



ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 2026

Wolverhampton Information, Advice and Support Service

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WIASS Annual Report April 25 to March 26

Introduction

Wolverhampton Information, Advice and Support Service (WIASS) 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.

IASS is an in-house Local Authority service with an office base in the City's NHS Child Development Centre. The service is jointly commissioned by the Local Authority and Black Country ICB Wolverhampton Place.

What we offer how and when

WIASS 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.

WIASS 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.
- a weekly SEND surgery at Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub.
- attendance at school and 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](#). WIASS meets all national Minimum Standards.

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 in 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.

Advisory Group discussions over the past 12 months included matters relating to exclusions and modified timetables and follow up conversations with the Local Authority to confirm the legality of local processes. The use of AI was another hot topic of conversation which resulted in WIASS publishing a statement on the use of AI. This was to reassure families that WIASS does not use AI to offer legal advice, and that the team are fully qualified to IASS Network standards to give legal advice.

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 2025/26 three caseworkers completed SEND Tribunal Training facilitated by the IASS Network. This means that all staff have completed SEND Tribunal Training in addition to three levels of IASS Network (IASSN) IPSEA legal training, meeting IASSN Minimum Standards.

One staff member completed IASSN training for “Children Missing in Education” and Section 19 policy. All staff attended IASSN workshops on the White Paper SEND Reforms, to be informed of the Government’s proposals from a service and wider perspective.

Staffing has remained steady for the past three years and the service is fully staffed in line with the current WIASS staffing structure. One member of staff is part time which means there are available hours in the staffing structure to increase this, depending on the demand for the service. Staff absence is minimal with only four days taken for sickness absence in 2025/26.

WIASS Activity

Casework referrals/commentary/key findings

There was a slight increase in referrals this year on last year’s figures. However, the number of contacts made with families increased by 24% and subsequently the number of open referrals each month increased. This reflects the complexity of issues families face. The delays in Education, Health and Care needs assessments, decisions after annual reviews and children/young people waiting for specialist setting placements are having an impact for families and consequently, the length of time WIASS remains involved until a suitable resolution. This means there is more pressure on the team to support families in a timely manner and cope with demand.

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 Tribunal appeals.

Number of referrals per month:

Month	No. Referrals	Cases open	No. Contacts	Cases Closed	24/25 No. Referrals
April	56	520	1369	99	65
May	70	534	1458	113	81
June	110	600	1855	77	73
July	61	604	1652	81	60
August	30	561	608	50	29
September	104	635	1848	70	97
October	99	680	2080	92	83
November	81	690	1750	68	90
December	57	677	1168	63	52
January	76	698	1940	54	78
February	66	700	1696	58	71
March	89	720	2141	67	94
Total	899				873

The number of referrals by age range was consistent with last year. The largest increase in referrals was for the 16 to 19 age range. Therefore, evidencing that more young people accessed the service for advice and support.

Referrals by age range:

Under 5	74
5-10	351
11-16	361
16-19	96
20+	12

WIASS received an additional 181 referrals for information only which is on a par with last year's figure. These are not included in casework statistics.

There is no set time limit for WIASS to remain working with a family. 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. Hence, there are more referrals remaining open due to awaiting Local Authority decisions, placements and appeals. For those without EHCPs who receive setting-based support the referral would remain open until intended outcomes are achieved. WIASS caseworkers use person centred planning tools such as Four Plus One to establish and agree a plan of support but there are no set rules or blanket policy as everyone is individual. 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 there is consistency for families, and they can build a trusting relationship with their caseworker.

IAS services should operate on a self-referral basis, but WIASS understands that often this can become a barrier to much needed advice and support for families. Although we ask colleagues to encourage families to self-refer often a helping hand is required. The online contact form on the WIASS website means professionals can complete the contact form alongside the family with their consent. In addition, it provides more information for WIASS to understand the needs of the child or young person and the reason they require advice and support. Over a quarter of referrals last year were received via the contact form.

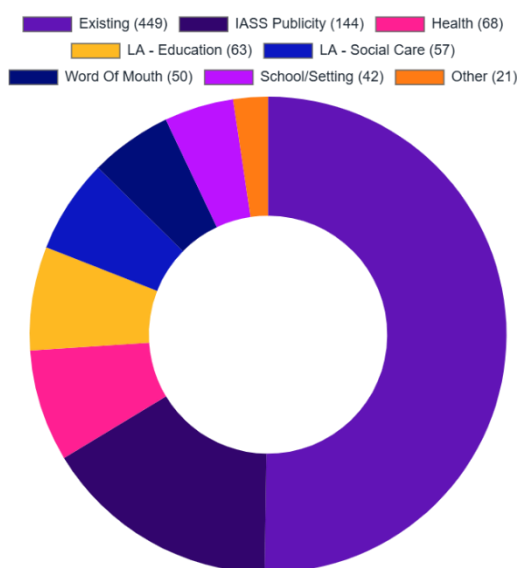
WIASS aims to empower young people and their parents/carers to feel confident to share their views and participate in SEND processes. The service continued to offer support in meetings, understanding that families may need more reassurance and intense support until they feel confident enough to do this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

Of the 894 casework referrals received 579 of referrals were for males with 314 for females, and one who identified as transgender. The percentage of referrals for females was slightly higher than last year. Although males were still the majority which is consistent with local and national data particularly for young people with EHCPs.

The highest number of referrals were for children and young people who had Communication and Interaction needs (413) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (389) as a primary area of need. This was consistent with last year and Local Authority data.

In all 1356 casework referrals were open during the year and 697 were closed.

Many families return to the service which is illustrated in the image below:



Number of referrals by referral source

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 filling in forms (such as parental or young person request for ECHNA, or appeal application), 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 133 families to help them resolve disagreements relating to SEND either with the school and/or Local Authority. As a result, WASS feels that due to its involvement at an early stage 20 cases where families were considering an appeal to the SEND tribunal were avoided. Statistically there was an increase in appeals in Wolverhampton, but this remained consistently lower than West Midlands comparators.

WASS attended 8 mediation meetings and helped 4 families to prepare. As section 1 appeals are most prominent there is no need for involvement from mediation services. Furthermore, there was an increase in families contacting mediation services for a certificate only and not for a meeting.

With regards to appeals WASS supported 19 people in preparing their appeal to the SEND tribunal service. The service helped 15 families to prepare for an appeal hearing. WASS attended three appeal hearings. In all three cases the LA decision was overturned as the tribunal judges ruled in favour of the appellant. With the support of WASS a further four 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 many of the appeals WASS helped to prepare will not be heard until later in 2026/27.

There continued to be an increase in referrals relating to exclusion, with 43 families supported by the service whose child had been suspended, or was at risk of permanent exclusion. WASS supported 20 parents whose child with SEND had been permanently excluded which is double the amount from the previous year. Ten children had EHCPs and three were undergoing an EHC needs assessment. WASS involvement included 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. Support in meetings is usually required out of hours to accommodate governing bodies. This means time and commitment from WASS staff. 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. For one of the IRP meetings attended, the governing body overturned the decision to exclude.

Training events and community outreach

Although low attendance at WIASS workshops in previous years despite bookings being high, the service decided to continue with a blend of in person and online workshops throughout the year. Contents of workshops included SEN support, EHCP assessment process, EHCP annual reviews, preparing for phase transition, checking a draft EHCP, and EBSNA Pathway. The service used Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub to deliver in person workshops. Attendance was still lower than bookings.

In addition, the service delivered bespoke sessions for schools and voluntary organisations. Sessions covered the graduated approach for SEND support, EHCPs and Makaton. These were well attended by parents and carers. Feedback from Embrace Outreach "Thank you for supporting our coffee morning at Embrace Outreach, Rebecca did a great job speaking to parents and offering one-one consultation. General feedback from parents was very positive, lots of parents found information and advice very helpful."

WIASS was invited back to deliver a SEND session for Wolverhampton's Foster Carer network. Twelve foster carers attended and expressed that following the session they had more understanding of how better to support their foster children in education.

With speech, language, and communication still the prevalent area of need in the city WIASS continued to offer taster Makaton sessions and a Level 1 Makaton course for parents who have children with speech, language, and communication difficulties. Attendees expressed their reasons for attending the workshop was to help them communicate better with their children, foster children, grandchildren and other family members. The workshops fully met people's expectations, and they found them very helpful. They particularly liked the "engaging demonstrations, quizzes and observing in practice." and they were "made to feel comfortable as soon as session began, and the pace of the session was perfect".

Further taster sessions were delivered in community groups and schools. These bespoke sessions were attended by staff and parents who have children with identified needs, working together to learn Makaton signs to support communication and foster better relationships between parents and school.

The service continued to attend Outreach and Family Hubs SEND coffee mornings and community neighbourhood events. This year WIASS received more requests from schools to attend SEND coffee mornings, and parents' evenings. The monthly drop-in session at Base 25 continued until December 25. The sessions ceased due to low footfall and uptake which meant that staff time could not be justified, especially with an increase demand from other services.

Following last year's success of WIASS started to hold a fortnightly SEND Surgery at Cherry Street SEND and Sensory Hub these were increased to weekly sessions in September 25. The sessions give parents, carers and young people the opportunity to speak to a member of the team confidentially to seek individual advice. Feedback from the sessions was positive often reducing the need for referrals for further casework support. This is evidenced in the following survey response from parents who attended the drop in:

"Lisa listened to us and informed us of the Tribunal process if we needed to move forward with this approach to get our son an SEN school place. She also offered support in doing this if we needed it. Luckily it did not come to that as he has since been offered a place, but it was reassuring knowing if it did come to that we would not have to do it alone and we could have support."

WIASS work with young people continued to be consistent with a 10% increase in young people accessing the service for individual advice and support. Casework statistics have already shown that 108 young people aged between 16 and 25 accessed the service for advice and support with some young people returning to WIASS for further advice and support as they started their new educational settings.

Strategic and Partnership working

WIASS continued to have a strategic presence with the service manager regularly attending SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board, SEND Improvement Plan Steering Group and Health Steering Group to help shape local processes and practice.

The service continued to be part of the EHCP Audit team and provided feedback and suggestions to the SEND Quality Assurance team to improve the quality of EHCPs. This was shared with the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.

WIASS manager continued to meet regularly with the SENSTART Manager, the Designated Social Care Officer and monthly with the Designated Medical Officer and Designated Clinical Officer. The meetings provided an opportunity to share concerns through work with families and to ensure WIASS was informed of new processes and procedures. For example, WIASS was involved in initial discussions for the pilot for parental requests and continues to participate and help review the process.

WIASS attended school intel sessions as a mechanism to report concerns and share best practice. As a result, follow up visits to schools were initiated by the Local Authority School Improvement Team to several of the settings raised by WIASS. The service continued to support the SENCo development work in the city. Through the development work and subgroup, concerns and practical solutions were discussed. This resulted in the Local Authority services offering additional support to several schools where WIASS had raised concerns.

The service continued to support the SEND Champion network across social care. The SEND Champion Teams channel is also a vehicle to promote WIASS training and community sessions wider. WIASS received 57 appropriate referrals from social care/family help staff which is consistent with last year's count.

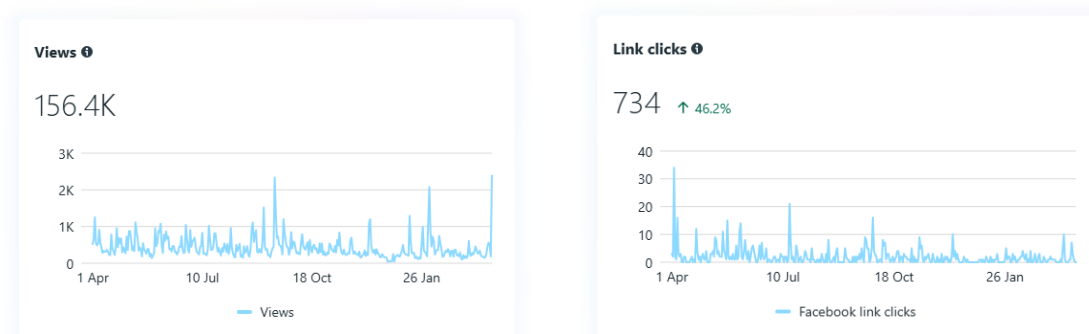
WASS collaborated with Local Authority and health colleagues in the development of a SEND Training programme for professionals. The service manager's legal experience and knowledge ensured accurate oversight for the legal modules in relation to education, health and social care.

Furthermore, the service continued to support the Local Offer Web Development group with the group developing a feedback cycle and initiating discussion for an events module. The co-production group continued to meet regularly with WASS support, and a coproduction toolkit was refreshed. The Coproduction Charter will be relaunched later in 2026/7.

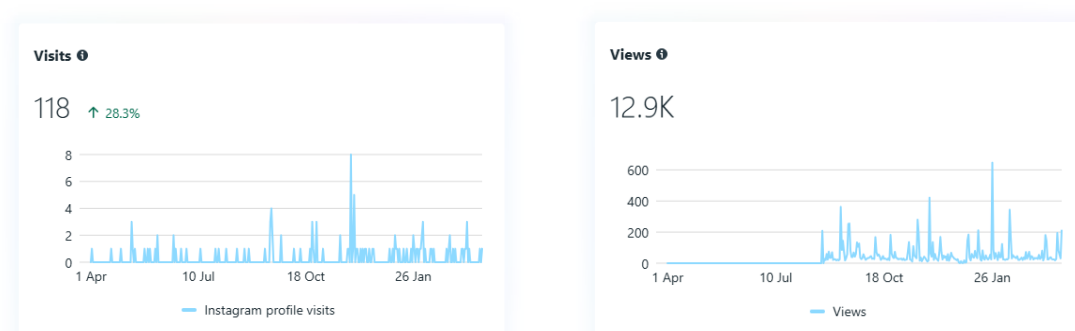
Social media

The service posted daily on social media platforms, promoting WASS events as well as events and activities in the city or online. The service also shared advice and links to websites such as Contact for families of disabled children and Autism West Midlands which offer advice and support for families. The Facebook newsfeed is featured on the WASS website home page.

Facebook and the number of link clicks:



Instagram views and visits:



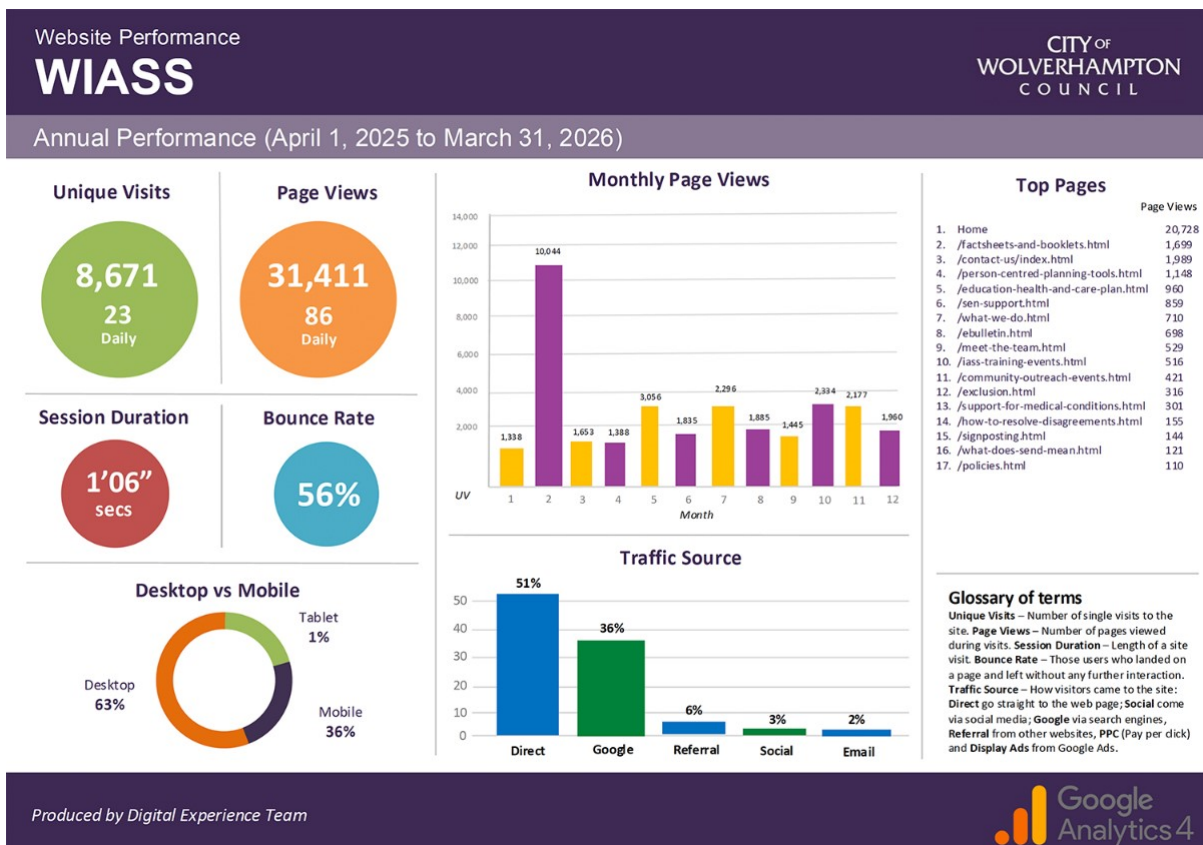
WASS has 1216 followers on Facebook with 43% in the 35-44 age group confirming parents use Facebook more than young people which is expected. Followers have increased by 9.7% from last year, with over 156K views. This is an increase in views

of over 60%. Click links increased by 46% which suggests people interacted more with posts.

There were 12.9K views on Instagram and content interaction increased by 100%. As young people tend to use Instagram more this increase is particularly pleasing.

Website

The WIASS website continued to provide helpful resource for families and professionals with an increase in over 64% in page views. Unique visits increased by 1942. The “Resources” page where parents, carers and young people can download factsheets and booklets was again a popular page with 1699 views. The “Contact Us” page was the most popular with 1989 views and includes the online referral form. This is evidenced in the increase in referrals via the online form which resulted in 26% of new casework referrals into the service. 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.



Annual satisfaction survey

WIASS received positive feedback from its annual survey. Statistics are reported to the Department for Education through the IASS National Network. Highlights from 2025 survey in comparison to IASS National Network:

Respondent statements	IASS National Network average	WIASS
The information provided by IASS was helpful or very helpful	93%	97%
IASS was neutral fair and unbiased	94%	97%
Did the information, advice and support provided by IASS make a difference	89.5%	98%
I am satisfied/very satisfied with IASS	93.5%	99%
Would you recommend IASS to others	95.25%	99%

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

“...I have felt confident with the support given and she has been extremely empathic towards the situation we found ourselves in. She has attended meetings and has been very supportive. I have felt that with the resources I have been able to challenge school as I felt stronger knowing my rights for my son’s welfare.”

“The staff are truly exceptional, and I cannot recommend them highly enough. They consistently provide outstanding service and show a deep understanding of my child's needs. Their support during challenging moments, such as EHCP meetings and report preparation, has been invaluable. They are always available to guide us with essential information, which makes a significant difference in our experience and ensures the best outcome for our child's future.”

“As a parent I finally felt heard.”

“She was supportive, understanding, and gave me guidance when I really needed it. Her help made a difficult time much easier to manage.”

“She's helped put things in place for me and my son for school life to run more smoothly.”

“She makes me feel confident when talking and putting my point across...”

“I just wanted to take a moment to thank you sincerely for attending the school meeting with me and for the support you gave throughout. Your presence made such a difference. I truly appreciated your understanding, guidance, and the way you helped me express my daughter’s needs clearly.”

Read the Annual Survey Report [annual-survey-2025.pdf](#)

WIASS did not receive any complaints about the service.

Priorities 2026 -2027

WASS will continue to deliver on KPI's agreed in the current Joint Commissioning Agreement which comes to an end in March 2027. Therefore, reviewing the Joint Commissioning Agreement will be a priority this year to ensure stability for the service in future years.

The demand on the service has increased due to the complexity of cases, the delays in statutory processes and more families appealing to SEND Tribunal. Whilst the team has coped with the demand it is important to continue to ensure staff feel well supported. Staff wellbeing will be a priority as part of the annual service development day. This is to ensure not only do the team have the appropriate support to carry out their roles but have the emotional support for complex and traumatic casework.

WASS will continue to be a strategic partner with the Local Authority and Health services in shaping the local area plans for the SEND reforms.

At a service level WASS will as far as practicable plan for the proposed changes and how these will impact the service. It will also ensure information is available for families. The service delivered a workshop for the consultation in April 26. This was well attended by parents, carers and SEND Wolves forum (Wolverhampton's parent carer forum) and provoked lots of discussion in response to the SEND reforms proposals. The service will feedback to local area partners. Further information sessions will be delivered in a timely manner.

The new Parent Carer Forum SEND Wolves Forum was established late 2025. Although a few meetings between the service manager and the PCF were arranged, they have not materialised so far. Unfortunately, there is no longer a PCF member on the WASS Advisory Group. Therefore, establishing a good working relationship with a PCF presence on the WASS Advisory Group is a priority.

Business as usual will continue with co-production, partnership work and supporting community events. This includes SEND Champions, EBSNA support, SENCo development, SEND Local Offer. school intel, complaints and compliance, development of personal budget policy and guidance for families. The service will continue to support the Quality Assurance for EHCPs with an additional two members of the WASS team to be trained to participate in EHCP audits in 26/27.