

South Tyneside Partnership

Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: 22 July 2026

Local SEND Reform Plan Update

Report of Stuart Easingwood, Director of Children's Services

Why Has this Report Come to the Health and Wellbeing Board?

1. In May 2026, the Health and Wellbeing Board endorsed the South Tyneside Local SEND Reform Plan and Local Area Partnership Maturity Assessment. This report provides an update on progress since that endorsement, including formal submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan to the Department for Education, mobilisation of Year 1 reform activity and the next stages of the national assessment process.
2. Since then, the Local SEND Reform Plan has moved from development and endorsement into formal submission and early implementation planning. The final submission was sent on 19 June 2026 following formal sign-off by the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Director of Children's Services, ICB signatories as required and other representatives that contributed to the Plan.
3. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the progress made since May 2026, including formal submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan, the commencement of Year 1 delivery activity, and the continued need for partnership-wide alignment to support implementation, assurance and readiness for national assessment and future inspection activity.

Which Outcome is this Linked to Within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and How?

4. The Local SEND Reform Plan contributes directly to the Health & Wellbeing Strategy outcome that *"Every child has the best start in life and is supported to achieve their potential."*
5. The programme seeks to strengthen inclusion, improve early identification and intervention, increase access to specialist advice and support, and ensure children and young people receive the right support at the right time. Through closer partnership working across education, health and care, the programme aims to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND while supporting a more sustainable and equitable system.

How Does This Report Contribute to the Cross Cutting Theme(s)?

6. The Local SEND Reform Plan continues to contribute to the key cross-cutting themes within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy:
7. **Reducing Health Inequalities:** Children and young people with SEND continue to experience poorer educational, health and social outcomes than their peers. The reform programme is focused on improving inclusion, strengthening early

intervention and increasing access to coordinated support across education, health and care. Through earlier identification of need, improved access to specialist advice and a stronger focus on local provision, the partnership aims to reduce inequality of experience and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

8. **Integration and Partnership:** Delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan is dependent upon strong partnership working across education, health and care services. The programme is being implemented through shared governance arrangements, joint planning and collective accountability for delivery. This includes ongoing collaboration with schools, health partners, families and wider stakeholders to ensure that reform activity is aligned and delivered consistently across the local area.
9. **Prevention and Early Intervention:** A central objective of the reform programme is to strengthen support available before needs escalate. The development of the Experts at Hand model, SEND Clusters and a more consistent graduated response are intended to improve access to specialist advice and support at an earlier stage, reducing reliance on reactive intervention and supporting children and young people to achieve positive outcomes within their local communities wherever possible.
10. **Community Engagement:** The partnership remains committed to ensuring that children, young people, families and practitioners continue to influence delivery of the reform programme. Ongoing engagement activity, co-production arrangements and stakeholder involvement will support implementation of the Local SEND Reform Plan and ensure that lived experience continues to inform service improvement and system development.

Local SEND Reform Plan Update

11. The South Tyneside Local SEND Reform Plan was formally submitted to the Department for Education on 19 June 2026 following sign-off from Local Authority and Integrated Care Board partners. The submission included the Local SEND Reform Plan, data return, Local Partnership Maturity Assessment and supporting evidence.
12. Since endorsement by the Health and Wellbeing Board in May 2026, activity has focused on securing formal partner sign-off, completing the national submission process, mobilising programme governance arrangements, establishing implementation planning across Year 1 priorities and progressing enabling activities required to support delivery. This has ensured that the programme has been able to transition from planning into implementation from July 2026.
13. Progress has continued on the development of the Experts at Hand model, a key element of South Tyneside's approach to strengthening inclusion and supporting earlier intervention. The model is designed to increase access to specialist expertise, enabling practitioners to respond more effectively to need within local settings and reducing delays in accessing advice and support. Alongside model development, work has focused on establishing the leadership, governance and delivery arrangements required to support implementation. This includes strengthening programme oversight, quality assurance and performance monitoring to ensure effective and sustainable delivery as the model is introduced across the local area.

14. Recruitment planning has also commenced with partner services to increase specialist capacity within areas including Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy. Recognising existing workforce pressures and the importance of maintaining current service delivery, implementation will be phased to ensure that expansion of the Experts at Hand model does not destabilise core service offers. This phased approach will allow capacity to be built incrementally whilst maintaining support for children and young people currently accessing services and ensuring that workforce growth is aligned to demand and service readiness.
15. Work is also progressing on the development of SEND Clusters as locality-based arrangements intended to strengthen inclusion, improve consistency and support earlier intervention through shared responsibility and collaborative problem-solving. The partnership has been working closely with a representative group of schools and education leaders to co-design the cluster model, ensuring that the approach reflects local context, builds on existing strengths and is shaped by those responsible for delivery.
16. A phased implementation approach is being adopted to support sustainable delivery and enable learning to inform future development. Phase 1 of the model is planned to launch in Autumn 2026 and will focus on establishing cluster leadership arrangements, testing key processes and embedding collaborative approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. Lessons learned through this initial phase will inform future development and scaling of the model across the local area.
17. Over time, SEND Clusters will bring together schools, early years settings and wider partners to improve local decision-making, build workforce capacity and support children and young people closer to their communities. The model is intended to strengthen collective ownership of inclusion and provide a mechanism through which partners can work together to identify needs earlier, share expertise and improve consistency of practice across local settings. In doing so, the partnership aims to increase confidence in meeting need within mainstream provision wherever appropriate and reduce the need for more intensive intervention through earlier support and collaborative problem solving.
18. Alongside this, preparatory activity has commenced for the specialist provision designation review and specialist provision banding review. A tender has been issued to appoint external consultancy support to work alongside the partnership in delivering this programme of work, representing a significant milestone in progressing the specialist provision designation and banding reviews from planning into delivery. This will ensure that the reviews are informed by specialist expertise and benefit from an independent external perspective, providing both challenge and assurance as the partnership considers future arrangements for specialist provision and funding.
19. The reviews will examine the relationship between need, provision and resource allocation across the local SEND system and will provide a robust evidence base to inform future sufficiency planning, specialist provision development and long-term system sustainability.
20. The reform programme is being delivered alongside wider activity to strengthen system leadership, improve use of data and intelligence, increase consistency of practice and ensure that resources are aligned more effectively to need. Since endorsement of the Reform Plan, progress has focused on establishing the

governance, programme management, implementation planning and assurance arrangements required to support delivery across all Year 1 priorities.

National Assessment Process & Next Steps

21. The Local SEND Reform Plan is currently subject to the Department for Education's assessment and approval process. National guidance indicates that local authorities whose plans are approved through the first round of assessment will become eligible to receive High Needs Stability Grant funding from Autumn 2026.
22. Where plans do not meet the required approval threshold, local authorities will be required to revise and resubmit their plans before approval and funding can be released. National guidance indicates that revised plans meeting the required standard will be eligible for funding within the same financial year.
23. Over the coming months, the partnership will continue to focus on delivery of Year 1 priorities, progression of the designation and banding reviews, implementation of the Experts at Hand model, development of SEND Clusters, workforce development, stakeholder engagement and strengthening assurance arrangements. This activity will ensure the partnership is well placed to deliver the ambitions set out within the Reform Plan and respond effectively to the outcome of the national assessment process.

Risks & Mitigations

24. The successful delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan remains dependent upon continued partnership engagement, workforce capacity, availability of specialist expertise and effective programme governance.
25. There is a risk that capacity constraints across education, health and care services could impact the pace of implementation and ability to embed reform activity consistently across the system. This is being mitigated through phased implementation, dedicated programme management arrangements and the development of additional leadership capacity to support delivery of key reform workstreams.
26. There is also a risk that continued growth in demand for SEND support and specialist provision may place pressure on system capacity and financial sustainability. The specialist provision designation and banding reviews form a key part of the local response to these challenges by providing an evidence base to support future planning, investment and decision-making.
27. The reform programme is supported by established governance arrangements, routine performance reporting and ongoing oversight through partnership structures to ensure risks are identified, monitored and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Summary & Next Steps

28. The South Tyneside Local SEND Reform Plan was submitted to the Department for Education on 19 June 2026 and the programme has now been implemented. Activity is underway across a number of priority areas including the Experts at Hand model, SEND Clusters, the specialist provision designation review, the specialist provision banding review, performance monitoring and programme assurance.
29. The programme represents a significant opportunity to strengthen inclusion, improve early intervention, increase consistency across education, health and

care and support improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The partnership will continue to focus on implementation, assurance and delivery while awaiting the outcome of the national assessment process.

30. The Health & Wellbeing Board is asked to:
 - a. Note the submission of the South Tyneside Local SEND Reform Plan to the Department for Education.
 - b. Note progress made in mobilizing delivery of the reform programme.
 - c. Support continued partnership-wide commitment to implementation of the Local SEND Reform Plan.
 - d. Note the anticipated national assessment and approval timescales.