

The logo for Information Advice and Support Kent (IASK) features a stylized kite with a purple, green, and yellow body and a long, flowing tail in shades of blue and purple. The text 'Information Advice and Support Kent' is positioned to the left of the kite.

**Information
Advice and
Support
Kent**

A service for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
– helping you to make informed choices

Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK)

Annual Service Report 2023/2024

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‘Having someone independent who can offer advice. The service having the ability to send someone to meetings, this is one of the most valuable things you offer.’ (Feedback survey 2023-2024)

Overview of IASK - Kerry Miles Service Coordinator

This report gives an overview of Information, Advice and Support Kent over the past year, statistics relating to outputs for the six- month period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024 with comparisons to the previous six months covered in the Interim Report, and comparisons over the past five years.

The service has experienced an extremely busy year with a huge increase in support being offered that is tailored to the families’ needs. We are finding that cases are becoming more complicated, and families need support from the service to navigate their journey in seeking the appropriate support for their children. The helpline received 3357 enquiries with telephone calls and email communications increasing over the last year by 6% to 6499.

The whole team have stepped up and been absolutely committed to ensuring that families requesting information, advice and support have been supported in a timely manner, keeping strictly to the service key performance indicators. By being flexible in their approach Family Involvement workers have moved appointments to meet the demand for face-to-face support for families who need it. There has an increase in virtual support for parents at meetings as well as offering bookable appointments to manage requests for support with paperwork. This combined method of delivering support has meant we have more than doubled the numbers we have supported compared with the face-to-face support that we provided pre-covid. The team have received well deserved positive feedback from parents, often directly to them, as well as via the user feedback surveys.

Unfortunately, we did not receive funding from health this year, the impact of not being jointly commissioned is that we were unable to appoint to a 0.8 KR 5 temporary data and information officer post or the substantive 0.5 KR3 Administrator post. Whilst this has had an impact on the team in terms of work-load, we have an additional member of staff funded through the Designated Key Worker Project now called the Dynamic Support Service to provide support for families where a child or young person has mental health issues that are below the threshold for accessing support through the Dynamic Support Database. The new post holder has been trained to Level 3 IPSEA accredited alongside relevant training related to supporting families to access the right support at the right time for their child who is suffering from mental health/high anxiety.

We continue to provide an accessible service and have provided more intensive support for 17 families where English is a second language, parents who have learning difficulties and visual or hearing impairments, and families where parents have dyslexia, ASC and ADHD themselves.

Parents come to the office for in-person support and help with accessing tribunal hearings, which has led to the service trialling four in person drop-in bookable sessions in each area of the County, with another four being offered in the summer in different locations in each area. To gain the capacity to do this, we have continued to mainly offer virtual support for school meetings where possible, unless a parent or young person's needs are such that they needed in person support.

Developments for the next year include, circulate the service video when finalised, continue to increase service engagement with young people, review and deliver further annual review workshops for young people to actively participate in their annual review of their Education, Health and care plan.

Impact:

The service has conducted user feedback surveys for cases that closed between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 **264** parents and young people were contacted, who had given us permission to seek their feedback. Feedback was sought from families who received more than 2 hours support during this period who are identified as receiving an intervention level 2,3 or 4. **65** responses were received resulting in a **25%** return rate.

100% of respondents felt that we understood their questions concerns well (3*) or **very well**

100% of respondents felt IASK **listened** to their view

94% of respondents rated IASK as good (3*) or **very good** at being neutral, fair and unbiased

95% of respondents were likely (3*) or **very likely** to recommend the service to others

95% felt satisfied (3*) or **very satisfied** with the service they received.

92% of respondents felt that the information advice and support provided has made a **great** deal of difference

For full details about the user feedback responses, please see Appendix 2.

Thank you emails from service users outside of the usual survey:

'I just wanted to take a minute to say an absolute heart-felt thank you to all of the team who helped, supported and guided us over the months. Thank you to you all and please don't ever underestimate the power of what you all do!

'Thank you so much for your help, calls and points before the meeting. Also your support being involved in the meeting today. Knowing that you were listening to what was being raised and discussed really helped me through the whole process. For this I really thank you.'

'Thank you for everything you have done. I hope you know, how irreplaceable you are on such journeys like mine and what difference you make to the families who are lost, defeated and angry with hitting a brick wall after a brick wall. Your knowledge, your devotion and enthusiasm give hope and confidence! It did to me!

'... Just wanted to thank you for joining us at the meeting last week. Your input and support for the family were invaluable'. (Deputy Head)

'Just a few words to say that your compassion and calmness that you always show whilst working with us as parents is truly admirable. At times, which are difficult when we feel we are not being listened to, it reminds us that there are some really good people working with parents and young people to make better outcomes.'

'I recently had the pleasure of speaking with X. I asked her a lot of questions and bombarded her with a lengthy monologue; thankfully, she was very patient with me, listening fully to everything that I felt I needed to say. I just wanted to extend my sincere thanks to her.'

'We are extremely grateful for your support during difficult time of our Tribunal appeal and hearing. We are very appreciated for all your amazing advice and support.'

'Thank you again for your assistance and for offering further support if needed. It is comforting to know that there are dedicated professionals like yourself who are willing to help families navigate these complex situations.'

Case Study 1:

Background

Julie aged 5, has autism and receives support with an Education, Health and Care Plan, moved into Kent in 2023. The school named by the Local Authority refused to admit. Parent requested support to get her daughter into school, older sibling was already attending the school who were directed by the Local Authority to take Julie as well.

Support

IASK Family Involvement Worker, assisted parent to write a letter to the child's case officer explaining issues that were impacting Julie being able to access education, this included issues that the older sibling was experiencing which involved racist comments and bullying within the school that were not being addressed or resolved. Although the school which was named in the plan was originally parent's preference, parent wanted to consider another nearby school but had not had the opportunity to view.

The Family Involvement Worker explained the process and procedures for moving school with and without an Education, Health and Care plan and explained that the Local Authority would need to officially consult with an alternative placement for Julie. Parent was supported to explore alternative schools that had vacancies in both year groups for both of her children. Parent visited the school of her choice, who accepted the older sibling and advised they were also able to offer a place to Julie subject to Local Authority consultation.

IASK assisted with making a request for the Local Authority to consult with the school that was parent's preference, which resulted in a placement being offered along with a gradual integration into the school. The Local Authority also agreed additional funding to support Julie's complex needs.

Impact

Parent had been trying to get her daughter into education for over a year, she was extremely concerned that her child had not been receiving an education and she was terribly upset about the attitude of the school staff, the racist comments and bullying that the family were subject to. Parent didn't know her rights. With IASK support and explanation of the processes and procedures parent had been empowered to contact and visit other schools. With IASK support to compose the letter to the Local Authority parent felt confident to request a change of placement for Julie and was able to clearly detail the difficulties that the family had experienced.

Parent has let us know that she is so pleased with the outcome and the children are happily settled at their new school and are both receiving appropriate education.

Case Study 2:

Background

Taz age 13 has autism, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, social emotional and mental health difficulties which affects behaviour. Taz was school refusing and has an education, health, and care plan. Parent has her own level of needs.

Support

IASK attended many meetings with the parent, Taz and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) to discuss ways to move forward and support Taz to be able to attend school full time. Initially Taz managed to attend school in a special educational needs support room, on a part time timetable. The school were struggling to meet Taz's needs, due to the behaviour issues and it was felt that a change of placement to a special school where Taz's sibling attends, would be better able to meet needs.

Taz's mental health and well-being were being impacted and Taz took an overdose. The Early Help team were asked to support. The current school placement advised that they could not meet needs and IASK worked with parent and school to ensure that education was provided whilst other schools were consulted.

IASK Family Involvement Worker supported parent to appeal the Local Authority decision to name a special school in the EHC plan. The parent was originally appealing a different mainstream school from the school that Taz wanted to attend. Taz had friends that already attended the school of her choice and parent felt Taz would settle better there. IASK supported those discussions, and parent to liaise with the tribunal to make changes to the appeal taking account of Taz's views and wishes.

Impact

Providing timely information and advice in a way that the parent and young person were able to understand, and supporting communication with the school and other services, ensured that both Taz and parent were well informed, able to make their own decisions and access the right support at the right time.

IASK empowered parent and Taz to engage with the appeal process by providing face to face support when needed, and telephone discussions throughout the process. With support and encouragement from the Family involvement worker, Taz's views about the school placement were provided and led to the appeal being conceded to name Taz's choice of school. Taz is looking forward to starting the new school, with plans for a slow transition to aid a successful start in September.

Service Outputs for the six month period 1 October 2023 – 31 March 2024 compared to the previous 6 months

- **3357** calls and emails came through the helpline representing a **19%** increase on the previous 6 months. Of the **1917** emails received, **129** came through the website representing a **21%** increase in emails and **43%** increase for those coming through the website.
- **337** families have received support at meetings via video or telephone conference calls and **179** face to face, this represents a **59%** and **67%** increase.
- **773** telephone appointments were arranged representing a **99%** increase.
- **1190** new referrals for casework showing a **17%** increase and the service has continued to support **672** previous cases
- **38** virtual one to one bookable information sessions with three slots offered per session. **four** in person one to one bookable information sessions held in accessible locations in the four areas of the County. A total of **102** people attended the virtual and in person sessions.
- Virtual attendance at: **four** Multi Agency sessions for parents of children who are on the pathway for an autism diagnosis.
- **112** young people over age **16** were accessing the service with support from their parents and **12** young people were receiving direct support from a caseworker with a total of **231** contacts recorded. **34** young people attended meetings and, with IASK support, played an active role.
- **36** young people were supported to participate in meetings with **34** feeling confident to actively be involved in their meeting.
- **17** meetings were for school or college support, **four** at annual reviews. **two** young people have been engaging with Education Health care plan drafts/co-production meetings, **two** with Statutory Assessment paperwork, **3** with appeals paperwork, **two** attending mediation, **2** attending a hearing **one** attending a preparation meeting, **one** Exclusion, **two** Paperwork.
- A record number of **541** families have received information, advice and support relating to appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, representing a **34%** increase. From this number, we have supported **129** families with paperwork and **50** appeals have been lodged.
- Virtual attendance at **16** mediations, **28** Telephone case management hearing/Judicial Alternative Dispute Resolution hearing, **13** tribunal hearings to support families who would otherwise have found it difficult to attend on their own. With IASK support **18** appeals were resolved before the hearing date.

- Special Educational Support (SEN) support continues to be the highest reason for contact with our service, having an increase of **27%** of referrals relating to education support. Whilst there has only been a **3%** increase in requests for information about the statutory assessment process there has been a **26%** increase in referrals relating to issues or enquiries about Education, Health, and Care plans. Although we haven't had a **significant** increase in referrals relating to attendance and exclusion these remain one of the top 10 referral reasons (see graphs page11/12).
- **72** families' reasons for referring to the service were related to concerns for their child's mental health. **17** specific discussions were recorded for health: **11** Children and Young People's Mental Health Service, **two** GP/paediatrician, **one** counselling, **one** parent's mental health, **two** speech and language therapy
- **17** families' reasons for referring to the service were relating to social care and **45** relating to the Children's Disability Register. **38** specific discussions were recorded for social care: **three** short breaks and activities, **33** disability register (which includes Max Cards), **one** local offer, **one** social care needs assessment.
- Website new users have increased in the past 6 months by **22%** and **18%** respectively with a total of **8,449** hits and **8,236** new users. There has also been an increase of **26%** in page views to **30,075**. The top seven viewed, excluding the home page, were: Parents and Carers, SEN Support and EHC plans, Information sessions/drop-ins, Helpline, FAQs, Inclusion and Equality and appeals to the SEND tribunal. We have received **129** email communications via the website. This method of communicating with the service has increased annually.
- Social Media followers at the end of March were **2,335** with up to **1422** post reaches each month.
- Virtual Workshops: **13** workshops were offered either in the day or evening. A total of **152** bookings were received and **82** parents and practitioners attended workshops: SEN Support in mainstream schools and colleges; Review meetings; Options for post 16 transition, Mental Capacity and decision-making post 16, SEN Support in the Early Years and Transition to Reception year. We received **100%** positive feedback from respondents across the range of workshops, who all said they would recommend the workshops and the majority of respondents scored a 4 or 5 (high) in response to their learning as per the workshop objectives. Examples of feedback received about what the participants will take forward from the session:

'Clear actions to discuss with the school and where I can get further support',

'Confidence to ask for what my child needs',

'A much better understanding of how to proceed with meeting my daughter's needs going into adulthood',

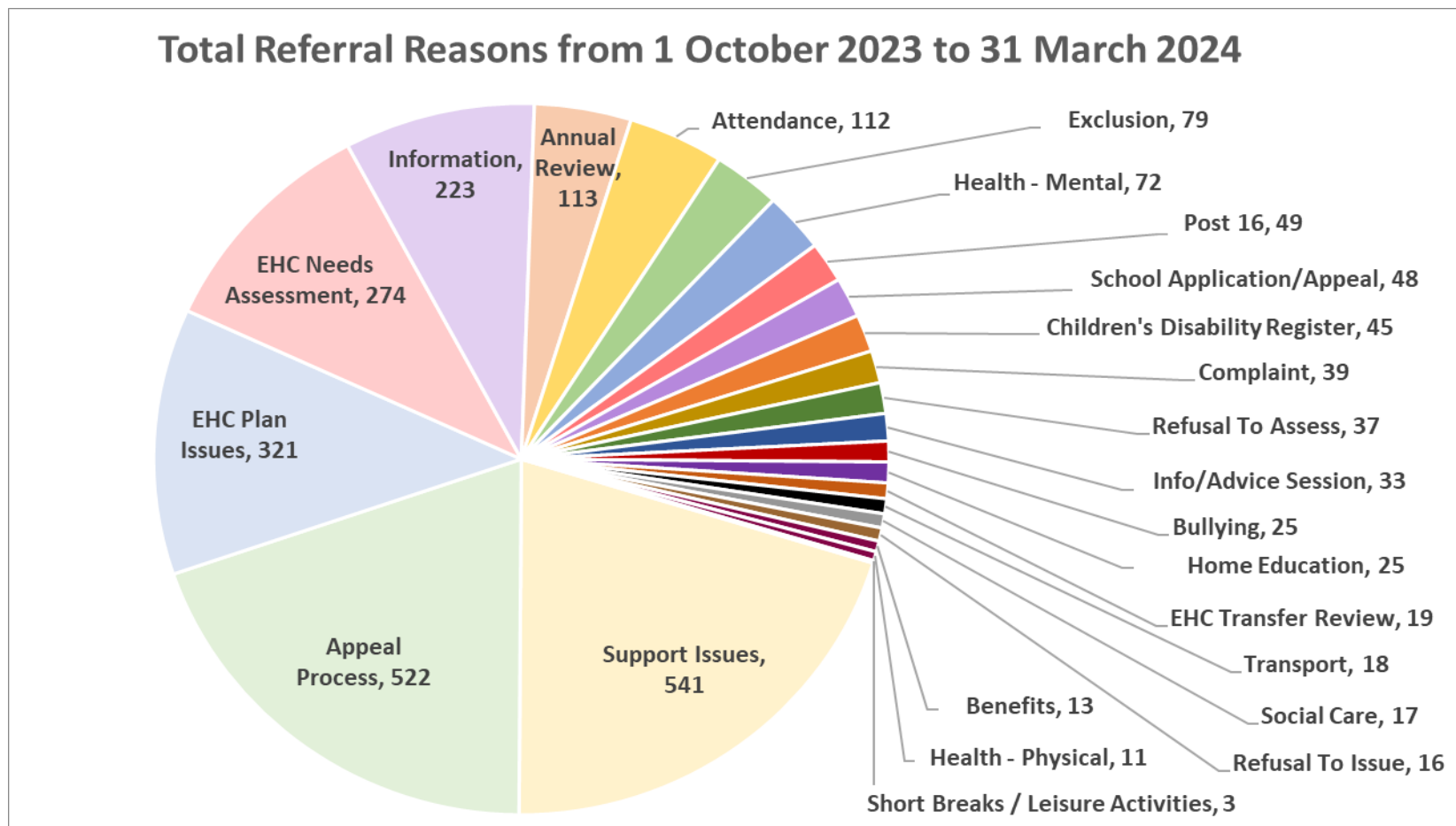
'Really helpful to know what resources are available and the different routes available. Helpful to listen to other parents' questions and the responses you gave',

'The session was incredibly informative generally, it also taught me that there are some kind people out there who want to help and support.'

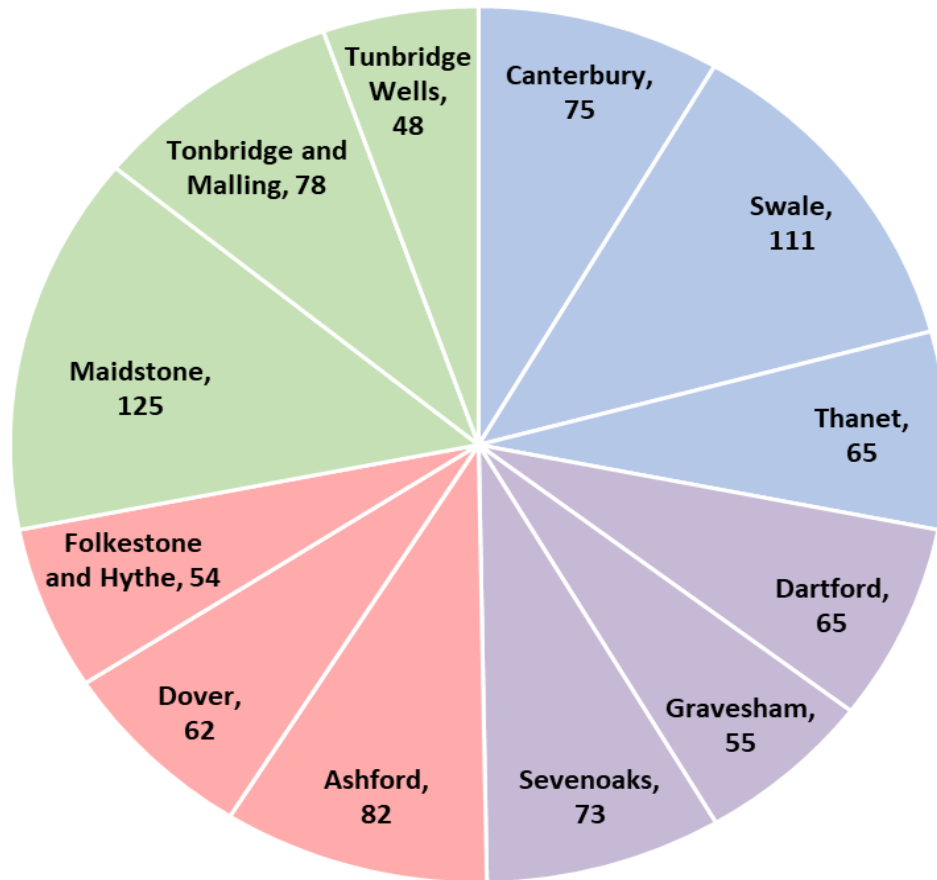
- We piloted a workshop session with sixth form students at Meadowfields special school, looking at how we can encourage young people involvement in meetings. We are reviewing the session and will deliver the session differently to a different audience to gather feedback about the session before offering to other special schools, the six children who attended enjoyed the session and one young person said what he got from the training was that it was 'all about me'.
- Face to face raising awareness activities at Roadshows with colleagues from the SEND Information Hub and Kent PACT. Locality Information, Advice and Guidance Roadshow events. Moving on events for children and young people, Early Years SENCO Conference, in-person parent support groups, and multi-agency Networking Event. virtual presentations Maidstone and Malling SENCos Forum, ASC support groups.
Reaching **290** parents, **47** children and young people, **273** practitioners from various Kent agencies and services, including Early Years SENCos and childminders.

To give an understanding of why parents and young people contact the service, the following graphs on the next 4 pages show referral reasons, referral reasons by district and main disability by district for the period 1 October 2023– 31 March 2024

More than one referral reason can be recorded against an enquiry a referral for casework which means the number of overall referral reasons is larger than the number of service users recorded.

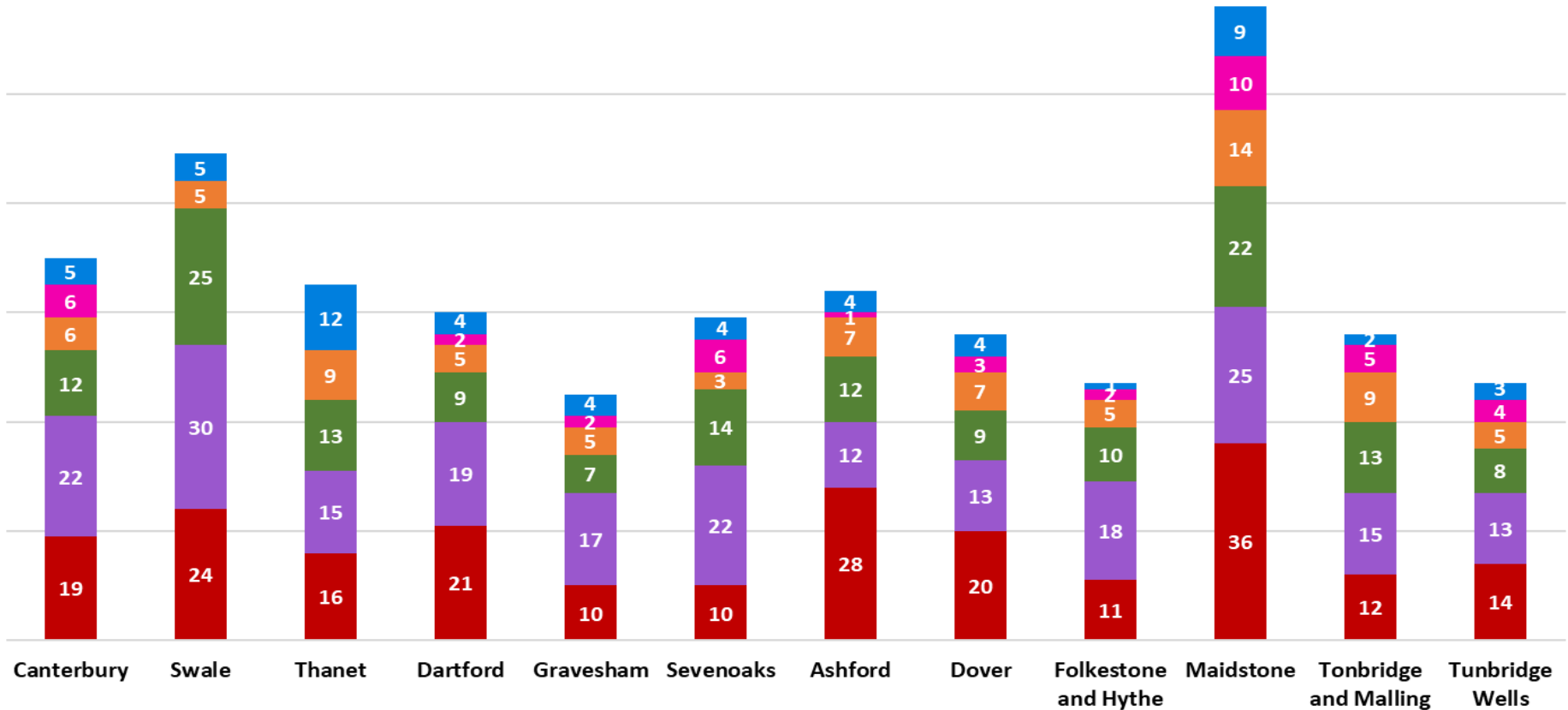


**Number of Referrals by District of Kent
from 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024**

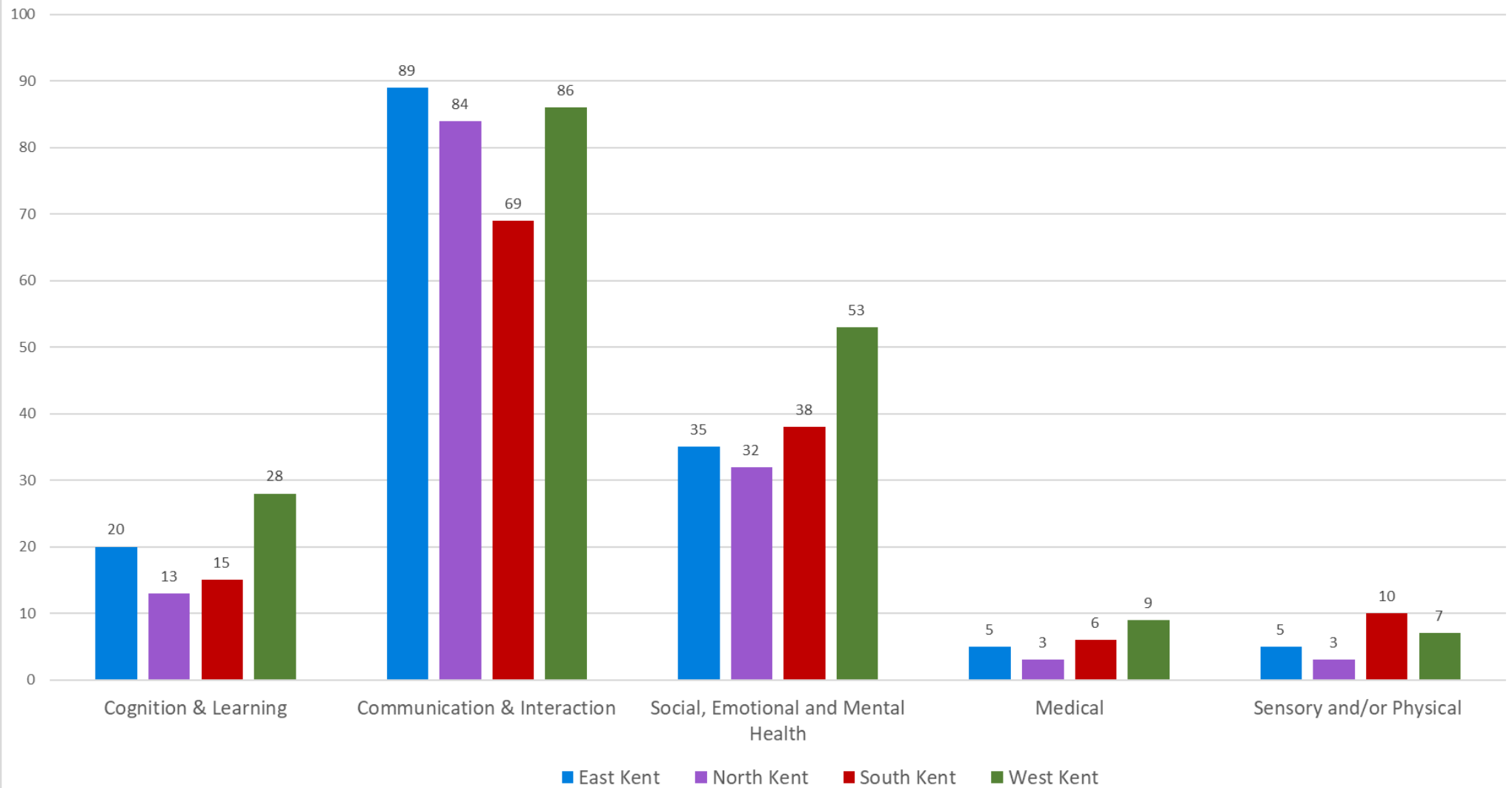


Top six referral reasons by district from 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024

■ Support Issues
 ■ Appeal Process
 ■ EHC Plan Issues
 ■ EHC Needs Assessment
 ■ Information
 ■ Annual Review



Referrals across the four areas of Kent, by the main disability, as identified by parents/carers or young person from 1 October 2023 - 31 March 2024



Annual perspective 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

- Service Co-ordinator continues to be a regular participant at the South-East Regional Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS) network meetings and also the regional representative for the IASS staff association.
- A service representative regularly attends the following Groups:
 - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Guidance Partnership Group
 - Youth Voice and Engagement Network
- Staff Training:
 - Five staff have completed their in-person training for all 3 levels of independent accredited on-line training through IPSEA.
 - Information, Advice and Support Services Induction and KCC induction for a new member of the team.
 - Safeguarding Adults and Children, DSE for new staff
 - CDC specific IASS training: Challenging Discriminatory Exclusions; Tribunal and general exclusion training; Visual Impairment; Introduction to mental health; CETRs, DSD, introduction to social care training modules all staff new staff.
 - Tribunal Update; IPSEA refresher x 1 staff.
 - Mandatory Training 1 member of staff and 3 volunteers
 - Mental Health Awareness for managers
 - Anti Bullying Alliance attended by 1 person and shared with the whole team
 - Responding to Complex Calls and Vicarious Trauma Training attended by 1 person and shared with the whole team
 - MCA and DOLLS Level 1- General awareness, Outcome Star Training, Legislation and Safeguarding Training for Key Workers, and Formulation Training specifically for the Dynamic Support Service funded post.

Key Performance Indicators From 1st April 2023 – 31 March 2024:

IASK has mechanisms in place to monitor performance and these are reviewed monthly at team meetings.

98% of e-mails were responded to within two working days **exceeding** the target of 97%.

97% of service users found it easy (3*) or very easy to get in touch with us, (*Q1 user survey*) **meeting** the target of 90%.

95% of service users found the service helpful (3*) or very helpful to them, (*Q2 user survey*) **exceeding** the target of 90%.

98% of Parents had support at meetings when requested, **exceeding** the target of 90%.

96% of calls were responded to within two working days **not achieving** the target of 97%. Due to the huge numbers of calls and emails required to be responded to within the timeframe. Out of 3,357 the actual numbers of calls not responded to within the two days was 109, they would have been responded to on the third working day.

Information, Advice and Support Kent Annual 5 year comparison of service provision

	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021	April 2021 – March 2022	April 2022 – March 2023	April 2023 - March 2024	Percentage Increase/ Decrease compared to 2022-2023
Enquiries	1392	734	1362	1044	783	-25%
New Cases/referrals	554	640	1035	2043	2203	+8%
Total telephone calls	4255	2900	4346	4707	4472	-5 %
Total emails	3763	5032	7562	8301	10088	+21%
Helpline emails/tel. calls	4749	3251	5196	6124	6499	+6%
Face to Face meetings	746	3	102	308	286	-7%
Bookable telephone appointment instead of a meeting in the community			470	619	1160	+87%
Virtual meetings – video or conference call		394	586	468	563	+20%

IASK Mission Statement

Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK) believes children and young people thrive and achieve their potential when all partners (parents, children, young people and professionals) work together to plan appropriate interventions and educational, health and social care provision.

Our purpose is to provide legally based information, advice and support to empower parents and their children and young people to make informed decisions.

IASK promotes working together based on mutual respect of the views, wishes and feelings of children, young people and their parents. We are committed to providing a flexible and supportive service responsive to individual needs and to enable parents, children and young people to be involved in decisions about education, health and social care as it relates to them.

Service Overview

The Children and Families Act 2014 Part 3, Section 32 states (1) *'A local authority in England must arrange for children and young people for whom it is responsible, and the parents of children for whom it is responsible, to be provided with advice and information about matters relating to the special educational needs of the children or young people concerned'*. (2) *'A local authority in England must arrange for children and young people in its area with a disability, and the parents of children in its area with a disability, to be provided with advice and information about matters relating to the disabilities of the children or young people concerned.'*

Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK) provide the information, advice and support service for Kent County Council residents. IASK provides confidential and impartial information, advice and support and operates at arm's-length from the local authority to ensure parents/children and young people have confidence in the impartiality of the support and information provided by the Service.

The Service's focus is on education and health and social care as it relates to the child/young person's special educational needs and disabilities. For health-related queries the service signposts to Local Healthwatch, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and to SEAP for advocacy for health.

IASK has a steering management group which meets three/four times a year to monitor service operations. The Service Coordinator formally thanks the Steering Group for their time and commitment to attending meetings and supporting the management of the service.

Information, Advice and Support Kent Steering Group Members

Amy Chivers Parent from West Kent – Chair

Sharon King Representative of Kent PACT (Parent Carer Forum)

Dana Aris - Parent

Hannah Chandler - Parent

Becky Clark, Parent / Representative of 21 Together

Jan Gray, Parent from South Kent

Natalie Hanchett - Parent

Rachael Velvick Parent / Representative of PDA Support Group

Sue Gibbons Designated Clinical Officer, NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board

Emma Hanson, Commissioning for Disabled Children's Services for Kent County Council

Kayleigh Leonard Young Person representative and Looked after Children

Fiona Pender, Representative of Space 2 Be Me Telephone: 01622 764566 Email: info@space2beme.org.uk
Website: www.space2beme.org.uk/

Siobhan Price, Kent County Council Mainstream Inclusion

Katie Wicks, Representative of SNAAP Telephone: 01227 367555 Email: info@snaap.org.uk Website: www.snaap.org.uk/

Kerry Miles, Service Co-ordinator for Information, Advice and Support Kent Email: iask@kent.gov.uk Website www.kent.gov.uk/iask

Feedback from Information, Advice and Support Kent User Survey April 2023 - March 2024

For cases closed between the period of 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 a total of **264** parents and young people were contacted, who had given us permission to seek their feedback. Feedback was sought from families who received more than 2 hours support during this period who are identified as receiving an intervention level 2,3 or 4.

65 responses were received resulting in a **25%** return rate.

97% of respondents found it easy (3*) or very easy to get in touch with us

100% of respondents felt that we understood their questions concerns well (3*) or very well

100% of respondents felt IASK listened to their views

100% felt the information and advice provided met their needs

94% of respondents rated IASK as good (3*) or very good at being neutral, fair and unbiased

95% of responses recorded satisfied (3*) or very satisfied with the service

95% of respondents were likely (3*) or very likely to recommend the service to others

92% of respondents felt that the information advice and support provided has made a **great** deal of difference

Top four examples of the difference made:

80% have a greater understanding of the SEND Code of Practice and the arrangements that should be made for children/young people with SEN

83% feel more confident

78% feel their child has benefitted as a result of the service being involved

70% feel that their child's needs are better understood than they were. (Please also see charts on pages 4/5)

Comments about the service:

'I felt very overwhelmed and stressed (quite desperate) when having to appeal against the LA. X was absolutely brilliant, I would 100% recommend IASK to anyone that was in the same situation as I was. Thank you very much again I am very grateful for your help'.

'Thank you to the lady who supported me on the day of the tribunal. She was very helpful and kind. I felt she made a difference by being there in the room.'

'You helped me understand everything, it was a complex situation, but you calmed me down and made me feel 'I can do this'.

'I had a lovely lady who understood me and went through all my paperwork, she was very understanding'.

'Having this support really helped with knowing my rights, what I needed to produce as evidence and general support. A huge weight was lifted as a result. Thank you'

'I was really overwhelmed with the help and support I got; I don't think I would be where we are now if not for the service. X really helped us, it's been life changing'.

Suggestions to improve the service:

'It would be useful to be able to speak to advisor on the phone - whenever I have called it has gone to voicemail'.

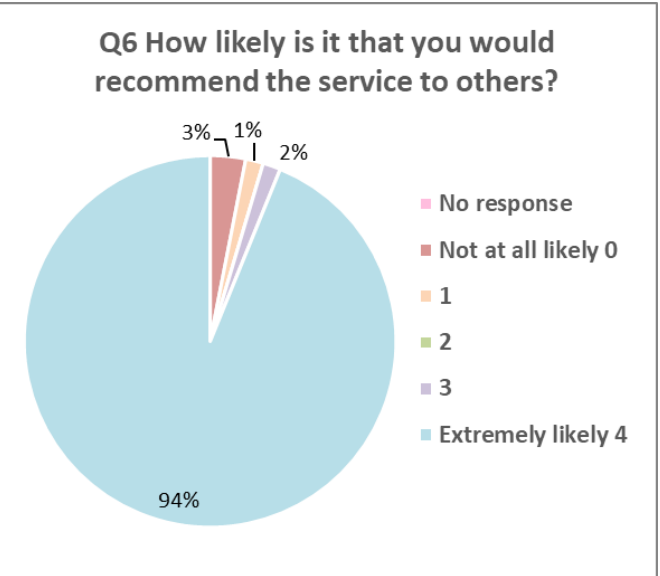
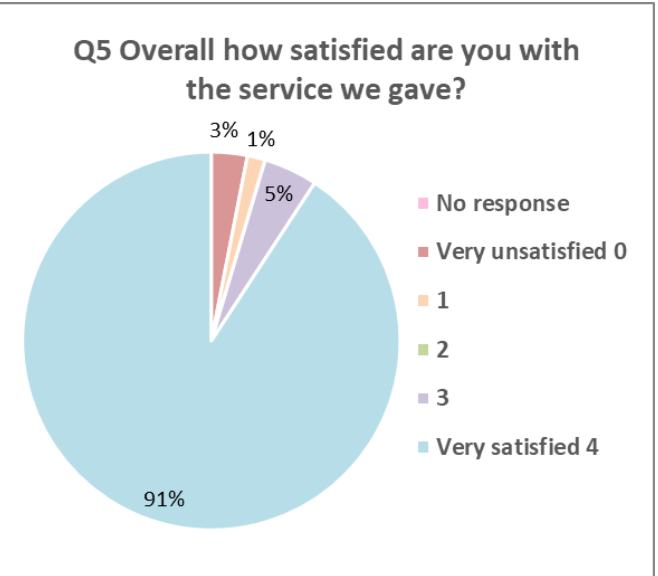
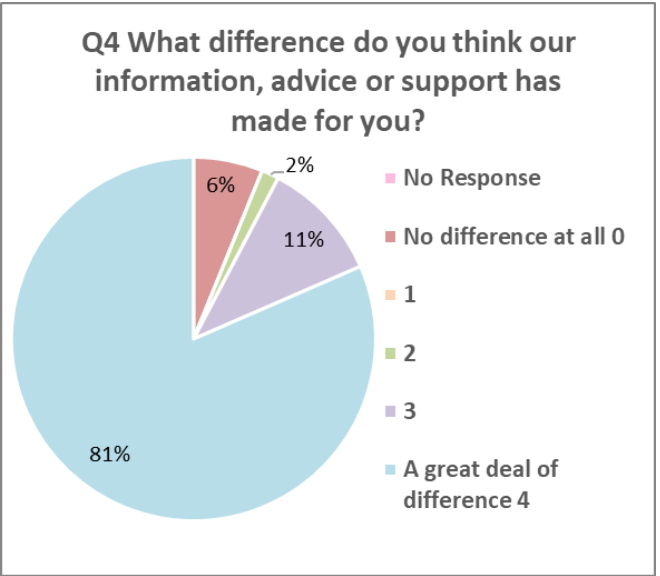
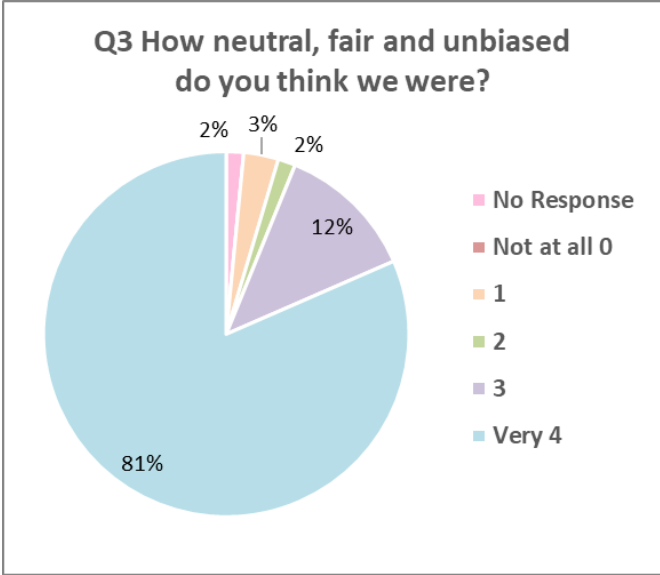
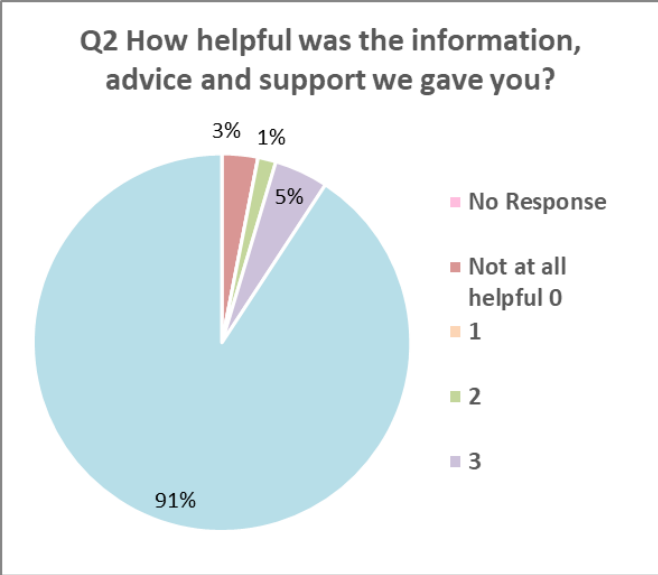
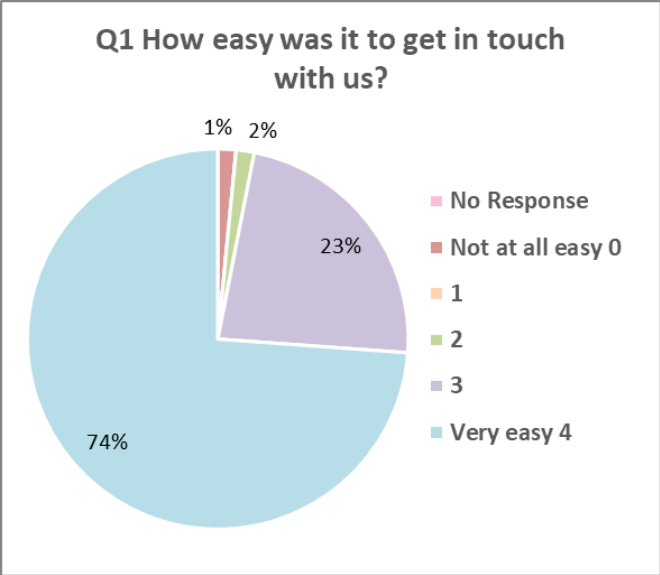
'The only thing was I needed emergency advice when my son ran away from school but I had to leave a message and there was a time delay getting back to me, though I appreciate it is a small team and I was happy with the service overall'.

'Communication, being able to get hold of somebody. That's me, I like things urgent, I don't retain information well'.

'Provide your own independent minutes from meetings you attend'.

Following feedback from the Information, Advice and Support Kent User Survey 2022-2023 we have made the following changes:

You said	We did
<p>'Need a follow-up discussion to make sure that the school meets their objectives and not slacken and need to get updates from the school to ensure they continue their obligations.'</p>	<p>Although this is not the service remit to keep schools on task. Staff do discuss further actions with parents/young people to empower them to contact school to chase actions and to ask for further meetings that the service can support at.</p>
<p>'There could be more prompts to coincide with statutory dead-lines'.</p>	<p>Staff diary further action calls when parents/young people are going through the statutory assessment process, or they are supporting with appeals. At other times families are asked to come back for support through the helpline to ensure their query is responded to within two working days. This also helps with the service capacity in meeting a high number of requests for support at meetings.</p>
<p>'IASK needs more people and more funding, even with the caseworker being so generous with her time'.</p>	<p>We have a set budget to run the service and therefore we have looked at different ways of working to maximise our offer of support i.e. virtual support at meetings and to support with paperwork instead of face to face. Workshops to explain processes and procedures. Attendance at support groups in the community to provide face to face support.</p>



Q4b Can you tell us more about the difference(s) we made for you? (Please tick any that apply)

