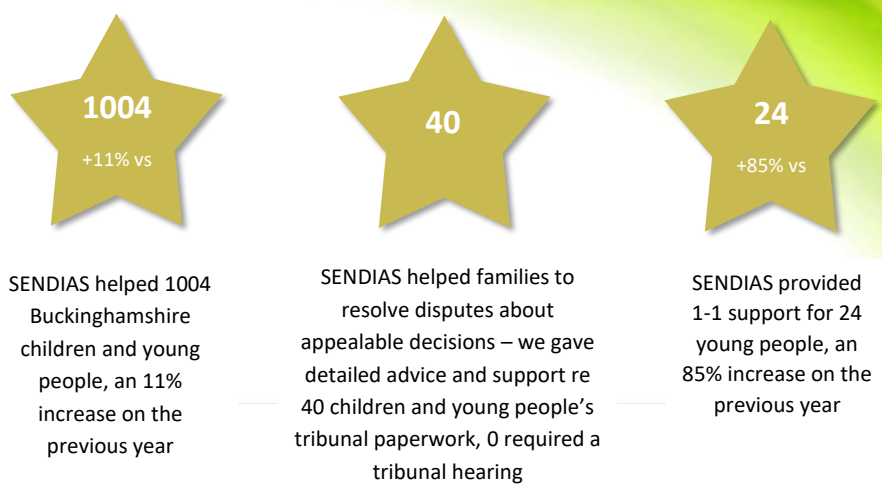


## 2022-2023 SENDIAS IMPACT AT A GLANCE



SENDIAS helped 1004 Buckinghamshire children and young people, an 11% increase on the previous year

SENDIAS helped families to resolve disputes about appealable decisions – we gave detailed advice and support re 40 children and young people’s tribunal paperwork, 0 required a tribunal hearing

SENDIAS provided 1-1 support for 24 young people, an 85% increase on the previous year

QUERY RELATING TO	NUMBER OF QUERIES RESPONDED TO (JANUARY 2023)
SEN SUPPORT	70
CHILDREN WITH AUTISM	73
CHILDREN WITH ADHD	45
SOCIAL CARE	35
CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL	23

<b>Impartiality rated at least 7/10</b> 100% (85%)	<b>Difference we made rated at least 7/10</b> 100% (85%)	<b>Satisfaction rated at least 7/10</b> 100% (93%)
<b>Would recommend our service to others</b> 100% (92%)		<b>Number of complaints</b> 0 (1)
<p><i>Previous year's figures in gold (15 respondents)</i>  <i>This year's figures in green (21 respondents) - see appendix E for full survey results</i></p>		

*'Very few people in my circle understand how stressful the educational process is for families like mine. Your calls and support really helped me to focus through some tough times.'*

*'It was lovely to speak to a knowledgeable person giving sound advice.'*

*'Helped me to see there was more than one choice.'*

*'I really cannot thank you enough, you have really spurred me on just as I was starting to give up hope on getting anywhere with any support for him.'*





**Buckinghamshire SEND IAS Service**  
**End of year report to Steering Group**  
**March 2023**

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## Our role:

All local authorities, by law, must provide information, advice and support to children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), and their parents/carers. Buckinghamshire SENDIAS Service is the information, advice and support service here. Our service is free, confidential, impartial and at arm's length from Buckinghamshire Council (BC). We have exclusive use of accommodation separate from County Hall.

We offer accurate information, advice and support around all matters relating to SEND. We do this mainly by telephone and email support, as well as by attending meetings and delivering training. Our aims are to empower our service users to understand their rights, to find out what is available to support them and to self-advocate as far as possible.

We deal with cases ranging in complexity, and operate a case management system to ensure the most effective use of our resources, triaging into levels of involvement: level 1 is the least complex, level 4 is the most: Level 1 is signposting, Level 2 is straightforward work including attendance at annual review and other meetings, Level 3 is for more complex work relating to issue e.g. permanent exclusions or to service user needs, Level 4 is direct involvement in tribunals.

We play a key role in influencing improvements to local strategy and processes provided for our service users by BC, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS), educational settings, and other organisations.

We work to national [Minimum Standards](#) agreed by Council for Disabled Children, Department for Education, and Department for Health and Social Care.

The SENDIAS Service team leader is line managed by Maxine Moore, Education Project Manager (SEND Resolutions Team), based in Children's Services, Buckinghamshire Council.

We have an informal commissioning arrangement with the BC Integrated Commissioning team. We report to a Steering Group led by the chair of the parent carer forum FACT Bucks.

## Summary of year's performance

### Funding and staffing

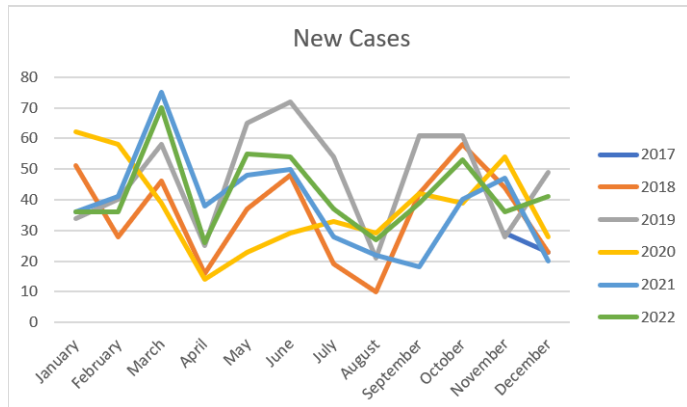
This year we have benefited for the first time from tripartite funding between education, health and social care facilitated by Simon James, BC Director for Education and our chair, Andrew Howard – this has given our overall funding a very welcome boost, enabling the recruitment of 2 additional full-time advisers and the extension of the team leader's contract to year round. We now have 4.76FTE total staffing compared to 2.4FTE total staffing in 2021 -22. This staff resourcing is ongoing, and not a one off, as our funding partners recognise the importance of sustained funding for recruitment and retention of the team, and long-term planning.

SENDIAS FUNDING				
Date	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Core funding from Buckinghamshire Council (Education)	108,734	111,704	111,552	114,965
Core funding from Buckinghamshire Council (Social Care)				30,000
Core funding from BOB ICS (Health)				30,000
FACT Bucks funding for online training for parents			3180	2800
Early Help Funding (0.5FTE Business Support Office 1 year fixed term to manage backlog)		19,987		
Early Help Funding (Adviser Overtime - one off funding)		13,800		
Council for Disabled Children Information, Advice and Support Programme task order funding	45,900	26,899	10,000	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>154,634</b>	<b>172,390</b>	<b>124,732</b>	<b>177,765</b>

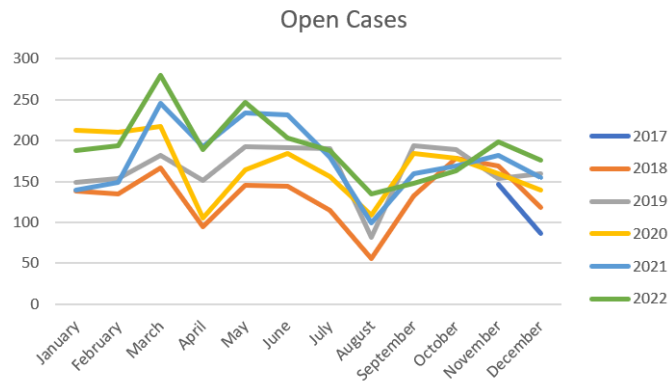
### Workload and demand

We have seen a continued rise in demand – our total number of open cases is now almost equal to pre-pandemic levels – strongly contributing to this we have experienced a phenomenal rise in new referrals, 72% higher than 2021-22.

### Demand 24.2.2022-23.2.2023



New cases relate to a specific child or young person's record begun that month.



Open cases include new referrals and referrals which were set up during a previous month, but are still ongoing and requiring active involvement from the team that month.

### Headline figures 24.2.22- 23.2.23

<b>New referrals</b>	<b>Open cases</b>
<b>828</b>	<b>1004</b>
(482) (405) (590)	(904) (860) (1011)
<i>Headline figures for</i> 24.2.2021 – 23.2.2022 in green 24.2.2020 - 23.2.2021 in red 24.2.2019 - 23.2.2020 in blue	

Cases per FTE Adviser hours although reduced are still high and staff feel highly pressured. This year, using data from the time in motion study, FTE Advisers is calculated as 90% adviser team time plus 20% team leader time. Previous figures assumed advisers and team leader were spending 100% time on advice.

Date	Ongoing cases	FTE Advisers	Cases per FTE Adviser
2022-2023	1004	3.1	324
2021-2022	897	2.3	390
2020-2021	860	2.3	374
2019-2020	1070	3	346

The Adviser List, new queries waiting for adviser input, has roller-coasted this year from over 100 at the start of the period to under 20 by the time term re-started in September 2022 to back to over 80 in February 2023. The summer holidays provided a useful opportunity to catch up, as new referrals were much lower than in term time, and our new full-time advisers and team leader were available to deal with the backlog. The turbulence relates to spikes in demand, such as phase transfer in February, and reduced capacity since December when an adviser started long-term sick leave following a planned operation (due to return for the summer term) and 2 volunteer advisers left our service - together these absences have had a noticeable impact on our flexibility.

Volunteers when available to support us consistently have made a valuable impact, taking on cases which need more hand-holding e.g. support with completing forms, interpreting, attending meetings we would otherwise not be able to attend. E.g. one volunteer supported with 20 cases during the period.

We continue to be funded for 0.5FTE Business Support. Although we have reduced the time taken in processing queries at the front door from an average of almost half an hour prior to the internal review to 10 minutes now, backlogs during the busiest months are unavoidable, exacerbated if the postholder is ever absent, and as with dealing with the Adviser List we are very reliant on the school holidays to catch up.

The overall impact for service users from the pressure of work on the team is delays in speaking to an adviser, however the delay has reduced significantly over the year. In some cases there was a wait of more than 2 months at the start of the period – by the end of the period level 1 queries requiring an adviser call could take 5 weeks, level 3 queries typically took 13 days.

### Demand – Children and young people

We worked with 24 children and young people individually, e.g. supporting with understanding processes; helping to express views; supporting at meetings. This is double the number reached in 2021 -22.

We were represented at this year’s Shout out for SEND Conference and our Children and Young People Lead Worker has also provided information and been available for advice at the relaunched Shout out for SEND meetings. We are working towards providing content on our service and rights for young people with SEND on the Youth Voice Bucks service.

### SENDIAS impact - Support with meetings

At the start of the period, we attended no meetings and could not offer support during tribunal hearings, because of lack of capacity. Our increased capacity has now transformed our availability for meetings. From September to 24.2.23 we attended approximately 90 meetings including 10 mediations and have been able to return to more hands-on help for tribunal preparation when justified.

Our role in making mediation accessible and effective has benefits for families and Buckinghamshire Council, enabling a timely opportunity to discuss a decision, hear from both parties, and seek possible agreements. In a Government research study from 2017 *‘the use of mediation reduced the incidence of Tribunal appeals. The analysis of the responses from Local Authorities suggests that when mediation was taken up, there was a 14 percentage point lower likelihood of registering a Tribunal appeal (i.e. 22% compared to 36% when mediation services were not taken up).’* ([SEND disagreement resolution arrangements in England: review - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/research-data-and-analysis/2017/09/2017-survey-on-disagreement-resolution-arrangements-in-england)). Using mediation therefore saves money for everyone.

The study also analysed costs, direct and indirect, of tribunals for families, the Tribunal service and local authorities finding that even in 2017 the total cost savings associated with the avoidance of a Tribunal appeal were in the region of £12,800 per case. This year as in previous years, SENDIAS has had great success in contributing to tribunal issues being resolved without a hearing becoming necessary – as far as we are aware, none of the 40 we were heavily involved with actually required a hearing. This obviously has benefits for families as they are saved the significant time, stress and costs, direct and indirect, of preparing for a hearing. It is also likely to mean that they had an acceptable agreement at an earlier stage than would have been possible if they had to wait for a hearing – Tribunal timelines have extended hugely since the pandemic, with hearings timetabled for a year after registration common by February 2023

Date	Tribunal advice	Mediations attended	Tribunal preparation	Tribunals required
2022-2023	103	15	40	0
2021-2022	121	7	13	1
2020-2021	114	21	17	3

## SENDIAS impact - Resolving complex cases

It has continued to be very hard to resolve complex cases without having to support families to escalate their concerns. However, generally we have noticed that communication from Education, Health and Care Coordinators to families has improved and quality of EHC plans is improving. We have also noticed some improvements in schools' awareness of what is available locally for children on SEN Support.

Complexity relates to:

- unclear or inconsistent communication with families by professionals
- delays and incomplete processing of annual reviews
- shortages of alternative provision and specialist placements and failure to challenge responses to consultations
- children with a wide range of needs requiring coherent input from multiple services

We help to resolve long-running disputes when families are stuck in the system – we make children out of education our priority - whether no school place, excluded, not attending - whatever the reason for the delay or difficulty we work hard to raise awareness and help the situation move on e.g. towards a suitable school place or alternative provision, for example, with consent from the family by team leader speaking directly to relevant senior leaders. Our improved links with other teams have led to speedier resolution of cases as we now have clearer pathways or nominated personnel to discuss stuck issues with. Accordingly, the proportion of new referrals to open cases has increased – typically around 50% of our work in previous years has been new referrals. This year it amounts to 82%.

## SENDIAS impact - Training and outreach for local SEND families and professionals

### Face-to-face events

Last year we were unable to attend any face-to-face events because of the pandemic and reduced capacity. This year we have attended a small number of face-to-face events with the purpose of reaching families we might otherwise miss and giving the team networking opportunities with professionals. These have ranged from the 'Professionals Fayre' for parents at Chiltern Wood School, when we spoke to more than 20 parents and carers, to an information session at the Healthy Living Centre led by one of our volunteers with interpreting skills, attended by 8 parents.

On the whole though we have moved away from face-to-face training and outreach towards live recorded webinars.

### Webinars

In the past year we have delivered the following live recorded webinars, mostly co-funded and coproduced with FACT Bucks. These are advertised via our email news update and through FACT Bucks's social media presence as well as the BFIS network. The number of registrations is often considerably higher than the attendees and all those registered receive a copy of the recording and the related Q&A.

Live webinar 2022-23	Date recorded	Attendees at live webinar	Number of You Tube views by 23.2.23
<a href="#">Capturing your child's views</a>	11.3.22	3	37
<a href="#">New to SEND</a>	27.1.23	6	38
<a href="#">Emotionally-Based School Avoidance</a>	10.2.23	17	52
<a href="#">Mental Capacity and Decision-Making</a>	24.2.23	7	5



We continue to promote our previous recorded webinars:

Live webinars 2021-22	Date recorded	Number of You Tube views by 23.2.23
<a href="#">Parents Communicating Confidently</a>	12.1.22	70
<a href="#">SEN Support</a>	12.10.21	176
<a href="#">EHC Needs Assessment</a>	21.7.21	203
<a href="#">Navigating the health service</a>	9.2.22	31

Responding to very high numbers of enquiries about phase transfer appeals, we also started running live non-recorded webinars inviting only service users who contacted, in the hope of providing them with tips to make a start whilst waiting for an adviser call. The first one held on 17.2.23 had 4 service users attending.

## Social Media and Accessibility

### Online contact form

A key improvement this year facilitated with our extra resource has been our more sophisticated contact form, which allows us to gather all the information we need in one go, send an automatic response and makes triaging straightforward, saving time. In the next business year it will be integrated with our database, saving even more time. The link to the [Bucks SENDIAS contact form](#) has been promoted widely. In our latest survey, 89% of respondents said they used our form, compared to 57% in our 2022 survey.

### Webpages

A major piece of work this year enabled by our increased resource has been to relaunch our webpages in December 2022, having made efforts to coproduce and gained helpful feedback from service users, professionals and the team on test pages. We have had encouraging feedback including:

*I have looked at the website and in my opinion it is so much easier to access and find the information I was looking for. Parent*

*The information contained is very comprehensive and extremely thorough. . . . it was really easy to navigate and had all the info in one place. FACT Bucks rep*

During their calls with service users, our advisers refer back to the initial email we send with relevant information including links from our webpages and use the webpages to ensure the service user knows where to find what they need. This builds their confidence and reduces adviser time spent following a call sending additional links.

50% of respondents in our recent survey said they used our webpages. 11% of respondents to the recent FACT Bucks survey said they used our webpages.

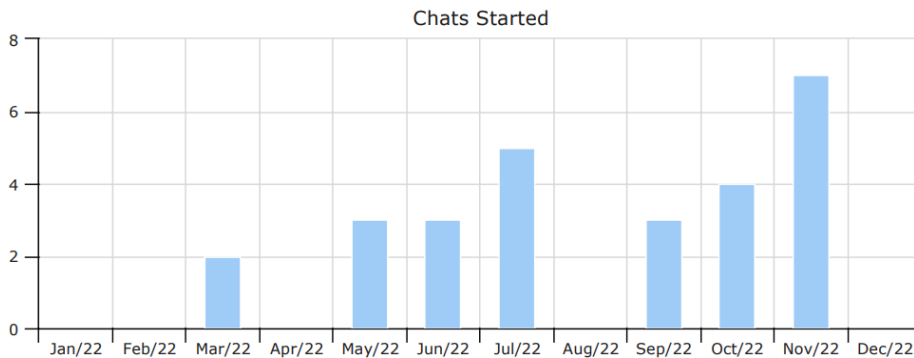
The monthly peak for webpage visits so far as measured by Site Improve was 714 in January 2023 compared to 670 visits to the old webpages in January 2022, so a small increase, which should grow as the new pages are promoted more widely. The total of unique visitors since December 2022 has been 1160.

We have a process in place with the web content team to deal with updates to the webpages. This is working well with response times of a few days.

## Webchat

Built into the webpages we have a webchat facility available twice a week during term time. This has been going since 2020 with limited take up. For example in 2021 there were 41 chats. In 2022 there were 27.

### Chat Activity



The number for January 2023 peaked to 18 – unfortunately this was related to a mistake on the BC platform which meant we were fielding enquiries to the main BC website. This was swiftly rectified.

Further analysis is needed to check how many chats do result in an adviser call being necessary, or whether the webchat is having the desired effect of reducing adviser calls.

## Email news updates

We sent 14 email news updates via Mailchimp to over 1000 service users who have consented to receive them. [Open rates](#) are one of the best ways to tell whether your email strategy is working. This number shows what percentage of your audience opens the emails you send them. If you have a higher open rate, it usually means your subject lines resonate with your audience. The highest open rates are found in government-related emails, with an open rate of 28.77%. The average open rate for all industries analysed by Mailchimp is 21.33%. Our average open rate for the last 4 email news updates delivered in this period was 59%.

The click rate is a percentage that tells you how many successfully delivered emails got at least 1 click. This number shows whether or not your audience finds the emails you send relevant enough to click through and check their email for more. The average click rate for all industries analysed by Mailchimp is 2.62%. Our average in the period has been 5%.

### **Voicemail**

At the end of this reporting year (13.2.23) we changed our voicemail message so that now callers are encouraged to leave only their email address, to be sent a link to our contact form. This was a practical decision aimed at improving efficiency, as dealing with voicemail referrals is much more time-consuming administratively than dealing with contact forms. Most other services work in this way. Our message advises callers to ask a friend to help them fill the form if they will not be able to do so unsupported. So far we have had no complaints and no additional missed calls. It's not impossible to leave a message for those who really have no choice, and we have had one or two, but it's been a success so far in reducing the time spent on voicemails.

### **Operational collaboration**

The year-round contract for the team leader has provided valuable time to ensure that the team has accurate information from other services and is promoting our own information to service leads, sharing feedback, fostering collaborative approaches, helping us and other services to make improvements. Examples include regular catch ups with the Designated Clinical Officer for SEND to discuss health queries, the Designated Social Work Officer for SEND for issues relating to children's and adult's social care, and the SEND Inclusion Advisers for issues relating to school delivery of SEN Support. We've met with teams, both virtually and face to face, to introduce our service and respond to questions, including iSEND team, SENCos, Paediatricians, CAMHS, Family Support, Youth Offending Service and Connection Support.

We have contributed to policy and process development. Examples include:

- BC home to school transport web pages and post 16 and home to school transport policies to make processes clearer for families, e.g. the Transport Exceptions Panel.
- CYP therapies strategy e.g., suggesting increased use of webinars/videos, using SENDIAS to promote services available, description of outcomes away from 'therapy' towards 'needs'.
- Support with redevelopment of iSEND letters and policies relating e.g. to refusal to assess, school placement and personal budgets.

### **Strategic involvement**

SENDIAS is well placed to play an important role, in line with national [Minimum Standards](#), in influencing local strategy, policy and processes so that these are developed in line with the law and reflect the views of local families. We are in a strong position to do this because:

- on a daily basis a large number of families tell us about the issues they are facing
- we have unmatched experience, breadth and depth of knowledge on SEND law and local provision across education, health and social care and across age ranges 0-25

Our availability for strategic involvement has improved because the team leader's role is now year round and the adviser team has grown in size and capability, reducing the time the team leader needs to spend on case work. The focus this year has been on promoting the service to strategic leaders and drawing their attention to significant issues we uncover through our interactions with service users.

Examples of how our input has made a difference at a strategic level:

We said:	This contributed to:
The high number of children with EBSA requires a coordinated approach – we organised joint meetings with EPS, CAMHS and FACT Bucks. There is no EBSA advice in the OAP document.	The EBSA toolkit and our joint FACT BUCKS/ SENDIAS EBSA webinar.
We reported a higher proportion of refusal to assess decisions against parents' requests for EHCNA.	Closer monitoring of panels and advice for panel members by senior leaders, several decisions were looked at again and overturned.
We were concerned that the Preparing for Adulthood Impact Group Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) did not include measures for housing for young people with SEND, for example, numbers living at home or in supported living.	Recognition that data is missing on where young people with SEND live and gap analysis is required. Housing representative now attends PFA Impact Group.
Contradictory advice in the Buckinghamshire Reduced Timetable Protocol issued September 2022 was leading to schools using reduced timetables contrary to government guidance, to manage behaviour.	Agreement to amend the protocol (amended April 2023) and clearer verbal guidance to professionals. We have noticed more schools now using alternative provision than reduced timetables to manage behaviour.
The SEN Support Toolkit doesn't include information about hearing impairment, specifically auditory processing disorder.	A Buckinghamshire position statement on auditory processing disorder.

## Minimum Standards

As predicted in last year's annual report, our enhanced funding has enabled us to meet almost all of the national [Minimum Standards](#), compared to the position at the beginning of the year when we clearly did not have capacity to meet demand, we could not offer a year round service, we had very minimal strategic impact and had no capacity to train others. The main exception is the local decision, based on value for money, to continue with webpages embedded into the Buckinghamshire Council website rather than to commission a standalone website.

Minimum Standard	Met/working towards/unmet				
1.	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
<b>Commissioning, governance and management</b>	4/8 met	6/8 met	6/8 met	6/8 met	8/8 met

Minimum Standard	Met/working towards/unmet				
2. Strategic functions	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
	3/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met

Minimum Standard	Met/working towards/unmet				
3. Operational functions	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
	2/6 met	2/8 met	2/6 met	2/6 met	4/6 met

3.2 The IASS provides branded information and promotional materials in a range of accessible formats.

3.3 The IASS has a stand-alone service website that is accessible to all service users

Minimum Standard	Met/working towards/unmet				
4. Professional development and training for staff	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
	2/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met	3/3 met

## Feedback

The combination of an extremely hard-working, conscientious team and the improvements we have implemented contribute to this year's SENDIAS survey results. Our new volunteer business support officer randomly selected and attempted to call 90 service users in February and March who had agreed in the past year to help with surveys. There were 21 telephone surveys conducted and the scores were the best we have ever had. It is the first time we have ever achieved 100% scores for satisfaction, difference made, impartiality and endorsement.

The FACT Bucks survey taps into a much higher number of respondents and presents a more mixed, but still generally positive picture. After friends and family and child's nursery, school or further education setting, SENDIAS was the most likely to have provide help or advice about how to get support for the child: 26% respondents who first needed advice in 2022 said they had used SENDIAS.

**Table 16. Did you receive help or advice about how to get support for your child from any of these people?**

Base: Those where support for child's SEN was first discussed during 2022	2021 (77) %	2022 (31) %	2023 (23) %
My child's school, college or nursery	53	42	35
A paediatrician	17	29	4
Friends or family	22	26	39
An educational psychologist	16	26	17
Our GP	14	26	13
Another healthcare professional	16	23	9
<b>SEND IAS Service</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>
Our social worker	13	16	4
Didn't receive help or advice from anyone	13	13	22
Another charity	3	13	0
Someone from the Integrated SEND Service	14	10	13
IPSEA	3	0	9
The Local Offer online resources	Not asked	Not asked	4

The FACT Bucks survey also highlights that despite our continuing efforts to promote the service, 30% of respondents say they have not heard of us.

**Did you make use of Buckinghamshire's SEND Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) Service during 2022? Please tick as many as apply**

All - 206 responses	Response Percent
Never heard of SENDIAS	29.13%
Heard of SENDIAS but didn't use it in 2022	35.44%
Looked at the SENDIAS web pages	10.68%
Had some information, advice or support from SENDIAS via email or telephone	25.73%
Was supported by SENDIAS in a dispute with the local authority	7.28%

Whilst the majority in the FACT Bucks survey rate the service positively, in the free text comments (Appendix F) 14% made negative comments - many cite delays in SENDIAS response times as a cause for concern, others feel SENDIAS is not neutral.

**Table 20. Overall, how would you rate the service offered by SENDIAS?**

Base: Those that had used SENDIAS during 2022	(74) %
1 – Not helpful at all	7
2	7
3	28
4	20
5 – Very Helpful	38

This is a new question for 2023.

### SENDIAS insights about the state of SEND locally

Key local problems for our service users continue to be the shortage of specialist placements, the lack of understanding from schools for children and young people with ADHD and the high numbers of children not attending school because of emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA). We have noticed a more informed response for children not attending school for any reason now that there is a more coordinated and structured approach to tackling EBSA following the introduction of the EBSA educational psychology team, the EBSA toolkit and our FACT Bucks SENDIAS EBSA webinar.

At the start of the period we found that, contrary to government guidance, a number of schools were using reduced timetables to manage behaviour instead of alternative provision. We now find that more are open to using alternative provision, but we are also having more queries relating to internal exclusions with children sometimes not allowed contact with other children or teachers for days.

From our perspective, whilst overall understanding of SEND law and ordinarily available provision has improved, effectiveness is still very patchy – even though SENCOs now have better access to training and have valuable support from the SEND Inclusion Advisers. From our experience this patchiness may relate to level of support around SEND from their senior leadership team and pressure of work for SENCOs with very little non-contact time.

We've found that on the whole the completeness of EHC plans is continuing to improve – in our experience newer EHC plans are more likely to contain health and social care advice and the proportion of post year 9 EHC plans with Preparing for Adulthood outcomes is increasing. However, the FACT Bucks survey shows that there is still dissatisfaction from families about the quality of plans and the lack of genuine coproduction, and we spend quite a lot of time advising and supporting them to raise concerns about EHC plans with EHCos not only for first plans, but also during annual reviews.

## Conclusions for our next business plan

A learning point for us from feedback is that still more promotion of our service is required for all potential service users – a third of parent/carer respondents to the FACT Bucks survey had not heard of SENDIAS, and the proportion who used our service for advice about EHC needs assessments has reduced since 2021. We have noticed in particular that while we deal with some children and young people who have a social worker, mainly via their parents/carers, there are fewer than we would expect, especially relating to Children Looked After.

We also need to continue to improve our resilience during spikes in demand and team member absence, by enabling self-service where possible – so we will continue with webinars and new web content, especially where we notice gaps in understanding, such as with support for some children and young people with ADHD, and placement at early years settings, schools and further education providers, including alternative provision.

We will continue our enhanced links with other teams, especially health teams, as this has helped with up-to-date information from them, promotion of our service and resolution of complex cases.

Our own data shows that, whilst we have doubled the number of children and young people we have worked with directly in the past year, we still have a great deal to do to inform children and young people about our service and ensure they have what they need to understand and make the most of their rights so that they reach the best possible educational and other outcomes.

We also want to continue to improve how we measure our impact e.g. on reducing tribunal hearings, and how we develop our service using service user feedback.



## Overview from our Chair, Andrew Howard

The report above details another year of significant support offered by the SENDIAS team to families of and young people with special educational needs. There has been a growth in referrals as well as a welcome return to engagement in meetings and strategic discussions. This has been made possible by the sustained increased level of funding secured from the Council and the ICB. Nevertheless, the service operates with only 3.1 FTE advisers available to families in an area that has in excess of 5000 EHCPs and 10,000 receiving SEN Support.

To this end, it has been necessary to streamline processes and impose a longer than ideal waiting time for first responses to enquiries. It is clear from recent survey responses, that this waiting time is a frustration and even though triaging is applied, families still feel left without support at often crucial times. However, the surveys also show that once the service is engaged, the families are grateful for the support they receive. The dedication and professionalism of the Team is a key factor in this.

The service's impact on resolutions is of particular note, assisting as it has the process of mediation to reduce the number of tribunal hearings required to ensure that provision to meet need for these SEND children and young people can be agreed between the parties involved.

Alongside the advice work, the Service has worked in partnership with the Parent Carer Forum to deliver further training webinars and engage in more strategic and operational discussions aimed at improving the local offer for the wider cohort of SEND children and young people than those for whom specific case advice is being offered.

The trends noted in this report, alongside the feedback from the surveys and from our stakeholders in our wider Steering Group meetings are already shaping our business plans for the year ahead. However, the core focus will remain on providing timely and impartial advice to families as they participate in the SEND process.

*Andrew Howard – Chair Bucks SENDIAS Service and Families and Carers Together in Bucks*

## Appendix A: Workforce

### In-house staff team:

Role	FTE	Funding source	Experience with SENDIAS
Team Leader	1.0	BC	17 years
Adviser	1.0	BC/BOB/ social care	11 months
Adviser	1.0	BC/BOB/ social care	1 year
Adviser	0.41	BC	3 years 3 months
Adviser	0.42	BC	4 years
Adviser	0.23	BC	4 years
CYP Adviser	0.20	BC	8 years
Business Support	0.5	BC	14 months
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4.76</b>		

### Volunteer SEND IAS Adviser (VSA) team:

Role	Min.no during year	Max. no during year	Number at year end	Average hours/wk/ term time/ volunteer	Experience
Volunteers Advisers	3	4	3	8	19 months
Volunteer Business Support	0	1	1	4	1 month

## Appendix B: Buckinghamshire SEND IAS Service local context

By 2020 there were an estimated 161,820 children and young people under the age of 25 in Buckinghamshire. Results from the 2021 census are not yet available.

In January 2021, 95,708 of these were registered at a school.

Nationally, the number of pupils with an EHC plan rose by 9% from 2021 to 473,300 in 2022. The number of pupils with SEN support increased by 4.3% from 2021 to 1,129,843. Pupils with an EHC plan made up almost one quarter (24%) of all pupils with SEN in January 2022. In Buckinghamshire in January 2022, 3967 or 4.1% pupils had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) compared to 4% nationally. 10,102 or 10.4% were on SEN Support compared to 12.6% nationally. Pupils with an EHC plan made up 28% of all pupils with SEN in Buckinghamshire in January 2022:

		EHC plans/Statements of SEN	3,967
		EHC plans/Statements of SEN (%)	4.1
		SEN support	10,102
		SEN support (percent)	10.4
South East	Buckinghamshire	Headcount of all pupils	96,964

[\(SEN in England - 2022\)](#)

The total numbers of new EHC plans issued in Buckinghamshire for 2022 was 748. For the same period in 2021, 708 were issued, this 4.5 % increase was a much lower rise than the previous year.

There was a total of 1340 requests for EHC needs assessment for 2022. This is an increase of 18% from 2021 and an increase compared with 2020 of 43%.

This demonstrates a **continued increase in demand**. 65% of these requests have been agreed, a slight reduction on 2021 (68%). For 2020 and 2021 the % of all requests agreed stood nationally at 78%, and for the south-eastern region 74%. 33% of requests in 2021 came from parents. In 2022 parental requests rose again to 35%. Requests from parents were significantly less likely to be agreed than from settings (52% agreed compared to 71%). There were no requests from young people.

There has been a **long-term fall in the proportion of EHC plans issued within 20 weeks**. During 2022, 65.3% of all plans were issued within 20 weeks, excluding exceptions. For 2021, 82.0% of all plans were issued within 20 weeks, excluding exceptions. This compares to 97% recorded in December 2020.

As for 2021-2, there continues to be:

- great difficulty in meeting the 6-week deadline for appendices – especially for health advice.
- very lengthy delays for the SEND team to process annual reviews.
- shortage of specialist placements.

During 2022, the Integrated SEND Team participated in 95 mediation meetings, which is a rise on the 80 meetings held during 2021. The majority of disputes (58%) were around the Refusal to Assess (RTA). The RTA cases represent around 20% of the total number of EHC Needs requests that were turned down during 2022. This is a significant rise on the 10% from the previous year. Approx. 38% of the cases that went to Mediation during 2022 later progressed to an appeal, with the remainder coming to some form of resolution with no further escalation. This is a rise on the 28% of cases that escalated during 2021.

iSEND received 204 appeals during 2022, of which 73 were appealing the RTA decision, therefore 131 appeals about content of EHCP or placement, representing 3% of all children with EHCPs in Buckinghamshire (5837<sup>1</sup>). During 2021 iSEND received 157 appeals, of which 34 were against RTA decisions and 123 appeals about content of EHCP or placement, representing just over 2% of all children with EHCPs (5409). In keeping with previous years, the majority of appeals are against Section I and with 19% of these seeking an independent setting, either mainstream or special. (*Data from SEND Resolutions, April 2023*)

In January 2022 the most common type of need nationally among pupils with an EHC plan was Autistic spectrum disorder, with 103,400 pupils (31.3% of pupils with an EHC plan).

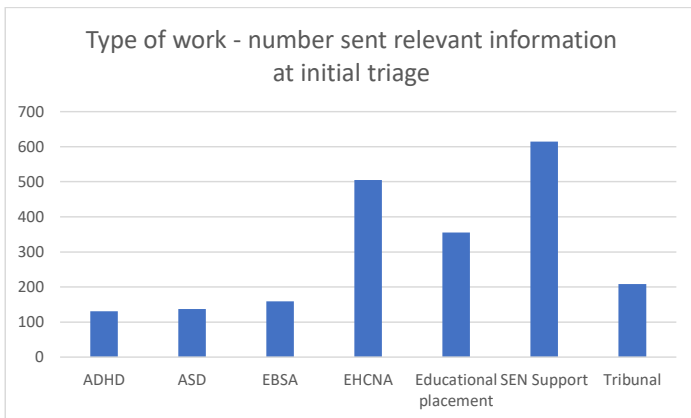
The most common type of need among pupils with SEN support was Speech, Language and Communication needs, with 262,400 pupils (25.1% of pupils on SEN Support)

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<sup>1</sup> Data taken from Staff Briefing (Feb 2023) – EHCPs maintained as of 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022  
Buckinghamshire SENDIAS Service 20

## Appendix C: Statistics from our database

Headline figures 24.2.2022-23.2.2023

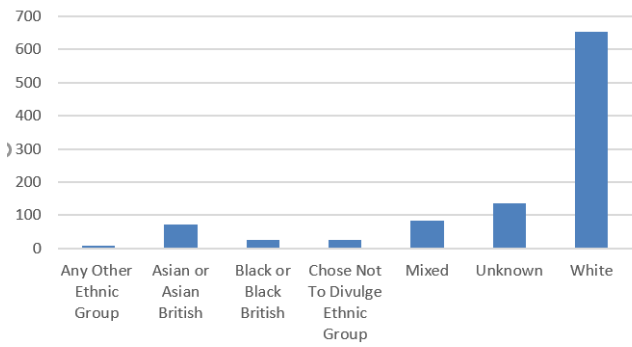


This table only records the main types of work as categorised in our mailbox – what the query appears to be about at the start of our contact with the service user. In the next reporting year we will have more precise information derived from classification codes in our database.

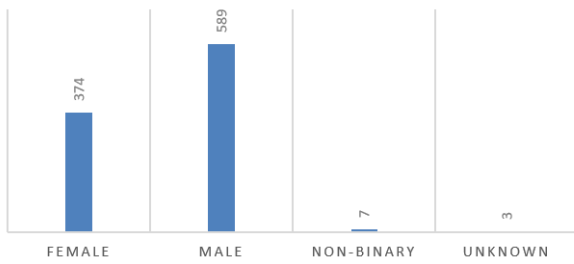
The record for ADHD is incomplete -only from June 2022.

This is the first year we have sent out information to more service users about SEN Support than about EHC Needs Assessment (EHCNA). We sent information about Tribunals and Educational Placement to significantly more service users than the previous year.

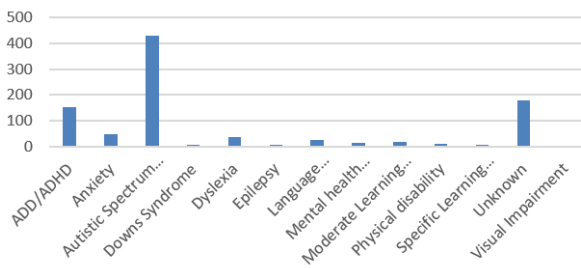
### ETHNICITY - OPEN CASES 2022-23



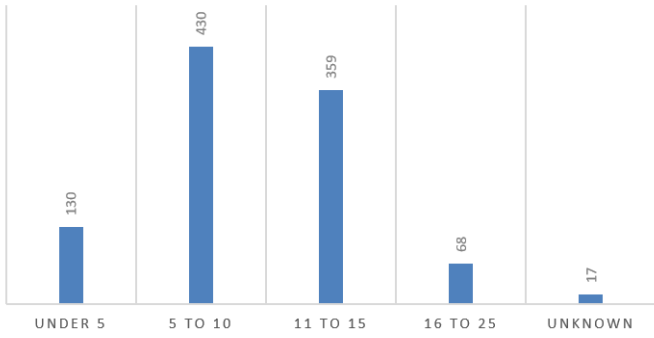
### GENDER - OPEN CASES 2022-23



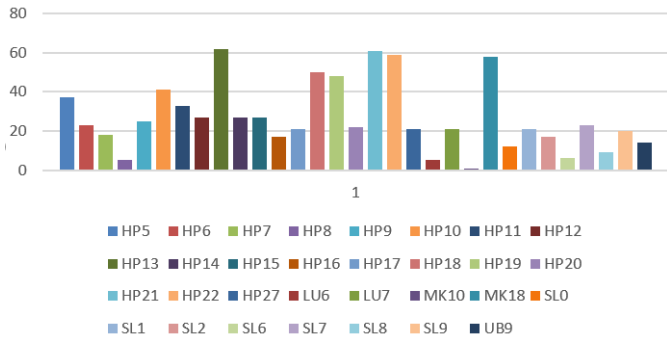
### DISABILITY - OPEN CASES 2022 - 2023



### AGE RANGE-OPEN CASES 2022-2023

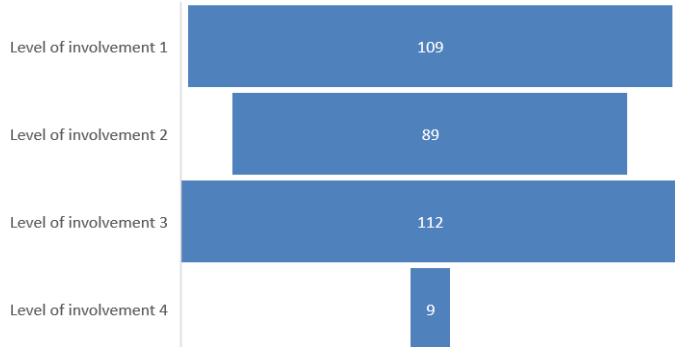


### CONSENT GIVER - POSTCODE 2022-2023



### Focus on January – mid-February 2023

### LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT 1.1.23-23.2.23



Level 1 is signposting

Level 2 is straightforward work including attendance at annual review and other meetings

Level 3 is for more complex work relating to issue e.g. permanent exclusions or to service user needs

Level 4 is direct involvement in tribunals.



## Appendix D: Feedback from professionals

*'The value of SENDIAS being around for the six-week holiday period is they are there for families and can explain things and signpost to services. The informal catch ups SENDIAS has with health teams are useful for promoting a consistent, accurate message - Getting the message right helps to allay anxiety for families and is invaluable for services as they cannot have individual conversations with families but SENDIAS have that outreach.'*

Fiona Barry  
Head of Service for Children and Young People's Therapies  
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust  
September 2022

*'I think this is really good!'* [about SENDIAS re-launched webpages]

Hayley Nowley  
Interim Head of iSEND  
December 2022

*Thanks again for the coffee morning. I have had really positive feedback from parents about it. Of those I spoke to they felt really informed by the session and were pleased to know that a diagnosis isn't required for support. I think that's a message that needs to get out there more. Form*

*My point of view it was a great way to begin liaison with parents and have them back in school again. It's set the path nicely for future coffee mornings and hopefully the positive word will spread! I also found it really informative and knowing what services you provide helps me to better advise parents.*

SENCo  
Broughton Junior School  
September 2022

*I just wanted to say thank you for coming to our Team Meeting this week. It was really helpful and the resources and links on your PowerPoint presentation have been really useful! I am sure many of the team will be in touch in the future for your advice and guidance!*

Sarah Barnett  
Family Support Service  
January 2023

## Appendix E: FACT Bucks survey 2023 - free text comments relating to SENDIAS

Positive	Negative	Neutral	Hasn't used the service or not in last 2 years
A great support and a window into the world of SEND	Absolutely toothless and a complete waste of resource as they do nothing to ensure lawful services are provided and abuse stopped by BCC	Awaiting contact from Sendias having filled out the contact form	I haven't personally used the service as I don't trust them because they are not independent as they make out and still under the thumb of the LA.
Advisers were very helpful, by email, phone and in-person.	Attended a webinar with SENDIAS, it was outdated, badly informed and boring	Had great support from Sendias during tribunal #1 in 2021. Had a lawyer for tribunal 2 in 2022 so not used, as far as I recall. It's much better if you have a phone that is answered, rather than hitting an answer phone. This I do remember. As well as long response times to emails sometimes. This may well now be resolved as I have not had cause to use the service in some time. It's an important service, and deserves more funding than it receives.	Never heard of it
amazing service and always helpful and friendly advice	Biased and I'll-informed - sadly not had good or accurate advice	I needed advice in a time frame and went on the website and got information that help would possibly take months for an advisor to get back. I was sent lots of information.	When contacted in 2019 and 2020 the volunteer knew less than I did
Fantastic support when you can get it but the wait times are so long that it's often too late by the time they respond.	During disputes with the County, we reached out to SENDIAS but only got sent some bits of information. Information we found easily ourselves via Google. It would have been much more helpful to have individual/specific assistance, suited to our child, rather than generic information.	It has been v helpful but I found the quantity of info about the EHCP process overwhelming (the process itself is overwhelming) and I didn't feel that I could get very detailed help from SENDIAS, e.g. going through draft EHCPs line by line to discuss what changes were needed. The advice given is more generic. Also, because they are impartial, they have to be careful what they say and they don't really give strategic advice on e.g. how to win an appeal, they just tell you what the law says.	
Helpful but my son has never had the support he needed due to funding	Gave up awaiting and sought advice from advocate		
Helpful, but the advice/support is not sufficiently detailed	In the end desperate I wrote in the chat my issue and only then was I called.		
I think they should receive more funding and have their own separate website page and Facebook group - Would rate higher if they had were able to tremble in size/funding.	It takes long for them to get back to you and you do need immediate help there is no one to speak to.		
Once I spoke to someone the information sent made more sense and they were super helpful and really lovely to talk to and helped a lot.	It takes too long for them to respond back, have had to look elsewhere for support		
Other times they were very helpful	It took a long time to be able to access the help due to the volume of parents needing support with their SEN children		
Their knowledge is invaluable, I would not have been successful if it wasn't for them, they are amazing	It was frustrating that I had to wait possibly months to access a service.		
There is some very useful information on the SENDIAS website	It would be great to have a faster response time. This puts me off contacting them, as issues or need for support can often be urgent.		

Positive	Negative	Neutral	Hasn't used the service or not in last 2 years
They are very helpful and supportive.	Local offer does not help. Multiple agencies will full neglect and emotional abuse as school hide their failings but blaming families and wasting money that if council had used advice they sort from nursery instead of ignoring these escalation of survival skills and defiance would not be a challenge stop in school restraint and failed imprisonment which is in breach of an anti-touchee policy and right to education in a safe environment and lying to professionals that use a multiple agencies attack on families that fight for their kids rights		
They provided me with lots of advice for what should have been happening since they have been off of school	Mainstream special school had said they couldn't meet need. Independent school could. Therefore my son should have been offered full time at the independent. He was offered part time. SENDIAS said I should accept as it would be hard to get full time. Looking back I know this is wrong. It feels like SENDIAS and BCC are working together and I don't trust them now.		
<a href="https://twitter.com/SENDInfoBucks/status/162327324874235904?s=20">This study might be of interest: https://twitter.com/SENDInfoBucks/status/162327324874235904?s=20</a>	Need support for my child rather than only for the parents		
Very helpful and so knowledgeable. Gained so much information and help after receiving none from the school. It did take a while to hear back but very helpful when we spoke over the phone.	Response time was delayed - no ability to call and ask a simple question. I had to wait 5 working days.		
Very helpful and supportive from a personal point of view.	SENDIAS took a while to get back to me once I resolved the problem and could offer used them at the time.		
	Service appears to be highly in demand meaning long initial wait. Information mainly via email with lots of direction to fact sheets or further links. Not very helpful for those with poor literacy or communication skills.		
	Take ages to respond and useless when they do.		
	The seem to be in counties pocket and spout local policy rather than law and statute. It is also extremely difficult to get through to them.		
	The SENDIAS lady was lovely but she gave me false information.		
	They appear not to be impartial but to be in county's pocket. Too often local policy is spouted at us when in fact this is overruled at every stage by statute and law.		
	They are not all that effective. They take a long time. The process for help/support takes a long time.		
	They are not strong and effective		
	They are too busy and overstretched. Much advice comes back to EHCNA/EHCP which is a cumbersome, not fit for purpose tool to try and force schools hand to behave how they should have in the first place. Too little too late once massive history of unmet needs, causes school based trauma leading to poor mental and then physical health		
	They told me my child would not qualify for an EHCP. She now has one and attends a moderate learning needs school. Felt they were no help at all.		
	Too interlinked to the LA.		
	too long a wait for appt		
	Waited 5 weeks for a copy and paste email response with just a link to website. No specific advice or support offered despite my request. Never answered the phone or returned voicemails.		



#### Case study 1

##### **The query**

*I have been told that my child cannot return to nursery in September due to their suspected autism.*

##### **What SENDIAS did**

Information sent on support for preschool child with autism or suspected autism, SEN Support in the early years and Disability discrimination.

45 minute phone call to parent, provided further advice about what to expect re support and inclusion, making a complaint/ disability discrimination, measuring progress, effective communication with school, High Needs Block funding, EHC needs assessment and safeguarding.

##### **The outcome**

The parent used the SEN Support and disability discrimination information we sent to challenge the setting on their approach. The setting recognised its mistake, took external advice, arranged High Needs Block funding and agreed for the child to return the following term.

#### Case study 2

##### **The query**

How will my child with medical needs have the support they require once they start school?

##### **What SENDIAS did**

Information sent on SEN Support, individual healthcare plan, Statutory guidance on supporting pupils at school with medical condition, Equality Act 2010, school nursing team, paediatric outreach nurse, EHC needs assessment.

Phone call to parent to give further advice on these, school admissions and working with chosen school for a successful start. Discussed pros and cons of the options for her child.

##### **The outcome**

Parent wrote to thank for help, felt confident about approaching schools, and what to expect from them.

## Appendix G: Our survey results – March 2023

Bucks SENDIAS Service end of year service user survey Feb/March 2023 – please see separate link: [Report](#)  
[Bucks SENDIAS Service Survey Spring 2023.pdf](#)

**Commented [SS1]:** This link will only be openable by BC staff – I'm obtaining a url for it.