

SEND Strategy Governance Board Notes (Thursday 30 April 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), Jessica Stubbings (ESCC), Jane Flock (ESCC), Fenella Potterton (ESCG FE/Post 16 Representative), Ann-Marie Waite (Secondary School Representative), Emma Buggy (Early Years Representative), Sarah Speedie (ESCC), Peter Houlders (ESCC), Helen Diplock (ESPCF), Alice Tigwell (ESCC), Max (Young Person Rep)

In attendance: John Murray (ESCC), *Louise Needham and Naomi Ellis (NHS - see below)*

Apologies: Linda Slim (DfE), Luke Parker (DfE), Andrea Ferns (NHS/ESCC), Kathy Marriott (ESCC) Yvonne Ely (DfE), Adeline Gibbs (NHS(E))

1. Facilitator's welcome and introduction

David (DS), welcomed all to the meeting and introduced two new Board members replacing Caroline Tozzi (who leaves role after this meeting), Louise Needham, Senior Designated Clinical Officer for Surrey and Sussex ICB and Naomi Ellis, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Safeguarding, Surrey and Sussex ICB

It was noted there was no representation from the *DfE or NHS(E)* at this meeting; colleagues have cited '*purdah*' in the pre-election period relating to the local elections on 7 May 26. We have been assured that any questions or concerns can be forwarded to appropriate DfE and NHS(E) advisers after the meeting

2. Matters arising and actions from last meeting

Two corrections were noted to the minutes of 15 January 26 meeting.

Page 4: Devolution/Local Government Organization: the creation of the combined authority is still expected in **2026** not 2027.

Page 3: Holly (HSR) noted that there is now greater understanding in the community about the outsourcing of **ND pathway** work, not EHCP work.

Actions from last meeting:

- Sally (SP) confirmed the planned piece on Alternative provision for the next AMAZE newsletter has been published. **Completed**
- Jake (JP) and Sally (SP) liaised with Early Years on referrals and an extension/update was noted. **In progress**

- It was noted there is already a strong bank of youth voice evidence, so future planning and strategic development will work with what is already available and be prepared to call for more as required. **Ongoing**
- Alice (AT) and Jane (JF) to liaise with Alex (former Young People’s Ambassador) about attending a commissioning/monitoring meeting; Alex has been asked and will attend dependent on his availability. **Completed**
- **System letter to DfE and NHS England:** David (DS) to coordinate with Caroline (CF), Elizabeth (EF) and Jessica (JS) to compile and send a letter; this was completed, circulated to the board, and the response was shared with the papers. **Completed.**
- JS to continue to strengthen engagement with health and care provider representatives. Health provides attended the SEND Strategy workshop on 16 March which was extremely helpful and will continue to be invited to engagement events and key meetings. **Completed.**
- Linda (LS) to confirm that 16 July 26 is the date for the ASEND review meeting; it is agreed and in diaries. **Completed**

3. Updates

National (inc SEND Reform and Every Child Achieving and Thriving)

SS talked through the presentation on SEND Reform and the White Paper “Every Child Achieving and Thriving”



SEND Reform staff
briefing April 26 SS.p*

- Members noted a strong appetite across schools for working collaboratively with families and partners to strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings, including closer working with special schools through outreach/training.
- Reform Plan themes highlighted: early intervention; inclusion; accountability and transparency across the system; improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Funding updates referenced in discussion included: an inclusive mainstream fund (noted as £1.6bn over 3 years nationally) and an Early Years Fund. Members noted that the per-school impact may feel limited once distributed.
- Consultation on the SEND Reforms was noted as closing on 19 May 26, with a constraint of 1,500 characters for responses (members noted email routes may also be available).

2.1 NHS Surrey and Sussex / ICB changes



Surrey & Sussex ICB update*



Appendix 1 - extract from ICBstructure*

- CT provided an update on NHS reform and the evolving Surrey/Sussex ICB structure, including a briefing document and a simplified structure chart focusing on children and young people.
- Members discussed the rationale and potential benefits of this configuration (shared cohorts and cross-overs between safeguarding, children in care and SEND), noting variation across areas nationally.
- A letter from the three Sussex PCFs to Surrey/Sussex ICB has raised concerns about lack of longer-term funding assurance to sustain co-production and engagement. Naomi (NE) acknowledged the issue and stated work is underway to identify a more substantive, longer-term solution and to consolidate different funding streams into a clearer allocation. **ACTION:** NE/NHS colleagues to provide an update on the proposed longer-term PCF funding solution by the next board meeting (or as soon as confirmed).

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution

- CF confirmed that there was limited new information on devolution for this meeting.
- The government will run a “technical consultation” in May on the options for the new authorities in Sussex. A final decision is expected in August.
- Members reflected on likely volatility and the practical challenges of progressing system plans during political transition.
- The board noted that the ESCC Lead Member for Education, Inclusion and SEND will change following imminent local elections, increasing risk for continuity of leadership for the SEND Reform Plan and Strategy. Councillor Bob Standley is standing down and therefore the Plan will be approved by the new Lead Member.

SEND Strategy (2026-2030) and Local SEND Reform Plan - process and governance

DS emphasised that the board’s role is governance and assurance: to test whether the proposed process for developing the SEND Strategy and Local SEND Reform Plan is practical, inclusive and effective (rather than drafting the documents directly). Members were invited to highlight strengths, risks and potential improvements to the process.

JS talked through the presentation.



SEND Reform staff SEND Strategy Draft
briefing April 26* JS.pdPriorities_CONFIDEN*

- A stakeholder workshop was held on 16 March to shape SEND Strategy priorities; following this draft priorities were circulated to workshop attendees, all board members and wider partners.
- An online consultation on the draft priorities is open. Six draft priorities were outlined. All board members to review the draft SEND Strategy priorities and submit feedback via the consultation by **8 May**.
- The final version of the SEND Strategy to return to this board on **22 June** for approval, then to Lead Members on **13 July 26**.

4. Local SEND Reform Plan - requirements, content and timeline



SEND Reform staff
briefingApril26 EF.pd*

- EF presented on the Local SEND Reform Plan which is a practical programme to prepare the system for reforms over the first 3-year period, the reforms are expected to span a decade, with legislation to follow later.
- The near-final draft is to be shared with DfE by **19 May** (noted as one day after the SEND Strategy consultation closes). There will be further engagement/testing of the draft in the following weeks with the final submission deadline to government remains **19 June** (the Board's next meeting is 22 June).

Feedback from the Board:

- The group reflected that the regular meetings are helping shape the work, and thanked the team for a clear and useful briefing. They acknowledged the compressed timetable and the focus on strengthening the plan ahead of the 19 June submission.
- Members emphasised that inclusion in mainstream should remain central, while also recognising the strengths of specialist provision and the role special schools can play in supporting the wider system.
- There was strong encouragement to engage education providers alongside health partners so the plan reflects what will work in practice, with opportunities to share skills and good practice across services.
- The discussion recognised parent and carer concerns and the importance of communications about the reforms that are clear, realistic and confidence-building. There was discussion about making clear our commitment to improving the experiences of family and doing this with care and kindness.

- In considering the “experts at hand” concept, members described the intended benefit as earlier access to specialist support with less bureaucracy and asked for plainer language and a defined year-one scope that is realistic given workforce pressures.
- DS proposed establishing a simple, bespoke communication route for board members to review and comment on drafts between this meeting and the **19 June** submission date, recognising the next scheduled board meeting falls after the deadline.

This was Caroline Tozzi’s final meeting with the board. DS, on behalf of the board, thanked her for her very valuable contributions and support and wished her well. Caroline shared her thanks and good wishes

5. Local Updates and reports:

SEND Strategy Implementation Group

SS presented the SSIG subgroup report to the group.



SSIG Subgroup
report*

Alternative Provision Subgroup report

JS presented the AP Subgroup report to the group.



AP Subgroup Report
April 26*

SEND Commissioning and Monitoring Group subgroup report

JF presented the C&M subgroup report to the group.



C&M Subgroup
report*

This is Councillor Bob Standley’s final meeting. DS and CF, on behalf of the Board, said goodbye to Bob and thanked him for his significant contribution and long-standing service, noting that his knowledge, mentorship and pragmatic advice will be greatly missed.

*please contact localoffer@eastsussex.gov.uk for any files embedded in this document.

Next meeting: 22 June 2026, 2pm Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes.