FINAL MINUTES

Title of Meeting:	SEND Improvement Board
Date:	Thursday 16th July 2026
Place:	Hybrid Teams Meeting & Endeavour House, LIME Floor 4, Room 2
Times:	10:00AM – 13:00PM
Chair:	Kathryn Boulton – Independent Chair
Attendees	Kathryn Boulton (KB) Independent Chair Andrew Cook (AC) Joint Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council Dr Ed Garratt OBE (EG) Chief Executive, Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board Sarah-Jane Smedmor (SJM) Executive Director Children Services, Suffolk County Council Lisa Nobes (LN), Director of Nursing, Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board Cllr Tony Gould (TG) Cabinet Member for SEND & Education Cllr Simon Alders (SA) Cabinet Member for Children & Young People Anna Mears (AM) Director of SEND at EAST (Special School Representative) Anthony Deery (ADe) Chief Nurse, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Belinda Danso-Langley (BDL) Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Catherine Morgan (CM) Chief Nurse, East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust Charlotte Crane (CC) Senior Safeguarding Manager for SEND, NHS England Chloe Worboyes (CW) Department for Education SEND Advisor Chris Lee (CL) Assistant Director for SEND and Inclusion, Suffolk Council County Daniel Spooner (DS) Chief Nurse, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Emily Williams (EW) Deputy Director of East of England, Department for Education Gareth Everton (GE) Director of Adult Social Care, Suffolk County Council Harriet Wakeling (HW) Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Quality, Suffolk County Council Hayley Cullimore (HC) Head of Inclusion, ASSET Education (Primary Education Representative) Hayley Griffin (HG) Service Director for Social Care, Suffolk County Council Jacky Copping (JC) Director of Nursing, James Paget University Hospital Trust Jamie Mills (JM) Senior Commissioner, Norfolk and Suffolk ICB

	James Allen-Perry (JAP) SEND Improvement and Intervention Regional Lead Vulnerable Children Unit, East of England Jonathan Fairclough (JF) Head of Delivery for Suffolk & Cambridgeshire, Department for Education Jo Hedley (JH) SEND Consultant, Suffolk County Council Julia Grainger (JG) Assistant Director Education and Learning, Suffolk County Council Kat Willson (KW) SEND Programme Manager, Suffolk County Council Kate Dodd (KD) Communications Programme Manager, Suffolk County Council Kathryn Searle (KS) Deputy Director: Women's Health, Babies, Children and Young People, Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board Katy Farrow (KF) SENDCo, King Edwards VI School (Secondary School Representative) Louise Warren (LW) NHS England Advisor Nick King (NK) DfE Advisor Nicki Howlett (NH) Service Lead, Suffolk SENDIASS Nicola Roper (NR) Assistant Director Adult Services, Suffolk County Council Rachel Cogman (RC) Head of CYP Quality Assurance, Suffolk County Council Samantha Bickerton (SB) Team Leader for Suffolk, East of England, Regions Group Simon Alders (SA) Sharon Muldoon (SM) Director of Education, Suffolk County Council Sonya Harban (SH) Strategic Finance Partner, Suffolk County Council Tina Stagg (TS) Deputy Head teacher and SENCO, Horizon School (Alternative Education Representative) Trudi Rose-Porter (TRP) Director- Transition, Foundation and Inclusive Learning (Post 16 Representative) Viv Proctor (VP) Assistant Head SEND and Inclusion, Springfield Infant School & Nursery (Early Years Representative)

Item No.	**Item Description**
1.	**Apologies:** Nicola Roper (NR) Assistant Director Adult Services, Suffolk County Council Harriet Wakeling (HW) Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Quality, Suffolk County Council Gareth Everton (GE) Director of Adult Social Care, Suffolk County Council Nicki Howlett (NH) Service Lead, Suffolk SENDIASS Andrew Cook (AC) Joint Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council Emily Williams (EW) Deputy Director of East of England, Department for Education Trudi Rose-Porter (TRP) Director- Transition, Foundation and Inclusive Learning (Post 16 Representative)

	Daniel Spooner (DS) Chief Nurse, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Anthony Deery (ADe) Chief Nurse, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Dr Ed Garratt OBE (EG) Chief Executive, Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board Lisa Nobes (LN), Director of Nursing, Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board Hayley Cullimore (HC) Head of Inclusion, ASSET Education (Primary Education Representative) Louise Warren (LW) NHS England Advisor Tina Stagg (TS) Deputy Head teacher and SENCO, Horizon School (Alternative Education Representative) Jo Hedley (JH) SEND Consultant, Suffolk County Council **Welcome** The Chair welcomed members attending both in person and remotely and did an introduction of all members to welcome new members. It was mentioned that where possible, that board attendees are to attend in person.
2.	**Review Minutes and Action Log** Minutes from previous meeting reviewed and approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was reviewed. All actions were reported as on track, with no items requiring escalation. No additional matters arising were raised.
3.	**Update on Parent Carer Representation** Since the previous Board meeting, it has been announced that the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum (SPCF) has ceased operations. The Board expressed its sincere thanks to Sue Willgoss and SPCF for its valued contribution to co-production and for the commitment, expertise and perseverance it has demonstrated in supporting the coproduction and delivery of the Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP). The Board was reassured that discussions are underway with Contact, the national organisation that supports Parent Carer Forums across England, to establish sustainable long-term parent carer representation as a strategic partner. In parallel, interim arrangements are being explored through VCFSE partners to ensure parent carer voices continue to inform and shape the programme during this transition period.
4.	**Travel Training Case Study** The travel training case study was presented as per the corresponding slides.

	SIB 208: Kate Dodd to connect with Julie Mitchell to develop opportunity for external communications and media coverage that showcase the positive impact of the travel training programme on children and young people. **Owners:** Kate Dodd and Julie Mitchell The Board raised the following questions/ challenges: • Has modelling been undertaken to understand the potential impact of proposed increases in rural bus services, specifically how many more children and young people may be able to travel independently and the extent to which this could reduce reliance on specialist taxi transport? • How are positive stories and outcomes from services such as travel training being communicated to families and communities? The Board sought assurance that communication approaches extend beyond traditional media to include parent networks, VCFSE organisations and peer-to-peer sharing. The Board noted the importance of lived experience and word-of-mouth recommendations in building confidence, awareness and trust in available support. • The Board challenged whether travel training should be more explicitly embedded within Suffolk's home-to-school transport approach and queried whether lessons could be learned from other local authorities, such as Essex, where travel training assessments form a more established part of transport policy. The following responses were shared: • It is difficult to quantify the potential impact of increased rural bus services on independent travel, as travel training suitability depends on individual circumstances. A key consideration is whether young people can safely access bus stops from home, particularly in rural areas. While improved transport connectivity could create more opportunities for independent travel and reduce reliance on specialist transport over time, any benefits would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. • The Board heard that the service is promoted through school events, parent engagement opportunities and communications channels. Despite these efforts, awareness remains variable, and opportunities to further raise the profile of the service will continue to be explored. • The Board heard that while Suffolk's policy encourages consideration of travel training, there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide it and DfE guidance does not mandate participation. It was noted that differences in public transport infrastructure, particularly the greater availability of transport links in other areas, may influence the extent to which travel training can be embedded within policy.

	SIB 209: Consider whether there are further opportunities to strengthen the role of travel training within transport policy and practice. **OWNERS:** Julie Mitchell and Sarah-Jane Smedmor
5.	**Performance – Expectations Reporting** **SEND Scorecard Analysis** The SEND Scorecard Analysis and SEND Statutory Service Performance was presented as per the corresponding slides. The Board raised the following questions/ challenges: • Is sufficient progress being made to address the attendance gap for children and young people with SEND? The Board sought assurance that attendance is being treated as a shared partnership priority across education, health, social care and schools. The Board also questioned how data and insight are being used to identify the underlying causes of poor attendance and inform targeted interventions. • The Board welcomed the improvement in annual review timeliness from 40% to 55%, but challenged whether annual reviews are resulting in meaningful amendments to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and sought assurance that plans are being updated to reflect children and young people's changing needs. The Board also questioned the extent to which amendments are driven by parental requests. The following responses were shared: • The Board heard that attendance remains a key area of focus across the partnership. Whilst overall attendance in Suffolk has improved, this improvement has not been consistently reflected for children and young people with SEND, particularly those with EHCPs. Partners outlined ongoing work to strengthen multi-agency pathways, align support across services and within locality working, and utilise improved data from the Inclusion Dashboard to better identify patterns, vulnerabilities and barriers to school attendance. Attendance was recognised as a shared responsibility, with health, education, social care and wider partners committed to coordinating support and targeting interventions more effectively. The Board also noted that this work aligns closely with the development of Experts at Hand, the Safeguarding Partnership and broader inclusion and belonging initiatives. • The Board heard that Suffolk is currently amending between 70% and 80% of annual reviews received each month, significantly higher than the national average. This reflects ongoing recovery work to address historically overdue reviews and update plans that had not previously been amended. It was acknowledged that this increased level of amendment is placing additional pressure on capacity within the service, reinforcing the need for the dedicated annual review improvement programme. The Board also heard that wider work is underway to strengthen the quality of EHCPs and ensure support remains aligned

to children's needs. It was noted that data regarding the proportion of amendments initiated through parental requests was not immediately available.

SIB 210: Through the LAIP refresh and Data & Performance Group, undertake further analysis of attendance data for children and young people with SEND, including attendance patterns, vulnerability factors and barriers to access, to inform partnership actions and monitor impact. **OWNERS:** Julia Grainger and Max Preston

SIB 211: Provide the Board with further analysis of annual review amendment requests and whether these have been initiated through parental, school or professional requests. **OWNERS:** Chris Lee and Max Preston

Neurodiversity Exceptions Reporting

ND exceptions reporting was presented as per the corresponding slides.

The Board received an update on the procurement of a single Autism and ADHD service provider for Suffolk, alongside the recommissioning of voluntary sector support for children, young people and families before, during and after diagnosis. Members also noted progress in developing a Suffolk Autism and ADHD data dashboard, which will strengthen oversight of demand, pathways and outcomes, and support more targeted, data-informed interventions across the system.

SIB 212: Complete development of the ND data dashboard and present the proposed reporting framework to SEND Operational Group (September 26) and the SEND Improvement Board (November 2026) for review and assurance, including opportunities for cross-system data analysis and targeted support planning. **OWNER:** Jamie Mills

The Board raised the following questions/ challenges:

- What further action can be taken to mitigate the impact of lengthy Autism and ADHD assessment waiting times? The Board sought assurance that children, young people and families are receiving appropriate support whilst waiting for assessment and diagnosis. Members also questioned whether wider initiatives, such as increased Mental Health Support Team coverage in schools, could help provide earlier support and reduce the impact of long waits on children and young people.
- The Board challenged how the system is meeting the needs of children and young people who are waiting significant periods for Autism and ADHD assessments, and sought assurance that support is being driven by identified need rather than delayed until a formal diagnosis is received. Members also questioned the variation in diagnostic conversion rates between NHS and private providers and the implications this may have for families, schools and the wider SEND system.

The following responses were shared:

- The Board heard that increased Mental Health Support Team coverage across schools presents an opportunity to strengthen early intervention and support for

children and young people awaiting Autism and ADHD assessment. Members noted the importance of ensuring that meaningful support is received whilst waiting for diagnosis, including through voluntary sector services, school-based support and stronger links between providers. The Board was advised that work is ongoing between Suffolk County Council, NSFT/ WSFT and partners to align these services and maximise the impact of the planned expansion to 100% school coverage.

- The Board heard that children and young people are entitled to receive support based on their identified needs, regardless of whether a formal diagnosis has been made. There is a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments and provide appropriate support whilst assessments are underway, and a diagnosis is not a prerequisite for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Members noted that lengthy waiting times continue to present challenges, reinforcing the importance of early support and intervention. The Board also discussed the differing diagnostic conversion rates reported by NHS and private providers and heard that further work is required nationally and locally to better understand the reasons for this variation and its impact on the SEND system.

SIB 213: NSFT to link with WSFT regarding mental health support teams in schools. Provide an update to the Board on progress and impact. **OWNER:** Belinda Danso-Langley

SIB 214: Wider discussion to take place outside of Board to clarify provision whilst waiting diagnosis and diagnosis routes. **OWNER:** Jamie Mills

SEND Quality Assurance Activity

SEND QA Activity was presented to the board as per the corresponding slides.

The Board raised the following question/ challenge:

- The Board challenged how the partnership is using quality assurance intelligence to strengthen inspection readiness and sought assurance that the system can clearly identify, evidence and learn from good practice.

The following response was shared:

- The Board heard that significant progress has been made in strengthening quality assurance arrangements through the establishment of a centralised QA function spanning education and social care. Members noted that this has improved oversight, consistency and the ability to identify themes across the system. The Board acknowledged that inspection readiness must now become a key focus, including building a strong evidence base of case studies, examples of effective practice and learning from areas requiring improvement.

	SIB 215: As part of the forward plan and inspection readiness activity, establish and maintain a bank of strong case studies to identify and evidence effective practice, support shared learning, and strengthen the partnership's inspection preparedness. **OWNER:** Rachel Cogman
6.	**Local Area Inclusion Plan and SEND Reform update** A brief update was provided on the SEND Reform Programme. Board members were encouraged to review the accompanying documentation for a comprehensive update on programme progress and developments. Formal recognition and thanks were given to Local Area Partnership colleagues for their engagement, responsiveness and commitment in enabling the successful submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan within challenging timescales. The Board received an update on the Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP), noting that there are currently 143 actions within the plan, the majority of which remain on track. The proposed timeline for the LAIP refresh and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) update was presented and agreed. The first iteration of the Local Area Partnership (LAP) Risk Register, alongside the proposed risk management process, was presented to the Board. Members welcomed the development of the register and emphasised the importance of its continued refinement. It was agreed that the Board will provide ongoing oversight of strategic risks and associated mitigations moving forward.
	Break
7.	**Education Representatives Update** The education representatives update was presented as per the corresponding report. Education representatives highlighted a strong appetite across Suffolk special schools to actively contribute to the development of Experts at Hand. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that educational input is representative of the breadth and complexity of need across schools. The involvement of the Suffolk Education Partnership was welcomed as a positive development. Members noted the clear actions arising from the update and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the LAIP refresh fully reflects the challenges and priorities identified. The Ed reps informed the board that they are looking to plan a rota for the board meetings, to help coordinate their attendance whilst carrying out their BAU. The board accepted this approach and appreciated their dedication and valuable contribution to the board. Education representatives highlighted ongoing concerns from schools regarding social care thresholds, including perceptions that cases are being deemed not to meet threshold. It was acknowledged that social care practice has evolved, with a greater focus on discussions around need rather than threshold, and that the use of "No Further Action (NFA)" terminology has ceased. Members noted that this change in practice may

	not yet be consistently understood across schools and welcomed further dialogue to improve understanding and communication. **SIB 216:** Meeting to take place to discuss social care change in practice including terminology used and referral pathways, with a view to improving shared understanding and addressing concerns raised by education settings. **OWNERS:** Anna Mears, Hayley Griffin and Rachel Cogman
8.	**SEND Statutory Service Communication and Pod Update** An update was given on the SEND Statutory Services and PODs working as per the corresponding slides. The Board raised the following questions/ challenges: • The Board sought assurance that there is a communications plan in place to ensure parents, carers, education settings and other key stakeholders are informed of the changes. • Clarification was also sought on current recruitment activity and workforce capacity within SEND Statutory Services. Members also discussed the induction and training arrangements for new staff, recognising that the time required for staff to become fully effective will vary according to their prior experience and knowledge. The following responses were shared: It was confirmed that communications have already been shared with schools and that further communications will be issued as the new arrangements are implemented. Members noted the opportunity to promote the developments more widely as a positive news story. **SIB 217:** SEND Statutory Services to develop and implement a communications plan for the POD model, including consideration of a public announcement and/or press release aligned to the launch, to ensure key messages reach parents, carers, schools and wider stakeholders. **OWNERS:** Chris Lee and Kate Dodd It was noted that recruitment is underway, including additional case officers within the non-school alternative provision teams and a small number of vacancies across area teams to maintain full staffing levels. Assurance was provided that all new starters receive a structured induction programme, including training, shadowing opportunities and ongoing management support. **SIB 218:** SEND Statutory Services to provide Board members with an update on current vacancy levels, recruitment progress and workforce development arrangements outside of the meeting. **OWNER**: Chris Lee
9.	**Belonging and Inclusion Strategy and Conference** The draft Belonging and Inclusion Strategy was presented to the Board for endorsement. Members noted the extensive co-production undertaken in its development, including

	engagement with education partners and contributions through established partnership subgroups. It was reported that stakeholder feedback had been fully considered and incorporated into the strategy. The Board welcomed the collaborative approach taken and agreed that the development process had provided a strong foundation for successful implementation. Members formally endorsed the strategy and recognised its importance in supporting wider inclusion, SEND improvement and reform priorities. The Board also noted the upcoming Belonging and Inclusion Conference on 23 September, with strong levels of engagement already secured. The conference was recognised as an important milestone to showcase progress, strengthen partnership working and provide a platform for advancing the wider inclusion agenda.
10.	**Forward Plan and Any Other Business** **Forward Plan** The Board noted the forward plan for future meetings and invited members to submit any additional items arising to the Chair and Programme Manager for consideration. **Staffing Update** The Board was advised that Julia Grainger will be leaving her role following many years of dedicated service and leadership within the SEND system. Members expressed their sincere thanks for her significant contribution and commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. The Board also formally recognised Sharon Muldoon's contribution to the SEND Improvement Programme, noting the pace and impact of progress achieved under her leadership. Members welcomed the update that Sharon will continue to support the system in a SEND Reform leadership capacity, helping to strengthen alignment between the Improvement and Reform programmes.
	Dates of Future Meetings Thursday 1st October 2026, 11:00AM to 14:00PM **TBC** Thursday 10th December 2026, 11:00AM to 14:00PM Thursday 25th February 2027, 11:00AM to 14:00PM Thursday 29th April 2027, 11:00AM to 14:00PM Thursday 8th July 2027, 11:00AM to 14:00PM **TBC**