

Next steps: On the horizon for Family Information Services to look out for

NEW Family First SEND Quality Standards

The Families First Quality Standards for FIS (download PDF) were completely refreshed recently. There is also a new standard about helping families to access grant funded early education for two, three and four year olds. A brand new section has been added with five standards to help Family Information Services/Local Authority Information Services meet the SEND Code of Practice 2014 requirements.

If you would like to know more, please complete a no obligation enquiry form or contact Anthony Ellison the NAFIS Manager by email anthony@familyandchildcaretrust.org or telephone 020 7940 7527.

Currently NAFIS is working with a number of partners to develop a set of quality standards for schools to help them meet the SEND Code of Practice 2014 requirements. This is in response to requests from schools who have taken up the Families First Quality Standards.

A new National Childcare Finder?

In 2015/16 the Department for Education (DfE) wants to develop a new, engaging and innovative solution providing accurate information about childcare provision for parents. The DfE is providing the opportunity for organisations to bid competitively to develop this technical/internet based solution.

In this competition, DfE is seeking the development of a new, engaging and innovative solution, which provides accurate information about childcare provision for parents. It envisages the solution will help parents make informed choices about what childcare is best for their children, taking into account a wide range of factors. It should be easy to use and provide timely, accurate data.

This will be of great interest to all Family Information Services and the parents they support. There could even be opportunities to weave in ideas that support families with disabled children and young people who typically have increased challenges finding suitable childcare and often end up paying more for it.

Through the Family and Childcare Trust, NAFIS will be engaging with this competition; clearly there is a crossover with the work of Family Information Services and we would want our members to be involved in any solution(s) developed as part of this competition.

(Adapted from information provided by the DfE)

Links with The Communication Trust

The Communication Trust consists of 52 member organisations supporting children with speech, language and communication difficulties offering services to all families in England. They would like to link with every Local Offer through each Family Information Service wherever possible.

The trust's members range from large charities that already have a presence on local authority websites, to small organisations offering services to children with low incidence needs. Some services are provided free, while others have a fee. Those with a fee are suitable for families with personal budgets, or can be purchased by schools, the local authority and/or the local NHS clinical commissioning group.

Many organisations do not have the resources to complete 152 Local Offer templates or to update 152 Local Authorities when changes take place. NAFIS will be exploring technical solutions that may assist with this issues, with the help of The Communication Trust.

In the meantime, the Communication Trust has created a single website for Family Information Services to link to. You may consider setting up a single record on your directory or a single web page about the Communication Trust and linking through to this page:

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/redirect/localoffer/

The trust has provided some guidance to help with this task:

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/redirect/localofferreadme/

(Adapted from the Communication Trust website and discussions with their consultant)

New Name for Parent Partnership Service and extension to existing scope

Parent Partnership Services in local authorities have changed their names. So look out for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) or Information Advice and Support (IAS) Services across England. The National Parent Partnership Network (NPPN) also changed its name to Information, Advice and Support Services Network (IASS Network). This reflects the extension of their remit to include social care and health responsibilities, in addition to education for the 0-25 age group including apprentices and college students.

The change of name for this service across England has inevitably meant updating local websites and publicity materials for parents. Make sure Family Information Service staff have the correct name for the service and know any new publications about for parents so they can signpost effectively.

If, as a Family Information Service, you don't know the contact details of your local service you can use the helpful finder on the IASS Network website:

<http://www.iassnetwork.org.uk/find-your-iass/>

Judicial review of local authority duties

In February 2015 the High Court handed down a Judgment in the first judicial review to consider local authorities' duties to disabled children following the SEND Code of Practice 2014 reforms. The claimants were two disabled children whose families instructed law firm Irwin Mitchell to seek a judicial review against a county council's proposed Local Offer consultation.

The case went before Mr Justice Mostyn on 5 February 2015 at the Royal Courts of Justice and the resulting media coverage with commentary from local and national press, disability charities and legal professionals has been intense. It is believed the findings in this case will have significant implications for how local authorities consult on and deliver their Local Offer in future.

It would be wise for Family Information Service strategic leads and managers to familiarise themselves with the case, especially where they are leading on or playing an integral role in delivering the Local Offer. There is plenty of information available about it online (including the judicial review document) which can be found through your chosen search engine. Some discernment and time will be needed to look through the legal information and commentary to consider lessons.

(Adapted from information found on www.judiciary.gov.uk and other publically available sources)

Sharing the Local Offer

Suffolk County Council, Blackpool Council and North Somerset Council have been working with their directory provider Open Objects Ltd to develop widgets. Suffolk in particular has focused on developing a SEND Local Offer widget that can be published on a website that has been specifically designed for families with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The widget functionality is a low-cost option which allows a Family Information Service to project Family Service Directory content onto any other website. This supports the principle of storing and retaining information in one place and publishing it across multiple channels. It can also help avoid duplication of content and promote Family Service Directories as the definitive source of up-to-date and accurate information. Please have a look at the following examples:

Suffolk SEND Local Offer Example

Blackpool FIS Example (not SEND specific)

If Open Objects Ltd is your vendor your account manager can provide more details about widgets and other methods of getting your content published across different channels. If you use another vendor, then think about getting in touch to ask what the possibilities are for your Family Information Service.

(Adapted from information provided by Kate Warboys Open Objects Marketing Manager)

About the author

Anita Abram is a families' information expert with relevant experience spanning over two decades. She has experience in a range of fields including information development, marketing and digital transformation. Working across the public and voluntary sectors, Anita implements solutions in creative ways, which engage staff and citizens.

Anita is the author of the national 'Family Information Service SEND Framework' (2014), funded by The Department for Education. She has also produced national quality improvement frameworks for use by the children's services sector (including children's centres and schools) with the Family and Childcare Trust and NAFIS.