

SMG Meeting 5 – Thursday 22nd May 2025 – Location: Townhall/Hybrid

Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome & Introductions (Agenda Flow –Kevin Harrison)
- Minutes of meeting (Sarah Wike)
- SENDIASS Update – data story/staffing/development plan (Sarah Wike)
- Highlight Report (Sarah Wike)
- Next tasks for priority attention (Action Plan)
- AOB (Kevin Harrison)
- Close (Kevin Harrison)

Meeting Attendees

In Attendance	Apologies
Kevin Harrison- Chair (Parent) Ellie Hirst – Case support Officer Nicole Hatfield – Parent Sarah Wike – SENDIASS manager Charlotte Allinson-Smith – Parent Emily Wilson- Quality Assurance and Governance Officer Chloe Clayton – SENDIASS Case Officer Luane Hutchinson– Parent	Olivia Bennett – Parent Joanne Ruston – Chair (Parent) Esther Prager- Parent Jill Duffin – FIS Manager Kim Smith- Youth Voice Participation Coordinator Laura Hammerton – Early Start and Families Service and Strategy Manager Sue Day – Head of SEND Hermione Rostron – Health Bev Bradley – SEND Improvement Team Sally Killips – Transport Manager Melanie Dyson- Service and Strategy Manager- SEND Sarah Cairns- Senior SEND Commissioner Laura Johnson- DCT Service Manager and DCSO Nicola Thomson-Dewey – Parent

Minutes of the meeting

Agenda Item	Meeting Discussion	Outcome	
Welcome & Introductions (Agenda Flow – KH)	<p>Kevin welcomed everyone to the meeting and started the meeting raising etiquette/toilet breaks etc.</p> <p>Kevin then went around the room, then onto the onscreen members and started introductions.</p> <p>Kevin asked Sarah for any apologies; Sarah shared those received.</p>	Apologies to be recorded in minutes. There were low numbers in attendance for this meeting. This is unusual. Apologies received seemed overall to be people taking annual leave. SW reported other meetings in this same week were all low in attendance too.	
Minutes of meeting (SW)	<p>KH asked if any matters arising.</p> <p>Sarah went over last SMG meeting 23rd January and went over last meeting actions. Sarah asked if all attendees were happy with meeting minutes and if they need changing.</p> <p>Emily asked the cost-of-living statement from herself and if it can be edited. Emily would like it re-phrasing to day-to-day expenses can be difficult for SEND parents.</p> <p>Sarah reported line management has reverted from Carly to Richard (Lynch).</p> <p>Sarah reported she has also asked Mel (Dyson- EHC team) from updates on her actions from the last SMG meeting in</p>	Minutes to be amended before finalised and published.	SENDASS to publish the minutes on the service webpages.

SENDIASS Update (SW)	<p>preparation for this meeting but not heard anything back yet and will update the action plan once she has the update.</p> <p>KH asked Sarah to present service updates from the previous Action plan.</p> <p>Sarah reported that the Action Plan Updates:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draft minutes finalised and uploaded and published to the website – green now 2. Joint commissioning report submitted to Richard Lynch – remains orange. 3. Business Case section is in 'red'. Sarah hasn't finished business case yet, Sarah hoping to finish next week. The goal for this is to be end of June but as case load has been high it's been difficult to prioritise it – remains in red 4. SEND Data dashboard is up to date and there is two years of data fed into that now – green now 5. Service annual report is signed off and published on website – green now. <p><i>*The discussion during this reporting did veer into the next agenda item so Kevin asked for that to be paused to complete this agenda item first.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. SW to keep a track of the progress of the joint commissioning report. 3. SW to progress business case through annual review process. 4. SW to begin preparing Q1 of the new financial year. 5. SW to get the survey and next annual report to go into production
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	<p>Kevin: Steered to the next topic on the agenda – highlight report.</p> <p>Sarah raised the issue of the high caseloads and steep rise for the last quarter (Q4) in comparison to the previous reporting period (Q3) and the rise was 204 cases above the last reporting period.</p> <p>SW raised the concern that she felt there was a need for more support at SEN support level for families but that this could not take priority now due to increase in demand for support with the statutory processess. SW gave the example that there were (on last data trawl) 39 live tribunal appeal cases and these are level 4 of case work intervention and take over and above case officer time per case. That said what this shows is that in terms of the business case for more staff this information could help to make the case for a case officer for SEN support and SEND Inclusion, and if we got additional capacity this would support with us been able to offer this level of case work (level 3 of case work intervention).</p> <p>Emily said she agreed and feels this would be a great idea for the inclusion of SEND children.</p> <p>Sarah referenced the rumours circulating about possible changes in the SEND processess and as the current government are talking about changes and refresh of the SEND system and yet it's not clear what this will look like and how that might affect our families. I have spoken to the National IAS and regional partners, and the thinking is there will be hard changes or things will not be as drastic as people are thinking.</p>	
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	<p>Emily added that it's like when statements of SEN changed to EHCP's, and the transition process began and so again we need to know what that support will look like for families when those changes begin.</p> <p>Charlotte said she felt that it will be difficult for schools questioned how would that effect their funding?</p> <p>Sarah said at this point as we don't know what those changes may be so how that would work and what that would look like we do not know as yet but we can keep this under discussion within SMG and be ready to respond when necessary.</p> <p>Esther asked if SENDIASS have seen an increase in EHC assessments? Esther said she had noticed social media groups are pushing parents with getting these applications in ahead of possible changes.</p> <p>Sarah said the service have seen a rise in EHCP applications and parents wanting to put these in and go to mediation/tribunal too and this has contributed to the sharp rise in referrals for those processes.</p> <p>Charlotte said some parent groups are advising to go straight to tribunals.</p> <p>Emily said this is quite worrying because especially with the RTA and RTI mediations, it can be an opportunity for the LA to get additional information, and the decision can be changed within the mediation.</p> <p>Sarah agreed with Emily and said as a service we advise on mediation although won't say this must be followed but we give the options between this first step and possible benefits for it and</p>	
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Highlight Report (SW)	<p>on the whole parents will take that advice. That said Sarah also reported they had seen a rise in parents asking to go straight to tribunal too.</p> <p>Esther said she believed mediation can work and it did work for her.</p> <p>Emily agreed saying it sparks additional conversation with the education setting and parent, and it doesn't affect appeal rights. Also, the mediation outcomes are legally binding.</p> <p>Sarah reported that as a service we like the mediation process and have seen them work well. Sarah reported that the service has promoted informal mediations too but there is not really consistency in the system with those. Sarah agreed to speak further with SEND team as informal mediations are not working or not being done and we can look at what those barriers may be.</p> <p>Ellie reported that as case advisors we do offer informal mediation as part of our mediation information/advice to parents, as we were told to be offering this by HoS for SEND so it is built into our advice and a practice standard. However, Ellie reported that she had received email from the EHC team stating that they do not offer informal mediations.</p> <p>Emily pointed out that the practicality of informal mediations can be difficult. There is a timeframe, and it can be hard to gain evidence from professionals within that timeframe.</p> <p>Sarah agreed stating that there had been a case where an RTA mediation had information that had been missing when ECHNA was submitted. In this instance SW said she raised it and asked if this could be submitted back to the panel as it was crucial data</p>	<p>SW to have conversation around informal mediations to bring back to the next SMG.</p> <p>SW to have a conversation with HoS about this to see whether its viable offering this process as a step before mediation processes.</p>
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	<p>about the child. The EHC team did look at it and reviewed the decision again and agreed to assess and so this was a good example of informal mediation.</p> <p>Esther queried in linking back to mediation, if it's an RTA or RTI – is there a pattern that we see is it school etc?</p> <p>Emily reported that there has been a lot of work recently done with SENDCOS. That was originally why the Hub was brought in, as parents couldn't see reports etc. So, parents had to ring the EHC team to get that information before whereas now we have the Hub so parents can access this as its uploaded in. Emily reported that there has been training with SENDCOS on what is needed and the APDR process, provision map etc. This makes it easy for panel to clearly see from the paperwork. It will always be a working progress to look at SEND support processes.</p> <p>Sarah reported that as a service hardly ever get tribunals on RTI. We tend to see RTA tribunals or section I. Of the 39 live appeal cases in tribunal 2 are RTI.</p> <p>Emily agreed that mainly tribunals are section I.</p> <p>Sarah added that as a service we've been advising mediation for section I too, we know parents don't need to opt for this for section I but it's a good way to look at evidence and re-look at paperwork and get actions/outcomes in place.</p> <p>Charlotte said she felt this helps gets things moving from a stalemate.</p> <p>Sarah agreed saying it does do that as it adds a layer of communication between parents and the LA.</p>	
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	<p>Kevin asked SW to report on the highlight report</p> <p>Sarah –reported that the highlight report was sent to everyone in advance of this meeting. Data dashboard is up to date; we are cited on the local area and SEF. A lot of work is going into the Ofsted preparation, and there is a positive paragraph too about the SMG. The joint commissioning report is still ongoing, but we are seeing lots of health-related referrals coming in, more so than previously and these are parents giving us updates on ASDAT pathway/contact, requests for filling in forms for health referrals etc. Sarah reported as a service we cannot offer support for health-based referral forms and where we can signpost to other relevant services.</p> <p>Ellie picked up on the increase in health-related referrals and the increase in requests for advice and support with the right to choose referrals/processes as well and parents/carers wanting to know what that is and how to refer in.</p> <p>Emily said she felt that's a lot of a different area in expertise isn't it.</p> <p>Charlotte asked if the service had noticed a rise in referrals for PIP as their policies have changed too.</p> <p>Sarah/Chloe both said they had noticed this too but again it's not an area of work in terms of support with forms the service offers and again will signpost on often to DIAL.</p> <p>Ellie said we can signpost to services but sometimes we find ourselves now saying to some parents, 'this is not within our remit' which is difficult for families but we can only do so much. Ellie also pointed out that sometimes we are seen as miracle</p>	
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	<p>workers too and lots of services out their state, “oh go to SENDIASS they can help you” but it’s not always within our service remit and this is frustrating as its giving families false hope and false expectations of what our service is. We hate saying this to parents, but we have also got to ensure what we offer is within our service remit and it doesn’t put extra pressure on us.</p> <p>Sarah said that as a service we are seeing a lot of desperation in families. There’s been a rise in parents becoming frustrated or angry and so worried that the emotional resilience is low.</p> <p>Charlotte said parents are angry because they are scared.</p> <p>Sarah agreed saying that’s exactly right – there’s a lot of closed doors for families.</p> <p>Charlotte said If they are lot of closed doors, they get stressed.</p> <p>Kevin added that he felt SENDIASS are good at that because you are so accessible, and families know you will be there. Even if other services are closed.</p> <p>Sarah said the aim is to always speak to parents whatever they come through our door for, and we would never shut a door to a parent.</p> <p>Emily asked if there was a particular theme from parents that the service was finding?</p> <p>Chloe said she felt its communication.</p> <p>Sarah said the data shows on average we are seeing 40% SEND support, 60% EHC processes. It used to be the other way around but now its 60% EHC. Case work is currently EHC top heavy, EHC and the statutory processes. The EHC referrals have been the</p>	
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	<p>highest in a long time. 353 cases went up from 204. We are down on capacity as one staff member is on long term sick. Between the remainder staff we have managed 548 cases. Sarah said that although we have managed it has been hard.</p> <p>Chloe also pointed out that it's been hard.</p> <p>Sarah said to cover staff absence and increased demand she currently now pretty much back to having a full-time case load. That said the service has recently got agency support to release some pressure for the last 8 weeks. One candidate had SENDIASS experience but is not local so on a temporary basis she just covering the virtual stuff. This has helped as Jackie is experienced meaning we didn't need to train someone. She has instantly been able to take phone calls and relieve some of that pressure. Jackie is on 2.5 days a week. Also, Charlotte has decided to do part time hours so I will put an advert out for the other half. I hope we will get interest in that. I am hoping I can focus on that and get someone in for Aug/Sept.</p> <p>Charlotte asked about the service signposting families to parent groups for Level 1 case advice. Can you signpost to groups you will know will give the correct advice?</p> <p>Sarah said that we always signpost to whatever is on the local offer for example the list of parent groups on the local offer.</p> <p>Charlotte said she just wondering if that would relieve some of the pressure.</p> <p>Sarah said it does as some parent groups out there do take the pressure of us, we do see the benefits of that. But we don't specifically signpost parents to a parent group.</p>	
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	<p>Esther said she felt the Facebook live sessions are good and it's a way for parents to share their experiences. Esther said what is asking is whether there is a way for parents to somehow share more information on your Facebook lives and advise – e.g early help or EHC etc.</p> <p>Sarah said she felt this was something the service can investigate that. Asking Esther is she was thinking we invite parents to come in on the lives and offer experiences to maybe new parents?</p> <p>Esther explained about the service doing a session on the EHC pathway for example or we could do a particular session on a specific topic, or is there a way parents of SMG could offer this on live sessions. As with experience tips/tricks to share with others.</p> <p>Sarah agreed and felt we would need to look at topics and see how it would work.</p> <p>Luane added she felt these types of sessions allow other parents to speak to and to have support from one another.</p> <p>Esther asked if this would be in lives or do the sessions at the family hubs. It might make it more meaningful in those sessions.</p> <p>Sarah said she felt both ways could be possible. We could pick a particular topic and pilot that at the end of term and scope it out with the SMG members and to see how we could give that a go. That could be an action. We could add posters and updates to face book like we do normally with this information. We have put one of about the change of mediation company and done one about tribunals. Sarah added that recently she had attended the SENDIST user group and so put an update on face book about the changes coming within that process.</p>	
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	<p>Emily said she had attended too, and it was interesting.</p> <p>Sarah said she felt it might be helpful for the chairpersons of SMG to attend one as it would be informative and interesting.</p> <p>Kevin agreed this would be good for them in their roles.</p> <p>Emily added that there is also a lot discussed about what they are going to do, for example going to be more paper based, reducing word limit of appeal paperwork and then thinking ahead Emily wondered what effect this will have on families.</p> <p>Sarah agreed and said in terms of case work support we will see the impact of this with families and it may be the paperwork word count will need triaging, so parents know what is best to add in and what isn't.</p> <p>Chloe asked if tribunal will now decide if an appeal will be paper based or not?</p> <p>Emily said she thought the answer to that was a bit woolly, we are not entirely sure.</p> <p>Charlotte asked if tribunal were wanting to streamline and get the paperwork down so they can get the wait down?</p> <p>Emily said she interpreted it as the focus on the phase transfer and that needs to be prepared in just a few months. They spoke about opening the school holidays which is new, they have never done that before. They would like paper hearings as that would give some time in the school holidays to get those actions and it makes logistic sense for it to be done this way.</p>	
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	<p>Sarah added that those phase transfer appeals in mid-February and march were coming back with June/July hearing dates so were seeing those getting priority.</p> <p>Chloe agreed and said she had seen these too and some for August too.</p> <p>Emily added she thought the August hearing dates were paper hearings for August.</p> <p>Sarah – I noticed they were keen Emily on the SEND 45 case review forms being used. Reporting that we've seen more of this work. Where families want SEND 45 forms filled in and parents needing help with the form. The form goes in front of a judge and sometimes families need help with filling that out.</p> <p>Chloe agreed and felt it's a very wordy document. Parents are still saying they want to tick oral hearing as they feel they can talk about their child better than writing about them on a form.</p> <p>Emily and Sarah both shared that the judges want it clear what parties are not in agreement about, the evidence that's relied upon and parents being clear what they want for their child and this needs to be clear and factual.</p> <p>Kevin asked if there were any other comments on this subject and moved the meeting on as Emily had an update she wanted to share about social media and a piece of work around a video.</p> <p>Emily said that Carly Speechley the Executive Director Childrens Services has asked for this and looking at positive results about keeping children in provisions. They have been rolling out a training programme on inclusion. They have also been piloting therapy dogs. Carly said no one really knows about this so asked if</p>	
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	<p>I can put something on social media. Then I am doing a slightly longer piece of work for Ofsted. I added SENDIASS and the social media engagement as its extraordinary. The Facebook live sessions will be on there and this will be added to the reports for Ofsted.</p> <p>Kevin said he thought that this was good.</p> <p>Ellie said following the last meeting she looked at social media reach as advised by Kevin in the last meeting and there were 569 views on last night's face book live. What we know it's a good and fast way to getting instant advice out there.</p> <p>Sarah updated on a piece of work with the family hubs so we have booked out some monthly drop-in sessions out around the Borough where we can offer information/advice. We will rotate round each taking turns and use all the hubs. We will then measure this and see what's happening. E.g. if a lot of parents went, we will keep you updated on this. All we can do is measure the impact on the families.</p> <p>Esther asked if you could book out time to speak to a case officer or have slots? Wanting to know more about how it would work.</p> <p>Sarah said it's difficult to see how it will go, even if/when we advertise the workshops sometime, they can be quiet. We also don't know what family's engagement with the Hubs will look like either yet. We will just test it out and go with what the families need.</p> <p>Chloe said she feels It's hard to know what parents will need and what to speak about.</p>	
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	<p>Sarah advised just go with it and see how it goes. Ellie could attend too in a supportive role.</p> <p>Kevin – Anything to speak about in AOB?</p> <p>Sarah mentioned the membership of SMG and that this was meeting 5 of 6 and the two-year process is then finished. This means the terms of reference and membership needs reviewing. Sarah said as the chairpersons have had 1 year each at chairing it feels natural to keep this role going as it is and to keep two chairs too as it's helped when one chair has not been able to attend, Jo and Kevin have shuffled around to make sure the other can cover in these instances. Sarah said we needed to open discussion on this and would pull the SMG parent reps together to discuss how to progress to the next cycle of SMG.</p> <p>Emily said she really liked SMG particularly hearing parent voice – this is so important for us.</p> <p>Kevin said that in terms of advice he always offer something technological and asked if we had ever thought about using co-pilot? It's a really good tool and will help with admin. Kevin – added that it's good for doing minutes and admin things and will save so much time. Kevin advised further that you can write a business case and co-pilot will make it into a 5-page report for you.</p> <p>Esther agreed with Kevin and used it in her professional role and said the benefits are worth it.</p> <p>Emily agreed and offered to support the service learn how to use it.</p>	
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	Kevin thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.	
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Meeting Action Plan

Action to follow Up	Members Involved	Timescales	Status
SW to draft minutes and circulate and include formal thanks and send invites to new members where there are membership changes	SW	30 September 2025	Green
SW to resend the meeting link for the next meeting to remind people of when and where it is			
To complete the joint commissioning arrangements, report and track next steps governance processes	SW/KR SW	September 2025	Green
Publish Annual Report	SW	September 2025	Green
Arrange meeting with MD- protocols development for informal mediation	SW/MD	July 2025	Orange
Prepare a business case	SW	October 2025	Red
Facebook analytics to be gathered.	SW/EH	August 2025	Green
Publish minutes of last meeting.	SW/EH	May 2025	Green
To complete data for end of financial year and Data Dashboard	SW	Q1 June 2025	Green

Terminology Explained

SENDASS – Special Educational Needs Disability Information Advice Support Service

SMG – Strategic Management Group

SEN – Special Educational Needs

HOS – Head of Service

DSR – Dynamic Support Register

DCR – Disabled Children's Register

ICB- Integrated Care Board

CETR – Care, Education and Treatment Reviews

SLA – Service Level Agreement

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

SENDIST – Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

DfE- department for Education

CDC- Council for Disabled Children

Date and Time of Next Meeting Thursday 23rd October 2025