



TORBAY SEND LOCAL AREA IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP BOARD (SLAIP)

PUBLISHED MINUTES – JANUARY 2026

Date: 14th January 2026

Time: 10.00-12.30pm

Location: Online

1. Intro and Apologies

- The Chair welcomed two new members, noting increased education representation.
- Chair noted the impact of the ILACS in relation to attendance as several board members were involved in meetings with inspectors.
- Young person's section postponed due to the absence of the SEND Youth Forum Chair.
- Parent carer voice agenda item deferred due to Chair's unavoidable absence

2. Minutes and actions

December's minutes approved.

Action Tracker

- Several actions have turned green since the last meeting, indicating completion or significant progress.
- Some actions remain amber, mainly related to the communication strategy, program lead recruitment, parental QA involvement, and transitions task group; updates were provided for each.
- The JSNA workshop is scheduled, the transitions group is being scoped, and agency support is being sought for SEND team capacity issues.
- The AP SEND QA framework is ready to go, and a full year's worth of meeting dates for the board has been circulated.
- Leads are encouraged to review and update progress percentages, especially where work has started but impact is not yet logged.

- No additional actions or exceptions were raised by board members during the review.

3. Risk Register

Discussion and Actions

- The Chair emphasised the need for robust risk identification, monitoring, and evidence of mitigation.
- Risks should be raised early and linked to any slippage or issues in the Priority Impact Plan.
- It was noted that some risks transcend all priority areas, especially the lack of programme management lead.
- A board member offered to share another local area's framework for capturing evidence and impact.
- Risks were highlighted around capacity due to business as usual and local government reorganisation, suggesting these be broadened.

Key risks discussed:

- Lack of programme management lead: Joint funding for role agreed between LA and ICB. MOU and JD evaluation taking place. Role to be recruited to asap.
- Parental confidence: Work on the communications plan and positive steps in place to date was noted. However, it was acknowledged that this is an area that will take time. Others discussed system-wide challenges, including trauma and legacy issues.
- EHCP timeliness: The Educational Psychology team has received 170 requests for the year so far, compared to 87 at this point in previous years and 114 last year, indicating a sharp increase in demand. The team is predicting a shortfall of 112 assessments based on current modelling. Staff are already 50–60% through their allocation for needs assessments, raising concerns about capacity for the remainder of the year. A recovery plan for the EPS and options appraisal has been developed to address the backlog and vacancies. Assurance on process improvements and agency support was provided but flagged ongoing risk if demand remains high.
- SEND team capacity and recruitment for Head of SEND: An external partner raised a concern about capacity gaps in leadership roles. An update was provided on interim arrangements and recruitment progress

- The issue of challenges around the Section 75 arrangement with the hospital trust was raised. If notice is given on this arrangement, the next year will involve significant work to separate adult social care from the trust, with a need to ensure safe transition arrangements. A decision on Section 75 will be made by the end of March, and it was suggested to note this as a risk now and revisit the implications in March depending on the outcome.

4. Progress Tracker

Discussion and Actions

- The Chair confirmed the tracker is based on impact statements, not just actions, and progress is measured by evidence of impact.
- Priority 1 and 4 covered in spotlights; updates given for 2, 3, and 5.
- JSNA workshop scheduled, with ongoing quarterly commissioning reviews.
- An update was given on attendance, neurodiversity, and ASC places, noting DfE decision needed for new provision.
- Contract review meetings and positive family feedback for EO test programme was provided.
- SEND team sickness absences and agency cover remain an ongoing area of risk.
- Good collaborative work between Children's and Adult Social Care was noted, however flagged transitional safeguarding as an area needing focus.
- The Chair questioned gaps in some areas that had not yet started – result was reporting issues rather than lack of action.

5. Data and Quality Assurance (QA)

Discussion and Actions

- Subgroup met prior to January to agree terms of reference and review dashboards.
- Main focus for LA data: EHCP timeliness, backlog, and quality assurance audits.
- Transparency on system-wide EHCP outputs required
- Health dashboard praised for clarity and comparative data
- Waiting times for autism remain a challenge; impact of support while waiting discussed.

- QA report recommendations to be shortlisted for action.
- Capacity risk: audits mainly undertaken by SEND team, risk of single point of failure. Proposal to open audit participation to more partners.
- Audit time commitments were raised and suggestion of a static group for consistency.
- Schools have limited involvement in audits; proposal to expand.
- An external partner offered independent quality audits.
- Social care input at annual review discussed; reminder to schools to use new tool.

Key Actions:

- Short overview of auditing expectations to be circulated to board members

6. Children and young people's voice

Deferred due to Youth Forum Chair unable to attend

7. Family Voice

Main item deferred due to Chair's absence

The Chair of the PCF passed on the overwhelming thanks from families to all those involved in funding and supporting the Play Torbay clubs to return, ASRUS, Mayfield Club Hub and Forest School. The first week back it was clear how important these connections are to families and the belonging they give them.

9. Spotlight 1 – Waiting Times

- **Key Focus Areas:** The board reviewed waiting times for specialist assessments and support, specifically in mental health (MERS/CAMHS), speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, community paediatrics, and neurodevelopmental pathways (autism/ADHD).
- **Improvements:** Notable progress was reported in reducing waiting times for under-5s in speech and language therapy, attributed to new drop-in clinics and

service redesign. Community paediatrics in Torbay has no children waiting over 40 weeks, with about half seen within 18 weeks.

- **Challenges:** The most significant ongoing challenge is the increasing waiting time for autism/neurodevelopmental assessments, driven by rising demand. This is a high-risk area with system-wide implications.
- **System Response:** Recovery work is underway, including additional funding, pathway redesign (INAP), and efforts to simplify and standardise processes. However, the sustainability of improvements depends on securing ongoing funding, which remains uncertain.
- **Support While Waiting:** There is a strong emphasis on improving the “Waiting Well” offer, with new services like the My Way emotional health platform, occupational therapy advice lines, and mapping of neurodiversity support resources. The partnership is working to ensure families are aware of and can access these supports.
- **Data and Impact:** The board is focused on not just reporting waiting times but also evidencing the impact of support provided while waiting, using feedback from families and young people.
- **Risks and Dependencies:** Risks include non-recurrent funding for autism recovery, capacity constraints, and the need for improved communication with families about realistic expectations and available support.

Key Actions – Waiting Times

- Additional funding allocated for autism/neurodevelopmental assessment recovery, with ongoing efforts to secure recurrent funding.
 - Implementation of the Integrated Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway (INAP) to standardise and streamline processes.
 - Expansion of early access services (e.g., speech and language drop-ins, OT advice line, My Way platform) and mapping of support resources for families while waiting.
 - Ongoing monitoring and reporting of waiting times and impact, with a focus on evidencing improvements and learning from family feedback.
 - Partnership work to develop escalation panels for “stuck” cases and ensure multi-agency solutions for complex needs.
-

10. Spotlight 2 – Governance – co production and Communication Strategy

- **Governance:** The governance strand is acknowledged as a priority but was set aside for this meeting to focus on communication and co-production. There are plans to use a DfE maturity toolkit to self-assess governance effectiveness, with a follow-up meeting scheduled to address this.
- **Co-production:** Co-production is integrated with communication efforts. The SEND Pledge event is central, aiming to gather actionable feedback from families and professionals to shape future actions. The Torbay Co-production Charter underpins this approach, emphasising active participation and shared decision-making.
- **Communication Strategy:** A draft strategy has been developed as a starting framework, pending further input from the SEND Pledge event. The strategy is structured around three levels: strategic, operational, and individual communications. It highlights the need to identify and engage trusted networks, recognizing that families often access information through informal community channels rather than official sources.
- **Cultural Change:** The most challenging aspect is driving cultural and behavioural change across all partner organisations to ensure consistent, high-quality day-to-day communication with families. This is seen as a long-term goal, requiring buy-in and action at every level.
- **Immediate Actions:** Next steps include a co-production session to refine the strategy, the SEND Pledge event to gather practical actions, and mapping of trusted information channels. There is also a focus on improving feedback mechanisms and parental confidence.
- **Risks and Capacity:** Concerns were raised about whether the current approach is a true strategy or more of an action plan, and whether there are sufficient capacity and expertise to deliver the required cultural and communication changes. The need for prioritisation and possibly external communications expertise was discussed.
- **Feedback and Evidence:** The strategy will be informed by existing feedback from families, complaints data, and ongoing engagement, with a new family liaison role planned to strengthen the feedback loop and evidence positive change.

Key Actions – Governance, Co-production, and Communication Strategy

- Use of the DfE maturity toolkit to self-assess and strengthen governance, with a follow-up meeting planned.

- Delivery of the SEND Pledge event to co-produce practical actions with families and professionals, based on the Torbay Co-production Charter.
 - Refinement of the draft communication strategy through further co-production sessions and integration of feedback from the Pledge event.
 - Mapping and engagement of trusted information networks to improve reach and accuracy of communications.
 - Recruitment of a family liaison role to enhance feedback collection and parental engagement.
 - Prioritisation of actions post-Pledge event, with a focus on short-term deliverables and a pathway toward longer-term cultural change.
-