Lancashire SEND Partnership Improvement Board

1 June 2026 – 13.00-15.00
Hybrid Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present
Kathryn Boulton, Independent Chair.
Cllr. Matthew Salter, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Lancashire County Council.
Peter Chapman, Interim Associate Director for SEND & Complexities, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.
Paul Turner, Director of Education and Inclusion, Lancashire County Council.
Paula Green, Head of SEND and Inclusion, Lancashire County Council.
Miranda Hyman, Co-Chair, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.
Clare Smith, Strategic Lead for Participation and Co-production, Lancashire County Council.
Oliver Moores, SEND Young Advisor.
Jenny Birkin, Primary Heads in Lancashire representative.
Marie Haworth, Further Education representative.
Diane Booth, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals Trust representative.
Paul Jebb, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust representative.
External Attendees
Deanne Brownley, Department for Education (DfE) SEND Case Lead.
Cath Hitchen, Department for Education (DfE) Appointed SEND Advisor.
In attendance
Jennifer Ashton, Manager of the SEND Partnership, Lancashire County Council.
Grace Westwood, SEND Senior Manager, Lancashire County Council.
Hilary Sharples, Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector representative.
Stephen Morton, Consultant in Public Health, Lancashire County Council.
Paula Hignett, Steering Group Member, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.
Apologies
Lindsey Marlton, National Health Service England (NHSE) Advisor.
Jacqui Old, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Lancashire County Council.
Jane Scattergood, Interim Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.
Dave Carr, Director of Policy, Commissioning and Children's Health, Lancashire County Council.
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.
Michelle Pye, Co-Chair, Lancashire Parent Carer Forum.
Rachel Lomax, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust representative.
Victoria Hampson, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust representative.

Louise Swarbrick, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust representative. **Natalie Sinclair,** Early Years Federation group representative. **Philippa Perks,** Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector representative. **Christopher Beard,** Lancashire Secondary Schools Headteacher Representative. **Helen Dunbavin,** Special School Headteacher Representative. **Fran Clayton,** Lancashire Special Schools Headteacher Representative.	
Agenda Item	**Minutes:**
1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies	Kathryn Boulton, Independent Chair welcomed attendees including those joining online. Apologies were formally noted from those unable to attend.
2. Minutes from the previous meeting	The minutes from the meeting held on 7 May 2026 were reviewed for accuracy. The Board confirmed that these been accurately recorded. The Chair confirmed there were no matters arising that were not already included within the current agenda.
3. Action Log	The Board reviewed progress against actions. The Board was assured that actions from previous meetings are being progressed satisfactorily and remain on track.
4. Overview, Escalations and SEND Reform Plan	Paula Green, Head of SEND and Inclusion shared an overview of the Priority Action Plan (PAP), highlighting continued progress, with 82 of 95 milestones (86%) now completed or on track, demonstrating improvement from the previous reporting cycle. However, 10 milestones remain off track and 3 are delayed. **Challenge:** Escalations focused on System C and data challenges (integration, reporting, and access), health advice timeliness and recovery plan, pressures in mediation and tribunal capacity and Local Offer delays due to platform migration with timescales for effective mitigations emphasised to ensure progress is made. **Response:** Assurance was provided to the board that significant progress against the PAP had been made. Robust plans are in place to strengthen data quality and governance, which include: • Integration of SEND data with dedicated Business Intelligence expertise in place, • Planned System C health check to improve accuracy and reporting, which had been approved and would be completed imminently through short pieces of work to review and improve effectiveness, • a data audit by DfE was planned and service-level agreements for data requests developed based on SEN2 returns. • A pilot of AI in EHCP processes was also reported, with early indications suggesting it may reduce errors, though concerns were acknowledged regarding perception, quality assurance, and communication with families.

	• Peter Chapman shared that the ICB would have further voluntary redundancies, but new admin staff were being trained to process the accumulated health advices by September 2026. • Jenny Ashton reported the delays with publications on the Local Offer had been escalated, and the migration to the new platform was now scheduled for July 2026. **Action 1:** Paula Green to develop a clear communication narrative on AI use with EHCP Improvement Group and share with all partners at the SEND Operations Board for wider dissemination to families. Paula Green shared the SEND Reform Plan update noting that a draft had been submitted to the Department for Education on 19 May for feedback, which had also been shared with Board members and Cabinet sign-off scheduled for early June. **Challenge:** Discussion highlighted the compressed timescales for development and submission, alongside the extensive co-production and engagement activity undertaken with partners, families and stakeholders. Board members sought clarification regarding governance expectations for formal Board sign-off prior to final submission, with acknowledgement that requirements remained unclear and needed to be confirmed. **Response:** The plan was confirmed to be aligned with the existing SEND Strategy and Priority Action Plan, ensuring continuity of strategic direction and priorities across the partnership. The scope of the plan was being shared with cabinet rather than the actual plan which needed amending before final submission to DfE on 19 June. The plan would also need to progress through ICB governance before going through DfE governance processes and official sign off. **Action 2:** Amendments to be made to the SEND Reform Plan in response to DfE feedback and final draft submitted by 19 June 2026.
5. Priority 1 – Leadership, Performance and Governance	The Board noted that all milestones have now been completed. Members reflected that there has been progress in strengthening the quality and reliability of data, with improved confidence enabling more meaningful performance analysis and supporting informed decision-making across the partnership. In addition, there has been advancement in integrating lived experience into performance reporting, ensuring that quantitative data is increasingly triangulated with feedback from children, young people and families. Progress on joint commissioning workstreams was also acknowledged, with initial infrastructure and tracking mechanisms now in place, enabling greater visibility of cross-agency activity and priorities.

	Challenge: Discussion focused on the extent to which these developments are embedding into routine governance and driving system-wide improvement. **Response:** Governance arrangements are functioning more effectively, with clear lines of accountability and escalation from sub-groups through to the Operations Board and into the Improvement Board. The Board acknowledged that these arrangements are beginning to provide stronger oversight of delivery, with increased ability to identify risks, respond to pressures, and maintain grip on improvement priorities. **Challenge:** Although it was recognised that while the structural elements of governance are now largely established, the continued focus must be on ensuring that this translates into sustained impact and consistency of delivery across the system. **Response:** Members were assured that the partnership now has greater visibility of where issues exist, alongside clearer mechanisms to drive improvement and hold services to account. However, it was acknowledged that further work is required to ensure that joint commissioning arrangements are fully developed and consistently embedded across the system, particularly in relation to addressing sufficiency challenges and aligning resources to need.
6. Priority 2 – Data, Complaints, Mediations and Tribunals update	Grace Westwood provided an overview of the detailed report shared with board members on complaints, mediations and tribunals, noting a significant and sustained increase in activity across all routes. Tribunal and mediation volumes have more than doubled, reflecting growing system pressures and a continued reliance on formal dispute resolution processes. It was highlighted that the majority of appeals relate to placement and recognised as a direct reflection of ongoing sufficiency challenges across the system. Families often lack clarity and understanding about decision-making processes, leading to escalation. In addition, workforce pressures remain significant, with high workloads within tribunal teams impacting capacity and timeliness. Operational improvements have been implemented including recruitment to tribunal teams to reduce workloads, alongside a strengthened focus on early resolution through mediation and enhanced staff training. Improvements in communication with families were also highlighted, particularly around clearer explanations of decisions. The development of the EHCP Improvement Plan was confirmed, with a specific focus on tribunal and mediation processes to drive more consistent practice and reduce escalation.

	Challenge: The discussion made clear that the impact on families in relation to tribunals remains largely negative at this stage, reflecting a lack of confidence from families in the system's ability to make the right decisions, with many feeling that escalation is necessary to achieve appropriate outcomes. The Board recognised that for many families, the tribunal process itself can be stressful and indicative of a system that is not yet working effectively for them. **Response:** While there is some evidence of improved experiences, particularly where communication is clear and staff are responsive, it was acknowledged that these remain inconsistent. Assurance was provided that by September 2026 there should be evidence of a change in narrative due to the improvements put in place since April 2026. The EHCP Improvement Group are focussing on lessons learnt from tribunals and mediations, particularly how to improve processes and practice, including quality assurance, which will all be captured in the EHCP Improvement Plan. **Action 3:** EHCP Improvement Group, led by Paula Green to invite Cath Hitchen to the meeting and report impact from deep dive on tribunals and mediations to the Improvement Board in the Autumn Term. Grace shared data highlights from April 2026 which showed that high demand continues (318 requests; 16,345 EHCPs total), timeliness remains low, although in-month timeliness has improved, this is partially due to health advice timeliness remaining a concern. Delays in 20 week timeliness have reduced but some plans remain to be finalised. It is anticipated that many of these will be finalised this week. Longest waits are often due to tribunals and families moving in and out of area. **Challenge:** Board noted that there are a number of children currently awaiting specialist provision, and asked what provision was in place for them while waiting. **Response:** Assurance was provided regarding children waiting for specialist placements, with a mix of arrangements in place. Assurance was provided that children who are waiting are being actively supported and monitored, with targeted interventions where necessary. It was acknowledged that the overall level of demand continues to exceed available capacity. **Challenge:** The Chair emphasised that the SEND staffing re-structure was a key element in improving timeliness of plans being finalised and experiences of families. Board members discussed the challenges associated with maintaining continuity through agency staffing, particularly where staff may move on quickly.

	Response: It was confirmed that all senior SEND manager and team manager posts have now been recruited to, with staggered start dates expected between June and August due to notice periods. Recruitment has also taken place for key support functions, including correspondence and policy teams, with further recruitment underway for SEND officers and senior SEND officers following a recent closing date. There is a clear trajectory towards a more stable and permanent workforce by September 2026. The Board was assured that the SEND service is moving towards a more stable operating model, which will be closely monitored to ensure sustained improvement in outcomes for children and young people.
7. Priority 3 – ND Pathway update	Peter Chapman provided a detailed update on the Neurodevelopmental (ND) Pathway. The digital front door and single point of access milestone has been reprofiled, reflecting the transition from a planned full rollout to a phased pilot approach. It was confirmed that the pilot is underway, with further rollout planned over a longer timescale to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose. The ND support offer, including the implementation of support hubs and the development of a local profiling tool to better identify needs at the point of referral continue to progress and intend to move the system towards a more needs-led model, reducing reliance on diagnosis as the criteria for accessing support. A significant update was provided on the autism pathway, with a new interim arrangement agreed for families currently on the LSCFT pathway, including those in Lancaster, introducing a single front door for referrals via Blackpool Teaching Hospital. Additional investment has also been secured to address delays, with a plan in place to prioritise those who have been waiting the longest. It was noted that this should lead to reduced waiting times and improved equity of access, although final trajectory data is still being developed. The ADHD pathway remains under review, with further work required to determine how best to address existing delays and service pressures. The Board was advised that similar approaches to those applied in the autism pathway are being considered, including potential redistribution of workload and additional capacity to support recovery. In the interim, the pathway remains open and continues to accept referrals, ensuring that access to support is maintained. **Challenge:** Members discussed the importance of communication in supporting families through these changes, acknowledging that changes to pathways and referral routes can create confusion if not clearly explained. The Board emphasised the need to ensure that both professionals and

	families understand what the changes mean in practice and where to access support. **Response:** It was confirmed that communications are being issued to schools, GPs and families that day, with additional work underway to produce more accessible, family-friendly information in partnership with the Parent Carer Forum. Members recognised that the programme is moving in the right direction, with strengthened infrastructure and investment beginning to address long-standing issues. However, it was agreed that continued focus is required to ensure consistent implementation across Lancashire and to translate these developments into improved, timely experiences for children and families. **Action 4:** Peter Chapman to provide an update at the next board meeting regarding ND assessment waiting time trajectories, profiling tool development and support hub progress.
8. Area for Improvement 1 – Communication (including LPCF / POWAR)	Jenny Ashton provided an update regarding strategic communications. The Board discussed ongoing challenges with the Local Offer, noting delays in the migration to a new platform which have affected the timely publication of key documents. While assurance was provided that progress is being made and improvements are planned, including more accessible, plain English content, it was acknowledged that these delays are limiting the effectiveness of the Local Offer as a key communication tool for families. Communication remains a key systemic challenge across the SEND partnership. **Challenge:** Members acknowledged that there are now multiple communication channels in place, including the SEND newsletter, which was identified as one of the more accessible and effective methods of reaching families. However, it was emphasised that despite these improvements, many families still report that they do not know what support is available to them or how to access it, indicating that messages are not consistently reaching or connecting with the intended audience. **Response:** There was agreement that future focus should be on simplifying messaging, ensuring consistency across services, and using trusted routes such as schools to share information more effectively. POWAR provided an update regarding their ongoing engagement with children and young people and their preparations for the upcoming Takeover Day on 6 July 10-2pm. They confirmed that planning is progressing well, with schools invited to submit entries on what inclusion means to them. Initial submissions had been received and it was noted that the final structure of the event would depend on the number and type of entries received. There has been active engagement in schools, with POWAR members working

	directly with children and young people to gather their views and experiences of living with SEND, which was described as a positive and valuable piece of work. They also highlighted progress on participation and co-production activity, including the development of the new children and young people's SEND survey. This survey has been co-produced through school engagement work and is designed to be simpler and more accessible, with plans to launch it shortly. POWAR noted that previous survey data will be retained, ensuring continuity of insight over time. In addition, it was shared that POWAR members are increasingly involved in wider partnership activity, including participation in recruitment processes, which was seen as a positive example of meaningful involvement. The Board welcomed this as a strong demonstration of co-production in practice. Parent Carer Forum provided a brief update, noting they are continuing to engage with families and gather feedback on their experiences. One positive example was shared from a recent drop-in session, where a family reported that a needs assessment had been completed within one week rather than the usual six-week timeframe, with a draft plan already prepared. **Challenge:** The Board acknowledged that while communication is improving and there are clear areas of progress, it remains an area requiring sustained focus to ensure that families receive clear, accessible and timely information that supports confidence in the system. Members emphasised the importance of capturing and evidencing such improvements more systematically, such as in case studies as they provide valuable insight into what is working well and where practice can be strengthened across the system. **Response:** A case study template had already been shared across the partnership but had only one response. Capacity pressures has previously made it difficult for staff to complete them. **Action 5:** Jenny Ashton will share the case study template with all partners and request all partners complete at least one a month if possible.
9. Area for Improvement 2 – Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)	Paula Green provided an update on PfA and noted that, while progress is being made, delivery is currently slower than expected and requires renewed focus. Key areas of work, including the development of PfA guidance and transition pathways, are ongoing but have been delayed due to dependencies on wider transformation programmes, including adult services and health system changes.

	Challenge: Discussion highlighted that PfA is not yet consistently understood or embedded across the system. In particular, it was noted that there remains a misconception that PfA is primarily a post-16 activity, rather than something that should begin in early years and be embedded throughout a child's journey. **Response:** This lack of shared understanding was acknowledged as a key barrier to progress, with suggestions for renaming it to preparation for independence or life, alongside the need for clearer pathways and more consistent messaging for both practitioners and families. **Action 6:** The PfA Group to liaise with Anna Burkinshaw, Local Offer Development Officer regarding the terminology and shared understanding of PfA. **Challenge:** The Board acknowledged that while PfA work is moving in the right direction, it requires stronger pace, clearer ownership and more effective communication to ensure it is fully embedded across the partnership. Members also discussed the importance of strengthening delivery mechanisms and governance for PfA, including support from NDTi. **Response:** It was acknowledged that there has been some instability in leadership and oversight of the strategic group, and that greater clarity on accountability and ownership is required to maintain momentum. NDTi support the SEND Employment Forum and there are plans to introduce a more structured 12-month delivery plan for PfA, alongside activity within the SEND Academy to embed PfA into workforce training and improve the quality of EHCP outcomes. There was agreement that maintaining focus on this area is critical, given its importance in improving long-term outcomes for children and young people. **Action 7:** Paula Green to share the 12 month PfA delivery plan, once it has been approved by the PfA Strategic group and SEND Operations Board.
11. Risk register and governance update	The risk register had been received by board members prior to the board meeting. Board members reviewed the register and agreed it remained appropriate, noting the risks sufficiency pressures, tribunal growth, data and system issues were already being monitored on it.
12. Forward Plan	The Board reviewed the forward plan, confirming standing items for the next meeting and approving the focused forward plan aligned to priority areas. Additional items to be added to the forward plan include: • Ofsted framework impact analysis, as inclusive mainstream schools with high levels of deprivation were being marked down. • Sufficiency and capital programme updates including:

	- feedback from school adaptation funding applications, - how schools engaged CYP in these, - list of approved schemes and impact of environmental changes. • SEND practice deep dive, in preparation for October's deep dive. • Feedback from Education Board and how schools and settings are meeting the needs of their community by being more inclusive.
13. AOB	It was noted that this was Grace's last meeting as she was leaving LCC. The Chair formally recognised the contribution of the outgoing officer, noting the impact of strong analytical leadership and performance management. The meeting closed with thanks to all attendees and acknowledgement of continued system-wide effort.
16. Close	The Chair confirmed the next meeting date for 6 July 2026, 14:00–16:00 TBC, in person following the POWAR Takeover Day.