

West Sussex Children and Young People's Plan 2026 to 2029



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Foreword

Welcome to the West Sussex Children and Young People's Plan for 2026 to 2029.

We are ambitious for all our children and young people, they are at the heart of our communities, our present and our future. This plan acts as a framework, it sets out our shared partnership priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people in our county and helping them to have the best start in life.

We believe West Sussex is a great place to grow up and live. Over the next four years, we will continue to work together across local government, health, education, police and the voluntary and community sector to achieve our priorities.

Over the past four years we have seen partnerships across the county strengthen and improvements in services for children and young people. We know that nothing in this plan can be achieved in isolation, and whilst there will be challenges and competing priorities, we are confident that working together we can achieve more and make positive and lasting impact.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their thoughts and helped contribute to this plan.



Jacquie Russell

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning



Dan Ruaux

Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning



What it is like to be a child or young person in West Sussex

As Chair of the Youth Cabinet, I feel privileged to be writing about what life is like for children and young people growing up in West Sussex.

I hear from lots of young people from the Youth Cabinet and wider afield. There are so many positive things about living in West Sussex. There are great opportunities to have our voice heard and make a difference through things like the Youth Cabinet and Youth Parliament, Children in Care council, the Care Leavers advisory board, our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's (UASC) voice group and the Children First Board.

There are many positive things available for young people to get involved in and make a difference. For example, Youth Cabinet members get to visit Parliament and take part in democratic events, which helps us feel like our voices matter. We also have great access to education, with lots of colleges offering different courses and paths for the future. There are also many opportunities for volunteering, which help young people gain confidence and learn new skills. And of course, we're lucky to have so many green spaces, parks, and beaches that make it easy to get outside, have fun, and spend time with friends.

But there are challenges too. The rising cost of living affects families across the county, and it also impacts children and young people directly. Many leisure activities have become more expensive, meaning some young people can't join clubs or take part in things they enjoy. Transport is another issue, especially in rural areas, where buses can be unreliable or very limited. For young people turning 18, travel can become even more expensive, making it harder to get to college, work, or activities.

We also have clear hopes for the future. We want to feel safe in the evenings, with well-lit streets and safer places to meet like youth clubs that are open and welcoming. We also want more visible police or a lawful presence in communities, so young people feel protected rather than worried when out and about. We want good, nutritious food in schools that is accessible to everyone. We want low-cost, reliable transport that helps us get to where we need to be.

Most of all, we want West Sussex to keep being a place where children and young people feel valued, included and supported, while continuing to make it even better so every child and young person can truly thrive.



Reema Ahamed
Chair of West Sussex Youth Cabinet



Working together – the role of the Children First Board

The Children First Board has three key objectives:

- To improve health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and young people who live in West Sussex, or who are cared for by West Sussex's children's services and make life better for children and young people who need our help and support
- Ensure that all partners providing services for children and young people in West Sussex work together effectively
- Ensure the voice of children, young people and their families is fully heard, considered and reflected in the work of the West Sussex Children First board.

The Children First Board plays a central role in ensuring services for children and young people in West Sussex are improving. The Board is independently chaired and is made up of key partners including education, the community and voluntary sector, health services, police, children's social care and other council services. All Board members are committed to putting children first and driving long-lasting positive change for all children and young people in the county.



Governance and accountability

The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is a partnership plan which is monitored and overseen by the Children First Board, which reports into the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board. The Children First Board will monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of the plan against the priority areas for each year of its life.

Like the lives of children, young people and families a lot will change over the 4-year lifespan of this plan. The CYPP will therefore need to be flexible and will be reviewed to ensure that it evolves to meet changing needs and ongoing alignment with national policy change and integration with other local and national strategic plans.

Elements of the CYPP priorities and actions will appear in other strategic plans and delivery of the CYPP will happen through different programmes across the West Sussex system. Although the Children First Board will be responsible for oversight of the plan the following structures will also monitor and support delivery of the priorities within the plan.

These structures include the following:

- West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board
- West Sussex Cabinet
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Board
- West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Pan Sussex Children's Board
- West Sussex Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Group
- Corporate Parenting Panel
- Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
- Sussex Safeguarding Children's Executive.

Appendix 1 highlights governance arrangements for the local authority and where the Children First Board sits within this.



Emily Brock
Independent Chair of the Children First Board



Key successes from the 2022 to 2025 Children and Young People's Plan

- 10% reduction in the number of domestic abuse re-referrals made with children in the family over the past two years (Q1 2023/24 compared to Q4 2024/25)
- There has been a 1% increase in the number of pupils with SEND supported in mainstream education in the last 3 years. It is important to set this figure within the context that since 2022, the number of children requiring SEND Support in West Sussex mainstream schools has risen from 9,700 to 11,320, 14.3% of the pupil population, up from 13.5%. This reflects growing demand for inclusive education and increased pressure on services
- A 35% decrease in the number of children and young people involved in road traffic collisions
- Whilst there have been fluctuations, the total number of permanent school exclusions (primary and secondary) has reduced by 30% between the Autumn term 2023 and Spring term 2025
- Working with young people we've created new online content to help young people to feel and stay safe
- Increased the percentage of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) issued within 20 weeks. In 2023 this figure stood at 2.5% and in the last quarter of 2024/25 this figure has increased to 14.3%. Improvement remains the focus and progress continues to be made
- Enhanced provision of online safety training and support to parents including online and in-person events
- There are termly fluctuations however, Early Help provision of support to schools has seen a 41% increase in the number of interventions carried out by the Dedicated Schools Team in the last year
- Strengthened the Single Point of Access (SPOA) function to support children and young people to get help for other services
- Introduction of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy
- Publication of the public mental health needs assessment outlining the needs of children and young people.



How we developed this plan

We held a 6-week public consultation, to ensure the plan would be shaped by lived experience and feedback from the communities we serve. We actively engaged with:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Professionals.

This resulted in 682 replies, which included 275 responses from children and young people aged 12 – 24 years old and feedback separately from our SEND Young Voices group.

A duplicate response of 97 replies from the Smartphone Free Childhood Chanctonbury group was recorded and is counted as one response for the purposes of the consultation.

Once the consultation ended, we held two partnership meetings to consider the results of the consultation, foster future ownership and engagement and to support the co-production approach to:

- Develop shared goals and outcomes from the priority areas
- Ensure content is inclusive and responsive
- Consider how we can measure the impact of priority areas.

The draft plan was considered alongside the outcomes from the previous plan and alongside the West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, the West Sussex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other local and national strategies currently available.

Review and governance

The draft plan was reviewed by the Children First Board and refined following their feedback. It was later approved at the Children First Board meeting in December 2025.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were built in to track progress and impact from the CYPP, and this will become a standing agenda item within the Children First Board.



Our priorities

The CYPP will focus on the following 5 overarching priorities. This is what we, as a partnership want to achieve over the 4 years this plan is in place.

1. Keeping children and young people safe from harm
2. Providing the earliest support to children, young people and families in greatest need
3. Reducing inequalities for children and young people
4. Improving children and young people's mental, emotional health and wellbeing
5. Working together with partners to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.



Priority 1 – Keeping children and young people safe from harm

Keeping children and young people in West Sussex safe from harm is everyone's responsibility and a shared priority we need to work on together. If something's going wrong in the life of a child or young person — at home, online, or in the community, we want to spot it early and help before things get worse.

How we'll achieve this:

- Working together to provide education and training around online safety children, young people, families and professionals
- Reduction in the number of re-referrals to children's social care
- Support children to live in safe and loving families to prevent children being looked after by the local authority
- Decrease in the number of hospital admissions of children and young people in relation to self-harm
- Continue to develop multi-agency approaches to tackling exploitation of children, substance misuse and supporting children and young people to keep themselves safe from harm
- Improve education to children, young people and families around the dangers of knife carrying
- Reduction in incidents and repeat incidents of children and young people experiencing exploitation and greater rehabilitation of perpetrators
- Promoting access to safe, inclusive places for young people to have fun and feel safe in our local communities. This will include greater use of Libraries and Family Hubs
- Enhanced coordination and communication across services who work with children, young people and families to improve outcomes
- Ensuring there is consistent provision of specialist support available to children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse
- Reduction in the number of domestic abuse re-referrals made with children in the family.



Priority 2 – Providing the earliest support to children, young people and families in greatest need

We know that life can sometimes be hard for our children, young people and families. When things are tough, getting help early can make a big difference. We're working to help ensure information, advice and support is easy to find and available when it is needed.

How we'll achieve this:

- Access to Family Hubs, crisis support and expert information. Advice and guidance via the Early Help Service and voluntary and community groups
- Parenting support provided as part of all early intervention work
- Dedicated schools' teams supporting all West Sussex schools
- Increase support available to lower income families during school holidays through the Department for Education funded Holiday Activities Fund
- Increase in the number of pre-school children accessing early years provision and free childcare funding
- We will ensure clear and accessible communication across children's services, education and health settings
- The right health services are provided at the right time for all children young people and families
- Ensure that the provision of supported accommodation is available to those that need it, enabling them to become more independent and resilient.



Priority 3 – Reducing inequalities for children and young people

We believe every child and young person should have the same chances to do well, regardless of their circumstances. That means working across services and organisations to ensure support is fair, inclusive and works for everyone. Together, we're creating more opportunities like supported internships, effective transitions and safe spaces as part of this priority area.

How we'll achieve this:

- Support young children to improve their school readiness
- Improve access to drug and alcohol specialist treatment for children and young people, including for all vulnerable groups
- Develop confidence and competence amongst the workforce supporting young people to talk about sexual health and to increase access to sexual health services for all
- Working with schools to reduce the number of school exclusions
- Implementation of a protected characteristics strategy for care experienced children and young people so they are not adversely disadvantaged compared to their peers
- Increase the number of supported internships available for children and young people with SEND
- Implement a young carers covenant and monitor impact to improve the life chances of young carers
- LGBT+ young people have safe spaces to be their authentic selves and receive timely support when required
- Effective transitions between all education transition points (early years – primary school – secondary school – further education – post education)
- Ensure safe and suitable housing for children, young people and families through comprehensive assessment and targeted support to reduce the risk of ill health and homelessness
- Improved school attendance for all children and young people, whilst understanding that greater support needs to be put in place to enable all children and young people, with a particular focus on children and young people with SEND
- Closing the disadvantage gap for all children and young people across all key stages
- Support children with a refugee background to fully integrate by providing comprehensive support
- Protecting children and young people from the harms of second-hand smoke
- Disrupting the sale of illicit tobacco and vapes to children and young people.



Priority 4 – Improving children and young people's mental, emotional health and wellbeing

We know that mental, emotional health and wellbeing is a huge and growing area of concern for young people, families and professionals. We want to help ensure children and young people get the right support when they need it. We're working to offer more support whilst waiting for services and training the people who work with children and young people to better understand and support mental, emotional health and wellbeing.

How we'll achieve this:

- Reduced referral to assessment time and referral to treatment time for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support
- Increased support for children and young people whilst waiting for CAMHS assessment and treatment
- Effective transitions between children's social care and mental health and adults' social care and mental health services
- Increase focus on prevention and early intervention to improve children and young people's mental health wellbeing transitioning to adulthood
- Reduce the number of young people aged 16 – 18 not in education, employment and training (NEET)
- Increase in Family Group Conferencing to develop well-being plans for identified children and young people
- Supporting the resilience of children, young people and families through early intervention, inclusive participation, and trauma informed support
- Through the Psychological Hub develop confidence of the social care workforce to respond to emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of children and young people open to children's social care
- Provide children and young people and families with information on how to access support around emotional wellbeing and mental health.



Priority 5 – Working together with partners to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

We want to make sure all our children and young people with SEND get the help they need early, feel included in school, and have their voices heard. By improving inclusive support in mainstream schools and through education provision, speeding up access to services, and working closely with families, we want to make things fairer and more responsive, so all children and young people with SEND achieve their potential.

How we'll achieve this:

- Support mainstream schools to develop enhanced mainstream provision, Quality First teaching, Ordinarily Inclusive Available Practice (OIAP) and special school outreach
- Strengthen our systems for early identification, ensuring that the needs of children and young people with SEND are recognised and supported as early as possible
- Reduce the disadvantage gap for children and young people with SEND
- Increase the voice and participation work with children and young people with SEND and their families to ensure their voice is heard and acted upon in service provision
- Enhanced communication around SEND support and provision
- More children and young people with SEND supported in mainstream schools
- Increase in the percentage of EHCPs issued within the statutory deadline
- Enhanced support for parents and carers whilst waiting for EHCPs and SEND support
- Reduction in the wait time for Speech and Language Therapy support.



Glossary

Acronyms

AP – Alternative Provision

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CYPP – Children and Young People's Plan

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

LGBT+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

OIAP – Ordinarily Inclusive Available Practice

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

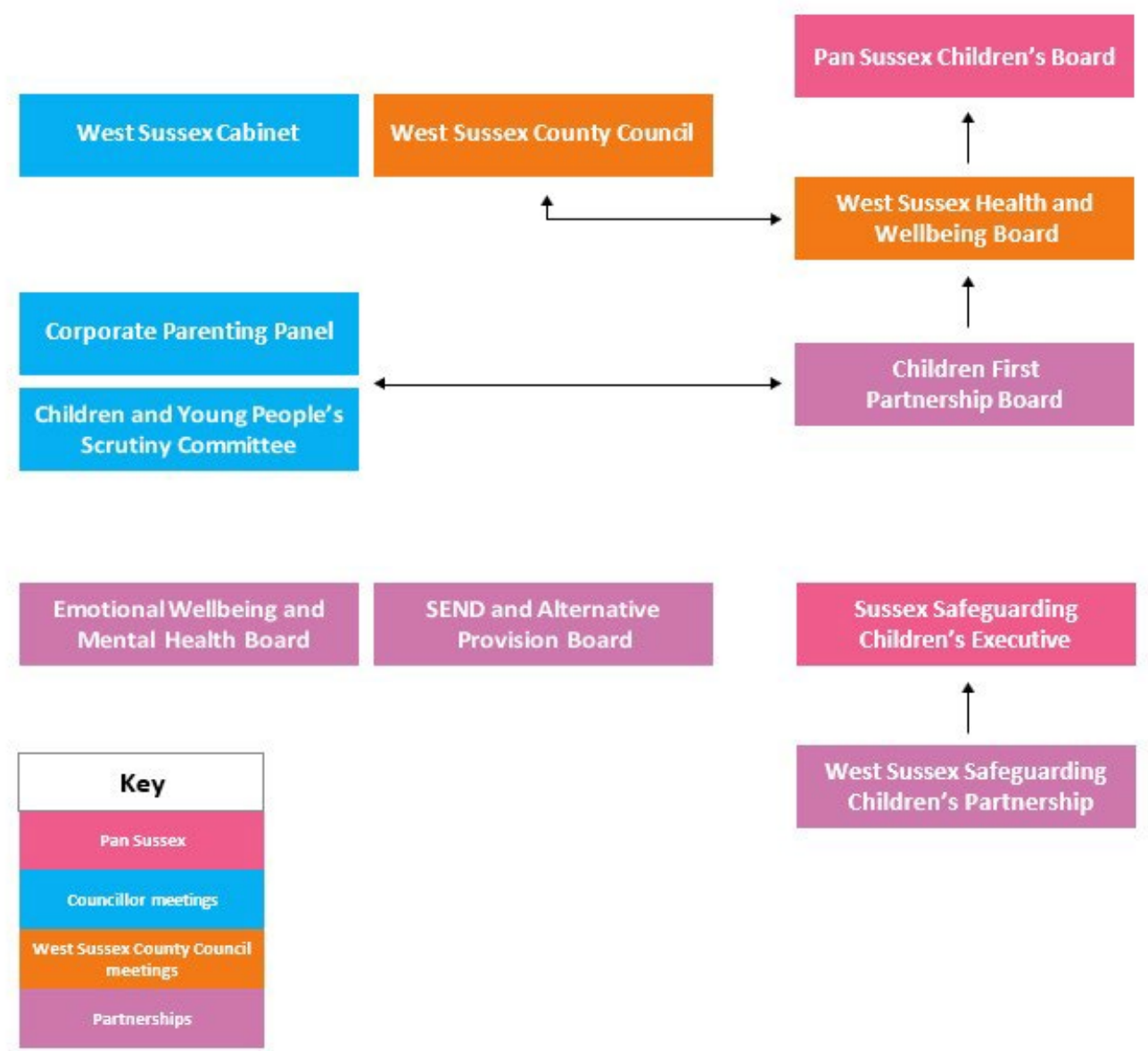
Terminology

Within the plan referencing to 'children and young people' refers to anyone aged 0-18 years and to the age of 25 years for our care experienced young people and young people with SEND and those with an EHCP. Early Years provision refers to the care and education provided to children from birth until the age of primary school.



Appendix 1

Children, Young People and Learning Governance Chart



Partners

Thank you to our Children First Board partners who have been key to the production of this CYPP and will be instrumental in ensuring its successful delivery.

Chichester College Group

Growing West Sussex Alliance

Healthwatch

NHS Sussex

Stonepillow

Sussex Community Foundation Trust

Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust

Sussex Police

Sussex Youth

West Sussex County Council

West Sussex District and Borough Councils

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

West Sussex Schools

YMCA Downslink Group

Contact details

If you have any questions about the Children and Young People's Plan or you would like to find out more, please email **CYPP@westsussex.gov.uk**



