

SEND Strategy Governance Board Notes (Thursday 15 January 2026)

2.00pm - 4.30pm 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), 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 (ESCC FE/Post 16 Representative), Ann-Marie Waite (Secondary School Representative), Emma Buggy (Early Years Representative), Sarah Speedie (ESCC) *Peter Houlders (ESCC), Kathy Marriott (ESCC)*

In attendance: Linda Slim (DfE, *SE Lead for SEND Improvement and Intervention*), Luke Parker (DfE) *John Murray (ESCC)*

Apologies: Honor Green (ESCC), Max (Young Person representative). Adeline Gibbs (NHS), Helen Diplock (ESPCF), Anne Marie Waite (*Secondary School representative*).

1. Facilitator's welcome and introduction

David (DS) welcomed Luke Parker (LP) from the DfE Regional Team who will be the direct contact for ESCC moving forward. *He welcomed back Linda Slim.* He also welcomed Sarah Speedie (SS), the New Head of Education: SEND and Safeguarding, to her first official board meeting. John Murray, ESCC Senior Manager: Leadership and Governance has been invited to the second half of the meeting as he will support the writing of the next iteration of the East Sussex SEND Strategy.

Matters arising and actions from last meeting

To reduce printing and paper use at Board meetings, it has been agreed that going forward there will be only one copy of each paper available per table. **ACTION:** Lisa (LC)

DS acknowledged that some attendees had asked to join the meeting online as they couldn't make the meeting in-person. While this is not currently possible, he confirmed that the option will continue to be reviewed.

There were no specific actions arising from the last meeting but there are two actions that are ongoing.

Sally Polanski (SP) & Jake Perry (JP) to meet to look at using a befriending service to match volunteers with vulnerable families who need intensive support. *Ongoing*

Elizabeth (EF), SP and Holly (HSR) to meet and discuss how best to communicate the upcoming changes to Alternative Provision and Inclusion more widely. This was raised at the AP sub-group, where the presentation of the AP directory on the Local Offer was also reviewed. ESCC are working with the ESPCF rep on the AP sub-group on this and the Local Offer pages are being updated. SP noted that there will also be a substantial feature on Alternative Provision in the next **AMAZE** newsletter. *Ongoing*

2. Updates from sub-groups

Local Updates and reports:

- Alternative Provision (AP)



AP Sub group report
Jan 26*

Jessica (JS) presented the AP report.

DS noted that the Board had considered whether AP should be reflected within the remit of a SEND Strategy Governance Board. The next iteration of the strategy will continue to focus on SEND. He explained that AP has its own dedicated AP Strategic Plan but emphasised the need to ensure strong, coherent links between the SEND Strategy and AP.

EF reported that significant work has taken place around post-16 provision for SEND learners. She noted that the AP provision previously delivered by 'College Central' has transferred from SABDEN to LSEAT (*London South East Academies Trust*) and operates as East Sussex Academy. It was also noted that The Workplace is also undergoing a voluntary transfer to LSEAT, this is currently in due diligence.

EF highlighted positive developments as a result of the East Sussex Academy, particularly the reduction in permanent exclusions for young people with EHCPs. Further work is required on reducing permanent exclusions in the primary phase, an update on the East Sussex Academy and discussion of this issue will be taken to the Primary Board in March.

Alice (AT) reported that she has been involved in youth voice work on AP for some time and observed a noticeable positive shift. She noted strong collaboration between ESCG and Bexhill but emphasised that the wider narrative and associated stigma around AP can remain a challenge.

- SSIG



SSIG Sub-group
report Jan 26*

SS presented the SSIG sub-group report and asked for questions.

Carolyn (CF) noted the significant progress made, particularly around investment in the wheelchair service, but raised concern that this was a one-off additional investment and that progress could be stalled due to the changes to the Integrated Care Board arrangements in Sussex and Surrey. Caroline (CT) confirmed this specific issue is included in current contract negotiations and the NHS planning round and remains an active focus.

Jane (JF) reported that Ross Care have submitted their final report on how the additional funding was used, and that learning from the additional money has been applied to the

current cohort. DS acknowledged both progress and challenges and the need to ensure the issue remains on future agendas.

Holly (HSR) noted that there is now greater understanding in the community about the outsourcing of EHCP work, and that it has generally been well received. She raised concerns that ongoing challenges with the ICB could stall progress and highlighted the need to record this as a risk.

SP suggested focusing on opportunities, noting good progress in post-16 services, while recognising that those under 16 still lack clarity about the direction of travel. She acknowledged the strength of the DCO role but uncertainty about how that role will develop. The group agreed that maintaining momentum is essential.

AT provided an update on incorporating young people's voices into the strategy. Numerous focus groups have been held to support development of the new SEND strategy, with around 160 young people involved so far, many of whom have taken part in multiple sessions. There is already a strong bank of evidence and resources on youth voice, but we will need to be creative and innovative in how we continue to capture youth voice moving forward.

- **SEND Commissioning and Monitoring Group**



C&M Subgroup - Jan
26*

JF presenting the sub-group report.

Chrys (CP) highlighted that having therapists and clinicians working together has been highly effective. It serves the best interests of children and also supports job satisfaction and staff retention.

AT said that Alex Gunter (AG), a young person who used to sit on the SEND Governance Board has asked if he can attend the Commissioning and Monitoring meetings. JF and JS agreed that he could. **ACTION:** AT and JF to agree communications with Alex and way forward

- **Change Programme**



sub-group report
Change programme
J*



Change Programme
and LISO update.GB
J*

SS presented on the Change Programme and Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) update and asked for questions.

EF stressed there is a huge emphasis on the early identification of SEN and this is being driven through family hubs with a strong drive to have SEND specialists in the hubs to identify children's needs early. East Sussex LA are developing a Best Start Strategy and working together across Social Care and Education to focus on vulnerable groups and learners. It is recommended that we bring this discussion in more detail to a future meeting.

Fenella (FP) asked when colleges will get involved in the LISO. EF confirmed that this is the first pilot, the second pilot will start at Easter and the third pilot will include colleges.

3. Updates on national policy and related issues:

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- **Schools White Paper**

The publication date of the white paper is still unknown. CF and Bob (BS) highlighted that this lack of knowledge creates uncertainty. DS confirmed that our approach will be to continue in our current direction, and if the white paper indicates a different requirement, we will adjust accordingly. This approach was discussed in more detail in the substantive Agenda item 4.

- **NHS/ICB**



East Sussex –
DfE-NHSE
Joint
LetterESx*



NHS Sussex Update-
Commissioning a

CT talked through the communication from the ICB which gives a high-level update on the transition to the ICB from 1 April 26.

CF emphasised her concern about the risks associated with the amount of parallel change taking place, the number of moving parts involved, and the limited resources available to deliver it.

DS asked whether it would be helpful to set this out formally in a joint letter to the DfE with our Sussex partners. Linda (LS) noted that the DfE is aware of these pressures, but a written statement could add weight. HSR suggested that the letter could also be shared with families.

The board approved this, and DS will now discuss next steps with EF, JS and CF to determine the best way forward. **ACTION:** DS to contact CT, EF and JS with a view to compiling appropriate letter for sharing with Board and onward to DfE/NHS(E)

- **Devolution/Local Government Organization**

BS reported that the Sussex Mayoral election has been postponed to 2028, while the creation of the combined authority is still expected in 2027. He noted that the consultation on local government reorganisation closed on 11 January. At East Sussex County Council, all political parties support the East Sussex proposal. The alternative option is the Brighton model, which would create five unitary authorities across Sussex. A decision is expected in spring. The government is minded to allow delay of 2026 local council elections to 2027 pending the related developments on devolution and on local government reorganisation.

BS stressed that although unitary authorities may be established, this alone will not resolve the wider issue of local government funding.

CS highlighted that this is also a year of significant reforms within social care. As a system, these are all major changes and present considerable risks for the families we support as we continue to deliver services through a time of change.

4. ASEND Post Inspection improvement Plan (6 month Review) - *priority issues to address East Sussex SEND Strategy (next iteration) - development process and schedule* **East Sussex Local SEND Reform Plan - *ensuring plan required serves strategic and improvement agenda as above***

DS highlighted that the substantive discussion in this meeting is to agree a single, unified process that meets:

1. Post-Ofsted/Area SEND inspection improvement requirements
2. The imperative to create the next iteration of an East Sussex SEND Strategy
3. The requirements of the DfE for a 'Local SEND Reform Plan' (DfE letter 15 December 2025 and with further details and timetable TBC).



JS presented slides on the initial thoughts on how we will develop the next SEND Strategy alongside a preliminary timeline with the aim for the strategy to be published on 1 September 2026. John Murray will help with the drafting of the strategy.

It is now proposed to use the Strategy Governance Board meeting date on 16 July for the ASEND review meeting and find a new date for the Governance Board meeting, suggested for 22 June 2026. This would be the point at which the East Sussex SEND Strategy Governance Board would agree a 2026-2030 SEND Strategy to be ratified by ESCC Lead Member for Education and Inclusion. The 'high level' East Sussex SEND Strategy will be designed to be accompanied by a delivery plan that also fulfils the requirements of a 'Local SEND Reform Plan' and which will embed the post ASEND Inspection actions on improvement. A single process to meet three complimentary requirements.

JS asked the board for views and points to take forward.

Holly reflected on learning from the previous strategy cycle, noting that key issues that ESPCF identified surfaced too late and should be addressed much earlier this time. A meeting in early February was proposed to review what had not worked previously and agree improved approaches. It was highlighted that the role of the ESPCF needs clearer definition, particularly regarding accountability and expectations. Members were reminded that several existing forums already provide opportunities to gather input, and these should be utilised. The importance of reaching a wide range of voices was emphasised, with agreement that the stakeholder workshops should also explore additional ways to strengthen engagement.

CP advised, given the ongoing NHS/ICB restructuring, engaging not only through system-level routes but also directly with local providers and stakeholders, ensuring their perspectives are included. He stressed the importance of identifying which provider representatives should be involved so that their input can inform the work. **ACTION:** JS, to discuss with CT and CP the appropriate engagement with health and care provider representatives.

DS and AT noted that schools are very keen for their young people to be involved in discussions relating to the strategy and would welcome opportunities to participate.

Emma (EB) highlighted that much of the engagement work tends to capture the views of those who are confident in expressing them, whereas some families, particularly those with lower confidence, may struggle to have their voices heard.

CF agreed and emphasised that the partnership is committed to being creative in how it gathers views, ensuring a broad and inclusive approach to engagement.

DS emphasised that the statutory duty requires supporting young people with SEND up to age 25. It was confirmed that the new strategy will cover the full 0-25 age range.

It was noted that the Sussex Post-16 Conference on 4 February will generate a series of actions that will link directly into the new strategy. EF confirmed that discussions have begun regarding the role of Adult Social Care within this work. The Board acknowledged that support for young people aged 19-25 needs strengthening and agreed that it should increase its focus and ambition for this age group.

The Board agreed that the approach we are taking is the right one.

The next immediate step is setting a date for the first strategy workshop, expected to take place in early March. All Board members will be invited, and JS welcomed suggestions for any additional attendees. A date for the second workshop will also be arranged.

DS proposed auditing existing meetings and mechanisms that could be used to capture data more effectively. EF noted that an emerging list already exists, and members were invited to send further suggestions to JS. A summary of emerging themes for the strategy and a draft skeleton structure will be shared at the next meeting.

LS will confirm with Adeline Gibbs that 16 July is acceptable as the date for the ASEND review meeting.

5. AOB:

None

Next meeting: 30 April 2026

9.30am-12.00pm Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes

*If you would like a copy of any attachments embedded in this document, please contact education.projects@eastsussex.gov.uk