

**UK Government**

To: Leigh Whitehouse – Chief Executive of West Sussex
Daniel Ruaux – Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning
Karen McDowell – Chief Executive of Surrey Heartlands and Sussex ICB

cc. Mike Suarez – Executive Director of Finance and Support Services of West Sussex

2 October 2026

Dear Leigh, Daniel and Karen,

Re: Local SEND Reform Plan Assessment Outcome

Every child and young person deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential, whatever their needs or circumstances. Delivering that ambition depends on strong local leadership, effective partnership working and a shared commitment across education, health and care to build a system that families can trust. As local leaders, your role in setting that direction, strengthening local delivery and securing better outcomes for children and young people with SEND is critical. Thank you to you and your teams for all the work you are doing in this important area.

This government's programme of SEND reform presents an important opportunity to improve support for children, young people and families, and to build a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable system. It was against this backdrop that, in March 2026, this government commissioned your local area partnership to develop and submit a Local SEND Reform Plan, underpinned by a Local Partnership Maturity Assessment.

Thank you for the commitment and effort that you and your partners have brought to the development of your Local SEND Reform Plan. We are pleased to confirm that your plan has been approved.

This approval recognises that your plan has met the required threshold and provides a foundation from which your local area can move into delivery. It also reflects the

government's recognition of the commitment that your partnership has shown to reform, and the progress made in developing a shared plan for improvement.

While your partnership has shown a positive trajectory, the government's wider assessment is that your partnership remains at an early stage of development and has not yet demonstrated the maturity, grip or assurance that will be needed to deliver reform successfully at pace. Further work is needed to strengthen capability, governance, partnership working, and delivery disciplines to ensure that the plan translates into sustained improvements for children, young people and families. Further feedback on your plan is attached at **Annex A**. You should consider this feedback carefully and address the areas identified through your delivery arrangements. We expect this to be reflected in your local governance, implementation planning and reporting to the government. If our officials can help you to do this in any way, please do get in touch. We stand ready to work together to support you.

The government's approval and financial support is subject to clear expectations. Successful delivery will require stronger collective ownership, more rigorous oversight, and a sustained focus on measurable outcomes. We expect the partnership to move swiftly from planning to implementation, with clear senior accountability, robust performance monitoring, and early evidence that delivery is leading to improved experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

As you move into delivery, the government will closely work with you and monitor progress. Government officials, health regional SEND leads, and your assigned SEND and Financial Advisers will continue to engage with your partnership as you implement your plan. Quarterly review meetings will provide a formal opportunity to consider progress against the commitments in your plan, assess emerging risks and challenges, and agree any further action required. Where appropriate, these review meetings will be consolidated with existing improvement engagement. Further details on available support and monitoring arrangements are set out in **Annex B**.

Your local area partnership is expected to submit quarterly data returns as set out in the guidance you received in August 2026, to enable the government to understand the emerging impact of implementation. The Department for Education will, in turn, use your submitted data to provide quarterly data reports with visualised analysis and benchmarking to support your local delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

As your local area's Local SEND Reform Plan has been approved, you are now eligible to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of your DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025-2026. The indicative High Needs Stability Grant allocation for West Sussex is £182,695,949. Your allocation will be confirmed in writing in due course, with payments expected on 30 November 2026. Your allocation remains subject to change as a result of final audited outturn. If any overpayment is made under this grant or any amount is paid in error, the Secretary of State may reduce, suspend or withhold grant payments or require the repayment of the whole or any part of the grant monies paid, as may be determined by the Secretary of State and notified in writing to the recipient authority.

For deficits that arise in 2026–27 and 2027–28, local authorities can expect that we will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited. Future support will take into account LAs' successful delivery of their approved Local SEND reform plan, including appropriate use of investment funding to establish an Experts at Hand offer.

Once again, we would like to thank you and your partners for the work that has gone into developing your Local SEND Reform Plan. Approval is an important step, but it is only the beginning of the next phase. The government will continue to monitor progress closely, looking for demonstrable improvement against the commitments in your plan. Where progress is insufficient or not evidenced, we will consider whether further support, challenge or oversight is required. Reform must be experienced by children and young people with SEND and their families in practice. We are asking your partnership to now demonstrate that it can convert commitment into delivery, and delivery into better outcomes for the children and young people with SEND in your care, and their families.

We recognise that this will require sustained effort across local government, health services, education providers and central government. We are committed to working with you to realise this ambition, providing the support, investment, challenge and national leadership needed alongside your local efforts. We are asking your local area to provide the clear commitment, focus and leadership that this critical issue requires, and we stand ready to support you. Together, we can build a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable SEND system that earns the confidence of children and young people with SEND and their families, and enables every child to achieve and thrive.

Information on your outcome will be shared with MPs whose constituencies fall within your local area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Georgia Gould". The script is cursive and fluid.

Georgia Gould

**Minister of State for School Standards
Department for Education**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alison McGovern". The script is cursive and fluid.

Alison McGovern

**Minister of State for Social Care and Mental Health
Department for Health and Social Care**