



ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

Wolverhampton Information, Advice and Support Service

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WIIASS Annual Report April 24 to March 25

Introduction

Wolverhampton Information, Advice and Support Service (WIIASS) is a statutory service which provides free impartial, confidential information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents/carers on matters relating to special educational needs and disability.

WIIASS is an in-house service which is jointly commissioned by the Local Authority and Black Country ICB Wolverhampton Place.

What we offer how and when

WIIASS provides free, impartial, and confidential information, advice, and support to enable young people and their parents/carers to:

- make informed choices about their own or their child's SEND, inclusion in schools and other settings, and the graduated cycle of SEN support (assess-plan-do-review).
- feel confident to express their views and participate in decisions.
- find positive ways to communicate with schools and the local authority.
- understand their rights and navigate the law and processes relating to SEND, including with school suspension/exclusion and SEND appeals.
- navigate the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process and subsequent outcomes as well as the EHCP Annual Review process.
- explore and support options when there are disagreements including raising concerns, mediation and SEND tribunals.

WIIASS provides an all-year-round flexible service which is open during normal office hours and includes:

- a direct helpline with 24-hour answer machine.
- an online contact form.
- information resources including website, social media, booklets, and factsheets.
- a dedicated casework service for those who require more tailored advice and support.
- regular SEND surgeries at venues across the city.
- attendance at community events.
- workshops on SEND law and local processes for parents, carers, young people, and professionals, including bespoke requests.

Statutory Framework

Chapter two of the SEND Code of Practice 2015 outlines the duties for local authorities to provide a confidential, impartial and arm's length SEND information, advice and support service and says:

'Local authorities must arrange for children with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, and their parents, and young people with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, to be provided with information and advice about matters relating to their SEN or disabilities, including matters relating to health and social care.' (2.1)

'Information, Advice and Support Services should be impartial, confidential and accessible and should have the capacity to handle face-to-face, telephone and electronic enquiries.' (2.5)

'The information, advice and support should be impartial and provided at arm's length from the local authority and CCGs.' (2.8)

Minimum Standards

There are a set of national [Minimum Standards](#) for services providing impartial information, advice and support relating to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). The Minimum Standards are developed by the [Information, Advice and Support Services Network](#)

Governance

As part of the Minimum Standards 'The Governance arrangements outline a clear management structure, encompassing a strategic manager within the IASS and a steering group or advisory body which includes representatives from service user groups and key stakeholders from education, social care and health.' (1.7).

WIASS Advisory Group meets every term to support the IASS Manager ensuring the continued development and best practice of the service. Along with the IASS Manager the Advisory Group consists of parent/carer service users, representatives from the voluntary sector, Royal Wolverhampton Trust, Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), schools, and the Local Authority. It has an independent chair from Changing Our Lives. Young people's views are represented through the work of the IASS Casework and Service Development Officer.

Resource and Capacity

Service structure

IASS Manager 1 FTE

Casework and Service Development Officer 1.65 FTE (2 positions)

Caseworker 2 FTE

Caseworker 1 FTE Term Time

Staff development

In the past year two caseworkers completed level 3 legal training. This means that all staff have completed three levels of IASSN Network (IASSN) IPSEA legal training, meeting IASSN minimum standards.

In 2024-25 four members of the team completed LA restorative practice two-day training. Three caseworkers completed IASSN vicarious trauma training.

All staff have completed Oliver McGowan online training.

Staffing has remained steady since June 2023 and the service is fully staffed in line with the current WIASS staffing structure. Although, as one member of staff is part time there are available hours in the staffing structure to increase this, depending on the demand for the service.

WIASS Activity

Casework referrals/commentary/key findings

The past few years have seen a significant increase in casework referrals. There was a slight increase in referrals this year on last year's figures which meant the current staffing structure was able to cope with demand. However, the service continues to develop its way of working to ensure it can meet demand and the needs of families in the city. The number of referrals per month was consistent with previous years with August having the fewest referrals. The biggest increase (15%) was in referrals for 11 to 16-year-olds.

Month	No. Referrals	Cases open	No. Contacts	Cases Closed	23/43 No. Referrals
April	65	548	1295	99	47
May	81	530	1301	113	59
June	73	490	1390	77	97
July	60	473	1221	81	61
August	29	421	492	50	36
September	97	468	1299	70	96
October	83	481	1542	92	71
November	90	479	1579	68	80
December	52	463	942	63	39
January	78	478	1535	54	80
February	71	495	1409	58	92
March	94	532	1683	67	84
Total	873				842

Referrals by age range

Under 5	80
5-10	317
11-16	376
16-19	86
20+	14

The IASS Network has four intervention levels. The first level is where information only is provided for the individual. This is not recorded as casework. Casework referrals start at level 2 which means providing individuals with tailored information and specific advice about the education, health and social care SEND system and local processes. Level 3 intervention is where more in-depth support, partnership working and attendance in meetings is required. Level 4 is more intense support for example permanent exclusion meetings, Independent Review panel meetings, preparation for and attendance at mediation and SEND appeals.

WASS received an additional 188 referrals for information only. This is recorded as intervention level 1 and is not included in casework statistics.

Furthermore, WASS does not count each contact and piece of advice given as one referral. A Caseworker may work with a family for several weeks/months depending on the needs and circumstances. For example, if a parent/carer or young person contacts for support in navigating the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process then their allocated Caseworker will continue to offer advice and support until the outcome of the assessment, and perhaps beyond if the outcome is not to their satisfaction. This would be the same for those without EHCPs who receive setting-based support. A family may return to the service for further support at various stages through their SEND journey. Wherever possible the same Caseworker will continue to offer advice and support. This means the family have a consistent Caseworker which in turn provides a consistent experience for them.

The IASS Network expects services to only accept self-referrals. However, WASS understands that often this can become a barrier to much needed advice and support for families. Whilst we ask colleagues to encourage families to self-refer often a helping hand is required. Hence the web contact form was introduced in 2023. This means professionals can complete the contact form alongside the family with their consent. In addition, it provides information for WASS to understand the needs of the child or young person and the reason they require advice and support.

WASS aims to empower young people and their parents/carers to feel confident to share their views and participate in SEND processes. The service continues to offer support in meetings, understanding that families may need more reassurance and intense support until they feel confident enough to do this by themselves. All young people who contact the service for support and parents and carers who have or may have their own additional needs are prioritised. The WASS caseworker agrees a

plan of support they will provide but there are no set rules or blanket policy as everyone is individual.

Of the 873 casework referrals received 600 of referrals were for males with 270 for females, and one who identified as transgender. Two did not share their gender status. This would seem to mirror the 2024 data for EHCPs in the city where 71.7% of children and young people who have an EHCP are male, and consistent with the national picture.

Majority of referrals (over 65%) were for children and young people who had Communication and Interaction (290) and Social Emotional and Mental Health as a primary area of need. This too is consistent with 2024 local authority data.

In all 1357 casework referrals were open during the year and 854 were closed.

Casework advice and support may include:

- Providing advocacy in line with the Minimum Standards.
- Partnership working with education, health, and social care agencies/professionals.
- Virtual and face to face meetings/ home visits.
- Attendance and support at meetings with other professionals/services, virtual or face to face.
- Support with writing letters, filling in forms, giving views, preparing for appeal.
- Support for parent, child or young person at meetings, appeals, mediation, Independent Review panels (following permanent exclusion).
- Ongoing intensive casework.

Disagreement Resolution/Mediation/Appeals

WASS gave advice and support to 100 families to resolve disagreements relating to SEND either with the school and/or local authority. Consequently, 43 cases where a disagreement discussion and/or meeting had taken place the family were satisfied with the outcome and no further action was required. WASS feels that due to its involvement at an early stage 21 cases where families were considering an appeal to the SEND tribunal had been avoided. Although statistically there has been an increase in cases for mediation and appeal Wolverhampton has remained consistently lower than West Midlands comparators.

WASS attended 5 mediation meetings and helped 15 families to prepare. The service's involvement in mediation meetings has reduced. This may be due to two reasons: WASS support in disagreement resolution meetings taking place with the LA prior to mediation and because section I placement appeals are more prevalent and do not require mediation.

With regards to appeals WASS supported 11 people in preparing their appeal to the SEND Tribunal Service. WASS attended three appeal hearings. The Tribunal judges overturned the LA decision in two of these cases. With the support of WASS a further five appeals were agreed with a positive outcome for the young person before

the SEND Tribunal hearing. There continues to be a significant waiting time for appeal hearings which means some of these appeals WIASS helped to prepare will not be heard until later in 2025/26.

The service continued to see an increase in referrals relating to permanent exclusion. WIASS supported 10 parents whose child with SEND had been permanently excluded and 28 parents whose children had been suspended. This includes a range of advice and support starting with a discussion about the exclusion process itself, preparation to challenge the decision, support at Review Panel meetings and support at Independent Review Panel (IRP) meetings. None of the decisions were overturned. These types of referrals take time and commitment from staff, particularly where support in meetings is usually required out of hours to accommodate governing bodies. However, the support from WIASS always aims to focus on a positive way forward, to ensure needs are identified appropriately and support put in place accordingly. In the three IRP meetings attended, each time there was an acknowledgement by the governing body of the young person's unmet needs, even though the decisions were upheld.

Training events and community outreach

WIASS delivered a blend of in person and online workshops throughout the year. Families were surveyed in June 2024 to see what content topics they wanted delivered in the training workshops. Consequently, WIASS delivered workshops covering SEN support, EHCP assessment process, EHCP annual reviews, Checking a draft EHCP, Person Centred Planning tools, and EBSNA Pathway. The service continued to use Low Hill Family Hub in 2024 and since January 2025 Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub to deliver in person workshops. Like last year despite places being fully booked attendance has been low. Less than half of those who had booked a place attended. WIASS will review this in summer 2025 with a view to make best use of staff time, whilst continuing to meet IASSN minimum standards and deliver what families in Wolverhampton want.

In addition, the service also delivered several bespoke sessions for schools and Wolverhampton's Foster Carer network covering the graduated approach for SEND support. These have been well attended by parents and carers.

WIASS is aware that prevalent area of need in the city is speech, language, and communication. As WIASS has a member of staff who is a Makaton tutor, and in discussions with Head of Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service, WIASS delivered three Makaton taster sessions, and a Level 1 Makaton course for parents who have children with speech, language, and communication difficulties. Further taster sessions were delivered in community groups such as at the Embrace coffee mornings. Also, two schools received a bespoke session for staff and parents who have children with identified needs, working together to learn Makaton signs and support communication.

The service continued to attend Outreach and Family Hubs SEND coffee mornings and received more requests from schools to attend SEND coffee mornings, and

parents' evenings. WIASS has held a monthly drop-in session at Base 25 since July 24 to offer information and advice for young people and their families. This has not been as successful as we had hoped, and there have been some teething issues with access to Wi-Fi, confidential room space and lack of promotion. The service will review before end of summer term to see if some of the issues can be resolved for the service to continue.

WIASS continued to support Voice4Parents coffee mornings in the Autumn term offering individual advice drop-in sessions. The service hopes to build a strong working relationship with the new parent carer forum and have a Memorandum of Understanding in place.

In January 2025 WIASS started to hold a fortnightly SEND Surgery at Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub where parents, carers and young people can speak to a member of the team confidentially to seek individual advice. Most sessions have been well attended with people happy to wait to be seen. Thirteen people received tailored advice and consequently there was no need for a referral for further casework support.

Following the success of the communication training WIASS delivered for the Local Authority Travel Unit in September 23 this was repeated in September 24 and a further session planned for summer 25. WIASS received feedback from parents who have noticed the difference in communication with the Travel Assistants and the positive impact this has had for their children. A case study will be completed and published on IASS website summer 2025.

WIASS work with young people has increased. Casework statistics have already shown that 100 young people aged between 16 and 25 accessed the service for advice and support. Two workshops about person centred planning were delivered to Hy5! – Wolverhampton's group of young people helping to inspire change for young people with SEND across the city. Unfortunately, due to changes in staff at Wolverhampton college planned sessions did not go ahead in the Autumn term. However, relationships have now been established with the new staff, and sessions are planned for Autumn 2025/Spring 2026.

Strategic and Partnership working

The service continues to support the local area's response to the Written Statement of Action; provides input into the SEND and Alternate Provision Improvement Plan; is an ever-present member of the SEND co-production group; completed user testing for the new Local Offer website and continues to be a member of the Local Offer Web Development group monitoring the Local Offer website, additions, amendments and feedback.

WIASS manager completed EHCP audits providing feedback and suggestions to the SEND Quality Assurance team to improve the quality of EHCPs. Improvement in EHCPs was shared with the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.

WASS manager continues to meet with SENSTART Manager each half term. As a result of meetings, the Local Authority EHCP decision letters have been amended to be clearer for families, making the processes for disagreement resolution, mediation, and appeal easier to follow. The service participated in several projects SENSTART has undertaken to improve processes for families, ensuring that the parent carer and young person voice is represented.

Bimonthly meetings are held with Designated Social Care Officer where any themes and issues regarding social care are reported by the WASS Manager. It also offers an opportunity for WASS to offer family and staff feedback on projects such as short breaks. Monthly meetings are held with the Designated Medical Officer/Designated Clinical Officer with similar sharing of intel.

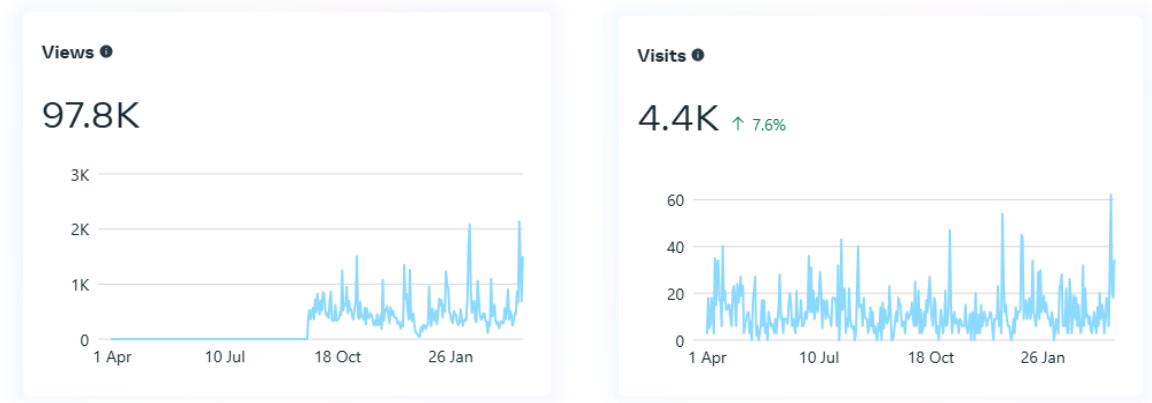
WASS manager regularly attends school intel sessions as a mechanism to report concerns about maintained schools and share intel. As a result, this means WASS has a better understanding of local context. The service continued to support the SENCo development work in the city. Through the development work the WASS manager can report any concerns and discuss practical solutions within the group. This means SENCos continue to develop their understanding of SEND processes and any concerns can be addressed and managed to bring about positive change. An example being additional support for a new in post SENCo who had reached out to WASS. In turn a discussion with the SEND Inclusion and Support Officers led to further support for the school to embed the graduated approach.

The service also continues to support the development of SEND Champions across social care. Being part of the SEND Champion network has meant the service can offer accurate information on SEND processes and in particular the legal aspects of SEN support and EHCPs to the wider workforce working with families. The SEND Champion representative from WASS responds to questions posed in the SEND Champion Teams channel. The channel is also a vehicle to promote WASS training and community sessions wider. WASS received 56 appropriate referrals from social care/family help staff.

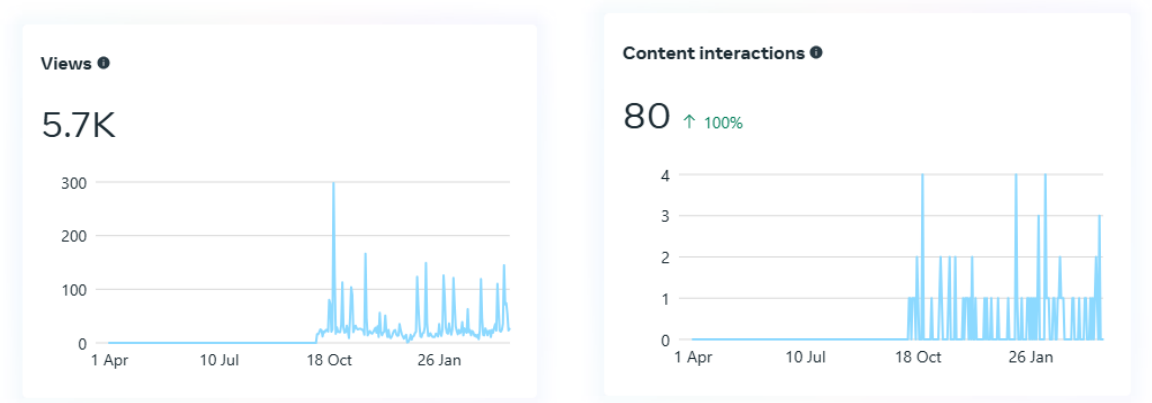
Social media

The service continues to post daily on social media platforms, promoting WIASS events as well as events and activities in the city or online. The service also shares advice and links to websites such as Contact for families of disabled children which offers advice and support for families.

Facebook views - the number of times that content was played or displayed and the number of visits to the page.



Instagram views and interactions



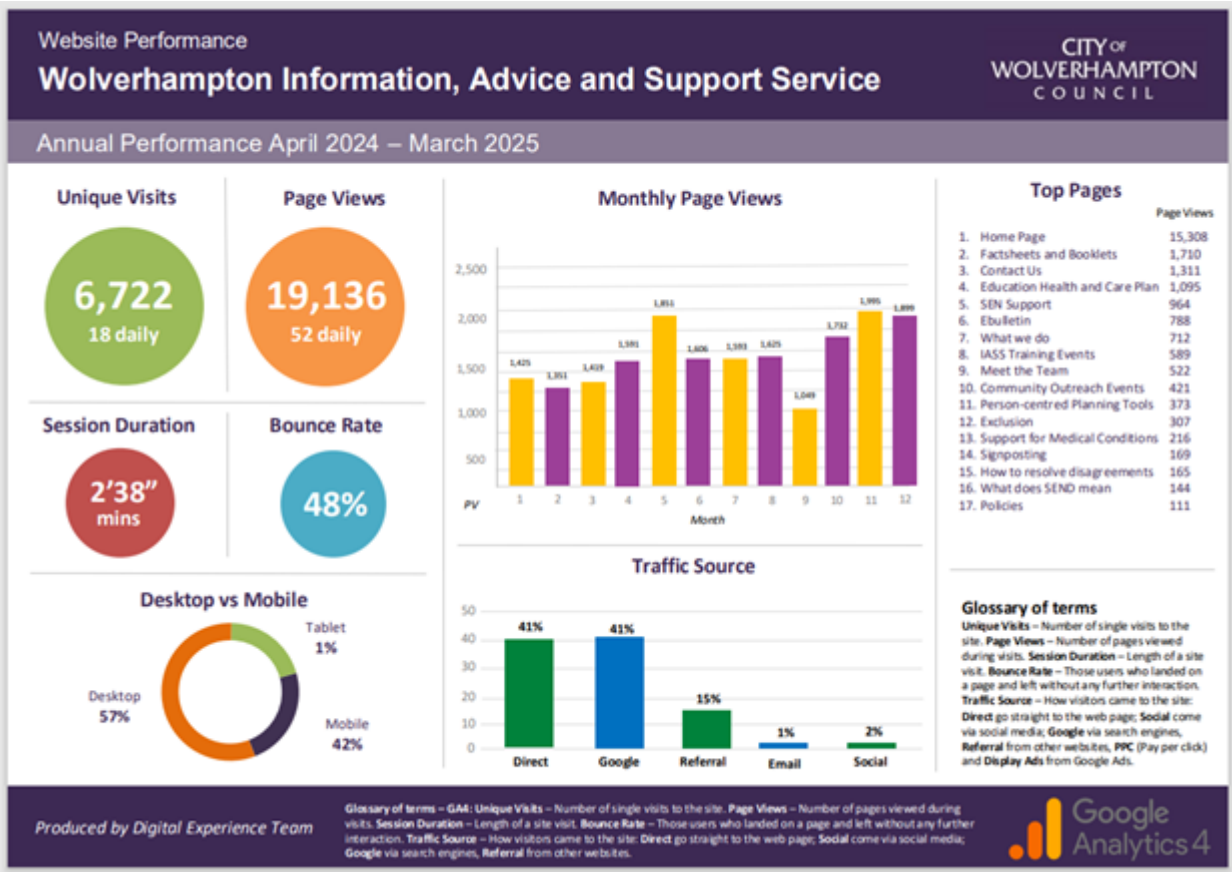
WIASS has 1115 followers on Facebook. Majority of followers (784) live in Wolverhampton with the remaining followers living in surrounding areas.

The WIASS Facebook news feed is displayed on the WIASS website home page. This means anyone visiting the website can also scroll the Facebook news feed for information on events etc.

Website

The WIASS website continues to be a helpful resource for families and professionals. The “Resources” page where parents, carers and young people can download factsheets and booklets were the most popular page with 1710 views. The “Contact Us” page was the next popular with 1311 views and includes the online

referral form. This has resulted in 20% of new casework referrals into the service from the online form. The “Education, Health, and Care Plans “page and “SEN support” page were the next popular pages. There was not much difference in views which is encouraging that families want to know more about the graduated approach and getting support in place at the earliest opportunity. See below for further analytics.



Information resources

The WIASS easy read SEN support booklet was co-produced with young people from one of the city’s mainstream secondary schools and one of the alternate provision settings. Widget versions of WIASS policies were produced and published on the website. Further accessible versions of WIASS factsheets are planned.

A new factsheet detailing the EHCP appeal process was produced and published on the WIASS website. This includes mediation, legal aid, and links to SEND Tribunal videos which explain what to expect during the appeal hearing process.

Annual satisfaction survey

WIIASS received positive feedback from its annual survey. Statistics are reported to the Department for Education through the IASS National Network. Highlights from 2024 survey in comparison to IASS National Network:

Respondent statements	IASS National Network average	WIIASS
The information provided by IASS was helpful or very helpful	81%	97%
IASS was neutral fair and unbiased	92%	97%
Did the information, advice and support provided by IASS make a difference	85%	98%
I am satisfied/very satisfied with IASS	91%	98%
Would you recommend IASS to others	93%	98%

The survey was completed by parents, young people and professionals who have used the service. Examples of feedback comments:

“I was quickly contacted by a member of the team who was very helpful and very knowledgeable...She reassured me and sent me an email with all the information that had been discussed during our phone call. I really appreciate the help and support I received, and I am thankful there is such a useful service.”

“She listened and gave me advice when I needed. She came to a meeting at school and guided me on what to do next...a friendly person on the end of my frustrated phone calls and emails repeatedly helping me each step of the way.”

“I value your easy to access information through all platforms to share by signposting with all relevant families in Wolverhampton, often at the beginning of long-term support. Offering 'additional' family friendly approaches such as Makaton and events in the communities is such an asset to the families to feel more supported when statutory services are more limited to offer everyday and/or practical support. This in turn, also enables families to feel connected to WIIASS (hopefully before they need any other support).”

“The support from the IASS has been incredibly helpful for both my child and me in numerous ways. They assisted me with my child's EHCP, helping ensure the plan was amended by the school to accurately reflect his disability and needs. This included adding more detailed information about the support he receives, his abilities, challenges, and what he requires. I also received support during a school placement appeal, which had initially left me feeling extremely anxious. Thanks to their guidance, I'm always informed about the available options, allowing me to make more informed decisions without rushing.”

“She explained everything so clearly and helped me put in place a plan for what needed to be done. She helped me understand the language in my son's EHCP and request adjustments where required to ensure his needs were clearly documented.

She was extremely knowledgeable and responsive, and we would have been lost without her.”

“She has gone above and beyond for the young person I work with. She has gone out of her way to get the young person’s rights and wants made clear and made sure she was informed of her choices and where she stands legally throughout. The outcome for this young person would have definitely been undesirable without her input.”

Read the Annual Survey Report [WIIASS Satisfaction Survey 2024](#)

WIIASS has not received any complaints about the service.

Priorities 2025 -2026

WIIASS will continue to deliver on KPI’s agreed in the Joint Commissioning Agreement.

The trend in the demand for the service means that priorities will focus on developing individual skills to deliver the advice and support families need. There will be a focus on Person Centred Planning tools to enhance casework skills and ensure positive outcomes for children and young people receiving advice and support from the service. This is with an aim to inform best practice and monitor outcomes and closure of casework more effectively. WIIASS will continue to monitor internal processes for allocation of referrals to ensure the most complex referrals will continue to receive dedicated support from an IASS caseworker. This includes all referrals from young people.

WIIASS will collaborate with partners to ensure families are aware that the service offers free, impartial, and confidential. There has been a noticed increase in independent advocates offering similar services at a cost to families. Therefore, it is important that families know WIIASS offers information, advice, and support at no cost. WIIASS Manager will continue to report any issues to meet demand to the SEND Joint Commissioning Group.

It is important that WIIASS continues to produce resources and delivers information in a way that young people want and find most accessible. As mentioned previously, further accessible factsheets are in the pipeline and will be published by Spring term 2026. WIIASS is hoping to resurrect the delivery of drop-in sessions at Wolverhampton College for young people with SEND now that new relationships and key contacts have been reestablished. This is planned to start Autumn 2025.

The service will continue its partnership work and attendance at community events. WIIASS will continue to offer SEND Surgery for families in Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub. These will be evaluated in July with a view to continuing in a different format from September 2025. As mentioned, both in person and online workshops despite places fully booked have not been well attended. WIIASS will review over the summer and explore alternative options.

The service will continue to support the local area priorities as set out in the SEND and Inclusion Strategy. This will include involvement in the SENCo Development network, SEND Champions, Local Offer development and Co-production for SEND and the Families First for Children Pathfinder.