

SEND Strategy Governance Board Notes

Mon 22 June 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), Chrys Poullikas (NHS), Jessica Stubbings (ESCC), Fenella Potterton (ESCG FE/Post 16 Representative), Ann-Marie Waite (Secondary School Representative), Emma Buggy (Early Years Representative), Honor Green (ESCC), Sarah Speedie (ESCC), Peter Houlders (ESCC), Alice Tigwell (ESCC), Councillor Paul Soane (Lead member), Naomi Ellis (NHS Surrey/Sussex ICB), Louise Needham (NHS Surrey/Sussex ICB)

Attendees: Russell Shingles (NHS); Adeline Gibbs (NHS(E)); Linda Slim (DfE)

Apologies: Luke Parker (DfE), Kathy Marriott (ESCC), Kirsty Edyman (Special School Representative), Max (Young Person Rep), Helen Diplock (ESPCF), Yvonne Elvy (DfE), Jane Flock (ESCC)

1. Facilitator's welcome and introduction

- David (DS) welcomed members to the final formal Board meeting of the academic year and noted the significance of the meeting, given that the Local SEND Reform Plan had been submitted on Friday 19 June. Thanks were given to all partners who had contributed to the development of the plan. DS gave specific thanks to John Murray (JM) and Jessica Stubbings (JS) for their work on the final drafting.
- DS noted that this was the final formal Board meeting with governance responsibility for the current East Sussex SEND Strategy, which had been extended to 2026. Members, officers, parent carer representatives and young people were thanked for their contribution to the strategy and its delivery.
- New and returning members were welcomed, including representatives from the DfE and NHS England, Naomi Ellis (NE) and Louise Needham (LN) as formal Board members, Russell Shingles (RS) from the ICB, and Councillor Paul Soane (PS) the new ESCC Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability and Board member.

2. Matters arising and actions from last meeting

- Previous minutes were agreed as an accurate record. The Board reviewed the outstanding actions and confirmed that those relating to Early Years referrals and young people's voice in future planning were complete, with ongoing engagement mechanisms remaining in place.
- The action for NHS colleagues to update on longer-term Parent Carer Forum funding was also closed, as the funding position had been confirmed.

3. Subgroup updates

3.1 Alternative Provision Subgroup

- There had not been an Alternative Provision Subgroup meeting since the previous Board, so there was no update to receive on this occasion.

3.2 Strategy and Implementation Subgroup



Sub-group report -
SSIG JUNE 26

- Sarah (SS) introduced the SSIG report, noting that detailed progress updates would be shared with the papers for the July ASEND review meeting. The Board noted SSIG's role in providing challenge and scrutiny of progress against the ASEND post-inspection action plan.
- Members discussed areas where further assurance was needed, including CAMHS waiting times, wheelchair provision and pressures within the Educational Psychology Service. While some improvements were noted, concerns remained around long waits, the sustainability of progress, interim arrangements for wheelchair provision ahead of the new contract in April 2027, and national workforce pressures affecting educational psychologists.
- The Board also noted the need for stronger data linkage across services, and for NHS services, to better understand overlapping cohorts and support assurance, scrutiny and planning

3.3 Joint Commissioning Monitoring Group



Sub-group C&M
June 26

- JS presented the Commissioning and Monitoring subgroup report on behalf of Jane (JF).
- Discussion focused on wheelchair provision. Members noted progress with recommissioning and that a new contract is expected from April 2027, but remained concerned about the interim position and the risk of losing recent improvements in waiting times.
- The Board requested further assurance on how the service will be resourced and managed during 2026/27, with updates to return as the interim arrangements become clearer.

4 NHS and ICB Reform in Surrey and Sussex - challenges and opportunities for next East Sussex Strategic Cycle (2026-2030)



NHS-Surrey-and-Sussex-Presentation-Tem

- Louise (LN) and Naomi (NE) led a discussion on the implications of the ICB reorganisation. Members welcomed the information on newly recruited SEND health capacity and the opportunity to share learning and improve consistency across the wider Sussex and Surrey

footprint, while recognising the importance of maintaining local knowledge, relationships and continuity.

- The Board discussed both the opportunities and risks of organisational change, including the need to involve providers early in transformation work, particularly around the ND pathway. Workforce was noted as a key shared priority, with members highlighting the need for longer-term pipelines into specialist roles.
- Data was also identified as a priority, with work underway to improve access, reporting and linkage across services. Members emphasised the need for reliable data to support assurance and planning, alongside lived experience and user voice. Russell Shingles (RS) introduced himself and his role as Surrey/Sussex ICB Head of SEND, Children in Care and Child Death Overview and outlined the data collecting systems and outcomes that he has been surveying - he will be a direct contact for our Board to liaise with over data capture and reporting issues.
- The Board also noted the need to strengthen engagement with young adults aged 19-25. LN agreed to bring a further update on the ND transformation programme to a future meeting once arrangements are clearer. **Action:** Board to require NHS Surrey/Sussex ICB and LN in particular to update on ND transformation programme

5 Local Government Re-organisation and post local electoral updates

- Councillor Paul Soane (PS) and Carolyn (CF) provided reflections on the post-election context, local government reorganisation and the potential implications for SEND reform. Members noted that the period since the elections had been very busy, with new members needing time to understand key issues and receive relevant briefings. SEND remains a significant area of focus for the Council and the partnership.
- A decision on local government reorganisation was expected before the summer recess, although the national political context meant that timescales could be uncertain. Members recognised that the uncertainty can be challenging, particularly in areas such as Peacehaven where future boundaries could have practical implications for planning and provision. However, the Board was reassured that business as usual work continues.
- The Board discussed the importance of continuing to progress planned developments, including inclusion bases and specialist provision, while being mindful that any boundary changes may require later decisions about how resources are allocated. Members noted that data and clear metrics will be important in informing any future decisions.
- The DfE/NHS(E) representatives confirmed that they would continue to work with the partnership through this period of change. The Board noted the helpful response received to its earlier correspondence setting out the partnership's ambitions and the challenges of delivering those ambitions during a period of organisational uncertainty.

6 East Sussex SEND Strategy 2026-2030

7 Local SEND Reform Plan - submitted by 19 June 2026.



SEND update for East Sussex Local SEND Strategy 2026
SEND gov board June SEND Reform Plan_FI - 2030_FINAL VERSIC

- The Board considered the SEND Strategy and Local SEND Reform Plan together, recognising the close relationship between the two documents. The Strategy was described as setting the wider ambition for the local SEND partnership, while the Reform Plan provides the HM Government required detail on how required SEND Reforms will be delivered. It was emphasised that, although the local authority has a convening role, both documents belong to the wider partnership and will require shared ownership and delivery.
- Members were thanked for their flexibility and responsiveness throughout what had been a challenging process with tight timescales. The Board noted that the development of the Strategy had been iterative, with feedback gathered through existing partnership structures, including schools, partners, young people, parents and carers. This feedback had helped to strengthen the focus on belonging, lived experience, partnership working and clear governance through the Board.
- The Board welcomed the direction of travel and the emphasis on improving the experience of children, young people and families, rather than relying solely on performance measures. Members agreed that the Strategy should help the partnership stay focused on whether services feel different for families by 2030.
- Following the presentation of the Reform Plan, as submitted to DfE by due date, 19 June 2026, members discussed the importance of maintaining honest and clear communication with parents and carers. It was acknowledged that there is some lack of confidence in the current system, and that the partnership will need to be open about what can be changed locally, what is being shaped by national reform, and where there may still be difficult messages to communicate.
- Members welcomed the collaborative approach being taken and commented that the sense of joint working was visible through the work with schools, local area groups and wider partners. The Board noted that East Sussex appears to be well placed in some areas because of the groundwork already underway, while also recognising the scale of the programme and the need to remain realistic about the pace of change.
- The Board highlighted the need to keep early years and young people aged 19 to 25 in focus. It is in these two age ranges that there are fewer ‘networks’ and connectivity across service providers and place based stakeholders. It was noted that there are links with wider work, including Best Start and Sussex post-16 SEND work, but members agreed that these areas may need to be further interrogated by the Board so that the connection with the SEND Strategy and Reform Plan is clear. **Action:** agenda planning group to note the need for 19-25 and Early Years specific items/discussion (EF/JS and DS)
- A key challenge raised was the potential impact of identifying need earlier. While the Board supported the principle of earlier identification and support, there was concern that this could create additional pressure on assessment and diagnostic pathways if services are not aligned and sufficiently resourced. Members agreed that this should be considered as part of wider system planning, particularly where health, education and specialist services intersect.
- There was discussion about the Board’s role in providing ongoing governance and

challenge. Members agreed that the Strategy should be treated as a starting point rather than a fixed document. Given the level of national and local change, there will need to be opportunities to review, flex and adapt the approach over time.

- Members also discussed the importance of accessible communication. It was felt that publishing the plan alone would not be sufficient, as the documents are detailed and not always easy for families or professionals to navigate. The Board agreed that a mix of communication methods will be needed, including summary versions, plain language materials, local offer updates and opportunities for feedback as implementation develops. **Action:** agenda item on communication and dissemination of strategy and plan to be timetabled (EF/JS and DS)
- The Board noted that some messages may be difficult, particularly where national policy direction may not align with what all parents and carers would want locally. Members agreed that the partnership should be honest about these tensions, while continuing to involve parents, carers, children and young people in shaping how changes are implemented.
- Members discussed how key messages could be shared effectively with children and young people, including through schools and existing engagement mechanisms. It was agreed that communication should not rely on one route, and that schools will have an important role in helping young people understand the changes in a way that is meaningful for them.
- **Action:** Lisa (LC) will share the Local Offer page with Board members so that they can review the information available to families about the Board and consider how it supports communication about the SEND Strategy, Reform Plan and wider local area offer.
[SEND Strategy Governance Board | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

8. Post Area SEND Inspection Action Plan - review meeting (16 July 2026), preparation and attendance

- In relation to the DfE/NHS review session on 16 July, members discussed attendance and logistics. It was agreed that Board members would be asked to confirm whether they intended to attend, so this could be shared with colleagues organising the session. Written evidence would also be submitted ahead of the meeting and used to support the discussion. **Action:** LC to forward list of attendees expected to DfE (LS and LP) prior to Review meeting

9. AOB

- The Chair noted that this meeting concluded the Board's governance responsibility for the 2022 to 2025 Strategy and thanked members for their work and commitment throughout that period.

The next SEND Governance Board meeting was confirmed for **22 October 26 at 9.30am**.