

WESTMORLAND & FURNESS SEND PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of Meeting

SEND Partnership Board

Date: 13th February 2026 Time: 09:00 – 11:00

Present: Amanda Corcoran (Chair), Isobel Booler, Jen Whittam, Gemma Parkes, Claire Diggle, Laura Burling, Andrew Horrabin, Cllr Janet Battye, Sue Sanderson, Jason Haddershon, Vicky Hepworth-Putt, Elaine Croll, Helen Howlett, Sharyn Duffey, Katie Raine, Peter Chapman, Milorad Vasic, Catherine Prince, Matt Hardwick (Joined at 9:50)

Apologies: Vanessa Wilson, Richard Scott, Janet Arris, Helen Keaveny, Amy Holliman, Steve Hatton, Sharon Simpson, Andrea Henderson, Lisa Balderstone, Deborah Parry, Dean Graham, Sarah Powell, Lauren Jackson, Jacquie Shenton

	Agenda Item	Notes
1.	Welcome and Apologies	<p>Amanda Corcoran was welcomed by Catherine as our new Independent Chair for a 3-year term.</p> <p>Amanda then welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made, apologies were shared and accepted.</p> <p>Amanda gave brief intro of her background and role – she is currently the Director of Education for Manchester, and her this work includes a SEND oversight. She has been a teacher, SENDCo and Specialist Teacher, and led SEND in Manchester for many years before taking up her current role. She also set up the Greater Manchester SEND Board and has done some work across the NW region.</p> <p>Westmorland and Furness is very different to what she has experienced in Manchester, and she is delighted to join us, see the similarities and differences and work together.</p>

2.	Updates and Actions Review of action tracker from December meeting	All colleagues agreed with the minutes from last mtg and these were accepted as a true record. Catherine talked through actions and updates on the action tracker. All were either completed or on today's agenda.
3.	Supported Internships	<p>Gemma Parkes provided a Supported Internships overview (on behalf of Josie Burrell who was on bereavement leave) and talked about how this programme has grown and developed over the past few years. The slides will be shared with colleagues following the meeting, along with a case study.</p> <p>There are currently 48 young people on SI, with a further 12 on a pre-SI course. Due to increased demand for places, next academic year, two cohorts will take place (one in Sep and one in Jan) as well as pre-SI, this will focus for YP who have been in special school.</p> <p>We are taking part in national events and open days and events, with close links to colleges – esp Kendal, who are closely aligned to our vision of how this will increase independence for young people.</p> <p>Isobel asked if there is more we can do with adults and transition, as this closely supports the independence and transition into adults. Can we link in with comms to develop videos, showing details of Supported Internships, as well as the impact the programme has on YP's lives.</p> <p>ACTION: GP to speak to Vicky in Comms to look if we can make videos as well as case studies. Amanda suggested that these could be shared with parents of younger chn, as this may change their mindset, knowing their chn can work and be independent.</p> <p>Cllr Battye asked what young people go onto after their SI year is completed. Gemma reported that ideally this is paid employment with that employer, but conversations do take place as part of the programme to ensure YP's views are heard throughout.</p> <p>ACTION: GP to bring that data to the next board. (Last year over 90%, but will confirm this year). IB – we can look at different employers and different statistics.</p> <p>FUTURE AGENDA ITEM: To undertake a deep dive/longer study looking at what provision is in place to support YP with more complex needs and how we can re-engage them into SI later on as they aim for independence.</p>
4.	SEND Improvement	Jason provided some background information on the data we capture and present to provide Amanda with a greater understanding. A point to note is that this data is 95% single agency, as the ICBs are working on developing their joint data dashboard as part of their ongoing improvement works.

<p>(a) Performance Dashboards Update</p> <p>(b) SEND Improvement Update</p>	<p>Requests for assess continues to increase, with an additional 20 requests in Jan 2026 compared to Jan 2025 and an increased number of mediations following refusal to issue. Work is ongoing on how we can present the data to show how many assessments were then re-requested following initial refusal. Common reasons for refusal include not enough information being shared when the initial request is made – this is more common if it is a parental request. The SEND Team have now developed a document to be used following parental requests which can be shared with schools asking for specific supporting documents to be provided. The hope is this should avoid refusal to assess and then re-requests. This will be monitored over the coming months.</p> <p>There is a clear pattern of increase in the number of requests over the past 3 years, with clear patterns in when during the course of the year the request come in. There is an increasing number of parental requests, and recently there have been months where we have had a greater number of parental requests than school requests. This will continue to be monitored and Gemma shared that there is a perception within our schools that if parents request it carries a greater weight than schools or will be responded to more quickly. This is being addressed with our schools.</p> <p>We have also been working on developing a digital parental entry point that will give us more information than the model parent letter. We are planning to adapt this for schools to make requests more straightforward for them.</p> <p>Isobel asked if we can see the data relating to ceased plans and also the proportion of EHCPs in W&F, as we are now becoming an outlier – both within our statistical neighbours and nationally. It would also be helpful if we can see the number of EHCPs across districts, to allow us to see the acute spike in Barrow, as well as how many are being met within mainstream provision, to help us plan for EHCP reforms.</p> <p>ACTION: JH to make these changes to the dashboard and create monitoring of net gains/losses in overall number of plans.</p> <p>Amanda asked if there is a pattern by age or phase? JH showed this data to look at the number of requests across year groups, and main ones are in Rec and Y6 – this is typical across all LAs. Gemma commented that there was increased request patterns in Y10/11 and these are often around EBSA or SEMH needs, where schools feel unsure what else they can offer. We are now developing our RPs to help meet this need – with Ullswater Community College opening a 25 place RP in September 2025. This is already showing positive results and is informing our work around sufficiency and RP.</p> <p>Timescale compliance was 90% in 2024, approx 72% in 2025, this has continued to drop – and is now 18.5% in Jan 2026. We are undertaking deep dives into ‘why’ and Amanda further challenged on the reasons for this significant fall</p>
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	<p>in timeliness. This is due to various factors: significant capacity issues in the EP team (injury/illness/staff leaving the service), the significant increase in the number of requests being received, no additional capacity within teams, despite these significant increases and greater time/focus on QA processes.</p> <p>ACTION: GP/IB to bring an EHCP recovery plan due to the next board.</p> <p>Gemma stated that when a deep dive has been undertaken to look at plans that are late, it is mainly due to delayed advice. Consideration is now being given to how the team can begin to write some sections of the plan prior to the advice being received. Another delay is when a draft is issued and parents respond, a further response time is given to the second draft. Whilst this is helpful to families, it is not in the CoP and this is causing delay.</p> <p>ACTION: AC and GP to have a conversation outside of the meeting, to further look at how timescales can be improved.</p> <p>Annual review completion is improving, but still not where we want it to be. Capacity challenges continue to affect this due to sheer number of plans, as well as the exceptionally high cohort in phase transfer this year (approx. 900 CYP) causing a significant pressure point.</p> <p>An overview was given of the SEND Improvement workstreams, IB conferred due to us receiving the middle judgement on our inspection, we have been matched with a SLIP (Bedford).</p> <p>ACTION: Gemma to give an overview of SLIP work at next meeting.</p> <p>JH informed members that we were still awaiting NWRIGG data return for this quarter he will bring this to the board when we receive it.</p> <p>Elaine Croll thanked Jason for the insightful data analysis, particularly focussing on mediations and tribunals and felt that it would be useful to look at themes and outcomes of these. Elaine asked how are the ICB part of the plan delivery, as the fortnightly improvement oversight meetings have recently been cancelled. Isobel commented that these have been paused as she feels the updates from these meetings are not reporting back against the plan, more providing a general update. The plan is currently being reviewed in full, ensuring we are ready for the SEND reform announcement, and then the plan can be further developed to reflect these. We will then resume these meetings, linking back to key interdependencies.</p> <p>Elaine also asked about school reps on the Partnership Board and Catherine explained that we have membership from Primary, Secondary, Special and PRU schools on the board, as well as a single agency SEND Taskforce made up of school leaders.</p>
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		Forward plan item – SEND Improvement Plan.
5.	DSG Management Plan and High Needs Block	<p>Positive news has been received this week, with 90% of the deficit of the HNB taken, we need to further look into details of this, and any impact/implications/conditions of this, but this is a significant pressure reduced.</p> <p>Claire Diggle talked through most recent data (Q2 25/26 – this was circulated prior to the meeting) with a forecast in year pressure of £11.749m, the projected deficit is £33.884m. This is 143% of the available High Needs Block.</p> <p>In Q2 biggest driver for HNB spend was EHCP top ups, followed by ISP costs. Our expenditure forecast also aligns with this data.</p> <p>Compared with statistical neighbours, we had the 3rd lowest in year deficit of £8m in 2024/25 - however, it will be considerably higher this financial year.</p> <p>W&F has higher % of EHCPs than national or stat neighbours, putting further strain on budgets. Mainstream top ups have fallen 1.61% since 23/24 but we are still higher than the national average – including RP and special schools.</p> <p>Our banding funder (except the lowest) is considerably higher than the national average and special schools are funded higher than neighbours with some additional top up rates at special schools as high as £40k. All our special schools have significantly higher staffing ratios than neighbours and national.</p> <p>Andrew Horrabin asked if we paying more for less provision? Isobel confirmed- in short, yes! Our special schools are very well funded compared to statistical neighbours/national with very high staffing levels. This is an additional challenge for adults, as lots transfer to Beaumont college and do not have the independence.</p> <p>Our system looks like a very high spend, but what isn't said is that we have one of the highest proportions of EHCPs in mainstream nationally. This then averages out well and benchmarks with other systems.</p> <p>Amanda asked if the special schools got a very high level of need, therefore benchmarking against other schools, may not be comparing against similar needs of children. GP reported there are some very complex needs in ISP, but as we don't have a maintained special school for SEMH we are having to use ISP for this area of need.</p>
6.	SEND Sufficiency Progress and Strategy on Implementation and delivery	<p>Sharyn provided a brief update to the board, but it may be appropriate, following the SEND reforms, to have a more detailed sufficiency review.</p> <p>Completed delivery of Phase 1 RP – 61 places (inc 25 place provision SEMH Eden with a particular focus on EBSA).</p>

	<p>The team are currently reviewing existing RP to ensure all designations are correct and we have a SLA in place for new and existing RPs. The cluster network for RPs is now operating and this has been well received by the schools/colleagues involved.</p> <p>A feasibility study regarding collaboration between W&F, Kendal college and Sandgate is taking place to develop post 19 pathways, this will also release capacity at Sandgate, but rely less on ISP at Post 19. Current funding options for this project are currently being explored.</p> <p>The team are also looking at AP, SEMH and Section 19 hospital tuition. The commissioning framework for AP is now in place, which provides reassurance. We are currently experiencing the difficulty that most local AP providers for Section 19 or EOTAS are not yet on framework. These providers are still quality assured by the LA, but we do need them on the Framework. We are going to reopen the framework and will encourage them to apply so we can continue to commission places there.</p> <p>A detailed SEND sufficiency workshop has been held, with a revised programme management framework. This group are meeting biweekly to monitor and track progress against the sufficiency strategy and how we are delivering against these. This group are also focussing on how we are delivering best value for money and the impact of these decisions on the HNB.</p> <p>At present, the focus is on Phase 2 of RP with school visits planned for after half term. Special School capacity is also being reviewed, with a view to increase places or developing SEND Units to ensure all CYP are placed in local provision.</p> <p>In June 2024, we were awarded the Wave 4 Free Special School in Eden. The DfE have now informed us that this will not be going ahead, but instead we will be given £6.7m in capital funding instead. We are going to appeal this decision, and the DfE have acknowledged that LGR has left a 'cold spot' in special school provision across W&F.</p> <p>Amanda queried what the unmet need was. Matt H responded and said in his school, since Covid, there has been nearly 100% increase in EHCPs, mostly due to SEMH and autism. Secondary schools are struggling to meet this need, and many of these young people are academically able, yet unable to manage in mainstream education, but do not meet the profile for special schools. The places that can support these CYP are limited, private and expensive, and there is now a clear gap appearing for high functioning CYP who cannot have their needs met in mainstream – this pattern is beginning to be identified nationally.</p> <p>GP commented that a lot of children who are currently in RP/mainstream settings, should be in special and this is down to a lack of places.</p>
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		<p>Snippets of information are beginning to be released re: White Paper. All secondary schools are to have Inclusion bases – however, the vast majority already have something very similar!</p> <p>MV provided an update on what had been shared with him. The White Paper will be two papers released simultaneously (one discussing the content and a SEND consultation from 0 –25) The aim of the White Paper will be to try and bridge the gap between the Best Start in Life strategy and skills strategy. A 12 week SEND consultation will dig into and it is expected to will need legislative parliamentary discussion, which will go into the later session of the year. Nothing will then be substantive until after 2028, and then transition arrangements will be in place. Implications may be around inclusivity and EHCPs, but none of this will be imminent. Our current issues will remain will be with us for a while longer!</p> <p>It was agreed when the White Paper is published, we as a board will need to create and publish a collective response to this.</p>
7.	Parent Carer Forum development and engagement review and next steps	<p>Laura Burling introduced herself as the Contact Associate who will be engaging with parent carers and developing a new PCF for Westmorland & Furness.</p> <p>Laura informed the board that Contact will continue to hold grant for 2026/27, then there will be a retender for this contract.</p> <p>Laura shared she recognised the implications and impact of having parent carer voice and not currently having a PCF as part of this. She informed partners that she will do everything in her power to set up W&F PCF, but this has to be paced in a way that is suitable for parents/carers as well as complexity of our geography.</p> <p>Laura’s referred to her timeline of work from Nov 2025 (shared in advance of the meeting), she was not involved prior to this and also expressed her thanks to Lorna for providing detailed mapping details to enable her to begin her work.</p> <p>Laura shared that her approach to engagement is relationship led, making early contacts to set up foundations of trust, then how this work can be continued.</p> <p>There had been 5 engagement opportunities in Jan (1 in person @ Appleby and 4 online) - parent carers sharing concerns and uncertainty about SEND reform and white paper, future role and influence of PCFs, particularly within LGR. Early conversations reflect on ‘what difference will these make’? Laura felt that we have to listen to current voices so we can build from this. She believes in a slow, relationship centred approach, giving a ‘right’ engagement process, but she can see we do need a PCF.</p>

		<p>Laura shared that work that grant can be funded, but must be parent agreed and parent led. This grant will again be available from April. Laura’s long term goal is to build PCF with parents that is informed, inclusive and representative, so they are able to influence and coproduce strategically.</p> <p>Laura informed the board that she is making plans and linking in with Eden Family Hub as well as healthwatch partnership in Barrow. Some of these sessions will be for families, as well as for parent carers.</p> <p>KIT monthly meetings are planned with SEND Partnership team to ensure we receive regular updates.</p> <p>ACTION: To have a more detailed agenda item on this next time with opportunities for discussion.</p>
8.	Health Updates	<p>Peter updated the board on ICB reforms. LSC ICB have been asked to make 47% reduction in their workforce. A VR scheme ran before Christmas. It is now known there will be significant direct impact on CYP commissioning with significant number of staff (both senior and operational) leaving the organisation including Vanessa Wilson and Kirsty Hamer. There are also 80% of commissioning leads and 75% of DCO administrators be leaving on 1st April. This will have a significant impact in some of the work we are able to do – particularly timescales within joint commissioning. Following this, we will be reviewing all current commissioning work and develop a prioritisation of work.</p> <p>LSCFT have confirmed to the ICB that their ADHD and Autism pathways closed on 2nd Feb. (Only deliver ADHD pathway for W&F footprint). At present, the ICB are exploring mitigations around this, looking at deploying temporary pathways and exploring private provision, as well as the offers available at other trusts. This work is ongoing at CEO level, and the board will be kept updated. Isobel thanked Peter for his openness, and all agreed this will have significant impact on our CYP.</p> <p>All agreed we need an immediate follow up to this and have a partnership response, as well as recognising the significant risk to our CYP if we don’t have any mitigations in place as it will have big impact on families.</p> <p>ACTION: MV to escalate this</p> <p>ACTION: To keep focus on this within the agenda/future board meetings</p> <p>Peter was asked to pass on thanks and best wishes to colleagues who are leaving – particularly Vanessa – who has been a key part of this partnership since the outset.</p> <p>Helen updated that the north ICB North restructure was ongoing. No one yet knows how this will look, but likely to be a regional/central model, so unsure how this will affect/impact partnership working.</p>

		<p>Commissioning is being reorganised, current focus on SaLT and Children’s equipment, as well as MACH being reprocured. The deadline for recommissioning completions is the end of this financial year.</p> <p>Helen asked colleagues to refer to PINS and MDT updates, in the information that was circulated prior to the meeting. An adults ND pathway is being set up and W&F are part of the response to this, this is being led by Andi Henderson.</p>
9.	Forward Planning	<p><u>Agenda items for March meeting</u></p> <p>Health updates – have this at the top of the agenda to ensure more time</p> <p>EHCP timeliness – recovery plan – how will this fit with implementation plan we have to write with DSG overspend.</p> <p>White paper (any updates)</p> <p>SEND Improvement Plan</p> <p>PCF development</p>