



Annual Report for 2019 to 2020 from SEND Advice Surrey

We started this reporting period with our new name and marketing materials which went down well with our users and we received lots of positive feedback including “*it says what it does on the tin*”. We continue to take these materials to events, training and meetings.

Staffing:

We had two new starters this year, one has since left and the other is now our new Helpline Advisor. We also had an Advisor leave following a long period of absence.

Both the Helpline Advisor and the marketing materials are being paid for from a grant received.

The Organisational Chart states 6 FTE for the SEND Advice Surrey Team but as stated we are currently working on 3.22 with a Helpline Advisor on a 6 month fixed term contact. This later role is currently being developed and moulded. Having only 3.22 FTE Advisors means that slots are not available for up to 10 working days at present (March 2020) but all contacts are returned within 1 working day. Along with the Manager taking calls (and offering limited strategic planning, service management and delivery and quality assurance) the team are under real pressure to offer an arm’s length, dedicated SEND information, advice and support service in a timely fashion. At this time we have had to make a decision that meetings cannot be attended to support parents.

Month / Year	Advisors (average FTE trained & untrained)	
	in Term Time	in Holidays
April 2019	3.03	1
May 2019	3.03	1
June 2019	3.03 + 2	
July 2019	3.03 + 2	
August 2019	1 + 2	1 + 2
September 2019	3.03 + 2	
October 2019	2.34 + 2	2 + 1
November 2019	4.04	
December 2019	4.04	1

January 2020	4.04	1
February 2020	3.22	1
March 2020	3.22	

Table 1: Shows the number of trained verse untrained Advisors each month.

Week commencing	Contacts IN	Contacts OUT
6th Jan	74	92
13th Jan	27	53
20th Jan	51	58
27th Jan	47	50
3rd Feb	15	56
10th Feb	36	35
17th Feb	66	65
24th Feb	83	41

Table 2: Number of contacts in and out taken by the manager (weekly).

I also feel that we need the Senior SEND Advice Surrey Advisor which disappeared in the last restructure following someone leaving. (We were not able to recruit due to a freeze on recruiting then the role disappeared from the organisational chart). This role would, for example, go back to taking on the urgent calls, supporting the team, ensuring the daily lists are covered and helping with the research of complicated cases as well as case holding like the rest of the team. They would also support Advisors at Tribunal hearings.

We are able to challenge teams on the Law (which is always challenging but the point of SENDIAS services), most Officers take this well and as a learning conversation.

Contacts in:

The number of contacts in continue to increase with the team being under great pressure to advise in a timely fashion (as mentioned above). We are not meeting 1.2 of our Minimum Standards – “*the capacity and resources to meet local need*”. Families are able to call us, leave a message on the answer phone, send a contact form through our website, email, write in or even Skype us.

A new system was put into place this year where slots are bookable. This was set up to reduce the stress on the team due to long lists of unanswered calls and so parents could book a time for us to advise them. This system has meant that the slot is booked to meet the working needs of families but also means the parents and young people are aware of

the time we are calling reducing the number of calls going unanswered (and reducing the table tennis effect!). We still have calls going unanswered but they have reduced remarkably.

There is also an issue with our telephone number coming up as withheld but we now explain this when booking a slot. We are also able to use a texting out service to ensure users are aware we have tried calling.

Month / Year	Slots	
	Available	Booked
April 2019	N/A	N/A
May 2019	N/A	N/A
June 2019	111	87%
July 2019	133	81%
August 2019	70	95%
September 2019	143	100%
October 2019	108	100%
November 2019	111	99%
December 2019	91	71%
January 2020	92	98%
February 2020	94	100%
March 2020		

Table 3: Shows the number of slots available and booked.

PLEASE NOTE: This does not show the urgent slots booked each day which are over and above these figures and cancelled slots which are counted as not booked.

The slots are one and a half hours long and normally allow time to type up the advice given on our database. The issue arises when urgent calls come in with tight deadlines or calls are so complex that we have to call back after seeking advice or we have to check a plan or write an email for them for example. We also use a rota system each day to enable an Advisor to take on these urgent calls.

Top reasons for calls in alphabetic order	
November 2020	Appeals/Tribunals
	Annual Review Meeting
	EHCP Advice

	EHC Needs Assessment
	Out of School
	Support at School/College
December 2020	Appeal / Tribunal
	Annual Review Meeting
	EHCP Advice
	EHC Draft Plan
	EHC Needs Assessment
	No response from SEN CO
	Placement C/YP
January 2020	Appeals / Tribunals
	Complaint Procedure
	EHCP Advice
	EHC Draft Plan
	EHCP Needs Assessment
	Placement C/YP
	Transport
February 2020	Appeals/Tribunals
	Annual Review Meeting
	EHCP Advice
	EHC Needs Assessment
	Out of School
	Support at School/College

Table 4: shows the combined top reasons for contacts in and out in alphabetic order each month (please note that due to issues with our database we are unable to report prior to this period as figures are not accurate).

Contacts are now coming in from wider community. We have undertaken networking with Early Years, Family Centres and Family Voice (Surrey's parent forum) which has shown a change in the type of contactors. Having a Contact Sheet on our website has also increased the number of contacts in as it gives another avenue for contact.

Contactors lack any understanding of the SEND process which means longer and more detailed support being offered. Our Information Sheets do help with these callers but as a team we are hand holding a lot more than in previous years. These callers are time consuming and calls can't be closed. We are therefore using the new layout of our database (by setting up reminders and booking slots), e.g. when a case goes to Tribunal all the Key Dates are recorded as Reminders and the case can't be transferred over (closed).

Callers are also less IT savvy so we are having to complete forms on their behalf even converting forms from PDF to Word to enable them to be completed by our team rather than print out, complete, post out and wait for them to input and then return the form. We are also being impacted by those parents who unable to read and write contacting us. The advice conversations are longer and follow up work is time consuming and labour intensive. There was also an increase in the number of contacts from parents of looked after children which increases the complexity of the advice we need to give.

With written permission we are able to contact other services. Where possible our role is to empower but as mentioned above, sometimes this is not affective but many parents that come to us are frustrated, are not able to move forward themselves and have lost faith in the system. We know we are only ever advising with one side of the story so getting permission to talk can help to clarify situations. We have some good examples of team working between the SEN Team and ourselves where a simple conversation has cleared up confusion or a plan has been finalised. Sometimes the parents just needs the right to appeal and the letter from the LA has helped the families to do this.

We also had some excellent networking with the SEND Admissions Team at the beginning of this reporting period. Unfortunately this manager then left and the agreed procedures were never put in place. New links have now been made with the new Manager so hopefully we can move forward again and be supportive.

Tribunals:

We have attended at numerous TCMH's (Telephone Case Management Hearing) this year and represented and supported at a hand full of Tribunal Hearings. This later support is part of our role but not within the Job Description of the Team. (I do believe that the role needs to be re-evaluated to meet the changes seen over the last few years, i.e. to include representing and attending court).

Representing at court is very time consuming with the preparation work prior to hearings. Attending the hearing is a minimum of a day out of the office too therefore impacting on those left in the office and the number of slots available.

LA processes:

As processes change or letters are updated by the LA we are finding out from parents which then involves research and time to investigate, for example the changes made to the Transport policy, the School Admissions procedure and the complaints process all impacted on the teams time. Being updated on these would be extremely beneficial and would also

mean we would be able to filter and reduce complaints and could explain the content of the letters in a timely fashion.

The team would be happy to look at paperwork and letters sent out to highlight the queries that come in. These include abbreviations on Governance Board forms and explanation of who the mediation company is that are included on letters that gives parents the Right to Appeal. Conversation regarding this have started in one of the geographical areas.

The LA are continuing to frustrate the parent's right to appeal by not completing the statutory Annual Review procedure or delaying finalising plans.

Knowing when procedures or letters were undated and changed would mean we can explain this and reduce the number of complaints. Reducing stress levels for our users and the "*passionate*" calls that Case Officers may receive from parents. Getting a copy of letters sent out would also mean that we can explain in a more timely fashion as we would know what the caller was talking about rather than waiting for a copy to be sent over to us or advising blind. Being able to input on these would be very beneficial too!

We get many calls regarding Case Officers being off sick and the parents only finding out months later (following numerous voicemails being left). We then hear that managers don't know what is happening with plans as they are saved on the Case Officers' F drive. Timeframes (including the 20 weeks) are then missed and parent/cares become stressed, lose faith in the system and want to complain.

It sometimes feels that the LA turn a simple request into a complaint which delays matters, e.g. LA not replying to a request for reassessment and it being turned into a complaint.

(It has to be remembered that we only ever hear the negative side of processes and only on occasions do we hear positive news – mainly where we have supported and LA have conceded).

Website:

The website keeps going from strength to strength. Information Sheets are written to support families once we hear the same message more than a hand full of times, e.g. parents being unclear on the Annual Review process. These are then uploaded to our site and are available in PDF form to be emailed out. There are now 58 Information Sheets and 19 Template Letters.

Month / Year	Website		
	Views	Visitors	Pages Published
01 April 2019	1883	1054	4
01 May 2019	2446	977	0
01 June 2019	2505	779	10
01 July 2019	2484	1055	3
01 August 2019	1383	617	0
01 September 2019	2996	1424	8
01 October 2019	3830	1744	11
01 November 2019	3198	1553	3
01 December 2019	2404	1057	3
01 January 2020	4010	1968	0
01 February 2020	4256	2093	10
01 March 2020			

Table 5: Number of monthly visitors and views to www.sendadvicesurrey.org.uk and the number of pages published.

Twitter:

Twitter followers have increased in this reporting period and are shown on the front page of our website. An Advisor leads on the social media account with support from the manager. She also covers in the holidays.

Month / Year	Twitter		
	Following	Followers	Tweets
01 October 2019	101	396	650 (in total)
01 November 2019	102	400	675 total - 25 new
01 December 2019	102	404	700 total - 25 new
01 January 2020	112	417	726 total - 26 new
01 February 2020	102	422	749 total - 23 new
01 March 2020			

Table 6: this shows the number of followers to our site, the number of sites SEND Advice Surrey are following, the number of tweets per month and the total tweets (month on month).

The most popular day for views on our website is a Tuesday at 1pm. We therefore are tweeting on a Tuesday morning to ensure we meet these viewers (as tweets appear on our website).

Name of Information Sheet / page	Number of views	Comments
How is SEN Support funded in Schools?	4115	
Choosing a School	2625	
Who is SEND Advice Surrey and what are their opening times?	1837	This includes our contact form
Role of the SENCo	1361	
Contact the SEND Advice Surrey team	906	This includes our contact form
Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans	892	
Compliments, comments and complaints	805	
The Surrey Local Offer	527	
Easy-to Read Factsheets	512	
Needs Assessments	466	
Appeal process – after lodging your appeal	425	
SEN Support in mainstream schools	413	
What is an Annual Review?	405	Includes the Flow Chart
Moving to Surrey	355	
SEND Team details	351	
Checking an EHCP	329	
Exclusions	305	

What if I do not agree with decisions about SEN provision?	298	
What kind of information should be available to parents from their child's school?	288	
Personal Budgets	271	
Transport	247	

Table 7: these are the most popular pages viewed on our website, as of 12 March.

Our model letters are a new addition to the site (in March) and have already been viewed 196 times.

Top three viewed Template Letters	
1	First Contact and Formal Complaint regarding Bullying
2	School Refusal letter to school
3	Right to Subject Access request
196	TOTAL numbers of views:

Table 8: top three viewed Template Letters.

Wednesday Catch Ups

We continue to hold informal but minuted meetings at 2pm every Wednesday. These are held at the decks and we use a white board to write anything that comes up between each meeting. It works well as we have part-time and term time only staff and having a weekly meeting means that everyone is kept up to date. The notes from the meeting are signed by the whole team to ensure we are all informed. Points discussed can be anything from a Case Officer being off, changes to Legislation, a new support group up or updates on the new team starters.

Mentoring from West Sussex

We were invited to be part of a trial mentoring scheme that IASSN (Information, Advice and Support Service Network) were offering. This involved being paired with a long standing and experienced SENDIAS Manager from a local LA to learn and develop. This was a

positive experience and a lot was learnt. SEND Advice Surrey continues to benefit from this support.

Training and Events

The team continued to attend various events and training throughout the year including delivering a session for Family Voice's "*Under the Surface of School Avoidance*" course in February 2020. The current team are all up to date with their IPSEA legal training including the Face to Face.

We finish this financial year being asked to deliver training to the SEN Teams by a few of the Case Officers. We would be happy to write and deliver this training as it is a requirement in the Minimum Standards (proposed to be added in the SEND Code of Practice). The team would deliver a rolling programme of basic law processes.

Moving Forward:

To summarise, the team moves into 2020-2021 under pressure and not able to meet the demands of the families in Surrey who are seeking impartial, confidential SEND information, advice and support (SENDIAS) at arm's length to Surrey County Council. The team continue to work hard together to reduce waiting times and look at new ways to support those that contact us.

For 2020-2021 we would like to develop our working relationship with teams, e.g. the SEN Team. We have met with one of the Transport Teams and hope to meet with SEND Admissions by the end of this reporting period. Knowing when the LA aren't going to meet deadlines would help us to plan how we support families, i.e. all four area SEN Managers were emailed regarding the 15th Feb deadline and only one manager replied with her area's strategy and numbers of unfinished plans. It meant we were able to share this with families and draw up an Information Sheet to send to the numerous contactors that came in.

We would also like to see a continued working relationship with Family Voice.

We will continue with reporting our monthly trends and hope a procedure can be put in place so trends can be taken on board and actioned, these can be simple things like letters from the LA being simplified, not using abbreviations, containing correct information and clearer processes.

We look forward to rolling out our Face to Face Fridays where families will be able to book a half an hour slot to talk face to face with an Advisor – a new way of working and delivering SENDIAS.

As always we would like communication improved and consistency across the teams. Accountability taken when things go wrong, we do hear the worst of families' situations but

sometimes parents just want an apology, someone to listen or a returned call to reduce the distress and anxiety.

SEND Advice Surrey Manager
Dated 12th March 2020