

SEND Strategy Governance Board Notes Thursday 10 October 2025 9:30am - 12:30pm Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes

Chair/Facilitator: David Smith **Notes:** Lisa Cloves (ESCC)

Board members: Carolyn Fair (ESCC), Elizabeth Funge (ESCC) Holly Riley-Saxby (ESPCF), Nathan Caine (ESCC), Louise Moor (Primary School Representative), Sally Polanski (Voluntary Sector Representative), Councillor Bob Standley (ESCC), Chrys Poullikas (NHS), Caroline Tozzi (NHS), Andrea Ferns (NHS), Jessica Stubbings (ESCC), Jane Flock (ESCC), Fenella Potterton (ESCG FE/Post 16 Representative), Ann-Marie Waite (Secondary School Representative), Emma Buggy (Early Years Representative), Honor Green (ESCC).

In attendance: Linda Slim (DfE), Adeline Gibbs (DfE), Toby Silverman (NHS), Michael Tarrant (ESCG)

Apologies: Kathy Marriott (ESCC), Kirsty Eydmann (Special School representative), Helen Diplock (ESPCF). Peter Houlders (ESCC), Alice Tigwell (ESCC), Max (Young Person representative).

1. Facilitator's welcome and introduction

- David (DS) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. He noted that this was Nathan's (NC) final meeting and thanked him for his significant contribution to the Education and SEND in East Sussex, wishing him well in his new role as Assistant Director of Education at Portsmouth City Council.
- DS noted that the meeting will be shortened to two hours due to the NHS/DfE ASEND six-month review meeting scheduled for the afternoon. He welcomed Linda (LS) and Adeline (AG) to the Board meeting and confirmed arrangements for the afternoon Review. The Board meeting will not, in the light of shortened timing, be considering a 'deep dive' into one challenging issue (as is customary) but that practice can be continued at the next Board meeting.

2. Actions from last meeting

- Sally (SP) and Neil Miller to link up to investigate integrating the AP taskforce with specialist youth clubs that Amaze run. *Completed*
- SP & Jake Perry to meet to look at using a befriending service to match volunteers with vulnerable families who need intensive support. *Ongoing*
- Elizabeth (EF)/SP/Holly (HSR) to meet and consider how best to communicate changes re Alternative Provision and Inclusion more widely. Conversations to continue on ensuring everyone has shared understanding. HSR and EF are meeting next week and will discuss further. *Ongoing*

3. Updates from sub-groups (reports attached)

- Alternative Provision (AP)

Jessica (JS) presented the report from the AP group.



AP Subgroup report
Sept 25

- DS noted that one ongoing challenge is that the Board was originally established as a SEND Governance Board, with AP later assigned in terms of the Board's accountability. A sub-group now handles detailed work in this area which continues to evolve. He commended the Local Authority for its work in recommissioning AP, acknowledging the challenges and barriers encountered, and recognized that East Sussex has developed a strong and proactive approach to AP.
- Louise (LM) reported that her school has received specialist support from the new provider, including whole-school training, which she described as refreshing and exceptional. Holly's (HSR) experience has also been positive. Sally (SP) added that it is important to celebrate success and positive change, highlighting that this is a complex area where clear communication is crucial. DS stated Alice (AT) and her team have done a lot of work with children and young people in AP and has developed ideas on good practice to capture user voice in the AP system.
- Fenella (FP) gave a positive update on work with young people 14-16 in Hastings who had previously been excluded. Michael (MT) added that the setting has been treated as a "blank canvas", with learners helping to paint and take ownership of the space. Additional multi-skills courses are due to start after half term.
- Anne-Marie (AW) was in agreement. The pressure on secondary schools has been immense but it's really positive that things are now moving forward and courses are available.

SSIG including the summary of progress on ASEND action plan

NC presented the report from SEND Strategy Implementation Group.



Sub group report
SSIG Oct 25

- Caroline (CT) said the issue of waiting times was picked up in a thematic review of inspections across Sussex and has been escalated internally across the Sussex ICB. The main challenge is the rise in EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans), which is very challenging for assessment and intervention/support providers. Work under way includes meetings with the CMO, SEND focus sessions, operational sessions with providers, collaboration with contract teams, and in-depth data review. She acknowledged the ongoing pressure from increasing demand.
- Andrea (AF) meets regularly with service providers to support priorities, is reviewing private reports to quality-assure provision and is monitoring data and waiting lists.
- Chrys (CP) emphasised the importance of promoting Quality Assurance. He noted that the

number of EHCP requests is overwhelming and queried how effective planning can address this rise. He suggested looking at the proportion of advice coming from health versus non-health professionals. Chrys encouraged greater collaboration between the all engaged agencies, parents, and ESCC, commenting that the current system feels broken.

- SP shared feedback from the SENDIAS service, noting a clear increase in EHCP requests while information and support for SEND provision has reduced. There is concern that the existing framework may be removed, which is driving up EHCP requests. Families feel that schools are not providing enough support for young people at the SEND support level and that a diagnosis is needed to access help. She also highlighted the impact of the national context on the rise in SENDIAS enquiries
- Cllr Standley (BS) highlighted that local authorities, as well as health and care trusts and providers, are becoming overwhelmed and that the system needs significant change. He expressed hope that the upcoming White Paper will help address this.
- Carolyn (CF) added that the key message to keep emphasising is that the current situation is not sustainable. Without bold reforms, it will be impossible to continue meeting needs effectively. She noted that everyone is doing their best within an increasingly challenging context.
- NC highlighted that demands on health professionals have increased significantly. Compared to five to ten years ago, many more parents now identify their child as having social or health needs. He noted that the private sector is attracting many professionals away from public services and drew attention to the growing overlap between mental health and SEND needs, where pressure in one area often impacts the other. NC emphasised that mental health needs are distinct from SEND and that substantial work is required to clarify and address this distinction.

SEND Commissioning and Monitoring Group

- Jane (JF) presented the sub-group report and summarised by saying that substantive issues had already been aired in the feedback from the other groups.



Sub-group report CM
Sept.docx

- SP contributed that commissioning is a real strength in East Sussex.

Update on Head of Education: SEND and Safeguarding appointment (process, timings, recruitment engagement of Board members)

- Elizabeth (EF) provided an update on the recruitment process for the new Head of Education: SEND, and Safeguarding. Sarah Speedie, currently Strategic Lead for Education Improvement at ESCC, has been appointed. A start date is still being finalised.
- CF thanked NC for his dedication and hard work over the years at ESCC, noting his commitment and contributions. She added that he will be greatly missed and that Portsmouth City Council is very fortunate to have him.

4. Updates on national policy and related issues:

Change Programme and funding future

- NC noted Portsmouth is a key ESCC partner with the Change Programme focusing on improving mainstream inclusion for children with SEND. Phase one involved refining the system whilst phase two is addressing more significant changes.
- The development of the Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) role is a key focus within this phase. This will help the Local Authority support schools in implementing mainstream inclusion, including Universally Available Provision (UAP). Work has included reviewing non-statutory provision, consulting with schools to identify pilot schools, and defining specialist support. Parents and carers have provided valuable feedback on communication. Early indications from the Change Programme suggest that long-term policy will support specialist offer around SEND provision.
- Funding is confirmed until the end of Summer 2026 and it is hoped that, following the spending review, there may be an opportunity for longer-term funding.
- HSR noted that participating in the ISOS focus groups was very positive and requested that the PCF be involved in future discussions, particularly regarding how outcomes are communicated to parents. NC confirmed that this would happen.

Schools White Paper (SEND/AP)

- EF highlighted that there have been discussions on the Schools White Paper, how involvement in the Change Programme has helped shape the approach in East Sussex and engagement with the PCF has clarified current and future work with parents and carers. The focus moving forward is on collaboration with schools, listening to parents, improving outcomes, and addressing challenges and opportunities in supporting more children.
- Schools are supportive but also realistic about the challenges around resources and support. Ongoing work includes expanding provision in mainstream schools through the Change Programme, UAP, and LISO. Priorities are being aligned internally and with schools, with progress moving in the right direction to prepare for upcoming government reforms.
- We have reviewed our non statutory services and done important work with schools and parents looking at we can best use out existing resources moving forward. There are things we can do better without any reform and that is where our focus is now and we will align with what reform comes through
- EF stressed that vital to this is having full partnership with health. There is a need to be mindful of the sweep of changes taking place across all services and the pressure on resource and capacity. Currently we have an existing strategy and an improvement plan but we will have a new SEND Strategy for 2026. We need one plan with clear plans and sufficient resource to deliver sustainable change.

- DS asked about the timing of the White paper. Linda (LS) confirmed that the DfE remains committed to publishing the Schools White Paper in the autumn, with a clear focus on inclusion. Ongoing Change Programme work already aligns with this direction, and additional support for inclusion in mainstream schools will follow once the paper is released.
- SP noted that there has been a challenge for Amaze in engaging families in the Change Programme due to its complexity which becomes more complex when reforms are layered over this. There needs to be good, clear communication around this. HSR agreed that a direction on communication is needed.

NHS/ICB

Caroline (CT) shared a paper by Peter Lightfoot, Chair of NHS Sussex which summarises the latest progress in implementing the transition of NHS Sussex into a new Surrey and Sussex ICB from 1 April 2026



ICB Progress
Update.pdf

- The report highlights that there are huge changes and a lot of volatility, but CT stated there are also opportunities. This aims to improve health outcomes, reduce inequalities and deliver better value. It offers opportunities for more effective commissioning of NHS services.
- The focus is on sharing good practice and collaborating to achieve the ambitions of the 10-year plan, which aims to bring services closer to local communities while balancing wider area priorities with local needs.
- For the SEND agenda it's a challenge but the Pan Sussex Children's Board is committed to the agenda and looking at how we make sure we are working with our partners across the system.
- CT explained that the ICB aims to transition to a more strategic role, shifting away from case management. The focus will be on effective tendering, procurement and contract management and supporting providers to concentrate on service delivery, including supporting them to have discussions on care pathways and addressing waiting list challenges.
- DS invited questions. NC raised concerns about national risks, noting uncertainty around the future of ICBs and their role in the SEND system, with the risk that local authorities may bear the impact. CF agreed, stressing the lack of coordination at government level and the potential negative effects on the most vulnerable children. She emphasised the need to ensure SEND remains an explicit ICB responsibility, warning that dilution of this role could weaken accountability.

- Adeline (AG) acknowledged the significant level of change and the desire to minimise disruption. She noted that, as a South East region, these concerns have been raised with the National Director for Learning Disability and SEND. As a result, an addition of “*SEND Best Practice Guidance*” has been included in the national blueprint. It has been confirmed that the SEND function and associated responsibilities will remain with ICBs until at least 1 April 2027. AG added that several changes still need to be worked through.
- CT noted that April 2027 is a short timeframe and asked how the transfer will be managed. AG responded that this is now with the national team and a working group is being established to work through the details with LA, parent/carers representatives, and partners invited to participate. AG emphasised that ICBs’ statutory functions regarding SEND remain unchanged until any legal changes are formally made.

Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation

- CT stated that ESCC and other authorities have submitted an East Sussex proposal which was developed in collaboration with all 5 Districts and Boroughs . There have been subsequent variations suggested by partners (see later), but the ‘One East Sussex’ proposal remains with Government. A decision is expected from Government in March 2026. The longer plan of mobilisation and design is planned for late early 2026 with transition to occur in 2026-2028. Brighton and Hove have put in a different proposal with different boundaries and Hastings have put in two varying proposals.
- With regards to devolution, the inaugural Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) election is scheduled for May 2026 for the Sussex and Brighton combined authority. The authority will receive £38 million annually over 30 years as part of the MCA. Some mayoral candidates have already been announced.
- BS confirmed that, as part of this suite of changes, current districts, boroughs and the County Council would be abolished and new single tier authorities established. The MCA elections would precede the single tier elections in East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove - which may lead to further postponement of ‘county’ elections to 2027.
- CF expressed concern that this could become a significant distraction from an already demanding day job. Some of the biggest changes in public service in years are occurring all at once and involving the same group of people, which makes the situation quite challenging. CT emphasized the importance of everyone staying focused on our core responsibilities.
- SP stressed the importance of recognising the impact on all stakeholders. Already, SEND and wider Inclusion stakeholders are looking to collaborate across a wider canvass. ESPCF has joined a parent/carers collaborative, and Amaze are working with West Sussex as well as their historic services to East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.
- In a reminder of current financial pressures, Honor (HG) noted the large proportion of

ESCC spending directed toward Adult Social Care, and £38m represents a relatively small portion of the overall budget. ESCC is forecasting a £26m overspend this financial year beyond the unallocated reserve, consistent with national trends. Benchmarking shows East Sussex performing strongly in managing the high-needs block compared to similar authorities.

- DS summarised the opportunity for Board members, at this meeting, to familiarise themselves with the volatile landscape on which we are seeking to build a sustainable ‘inclusion’ and ‘appropriate support’ offer for children and young people. The East Sussex SEND Strategy 2022-2025 has been extended in its ‘lifetime’ until Summer 2026, enabling the Area SEND Post Inspection Action Plan impacts to be monitored and to assess new opportunities that may arise from the anticipated Schools White Paper. The Board’s work and the work of the sub-groups and the individual Board members, in key networks and forums beyond Board meetings, continues.

Next Meeting: 15 January 2025, 2pm Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes