

SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy & Partnership Board

23 June 2025, 10.00 – 12.00

Committee Room 2, County Hall, Chichester

<p>Chair Brian Pope, Independent Chair</p> <p>WSCC Aaron Swain, Operational Lead, SENAT Andrea Morgan, Principal Educational Psychologist Andrew Parker, Interim Head SEND & Inclusion Claire Hayes, AD Education & Skills Jade Fellows, Practice Development and Improvement Lead Kathryn Kellagher, SEND Development Officer Marielle Norris, Team Manager, Transforming Care Keyworker Service Michael Rhodes-Kubiak, SEND Commissioning Manager Nadia McGarry, SEND Improvement Lead Rebecca Turner, SEND Strategic Commissioning Lead Sarah Clark, Head of Virtual School</p> <p>Education and schools Mark Wignall, Head, Downlands Secondary Simon Brown, Head of SEND, Chichester College Ruth Campbell, Executive Head Chichester, Bognor and Boundstone nursery schools</p> <p>NHS Sussex ICB Caroline Tozzi, Joint Director for Children & Young People, Strategic Lead for SEND Toby Silverman, SEND Improvement Manager</p> <p>Parent Carers Rowan Westwood, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum</p> <p>NHS England SE SEND Advisor Adeline Gibbs</p> <p>Councillor Representative Jacquie Russell, Cabinet member</p> <p>Department for Education Liz Flaherty Sophie Batt, observer from Surrey County Council</p>	<p>Apologies WSCC Charlene Hornsey, Head of Early Help Daniel Ruaux, AD Corporate Parenting Derry Richardson, Head of Commercial & Contracting Grace Hall, Early Years SEND Lead Heidi Farr, Head of Assessment & Family Safeguarding Central Karen Furse, Head of Standards & Effectiveness Kieron Lyons, AD Children’s Social Care and Early Help Loretta Rogers, AD Adult Operations Vicky Richardson, Head of Practice, Improvement & Inspection Vince Clarke, Director of Children’s Services</p> <p>Education and schools Doug Thomas, Head APC Liz Mellor, Head, Horsham Nursery Phillip Potter, Head Oak Grove College Nicky Smith / Gillian Santi Governors Association</p> <p>Parent Carers John Clifton, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum</p> <p>NHS Sussex ICB Rachael Prim, Designated Clinical Officer, for SEND</p>
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1. Welcome

Mark Wignall joined the SEND-AP Board nine years ago when he became Head Teacher. Things have greatly improved and while outside perceptions of our work will be negative, he thinks we do an amazing job in difficult circumstances.

Mark wanted to leave us with two points:

- One of the biggest challenges we have is communication and engagement with families. His school's parent group has now been running for a year and this year's survey shows a marked improvement in numbers of parents not happy with the school: last year it was 52%, this year, down to 28%. This shows the power of co-construction and engagement.
- An ongoing frustration is the amount of money spent on INMSS placements, which could be given to mainstream schools to enable them to provide provision and offer true value for money.

Brian thanked Mark for his years of service and contribution to the board, where he has been a valued colleague who would challenge us and ask some of the difficult questions.

2. Action Log

See Action Log

3. Focus: EHCP Response Plan

Progress towards improving the figures for twenty-week timeliness has slowed down while numbers of requests continue to rise.

- In order to accelerate progress, we will need to address the culture and morale within SENAT. The Education & Skills transformation programme aims to enhance the leadership and structure in this area and is currently out for consultation with staff.
 - Reviewing performance management will be part of the Form and Function element of the transformation programme. CH loathe to ask for additional resource until we can be sure that we're using our current resource to the best of our ability.
 - This will be an unsettling time for staff which will affect performance. How will we mitigate against that?
- We need to change how we work to have an impact on progress. This includes looking at AI tools which would free up staff's ability to engage with families and schools. The WSPCF has shared a number of tools used by other Local Authorities with senior leaders.
- We need to use data more effectively to understand where the blockages are in the process. The data pack supplied to the board is too complicated – eg there are 8 slides on the EPS which could be reduced to one highlights' slide. The data pack is provided by the data team and is drawn from Mosaic, which doesn't tie up with operational data held by SENAT and the EPS. The data pack also needs to include health and social care.
 - Andy Parker's team will work with the data team to review the data pack provided to the board and simplify it so that it is easier to analyse and provides the narrative around the data.

- There are similar challenges in health. The Children's Metric Performance Dashboard is pan-Sussex but we need to triangulate existing data between services, especially around EHCPs. Rachael Prim (DCO) is working with her DCO counterpart in East Sussex and Brighton/Hove to develop guidance for providers and improve the timeliness and quality of advice given to SEND assessment teams across Sussex. The ICB issued provider commissioning intentions letters last year, which included the need for improvement in this area. The next step is to monitor this through contract management arrangements. The ICB are also promoting the Council for Disabled Children SEND training modules across provider services. We will then monitor uptake of training and the impact of this.

Underlying all this is the need to focus on why numbers of EHCNA requests continue to rise. Where appropriate, parent carers need to feel confident that their child's needs will be supported at school without the need for an EHCP.

Discussion points:

- This can be improved by school engagement with parents as at Downlands School.
- LISOs and LINC are focused on early intervention and reducing impact for schools but schools also need additional funding to put provision in place.
 - We could invest to save later and suggest that schools come forward with an evidence-based proposal of up to £20k around how to meet children's needs without the need for an EHCP.
 - LF reports that this can lead to galloping requests from schools for funding.
- To help schools support children and young people with SEND, we are developing the special school outreach programme and reviewing the advice from the SATS teams.
- All of this work is around children who are in the classroom. There also needs to be a focus on children not at school and to include the WSPCF in the discussion.
- There needs to be a senior level commitment to communicate better with families.

Parents have contacted WSPCF around concerns that their child's EHCP will be ceased in September although they are still too young for adult services. Cease To Maintain numbers cluster around June and September and it would be helpful to know what the data is for the next couple of months.

Actions

3.1 For September board, AP to work with EPS, SENAT, Rachael Prim (DCO) and Natalie McNeill (DSCO) and provide slides on actions proposed to improve performance.

3.2 AP's team will work with the data team to review and simplify the data pack provided to the board. The data pack needs to be easy to analyse and to provide the narrative around the data.

3.3 AP to ask for data around Cease to Maintain numbers and discuss with Rowan.

4. Feedback from DfE meeting

See attached presentation.

This was a supportive conversation about progress, albeit the progress is slow.

- The formal feedback letter from the DfE is on its way. The challenge is to make sure we capture the impact of what we're doing. If it's hard to prove the work is making an impact, it loses a lot of its point.
- Concerns remain around communications with families, particularly from SENAT – families are more upset about lack of communication from SENAT than they are around time delays.
- There also needs to be a greater commitment to communicating with families about the ongoing work to improve services beyond signposting to information – from the Local Authority and from health.

5. Discussion on draft SEND & Inclusion strategy

CH wants to launch this no later than December and we need to agree how we will achieve this in the current timeframe – eg, we could perhaps not have the second formal consultation.

- It's still not clear if it is a strategy for SEND Inclusion, or a wider Inclusion strategy, in which case we should be looking at other underachieving cohorts such as white, working class boys. There is ongoing internal debate around this, and without clear direction, it's proving hard to write a clear, focused strategy.
- It's not ideal that the Education & Skills strategy runs out after this one, as they should align. The SEND strategy should also align with the Early Years strategy.
- Writing the detail behind the priorities has felt very hurried – timelines were always tight and there was some slippage in agreeing the priorities. It's not written as one voice, as colleagues writing the detail have all interpreted the remit differently.
- The WSPCF would support delaying the strategy to give us more time to work on this middle part. Pulling the strategy together in a co-production way is just as fruitful as the end product, as it will put everyone on the same page.
- Advice from LF is that if the fundamentals aren't clear, we can't rush for December. The current iteration of the strategy is overly retrospective and references the Ofsted report, and it looks like we are trying to combine the SEF and the strategy in one document. It should be a crisp, clear and forward-looking document.
- The WSPCF survey will help measure the impact of the strategy.

Action:

5.1 CH to share the views of the board with DLT and reach a decision over whether it is a SEND Inclusion strategy or a SEND & Inclusion strategy; also to agree timelines.

6. Focus: Health quarterly update

- The role of ICB in the SEND commissioning landscape will change over the next few months. There's a proposal for the Sussex and Surrey ICBs to merge in order to increase efficiency and reduce running costs as part of a central government transformation programme. RP is allocated to West Sussex for three days a week but is working closely with the full-time DCO for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
- A thematic report and five priority areas for SEND have been developed pan-Sussex following the three Area SEND Inspections. These need to align with the SEND Strategy.
- A Health Directory is underway to support SENAT to access the most appropriate health services. This is waiting final sign off.

- Transition within health is complicated as there are different pathways with different services. Once 18, a young person moves to adults. It would be interesting to know what steps are put in place by providers to support young people with the move to adults. Some young people with complex needs are covered under the All Age Continuing Care framework or the Dynamic Support Register. Where all age processes are in place, there is improved oversight for young people transitioning to adult services.
 - WSPCF would urge that the All Ages pathways don't let children get swallowed up in the needs of adults.
- There is a commitment to ongoing engagement and coproduction with families.
- There is now a full year of tracked data, focused on the 5 original indicators: Best Start, Mental Health, Physical Health, SEND and Vulnerable Groups.
 - It would be helpful if CT could pull out the key indicators for us as a board and model the kind of questions we need to ask of the data. Some trigger points for SEND don't sit in the SEND tab, eg the 2 year check is under Best Start.
 - There is a mechanism in place to escalate concerns from Place Based Children's Boards to the Pan Sussex Children's Board.
 - Many families are unsure what LD (Learning Disability) means and it would be useful to have some comms around this. The Health Facilitation team is working on this.
 - The Neurodevelopmental data is confusing, with three different providers doing some sort of assessment. Some providers are more effective than others and it would be useful to break the data down by providers.
 - There is also an issue around when the waiting lists are counted from. The SPFT counts from when families are agreed to go on the waiting list, but it can take 18 months to get to that stage. Families need real clarity from providers as the long waiting lists push some down the Right to Choose (private) pathway. There are huge implications for families with the new law around PIP and universal credit, which only recognises a life-long diagnosis from the NHS.

Actions

6.1 CT to pull out the key and relevant indicators from the SEND dashboard and model the kind of questions we as a board need to ask of the data.

6.2 CT to work with colleagues to secure improved data regarding health service waiting times, including when the waiting lists are counted from.

6.3 CT to explore the offer of support that commissioned providers have in place to prepare young people for transition to adulthood.

6.4 TS / CT to provide an update on Health Facilitation LD comms developments.