposted on our website. The nature of consent is agreed and recorded on InForm. Consent, data handling, processing and retention processes are clearly detailed on all survey forms and service users are asked to tick boxes to confirm that they have read and understood the Privacy Policy.

### 3. Summary of data

All data below covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023- 31st March 2024.

#### a) Number of \*Initial Enquiries

Reason for contact	Number of Initial Enquiries
Assessment	13
Complaint	46
Education	344
EHC plan	409
Exclusion	40
Funding	11
Health Care	1
Outreach	1
Preparation for Adulthood	3
Professional Consultation	1
Provision/placement	70
Service information requested	9
Signposting only	38
Social Care	1
Transition	26
Tribunal	153
Unknown	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>



#### b) Initial Enquiries Response Times

##### b. Initial Enquiry response time

Number of work days between date of IE and initial response date, excluding Bank Holidays.

Response days (working days)	Number of Initial Enquiries	% (cumulative)	Target
2 days or less	638	53%	90%
3-5 days	394	86%	100%
More than 5 days	153	99%	
Not yet responded	5	99%	
Incorrect Dates	8	100%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>	-	

Response days (working days)	Number of Initial Enquiries	% (cumulative)	Target
0	119	10%	
1	270	32%	
2	249	53%	90%
3	221	72%	
4	115	81%	
5	58	86%	100%
More than 5 days	153	99%	
Not yet responded	5	99%	
Incorrect Dates	8	100%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>	-	

- 53% of Initial Enquiries were responded to within 2 days or less.
- 86% of Initial Enquiries were responded to within 5 days.

## c) Method of Enquiry

### g. Method of Access

Enquiries: Date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024 (inclusively). Method of

Cases: Event Date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024 (inclusively). Method

	Number of Initial Enquiries
Discussion	0
Email	859
Home Visit	0
Letter	0
Meeting	0
Message	9
Outreach	0
Phone call	308
Social Media	0
Text	0
Video Call	0
Other	0
Missing	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>

**Note:** Some IEs and Cases may have multiple activities occurring/being recorded, hence the number of IEs and Cases shown as active may not exactly match \*IE data from previous quarters.

**Note:** Some may also have duplicate reasons for making contact recorded.

**The main method of contact is predominantly email (72%), which includes submission of our Microsoft Contact Form online.**

## d) Service Users for Dorset SENDIASS

### e. Type of service user

Initial Enquiries: Date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024, inclusive. Based on Relationship in Adult details.

	Number of Initial Enquiries
Parent/Carer	1069
Child	28
Professional	47
Friend	0
Family	0
Neighbour	0
Unknown	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>

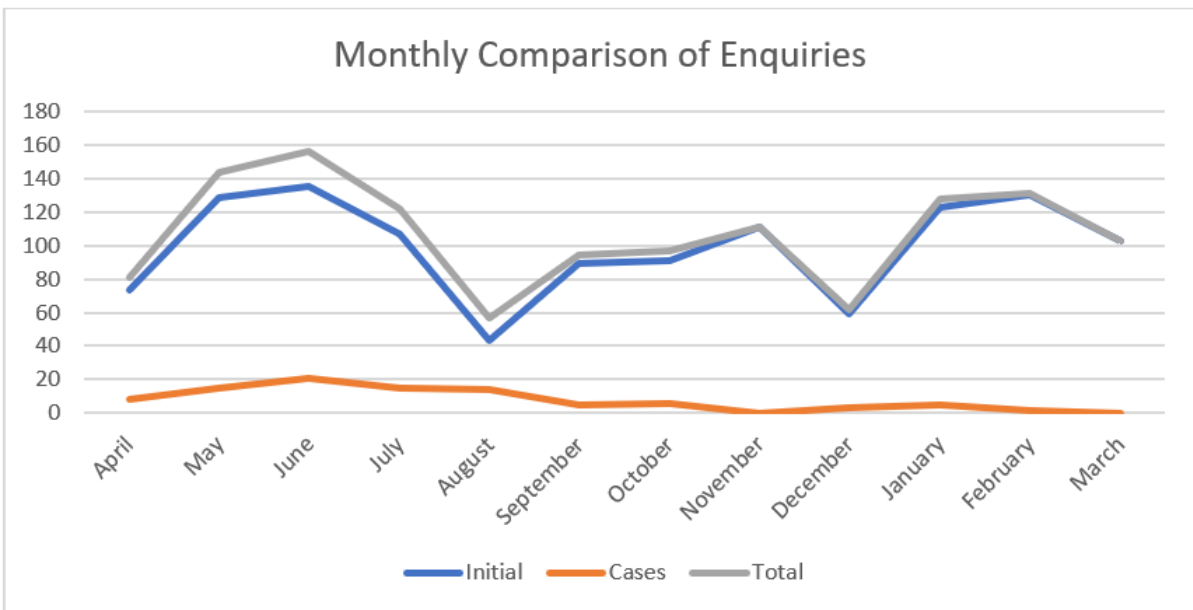
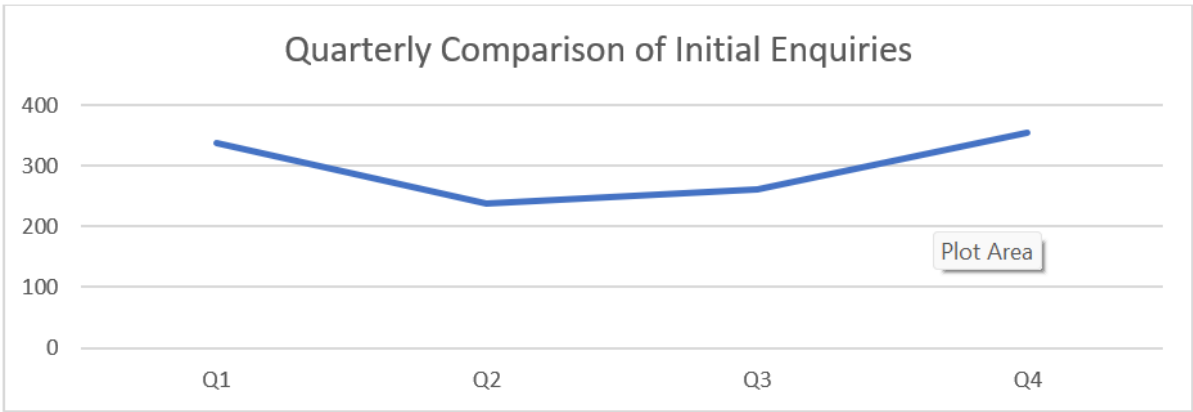
**Parent/carers remain our main service users (89%).**

### e) Initial Enquiries by Locality

District →	Unrecorded	Chesil (Weymouth & Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	Not Disclosed	Out of Area	Purbeck	West Dorset	Total
Unrecorded	17	8	0	2	6	0	0	0	1	34
Assessment	1	1	3	4	1	0	1	2	0	13
Complaint	6	13	1	11	9	0	0	2	4	46
Education	80	53	33	61	48	1	12	29	26	343
EHC plan	66	78	33	88	66	0	5	35	37	408
Exclusion	11	8	5	6	4	0	0	3	3	40
Funding	3	1	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	11
Health Care	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Outreach	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Preparation for adulthood	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
Professional consultation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Provision/ placement	10	9	8	16	11	0	5	6	5	70
Service information requested	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9
Signposting only	17	3	2	3	2	1	10	0	0	38
Social care	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Transition	2	6	3	5	3	0	5	2	0	26
Tribunal	25	41	1	19	22	0	0	27	18	153
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>1,198</b>

Of those IEs with district recorded:

- 18% were from Chesil
- 18% were from East Dorset
- 15% were from North Dorset
- 9% were from Purbeck
- 8% were from Dorchester
- 8% were from West Dorset
- 2% were 'out of area'
- 0.1% chose not to disclose
- 21% were district not recorded. This could be that the service user has not disclosed this information during an email or answerphone message.
- We will endeavour to gather and record this data better whenever possible.



**Commentary for 2023-2024:**

Overall, Initial Enquiries have continued to increase throughout the financial year. 2022-23 showed a gradual incline, whereas this year the dip in Q2 was more noticeable. We continue to experience significant drops in enquiries during school holidays, and spikes during times of transition. However, a difference this year is a continuing increase of enquiries during Q4.

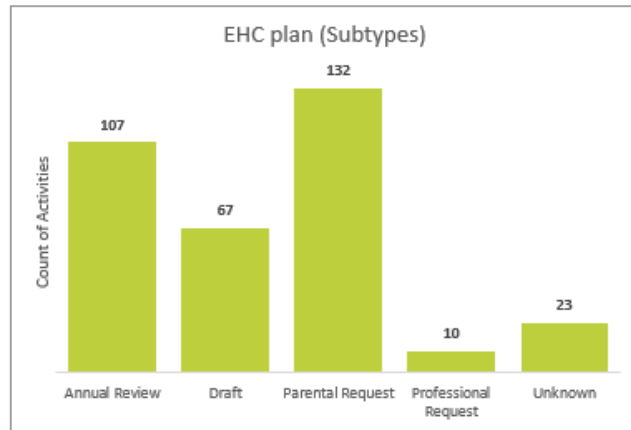
Case work can be seen to peak in June 2023 before gradually declining throughout the financial year, consistent with the new working model. In comparison, last year active caseload remained more stable with a sharp increase in November 2022.

## f) Top 4 Reasons for Initial Enquiries

### EHC plan

Subtype	Count of Activities
Annual Review	107
Draft	67
Parental Request	132
Professional Request	10
Unknown	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>

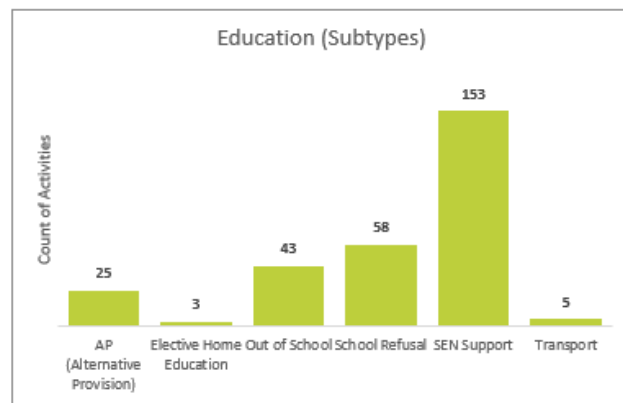
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### Education

Subtype	Count of Activities
AP (Alternative Provis	25
Elective Home Educat	3
Out of School	43
School Refusal	58
SEN Support	153
Transport	5
Unknown	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>

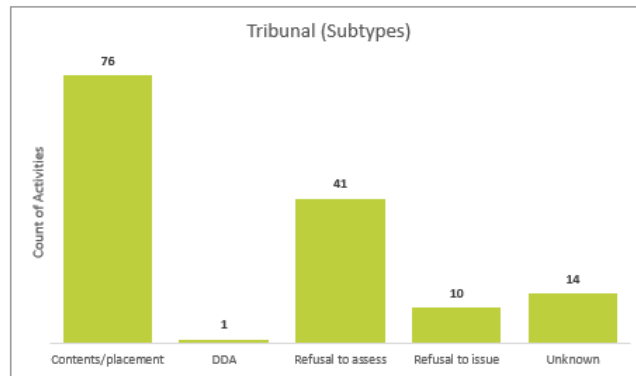
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### Tribunal

Subtype	Count of Activities
Contents/placement	76
DDA	1
Refusal to assess	41
Refusal to issue	10
Unknown	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>

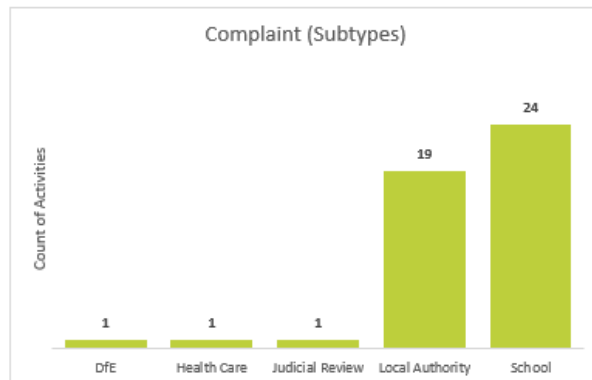
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### Complaint

Subtype	Count of Activities
DfE	1
Health Care	1
Judicial Review	1
Local Authority	19
School	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>

0





- **EHC Plan** generated the most IE related activity (**339**), with **parental requests** making up the majority (**132**) followed by **Annual Review** (**107**).
- **Education** was the second highest area for IE related activity (**282**), with **SEN Support** being the overwhelming majority in this category (**153**)
- **Tribunals** relating to **contents/placement** continue to generate a lot of IE activity (76).
- There were 46 IE activities relating to **Complaints**, (**24**) in relation to **Schools** and (**19**) regarding the **Local Authority**.

## g) Enquiry Outcomes, Closures and Case Conversions

### i. Closure Types

*Initial Enquiries received between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024 (inclusively), split by enquiry status.*

Enquiry Status	Number of Initial Enquiries
Closed - made 3 or more attempts to respond	51
Closed - responded successfully	1060
Closed - no availability for meeting	4
Converted to case	82
Received	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>

## h) Status of Cases by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

*Referral date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024 (inclusively). Each family could have more than one referral during this period.*

Referral Status	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Total
Active	1	0	3	3	0	2	9
Closed	24	7	19	16	7	8	81
Rejected	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>90</b>

- Chesil has had the most cases this financial year, followed by East Dorset.

## i) Initial Enquiries and Activity for Cases worked on by Locality 1<sup>st</sup> April 23-31<sup>st</sup> March 24, including C/F cases

### d. Active Initial Enquiries and Cases

*Initial Enquiry: if Date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024, inclusive.*

*Cases: based on Activities. If Activity Date is between 1 Apr 2023 and 31 Mar 2024, inclusive.*

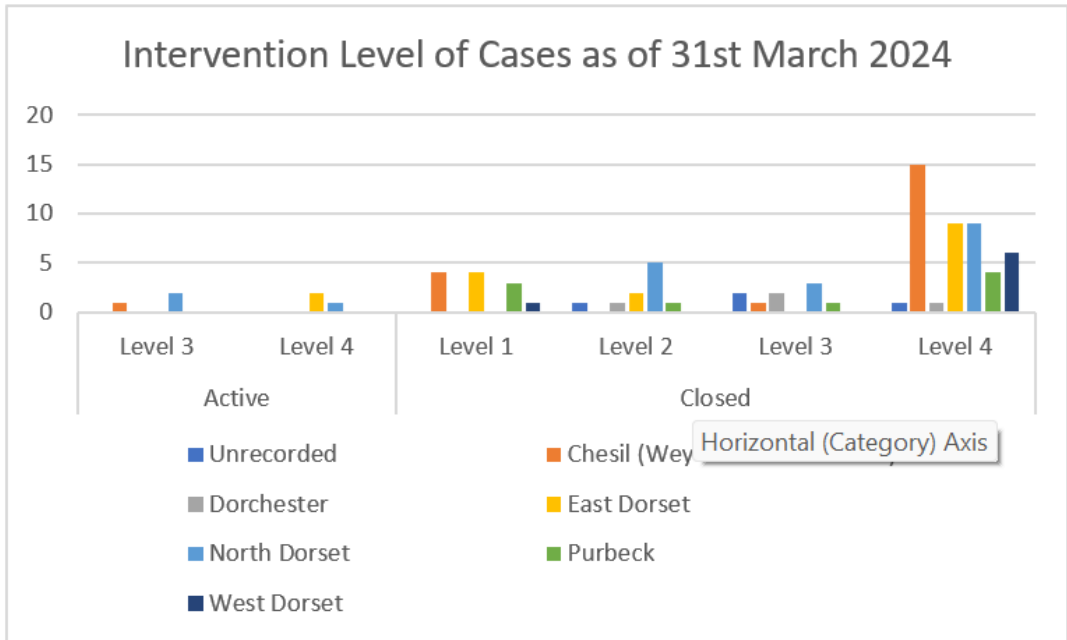
	Initial Enquiries	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Total Cases
Active	1198	42	10	38	29	15	13	147

- Chesil is the busiest area for activities related to cases, followed by East Dorset.

**j) Intervention Levels (of active cases converted) as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

Total Records  
82

STATUS	Intervention Level	District	-	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	Purbeck	West Dorset	Total
Active	Level 3	Record Count	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
	Level 4	Record Count	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
	<b>Subtotal</b>	Record Count	0	1	0	2	3	0	0	6
Closed	Level 1	Record Count	0	4	0	4	0	3	1	12
	Level 2	Record Count	1	0	1	2	5	1	0	10
	Level 3	Record Count	2	1	2	0	3	1	0	9
	Level 4	Record Count	1	15	1	9	9	4	6	45
	<b>Subtotal</b>	Record Count	4	20	4	15	17	9	7	76
<b>Total</b>		Record Count	4	21	4	17	20	9	7	82

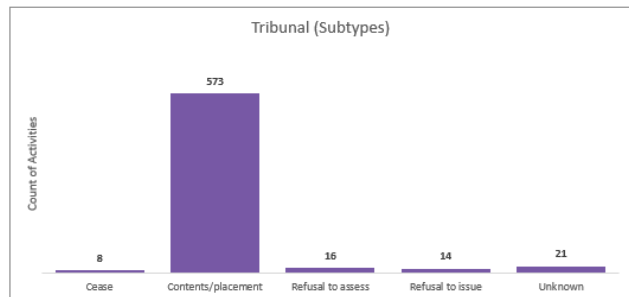


**k) Top 4 Reasons for Active Case Activities during 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.**

Tribunal

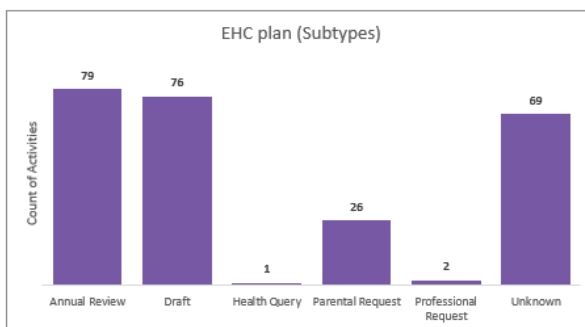
Subtype	Count of Activities	Count of Cases (by latest Activity)	Activites/Case
Cease	8	1	8.0
Contents/placement	573	64	9.0
Refusal to assess	16	6	2.7
Refusal to issue	14	4	3.5
Unknown	21	1	21.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>8.3</b>

-322



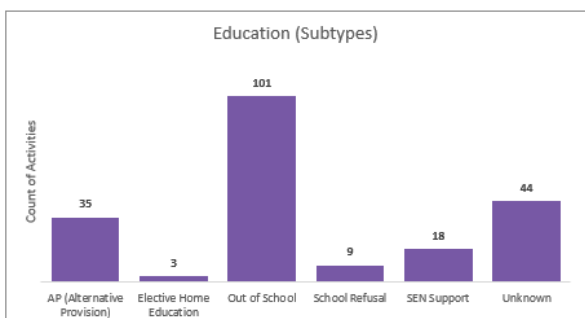
#### EHC plan

Subtype	Count of Activities	Count of Cases (by latest Activity)	Activites/ Case
Annual Review	79	25	3.2
Draft	76	18	4.2
Health Query	1	0	-
Parental Request	26	12	2.2
Professional Request	2	1	2.0
Unknown	69	27	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>3.0</b>
	-195		



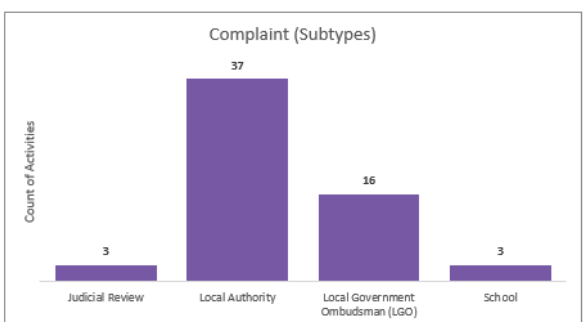
#### Education

Subtype	Count of Activities	Count of Cases (by latest Activity)	Activites/ Case
AP (Alternative Provision)	35	8	4.4
Elective Home Education	3	2	1.5
Out of School	101	27	3.7
School Refusal	9	3	3.0
SEN Support	18	4	4.5
Unknown	44	21	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>3.2</b>
	-164		



#### Complaint

Subtype	Count of Activities	Count of Cases (by latest Activity)	Activites/ Case
Judicial Review	3	1	3.0
Local Authority	37	19	1.9
Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)	16	7	2.3
School	3	1	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2.1</b>
	-49		



- The majority of active **case work** is regarding **Tribunals (632 activities)**, with (573) activities related to **Contents/Placement**.
- **EHC Plan** generates the second highest level of activities relating to case work (253), with **Annual Review (79)** the majority of case work, followed by **Draft Plan (76)**.
- **Education** generated (210) case work activities, with (101) activities related to 'Out of School' issues.
- There were (59) activities related to active case work connected to **Complaints: (37)** in relation to the **Local Authority** and (16) regarding **the Local Government Ombudsman**.

### I) Comparison of Trends

- There has been an increase in IEs (+73) from 2022-2023 (1,125) to (1,198) in 2023-2024.
- The most IEs were generated in **Q4** in 2023-2024 (355), which is the same quarter as 2022-2023 (350), but a +5 increase.
- The lowest number of IEs were in **Q2** in 2023-2024 (225), compared with **Q1** in 2022-2023 (218).
- **82** IEs were converted to cases in 2023-2024 compared with **149** in 2022-2023, a decrease of -67, which is a result of the new working model.

- The most **cases** were converted in **Q1** in 2023-2024 (**40**) compared with **63** in Q1 in 2022-2023 - a decrease of **-23** due to the new working model.
- The lowest number of case conversions occurred in **Q4**, which again, is a result of the new working model.

### m) Schools with 4 or more cases

#### f. Cases by school attended

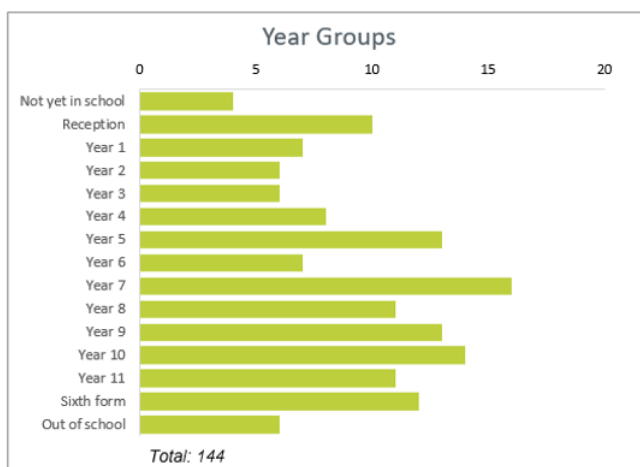
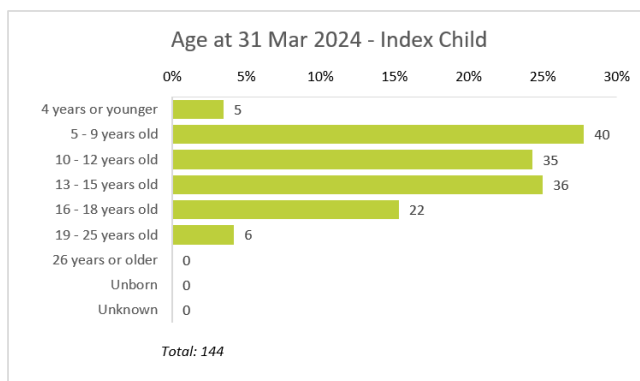
Top 15 schools by number of cases.

[Go to 'Schools' sheet to see full list of schools.](#)

School Names	Number of Index Children
Out of School	6
Ferndown Upper School	6
The Purbeck School	4
Atlantic Academy Portland	4

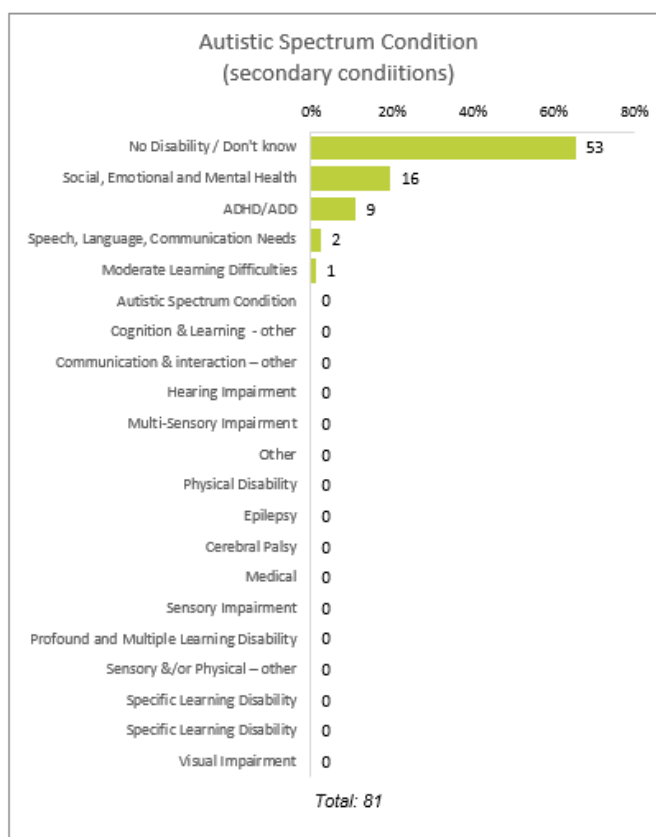
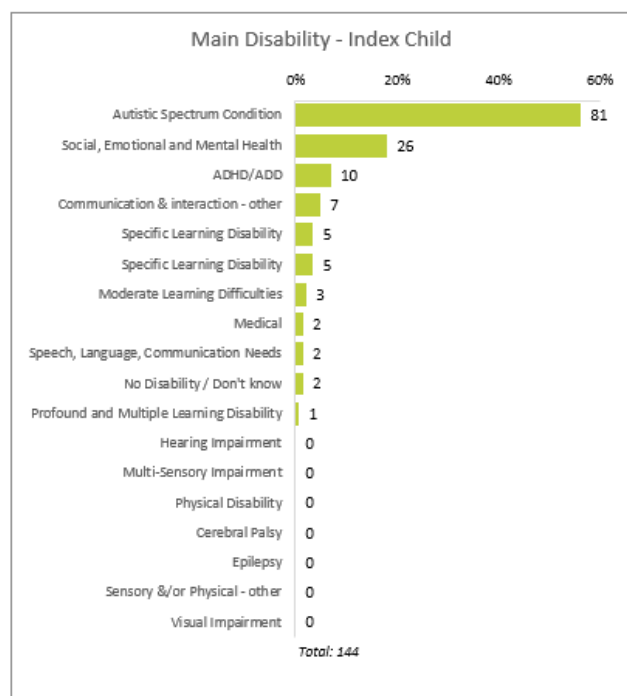
### n) Demographics (Index Child/YP)

#### Age Ranges



The data is in line with SEND national trends since COVID lockdowns. A major surge in Quarter 2 was clear in enquiries from families with children between 0-5 years of age. This surge reduced in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4, but is an area of development that we are exploring within our Steering Group to develop proactive, collaborative early interventions.

### o) Main Disability (Index Child/YP)



- **ASC** is the need most consistently enquired about, with **SEMH** as the secondary highest identified SEND for all CYP and also for CYP with ASC.

### Tribunal Data:

Tribunals April 2023 - March 2024		
Appeals registered in total	50	
Locality		
North	10	20%
West	3	6%
East	11	22%
Purbeck	4	8%
Chesil	21	42%
Dorchester	1	2%
Type of Appeal		
Refuse to assess	3	6%
Refuse to issue	3	6%
Content only	2	4%

Content and placement	1	2%
Placement only	25	50%
Extended Appeal	4	8%
Cease to maintain	12	24%
<b>Decisions (of 50 completed)</b>		
Withdrawn – agreement reached	6	12%
Conceded before Hearing	37	74%
Agreement reached/conceded at Hearing	1	2%
Parent favour	4	8%
LA Favour	1	2%
Case closed	1	2%

The data considers 50 active cases during the financial year, with a tribunal date prior to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. Most tribunal work is generated from Chesil, then East localities. Last year, Chesil was the highest percentage with East as second. The largest proportion of tribunals lodged are for placement only. This year, 'cease to maintain' took the second highest place from content and placement.

The decision data highlights 74% (a drop of 9%) of appeals being conceded by the Local Authority prior to the hearing, usually a day or two before. Agreement was reached by 12% (0% last financial year) leading to withdrawal. This seems a positive move towards earlier resolution, improving outcomes and reducing the impact of tribunals on the mental health of families. 96% of cases were either conceded before the hearing, or in the parents' favour.

#### 4. Feedback

The Triage and Information Officer sends out Initial Enquiry feedback forms, although during busy times this action is put on hold to prioritise response times. Case Officers provide a feedback form when an active case is closed.

##### Feedback received:

Initial Enquiry = 8, an increase from 4

Cases = 30, an increase from 19

Young Person = there are no responses

From the survey sections 2, 3 and 4 responses:

##### 2. How effective has Dorset SENDIASS been in helping you achieve these goals?

Out of 30 responses, the average (mean) score is 4.39 (out of a maximum effectiveness score of 5).

##### 3. I am likely to recommend the service to others

*Out of 30 responses, 90 per cent (n=27) strongly agree*

(27 strongly agree, 2 agree, and 1 strongly disagree)

#### **4. The information, support or guidance I received was helpful**

*Out of 30 responses, 93 per cent Strongly agree (n=28)*

(28 strongly agree, 1 Agree , 1 Strongly disagree )

Please see **Appendix 2** for a sample of positive feedback received from our service users.

### **5. Case Audits and Themes**

#### **a) Case Audits**

During the financial year, the wider team, including the Operational Manager, the Project Lead and Services Lead, carried a variety of 'deep dive' audits and case studies triggered by team discussions or concerns. 'Deep dive' audits included analysis of initial enquiries during a one week period, risk assessment status recorded on the Family Action Inform system, an audit resulting from the death of a young person; leading to a safeguarding audit of eight active cases and monthly audits of children missing education and tribunal progress. Actions were based on consistent system development within agreed expectations, safeguarding support including opening conversation and curiosity, targeted training, and consideration of gaps to address on the online Inform record keeping system.

Two case audits take place monthly, a total of 28 were conducted. The responsibility falls on the Project Lead, in her absence the Services Lead has implemented audits and will move to a full case overview per month once the Project Lead takes over. The Operational Manager takes oversight by monitoring as required. Audits are graded according to Family Action criteria and form part of monthly supervision.

Ongoing case discussions lead to awareness of emerging themes for leadership to base strategic direction upon. The outcomes influence 'Themes' meetings, help to identify gaps within the service and areas in need of further development. Strategic Thematic meetings are held between SENDIASS and LA representatives three times a year. The aim is to consider proactive collaborative working models to reduce the escalation of issues, such as children missing education, communication channels, mediation or exclusions thereby supporting positive outcomes for children and young people.

#### **b) Themes**

The 'deep dive' audits outlined above have identified themes that have been discussed at team meetings, steering group meetings, health boards, strategic/thematic senior management meetings and during other engagements with the Local Authority.

Themes that we have identified during the 'deep dive' case auditing process are outlined below:

- Assessment: processes and timeframes
- Collaborative opportunities between DC SEND teams and SENDIASS
- EHCPs: statutory deadlines and content
- Information Sharing, particularly of noticeable changes and trends

- Mental Health
- Children/Young People missing out on their right to a full-time education
- Children/Young People receiving no education/alternative provision at all
- Transitions and preparing for adulthood
- Our Young Person Lead presented a report at our Steering Group in November 2023 based on the findings from twelve young people across settings in Dorset. Unfortunately, their voices shared only negative experiences of not feeling heard during their education; lack of support when out of education; being unaware of SENDIASS; lack of understanding around SEND legal processes; feeling misunderstood and unaware of options for transition to adulthood. This report was shared beyond the group to other providers such as locality SEND teams. It produced learning for us all and a SENDIASS Action Plan.

## **6. Strategic functions and accountability**

### **a) Stakeholder Group**

The Stakeholder Steering Group met three times during the year, interested parties included: Dorset Council, DPCC and Family Action, amongst others, including a wide range of represented roles such as Educational Psychologist, Designated Clinical Officer, DC SEND representatives and a Service User. We sought further involvement in the Steering Group from other sectors, including social care professionals and young person representatives, in particular, and welcome representation.

The strategic direction of the Steering Group is of co-production in line with our Minimum Standards and revised Terms of Reference (February 2024). Information sharing is now a rolling agenda item, which influences our Continuous Improvement Plan, particularly liaison between locality SEND teams to maximise opportunities for early intervention and benefit outcomes for our children and young people.

Our experienced volunteers (Chair / Vice Chair of the Steering Group) stepped down in September 2023. The meetings were then chaired by the Operational Manager before transferring to the Services Lead in April 2024.

### **b) Manager forums**

The Project Lead attended the regional IASS meeting in September 2023. All members of the team are part of the IASSN network and online chat support forum. They are signed up to IPSEA, receiving ongoing SEND law updates, training opportunities and news.

Family Action has created COP (Communities of Practice). A SEND COP was launched in 2023, which the team continue to attend, contributing to policy and procedure, and benefiting from resource banks and training offers.

Family Action invested in a SENDIASS Task and Finish Group to share and spread good practice across our services. This project is continuing with a focus on feedback from each team informing transformational systems, implementation and training. This works alongside the new working model strategy and has been supported by the Operational Manager feeding back to relevant departments on necessary changes, team comments and attending organisational OM meetings focusing on next steps.



### c) Local partnership working and development links

After a short gap in communication due to our Project Lead vacancy, DPCC (Dorset Parent Carer Council) now meet us monthly within the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Both their team capacity and ours have impacted on opportunities for creative, impactful collaboration during the year, but relationships continue to be positive and purposeful. We supported each other with introductions to proactive organisations and establishing common themes for intervention.

We have also had SENDIASS representation on the Dorset Health Forum, NHS Keyworker Project, locality SEND briefings, 0-25 VCS Forum and regular communication with Dorset Youth Association. We joined the Dorset SEND Partnership Board in December 2023 as a consequence of our commissioner presenting fruitful opportunities for SENDIASS involvement and collaboration within DC.

We continue to invest in our relationships with both LA and ICB commissioners, communicating and collaborating regularly outside of formal contract meetings. This included involvement in the Dorset Area SEND Ofsted Inspection, March 2024. The Operational Manager and Services Lead completed a questionnaire and attended an interview with three Inspectors.

Ofsted feedback, Area SEND Inspection (11-15 March 2024): *'The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Support Service (SENDIASS) has redesigned its approach to responding to the increasing requests for independent information and guidance. This has strengthened its ability to manage available resources and continue to provide timely and effective support. This includes, for example, a triage process for referrals into the services so that support can be prioritised more successfully. (page 3)*

*Training and development across the partnership are highly effective. Leaders have well-considered transformation plans. There is significant investment to ensure that practitioners at all levels have the necessary expertise to deliver the partnership's ambitious strategies. For example, ICB leaders proactively engage with Dorset SENDIASS so that its support staff are better equipped to address questions about EHC plans. This helps to mitigate demand on services and so target the right support at the right time.'* (page 5) [50246984 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50246984)

## 7.Capacity

May - June 2023 showed a significant influx of enquiries.

During September - November 2023, the service saw another spike in enquiries. The team was without a Project Lead and full time Case Officer at this time. At this point, an alert was sent out to those enquiring to the service that the response date may be up to 10 working days. The average rate for reply stayed, however, within our target of 5 days, but at times, response was delayed.

The team faced a consistent increase in demand during Q4 and there were periods of only one Case Officer on duty due to the team already being at low capacity. The Project Lead and full time Case Officer were yet to be provided start dates. Annual leave, sickness and personal leave during Q4 were considerable; however, the new working model and the experience of Case Officers meant response times were met and feedback was 100% positive during this quarter.

## 8. Service development

### a) Minimum Standards

All staff working within the Dorset SENDIASS team are aware of the Minimum Standards for Delivery 2018. We benchmark the service against these regularly to evidence compliance and they are referred to during team meetings and supervisions. We also share our progress and priorities regarding the Minimum Standards during each Steering Group meeting.

### b) KPIs

Area	Target	Actual	Commentary
Support to parent/ carers	550 - 650	1,198	This KPI has been exceeded by 548. IEs converted to cases have now been reduced due to SENDIASS new working model.
Young People reached (increase in direct work/ independent access to the service)	12 – 15	28 cases involving YP 16+ during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024, but not all direct YP work. 12 YP directly collaborated with our YP Officer.	The service will be moving to outreach work in 2024-25 and is currently working on a model. This will particularly focus on opportunities for YP to express their view separate to their parents (based on consent) and transition to adulthood. Networking has already begun with VCS and a meeting is arranged with the Dorset Careers Service. SENDIASS will also be linking with youth workers at Dorset Youth Voice Team and Learning Belonging Team. We are waiting to hear of the commissioned advocacy service for signposting and family support.
Co-production	Contribution to development of the service	12 respondents to the Young Person Report	Co-production has taken place alongside other services to create a YP report; however, it proved challenging to engage educational establishments, but we did speak to Dorset Youth Justice System, CAHMs at Pebble Lodge and continue investing in relationships to benefit young people. Parent/ carer surveys are sent out and discussed at team meetings in order to develop service priorities. YP voice and feedback continues to need to be central to development. One current parent continues to attend the Steering Group. We are exploring co-production opportunities with CYP. See survey feedback in Appendix 2.

			Dorset SENDIASS worked with BCP SENDIASS on a co-produced, joint bid, which was submitted as a spin-off proposal from the original Keyworker Project. Although Family Action did not bid for the Keyworker Project, working closely with another SENDIAS Service enabled us to review our own work and priorities alongside a neighbouring SENDIAS Service.
Visitors to website	Increase in visitors for SENDIASS website – Starting point: Unique visitors: 3,559 No. of visits: 6,561 Hits: 88,668	Unique users: <b>total</b> of 7,000  6.7k of whom were ‘visiting’ or accessing our site for the first time. Pageviews: 25K, up from 10,315  No. of visits: 6700 new users + 300 return users = 7000 total users this year	Unique visitors increased from 5,307 to 7,000, an increase of approximately 1,700 from the 2022-23 financial year.  We gained 6,700 totally new users compared to 5,244 last year. Hits more than doubled.  Our focus continues to be an inclusive website that is accessible for our SEND service. We continue to aim to provide holistic signposting and templates that empower our families and link to the Local Offer.
Communication Plan implemented, including digital communication	Increase of digital viewing (previous data unavailable as n/a)	Reach: 3.9k increase of 21.6%.  Content interactions: 275 increase of 17.5%  Followers: 313  Clicks: 246 increase of 141.2%	The Triage Officer prioritised posting a variety of relevant SEND content, particularly signposting to support families. The data shows the strategy ensured an increase in our reach.  Family Action’s social media strategy relies on Facebook, as its target audience is parents. The managers are in liaison with the FA digital team to assess alternatives to support our service reaching and influencing young people and the demographic of younger parents/carers.  Publicity materials have been designed and published to both display and distribute during face-to-face events and to distribute to schools and other venues to reach our target audience.
Satisfaction	Original benchmark = 3.93/ 4	Average satisfaction 4.39/5, an increase of 0.46	30 surveys returned; three surveys responded they ‘did not’ agree it was ‘easy to get in touch with the service’, which was during 2023 when capacity

	overall satisfaction	(How effective has Dorset SENDIASS been in helping you achieve these goals?)	was compromised, meaning we were not consistently meeting response times and the previous holding caseload model was followed. This response has been 100% positive since the new model and we continue to analyse feedback to inform practice. For examples of feedback, see Appendix 2.
Annual report	Published on website	Published on website	Latest annual report to be uploaded imminently.
Development of Volunteers' service	N/A	Has had to be agreed to be paused due to staffing issues this year.	Area of development now staffing has been stabilised.

### c) Service Level Development Plan

Significant progress has been made with the following areas:

- ✓ Recruitment of a Project Lead experienced in SEND to meet Minimum Standard requirements
- ✓ Co-production strategy, including addressing themes with the LA
- ✓ Attendance and representation on local boards, e.g. Dorset SEND Partnership Board
- ✓ Development of the Young Person Action Plan, including Young Person Report presentation at the Steering Group
- ✓ New working model and refining the staffing structure for the service to meet growing enquiry complexity, demand and staff wellbeing needs
- ✓ Mandatory and legal training completed
- ✓ Auditing and compliance follow-ups in relation to risk assessments as evidenced in audits and case supervisions

Priorities for the year ahead will include:

- ✓ Recruitment of FT Case Officer (with YP Officer role responsibilities) to impact further progress towards YP KPIs, so that the relationship with YP is fully established and YP feel better consulted, supported and empowered to be part of the decision-making process regarding their own futures
- ✓ Further development of the YP/Work Experience-Volunteer combined action plan to directly engage more YP and volunteers in-line with KPIs (as above)
- ✓ Continuing to develop the website and social media presence to ensure accessibility and inclusivity e.g., improving reach for YP audience, supporting the empowerment and voice of families with Easy Read information, models and signposting and increasing number of web and social media hits in-line with KPIs
- ✓ Continuing development and delivery of the new working model and shared best practice across Family Action SENDIAS services

- ✓ Identifying further training priorities in-line with Minimum Standards so wider professionals, parents/carers and YP have an increased knowledge about legislation for the benefit of service users
- ✓ Experimentation and implementation of face-to-face extended locality reach
- ✓ Raising profile of SENDIASS to best support the needs of the community, according to data, within SEND law and signposting to holistic services
- ✓ Reducing escalation of families in crisis through collaboration with DC SEND locality teams to facilitate early intervention
- ✓ Further progress with QAF Framework in relation to pilot for Family Action's 5 new KPIs
- ✓ Further improve Inform recordings in relation to detailed recordings and chronologies
- ✓ Facilitate and integrate co-production with families. Ensure views of parents/carers, children and young people inform service development. 'You said, we did...'

#### **d) Volunteer Development Plan**

This is an area of priority as the service currently is without volunteer support, having lost two volunteers in September 2023. The stabilising of the team and recruitment of the Project Lead was essential and now a new Project Lead is in role, this will enable the service to move this work forward.

#### **e) Young Person Development Plan**

Young Person development work took place over a period of five months (May to September 2023). This involved a Case Officer taking the Young Person Lead role to carry out a body of research. A rolling development plan targeted production of a document collating young person views and identifying key themes. It identified gaps in our SENDIASS offer needing to be addressed to inform best practice and what an improved child and young person service could look like. This particularly highlighted the requirement for reach to young people and how vital this transformation is for their empowerment. It was agreed with our commissioner to hold the development work due to team capacity issues. Since then, a presentation of findings has been made to our Steering Group. The Project and Services Lead will now move this essential change forward.

#### **f) Training Offer**

With significant team capacity issues between September 2023 and March 2024, the team were unable to offer training opportunities. The new Project Lead is creating a training plan: a booking with VCS is already secured, and introductory meetings have been arranged with each locality to consider their training needs. The Services Lead is now available to network as no longer line-managing the wider team. We have begun to offer training to external services and encourage signposting of SENDIASS across borough through a variety of services that SEND families access, rather than just educational settings, such as GP surgeries and the mental health network.

#### **g) Mediation**

The Services Lead attended Global Mediation training in March 2024 to further embed the team's previous training.

The Operational Manager formed ongoing links with Global Mediation and attended combined LA meetings (arranged by the Commissioner) to consider arising themes and how to address them. Particular emphasis was placed on LA decision makers attending mediation and timelines. SENDIASS continued to work on advising families about opportunities for mediation and ensuring the child and young person voice was represented. During the financial year, Case Officers supported families to prepare for mediation and attended a few meetings where parents requested support as they felt unable to attend alone following advice received.

## **h) Publicity and Promotion**

The online presence of Dorset SENDIASS continued to increase via our website offer and Family Action rebranding, including updates, additional pages and increased links with other services. The team remained aware a balance was necessary in terms of promotion causing a surge of enquiries and how that would impact on a team short of staff. LA SEND managers requested and supported up-to-date exclusion information. Easy Read documents are due to be uploaded.

As part of Family Action's social media strategy, the Steering Group has requested options other than Facebook in order to engage the younger audience. This continues to be an area of discussion within the organisation. In the meantime, our Triage and Information Officer continues to activate increasing engagement within our community. We improved our provision of posts to empowering support and information. Along with this, continuing our links to relevant and current support groups, agencies and training Facebook pages.

## **9. Budget**

Fluctuation of staff caused changes to budget projection:

- ⊕ Recruitment costs
- ⊕ Sessional staff

However, staff vacancies reduced overall staff expenditure, so the service will stay within in-year budget.

## Appendix 1: Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
CHaD	Children's Advice and Duty Service
CO	Case Officer
DEAL	Dorset Education Advice Line
DPCC	Dorset Parent Carer Council
DSAB	Dorset Safeguarding Adults Board
DSL	Designated Safeguard Lead
EHCP	Education Health Care Plan
FIS	Family Information Service
FA	Family Action
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IPSEA	Independent Provider of Special Education Advice
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OM	Operational Manager
PL	Project Lead
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
SENDIASS	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Service
SLDP	Service Level Development Plan
TIO	Triage and Information Officer
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

## Appendix 2: Feedback

### ii) Anonymous service user case comments:

#### 5. What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you/your child/young person?

All the parent responses to this questions are recorded below.

- Without it, I would not have been able to appeal
- I now understand what steps I need to take now a lot better than having to do this without guidance
- Helped secure their chosen placement
- Helped alleviate stress to family during tribunal process
- Helped us to understand our rights better
- None
- Expediated the Council obtaining a school place
- I couldn't have done it without \*\*\*\*\*
- A massive difference. We would not have got the special school placement without your support and advice.
- Very helpful
- All the difference in the world :) he's going to be where he belongs because of the help I received
- Gave me a better understanding
- Put me at ease
- Life changing
- In our opinion, Sendiass changed the whole process and finally have us the outcome we were looking for. This was down to the phenomenal support and advice from Sendiass
- Everything! I don't believe we'd have got the result we did without the help of \*\*\*\*\*.
- Better understanding of SEND & EHCP & confidence in voicing concerns
- It give my child the voice I would struggling to achieve on my own and he now has the right support in school.
- I wasn't guided with forms and deadlines which I wouldn't have understood without the help and support.
- It was essential. He would still be at home with me with no special school place. The awful violent behaviour he witnessed long term at \*\*\*\*\* has made him ill. He is traumatized.
- Our grandson eventually has a place at the school we favoured but the selection process did not allow us to see how much each of the involved parties was primarily or partially influential
- Immeasurable difference for the good
- The information was vital in showing me what I was entitled to
- I have been through the whole education system with my child, from mainstream, to diagnosis, EHCP, tribunal, getting 1:1 TA support, getting a specialist placement, being out of education, applying for EOTAS and \*\*\*\*\* has been the only person I have trusted through the whole stressful experience. I know that what she tells me is correct regardless of what anyone else may say. I honestly couldn't have got through this without her.



- I hope we will get an OT assessment funded by LA. And EOTAS formally. Wouldn't have managed any of this OK my own. Knowing our rights has been vital.
- The support I received helped to make sure we had all the correct paperwork given to us, within the correct time frames, with all the information I needed to make the right choices for my son's well-being. I was given information I have not had from the LA and some paperwork I had, did not make a lot of sense, so SENDIASS helped me to make sense of it and to give me my options without influencing my decisions.
- Helped with positive steps
- Life changing, our son now has a school placement and we are extremely grateful for the support provided.
- Knowing a bit more what to do