



## Lancashire SEND Partnership Improvement Board

13 April 2026 – 13.00-15.00

Hybrid Meeting

### Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present
<p><b>Kathryn Boulton</b>, Independent Chair.</p> <p><b>Cllr. Matthew Salter</b>, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Dave Carr</b>, Director of Policy, Commissioning and Children's Health, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Peter Chapman</b>, Interim Associate Director for SEND &amp; Complexities, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.</p> <p><b>Paula Green</b>, Head of SEND and Inclusion, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Michelle Pye</b>, Co-Chair, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.</p> <p><b>Paula Hignett</b>, Steering Group Member, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.</p> <p><b>Clare Smith</b>, Strategic Lead for Participation and Co-production, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Oliver Moores</b>, SEND Young Advisor.</p> <p><b>Philippa Perks</b>, Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector representative.</p> <p><b>Jenny Birkin</b>, Primary Heads in Lancashire representative.</p> <p><b>Christopher Beard</b>, Lancashire Secondary Schools Headteacher Representative.</p> <p><b>Marie Haworth</b>, Further Education representative.</p> <p><b>Diane Booth</b>, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals Trust representative.</p> <p><b>Louise Swarbrick</b>, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust representative.</p>
External Attendees
<p><b>Deanne Brownley</b>, Department for Education (DfE) SEND Case Lead.</p> <p><b>Cath Hitchen</b>, Department for Education (DfE) Appointed SEND Advisor.</p> <p><b>Lindsey Marlton</b>, National Health Service England (NHSE) Advisor.</p>
In attendance
<p><b>Jennifer Ashton</b>, Manager of the SEND Partnership, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Helen Keaveny</b>, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust representative.</p> <p><b>Amber Burton</b>, SEND Consultant, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Grace Westwood</b>, SEND Senior Manager, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Natalie Stornelli</b>, Service Manager, LD&amp;A, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>John Betts</b>, Director of Finance and Commerce, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Leanne Ratcliffe</b>, Senior QA Officer, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.</p> <p><b>Gemma Hartley</b>, Delivery Manager, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.</p>
Apologies
<p><b>Jacqui Old</b>, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Lancashire County Council.</p> <p><b>Jane Scattergood</b>, Interim Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.</p> <p><b>Paul Turner</b>, Director of Education and Inclusion, Lancashire County Council.</p>

**Louise Anderson**, Director of Children's Services, Lancashire County Council.  
**Sakthi Karunanithi**, Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, Lancashire County Council.  
**Mairead Gill-Mullarkey**, Director of Adults Community Social Care, Lancashire County Council.  
**Miranda Hyman**, Co-Chair, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.  
**Rachel Lomax**, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust representative.  
**Paul Jebb**, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust representative.  
**Victoria Hampson**, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust representative.  
**Natalie Sinclair**, Early Years Federation group representative.  
**Helen Dunbavin**, Special School Headteacher Representative.  
**Fran Clayton**, Lancashire Special Schools Headteacher Representative.  
**Stephen Morton**, Consultant in Public Health, Lancashire County Council.

Agenda Item	Minutes:
<p><b>1.</b> Welcome, Introductions and Apologies</p>	<p>Kathryn Boulton, Independent Chair opened the meeting and noted that the Board was trialling a revised agenda and assurance-focused format following the recent governance review. It was reiterated that the Improvement Board operates as a challenge, assurance and accountability forum, with operational detail managed through workstreams and the SEND Operations Board. The expectation was therefore that issues would be escalated by exception, supported by clear mitigations and actions.</p> <p>Apologies were formally noted from those unable to attend.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> Minutes from the previous meeting</p>	<p>The minutes from the meeting held on 2 March 2026 were reviewed for accuracy. No amendments were requested and no additional matters arising were raised that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.</p> <p>Board members confirmed the minutes were a true and accurate record.</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Action Log</p>	<p>The Action Log was presented and reviewed. All actions were reported as either completed or on track, with no actions requiring escalation.</p> <p>The Board was assured that actions from the previous meeting were progressing as expected.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Overview, Escalations and SEND Reform Plan</p>	<p>An overview of the Priority Action Plan (PAP) was provided, noting that approximately 80% of milestones were completed or on track. Nineteen milestones remained off-track or delayed and were being managed through the SEND Operations Board.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Escalations from the SEND Operations Board focused on systemic communication issues highlighted through LPCF feedback and case studies related to EHCP processes. These included difficulties for families contacting caseworkers, inconsistent communication with schools and quality issues linked to agency EHCP writers.</p>

**Response:** Mitigations were outlined, notably the new SEND service structure implemented from 1 April, significantly reducing caseloads and embedding a relational, locality-based model.

The Board confirmed it was satisfied that the right issues have been escalated and mitigations are proportionate and credible, however, the Board emphasised that successful embedding of the new SEND service structure is critical and will require continued Board oversight.

Amber Burton, SEND Consultant shared the SEND Reform Plan update and highlighted significant engagement activity across schools, colleges, parent carers and partners. Further engagement events were required to capture feedback from children and young people, health providers, VCFSE and Family Hubs / Families First network providers. A SEND Development Day on 13 May would be used to review a near-final draft and develop a theory of change.

**Challenge:** Concerns were raised that Partnership consultation on 13 May would not provide sufficient time to finalise and submit the plan through governance processes.

**Response:** Assurance was provided as the draft is completed based on information collated so far, and therefore additional information will be added and final draft completed at the Development Day.

**Action 1:** Amber Burton to liaise with Peter Chapman to deliver health engagement events and attend SEND Champions Network, Clare Smith for CYP voice, Dave Carr for VCFSE views and Kathy Ashworth for Early Help providers.

Although national guidance and funding allocations were still awaited, work on the draft plan was progressing using best estimates.

**Challenge:** Board members asked what financial input had been sought.

**Response:** Amber assured the board she had liaised with John Betts, and John confirmed that Barry Scarr, DfE Financial Adviser was also involved. Financial assumptions would continue to evolve alongside national guidance.

The Board accepted this approach as pragmatic, given the uncertainty, and understood that the financial position would need to be refined once national funding details are confirmed.

**5. Priority 1 – Leadership, Performance and Governance**

The report included reporting by exception for off track milestones and assurance for progress being made.

Grace Westwood provided an update regarding the flow of data into the data dashboard. Data dashboard development was progressing, with partial phase 3 ICB data going live in April. However, the dashboard is being used alongside system data on EHCP performance, workforce capacity and placement sufficiency, which continue to rely on manual extraction.

Board discussion then focused on what the data was showing. EHCP timeliness had improved in-month, though timeliness pressures remained significant. Managed service contracts remained a challenge, with quality concerns leading to contract termination and work returning in-house. The average wait time had reduced by 10 weeks although several children were awaiting specialist school placements with block purchasing of independent places agreed to mitigate this. System pressures resulted in increased mediations and tribunals, as closures were not keeping pace with demand. Staff training was being provided to reduce escalations and a new tender for mediations is being procured to improve family experience. It was noted that Annual Reviews had increased and remains a key area of focus.

**Challenge:** Board members challenged the scale of longest waits requesting assurance on arrangements and requested in month timeliness trend reporting.

**Response:** Board members were assured that these cases were known, monitored and primarily linked to children moving in and out of area.

**Challenge:** The Board acknowledged progress but emphasised that timeliness improvements must be sustained and noted that health advice delays represented a system risk.

**Response:** Health advice delays were accepted as a critical risk, driven by ICB workforce pressures. Mitigations for increased temporary support were in place, and the risk had been escalated to the highest level.

**Action 2:** Peter Chapman and Paula Green to develop partnership-wide mitigation options for health advice delays, involving providers, SEND team and the ICB DCO.

**Challenge:** Board members raised concerns about the low number of plans where the decision was made not to issue and requested further analysis of this.

	<p><b>Action 3:</b> Paula Green to review not to issue rates and decision-making thresholds and report findings. EHCP Improvement group to pick this up.</p>
<p><b>6. Priority 2 – EHCPs: Recovery Plan Update and Learning from Complaints</b></p>	<p>Off track milestones included EHCP portal dashboard for Annual Reviews, process for sharing EHCPs, pathways for obtaining advice, Section 61 protocol and dashboard and decision making for children too unwell at attend school.</p> <p>Paula Green provided an update regarding mitigations taken to address these milestones.</p> <p>The recovery plan identified EHCP demand continues to rise (16,018 plans) although EHCP timeliness improved significantly in-month (34.5%) but remains below national averages. The delay of overdue assessments has reduced substantially over the last four months although Annual Reviews remain an area of pressure due to volume growth.</p> <p>Learning from complaints confirmed that poor communication, rather than disagreement with decisions, remains the dominant theme. Structural changes and workforce expansion are expected to deliver improvement over the next 3–6 months.</p> <p><b>Action 4:</b> SEND Operations Board to review mediation and tribunal growth and identify further mitigation options. EHCP Improvement Group will pick this up.</p>
<p><b>7. Priority 3 – ND Pathway: Thematic Review of Wait Times and Recovery Plans</b></p>	<p>Peter Chapman provided updates on the off track milestones. The SEN Support offers have been mapped across the county for each district and published on the webpage, although digitalisation of this remains outstanding. The profile tool is being trialled and single dataset agreed with providers. Accreditation of right to choose providers is ongoing and due to complete at the end of the quarter with shared care arrangements agreed. Funding for the Support Hubs phase 1 has been agreed for May 2026 for each locality with improved visibility on the local offer.</p> <p>Leanne Ratcliffe and Gemma Hartley presented a thematic review of ND pathway wait times and mitigation activity, including the 90-Day Challenge and the Spring North “waiting well” offer.</p> <p>Key messages included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 600 CYP waiting &gt;52 weeks have now been contacted.</li> <li>• High satisfaction scores from families.</li> <li>• Concerns raised by families whilst waiting for an ND assessment include difficulties with education, food, emotional regulation, sensory, sleep, social interaction and mental health.</li> <li>• Vulnerable Services oversight embedded across providers with regular meetings.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ND service specifications and community paediatrics frameworks are developed and moving through approval processes.</li> <li>• Training offers based on PiNS principles are being developed with LA's.</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Board challenge focused on children still waiting for clinical assessment despite interim support and the high proportion of educational difficulties among those awaiting ND pathways raised questions about pathway appropriateness.</p> <p><b>Response:</b> The Board recognised that while waiting times remain unacceptable, there is now a stronger grip on risk, with better family experience during waits and clearer commissioning intent for longer-term solutions.</p> <p><b>Action 5:</b> Performance &amp; Analysis Group led by Paula Green and ICB Needs Led workstream to review ND waiting list profiles, including appropriateness of referrals and education-led needs.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Parent carer forum asked whether food difficulties were more prevalent in areas where there wasn't an ARFID (Avoidant / Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) Pathway.</p> <p><b>Response:</b> It was acknowledged that not all areas have a recognised ARFID Pathway, although there is a working group in place to address this gap with procurement planned for later in the year.</p> <p><b>Action 6:</b> Peter Chapman and ICB Commissioning to provide assurance on the timeline for implementing new ND and community paediatrics specifications.</p>
<p><b>8. Area for Improvement 1 – Communication (including LPCF / POWAR)</b></p>	<p>Jenny Ashton shared an overview of off track milestones. The communication protocol has been drafted but the operational communication charter needs adding, and updates regarding processes for panels. Once finalised the protocol will be published on the Local Offer. Currently there are delays adding additional information to the Local Offer whilst it migrates to a new platform.</p> <p>Parent Carer Forum shared they had escalated concerns with communication processes at the last SEND Operations Board, which had been escalated earlier in the board meeting.</p> <p>POWAR shared an update regarding the refresh of the Participation Strategy to include the Four Cornerstones Approach to Co-production with workshops planned for this month. Leon had raised the importance of language and what it means to young people, for example the difference between strategic</p>

	<p>and operational. Plans for the Take Over Day on 6 July 10-2pm are taking shape with schools invited to participate and children not in school.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The Board acknowledged communication as a cross-cutting systemic weakness influencing complaints, trust and escalation.</p> <p><b>Response:</b> The Board accepted that work is underway but stressed that impact must now be demonstrable, particularly to families and schools. It was recognised that communication will remain a standing focus.</p> <p><b>Action 7:</b> There was a call to action for education representatives at the meeting to participate with their pupils in the Take Over Day. Jenny Ashton to circulate a detailed briefing for Board members regarding POWAR Takeover Day participation.</p>
9. Area for Improvement 2 – Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)	<p>Amber Burton reported that progress had been made against off track milestones, including transition guidance, and engagement through a PfA lens regarding SEND Reform planning. The Board was assured that PfA is being strengthened strategically, but practical guidance for families and professionals requires further visibility.</p> <p><b>Action 8:</b> PfA Strategic Group to circulate the updated PfA strategic plan to SEND Operations Board for review and sign off.</p>
11. Risk register and governance update	<p>The risk register had been received by board members prior to the board meeting. Board members reviewed the register and confirmed that previously identified risks remain valid.</p> <p><b>Action 9:</b> Emerging system risks linked to Local Government Reorganisation were noted and will be added to the Risk Register by SEND Operations Board once further clarity is available.</p>
12. Forward Plan	<p>The Board reviewed the forward plan, confirming standing items for the next meeting including quarterly EHCP QAF Audit findings, update and assurance on Children Not in School.</p>
13. AOB	None
16. Close	<p>The Chair thanked members for constructive challenge and confirmed the next meeting date for 7 May 2026, 13:00–16:00 TBC, in person.</p>