SEND Strategy Governance Board Notes

Thursday 22 October 2026
9.30 – 12.00 Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes

Chair/Facilitator: David Smith **Notes:** Josh Kemp (ESCC)

Board members: Sarah Nundy (ESCC Adult Social Care), Kirsty Eydmann (Special School Representative), Holly Riley-Saxby (ESPCF), Elizabeth Funge (ESCC), Louise Moor (Primary School Representative), Sally Polanski (Voluntary Sector Representative), Chrys Poullikas (East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust), Jessica Stubbings (ESCC), Andrew McKechnie (ESCC), Councillor Paul Soane (Lead member, ESCC, Education and Inclusion, SEND), Fenella Potterton (FE/Post 16 Representative), Ann-Marie Waite (Secondary School Representative), Jane Flock (ESCC), Max (Young Person Rep), Sarah Speedie (ESCC), Peter Houlders (ESCC), Emma Buggy (Early Years Representative)

Attendees: Russell Shingles (Surrey and Sussex ICB); Lindsey Rogers (Surrey and Sussex ICB); Luke Parker (DfE) Colin Gogay (DfE), Yvonne Ely (SEND Advisor to Local Reform Plans), Adeline Gibbs (NHS(E), Alice Tigwell (ESCC)

Apologies: Carolyn Fair (ESCC), Honor Green (ESCC), Helen Diplock (ESPCF), Amanda Marshall (ESCC Adult Social Care)

1. Facilitator's welcome and introduction

- David (DS) welcomed members to the meeting and set the meeting into context. He noted the start of a new strategic cycle for the Board (2026 to 2030) and referenced the work ahead to monitor delivery of the East Sussex Local SEND Reform Plan and the Area Post Inspection Action Plan within that strategic time frame.
- David thanked Lisa Cloves, in her absence on new ESCC duties, for her outstanding administrative support to the Board. Members recognised her contribution and wished her well for the future.

2. Matters arising and actions from last meeting

- Previous minutes were agreed as a largely accurate record. It was noted that Yvonne's surname and job title had been recorded incorrectly in the previous minutes. These details have been corrected for future minutes.
- Russell (RS) provided an update on funding arranged for Pan-Sussex PCF activity. He advised that additional funding opportunities are being explored. David requested that PCF funding remain on the agenda while the funding position remains ongoing.
- Further actions discussed were:
    - Board to require NHS Surrey/Sussex ICB and LN in particular to update on ND transformation programme – **ongoing**
    - Agenda planning group to note the need for 19-25 and Early Years specific items/discussion (EF/JS and DS). DS will ensure that these 'ends of the age scale' remain in clear sight of the Board.
    - Agenda item on communication and dissemination of strategy and plan to be timetabled (EF/JS and DS). **Remains ongoing**
    - Lisa (LC) shared the Local Offer page with Board members via a link in the notes of 22 June 2026 meeting. Communications, the Board agreed, would remain a key issue on Board focus, especially to ensure parents and carers are supported

through the Reform changes. Jessica (JS) confirmed that Dan Wood has been commissioned to develop a communications plan. He will engage with Board members to help shape this work. Holly Riley-Saxby (HR-S) highlighted existing concerns around trust in the Local Offer. She stressed the importance of making both the full plan and summary information available. Jessica advised that whilst the full plan is available on the ESCC website, publication on the Local Offer had been dependent on DfE approval. She confirmed that, now approval has been received, the full plan can be published on the Local Offer website.

Action: Keep comms issue on as a focus issue for the board to consider.

3. Board Terms of Reference - reviewed and revised

- DS presented the reviewed Terms of Reference (ToR) to Board members and invited comments. Views later emerged, from Adeline Gibb (AG) and others (see below) re. 'risk register' and role of the Board.
- David confirmed that voting arrangements have been added to the ToR should a formal vote be required.

Action: Minor amendments to Terms of Reference to be made to clarify the Board's role in risk analysis and the development of a risk register covering key issues.

4. Subgroup Reports

4.1 Strategy Implementation Sub Group (SSIG)

- Sarah Speedie (SS) provided an update from the SEND Strategy and Reforms Implementation Group (SSIG), which meets seven times a year. At its meeting on 15 October, SSIG reviewed progress against the Reform Plan. This included implementation, governance, emerging priorities and risks. Further detail would be covered in the presentation later in the meeting.
- Oversight of the four Building Blocks has been allocated across the three ESCC Heads of Education. This supports clear accountability and a collaborative approach across the Education Division.
- Sarah provided an overview of progress across the four Building Blocks:
    - Building Block 1 – Strengthening Inclusion: Work is focused on embedding the Universally Available Provision (UAP) consistently across schools and supporting schools to strengthen inclusive practice. Engagement with families remains an important part of this work.
    - Building Block 2 – Experts at Hand: Further detail would be provided later in the meeting. Recruitment within the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) was reported to be on track.
    - Building Block 3 – Co-production and partnership working: Work continues to emphasise the importance of keeping families central to the development and implementation of the reforms.
    - Building Block 4 – Sufficiency and place planning: Recruitment to key roles in the Assessment and Planning team is underway, alongside exploration of how AI could support the service in responding to increased demand. Expansion of specialist bases is continuing.
- SS highlighted key risks and issues identified by SSIG. It remains too early to demonstrate measurable impact across several workstreams. This is due to the current stage of implementation. The need for consistent reporting against agreed success

measures was noted. Alongside this, ongoing pressures relating to EHCP demand, workforce capacity and access to specialist provision was also noted.

- AG asked whether the Board would continue to meet quarterly. David confirmed that it would. The intention is for three 'regular' Board meetings and one meeting with Post Inspection Review as its prime focus, led by DfE and with other invitees as appropriate
- Sally (SP) highlighted the importance of accessible data. This would support the Board's oversight and decision-making. JS and SS agreed to review the high-level data and provide a more detailed summary to the Board.

Action: JS and SS to bring recommendations on data summary to the Board.

- Members discussed the potential use of AI in responding to increased EHCP demand. Louise welcomed the exploration of this approach. Russell (RS) confirmed that health colleagues would be keen to collaborate with the ESCC on work relating to EHCPs and AI.
- HR-S emphasised the importance of clear and carefully targeted communication with parents and carers about the reforms. This should include what is changing and how support will be accessed. EF highlighted the important role of ESPCF in supporting engagement as the new system develops.
- DS suggested that the Board could consider national comparative data. This would help to identify areas demonstrating positive improvement and opportunities to learn from approaches elsewhere.
- EF noted that the current phase of the reforms is focused on preparing for future changes. In the meantime, services continue to operate within the existing system. The associated pressures remain.
- SS thanked SSIG members for their continued work and contribution to progressing the Reform Plan.

4.2 Commissioning and Monitoring Subgroup

- Jane (JF) advised that the Family Advice helpline is receiving a high volume of calls related to SEND. This highlights the importance of ensuring information provided across SEND partners, including Amaze, is accurate and consistent.
- JF provided an update on engagement with Commissioning and Brokerage. She noted opportunities for both teams to share learning and support effective and cost-efficient ways of working.
- Experts at Hand will become a standing item at the Commissioning and Brokerage Group.
- JF also highlighted the importance of continued ICB representation. This is important at both SSIG and the Commissioning and Monitoring Group to support effective partnership working.

4.3 Alternative Provision Sub-Group

- Jessica (JS) provided an update from the Alternative Provision (AP) Subgroup. They had reviewed outcomes from the previous academic year. Permanent exclusions across primary and secondary had reduced by 24% and were now broadly in line with the national average. Secondary exclusions were below the national average, while primary exclusions remained slightly above. A Primary Task and Finish Group has been established. They will explore this further, with reducing primary exclusions a key focus.
- It was noted that many pupils who had been permanently excluded were subsequently identified as having SEND. Members discussed the importance of understanding why these needs had not been identified prior to exclusion. They also highlighted the need to strengthen earlier identification and support.

- Work is also underway to consider dual registration arrangements. Potential capacity pressures were noted, with the East Sussex Academy commissioned for 230 places and approaching capacity.
- An improvement in NEET outcomes for East Sussex Academy pupils was reported compared with the previous Year 11 cohort. It was also positively noted that four pupils from the East Sussex Academy had successfully returned to mainstream education.
- Feedback from pupils identified transport and limited engagement from their mainstream school as barriers when accessing Alternative Provision.
- SP welcomed the positive progress. She noted that SENDIASS had identified similar trends relating to primary exclusions. She offered to share relevant SENDIASS data and insights to support this work.
- JS explained that established inclusion partnerships operate within secondary education. A similar approach has begun in primary. However, pupils are not consistently being referred to these arrangements before exclusion. Work is underway to consider how the successful secondary model could be adapted appropriately for primary schools in East Sussex.

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

- RS provided an update on changes within the ICB. He noted that SEND now sits within the Chief Nursing portfolio, providing greater clinical input. Budgets remain within the commissioning directorate. They require close working between the relevant teams to support service improvement.
- Work is also underway to strengthen communication with the Council and with parents and carers.
- JS highlighted that the separation between the team and budget responsibilities had created challenges and delays. She asked that the Board remain aware of this risk. ***RS*** advised that, as the organisational changes become more established, this is expected to present less of a risk.

Action: Board to ask for on update to the separation arrangement between ICB SEND team and commissioning and budgetary functions at next Board meeting (RS and JS)

- HR-S emphasised the importance of ensuring that the voice of children and young people remains central to the Board's work.
- EF welcomed the positive news on recruitment at ICB to increase capacity and capability and said that future reporting should focus increasingly on the impact and outcomes of activity, rather than solely on the activity undertaken. Waiting times on assessments and interventions and feedback on service user (children and young people and parents and carers) should be prime subjects of reports
- HR-S also emphasised the importance of gathering feedback from those who have been unable to access services. This ensures their experiences are reflected alongside those who have received support.

6. Local Government Re-organisation updates

- Cllr Paul Soane (PS) provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). He noted the continuing uncertainty around the programme. The Secretary of State had selected the Brighton & Hove option. This would see Peacehaven, Telscombe and

Saltdean move from East Sussex to Brighton & Hove. However, LGR is currently paused, creating uncertainty around how the proposals will progress.

- PS advised that local elections are expected to go ahead in May 2027.
- Members also noted discussions about bringing the mayoral elections forward from May 2028 to May 2027 and suggested that this could signal a gathering of pace towards the 'Strategic Authority' of 'Sussex' – to which 'shadow body' officers have already been seconded
- PS noted that our Board should be mindful of opportunities that this 'cross Sussex' Strategic Body might offer to our East Sussex SEND agenda. An example might be in the 'Strategic Skills' approach to increase opportunities and routes into work and training for 16-24 year olds with SEND and an EHCP 'history'.

7. East Sussex SEND Strategy and Local SEND Reform Plan

7.1 Review of the last SEND Strategy

- JS presented an overview of a review of the last SEND Strategy 2022–2026 and feedback from the DfE on the Local SEND Reform Plan.
- Achievements included:
    - Children, young people and families increasingly shaping services through co-production.
    - Over 90% participation in EHCP processes.
    - Expanded short breaks and respite provision.
    - Early improvements in SEND attendance, exclusions and inclusion.
    - Stronger coordination across education, health and care.
- Areas for continued focus included:
    - Parent and carer confidence and trust.
    - Rising demand, complaints and waiting times.
    - Ongoing pressures within assessment pathways and specialist services.
    - Increasing EHCP requests, tribunals and elective home education.
    - Continuing disparities in outcomes for some groups of children and young people with SEND.

7.2 ASEND Improvement actions

- JS outlined the four areas for improvement identified through the Area SEND Inspection. She explained how the objectives and four Building Blocks within the Local SEND Reform Plan will support these areas. Further detail is set out on slide 4 of the presentation.
- JS then outlined the national SEND reform timeline. This set out a 10-year programme of national SEND reforms. The current local plan is focused on laying the foundations for these longer-term changes, with legislative changes expected to provide the means for Reform
- The Board noted that the Local SEND Reform Plan has now been approved. Feedback received following the approval process has been circulated to Board members. It is summarised on slide 6 of the presentation.

Action: Board to note the need to focus on the areas of the East Sussex Plan that are deemed to require strengthening AND to require updates via SSIG and officers through normal reporting arrangements (JS, SS and AM)

7.3 Local SEND Reform Plan update

- Andrew McKechnie (AM) introduced the four Building Blocks that underpin the Local

SEND Reform Plan. The Building Blocks provide the foundation for the changes required to achieve a more inclusive and sustainable SEND system.

- AM outlined the objectives associated with each Building Block. Further detail provided on slides 8–11 of the presentation. He stressed the fact that the Building Block approach to reform encompasses both the required improvements of the Post Inspection Action Plan AND the already suggested areas for strengthening of the East Sussex SEND Reform Plan submitted.
- AM then invited SS to provide a more detailed update on Experts at Hand.

7.4 Experts at Hand

- SS provided an update on the early implementation of Experts at Hand, with Phase 1 delivery now underway. Further detail on the Phase 1 offer is provided on slide 13. One Team Leader and three Best Start in Life Inclusion Practitioners (BSIPs) have been recruited. Recruitment is underway for a further four BSIPs.
- Educational Psychology Service (EPS) recruitment remains on track to secure the capacity required.
- Work is underway to identify the appropriate lead to support work relating specifically to CAMHS. Waiting times remain particularly challenging here.
- Navigators have been appointed. Initial work has also begun to map services from Universally Available Provision (UAP) through to specialist support.
- The Navigator model will support the identification of children and young people requiring additional support, it will help coordinate the appropriate services around schools, children, and families.
- SS reiterated that Experts at Hand is a core element of SEND reform. However, it does not replace existing statutory duties. This includes mainstream settings' responsibilities under the SEND Code of Practice and EHCP processes. It is intended to enhance and build upon existing support.

8. Focus issues for 2026/27 meetings cycle

David invited members to consider potential risks associated with implementation. These included:

- ensuring clear and effective communication with families to support understanding and confidence in the reforms;
- maintaining sufficient focus on the neurodevelopmental (ND) pathway and profiling tool;
- ensuring children and young people experience tangible benefits from the changes;
- ensuring the needs of post-16 and 19–25-year-olds are appropriately considered within Experts at Hand;
- ensuring success measures consider qualitative outcomes alongside quantitative data;
- workforce capacity and the development of sustainable pathways into areas including Speech and Language Therapy and Educational Psychology;
- and maintaining and strengthening confidence and trust in the SEND system.

EF highlighted the importance of considering opportunities alongside risks. Members discussed the potential development of a risk and opportunities register. This would help support future Board oversight.

Action: David to look into creating a risk and opportunity register, consulting with Board members and utilising work already done in SSIG and elsewhere.

AOB

- No additional business was raised.

The next SEND Governance Board meeting was confirmed for Monday 11 January, 14.00 – 16.30.