



UK Government

To: Anne Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council,
Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services, Torbay Council,
Libby Ryan-Davies, Chief Executive, NHS Devon ICB.

cc. Malcolm Coe, Director of Finance and S151 Officer.

9 March 2026

Dear Anne, Nancy, Libby,

Thank you for the work you do across children's services, from early years through to supporting learners in post-16 and on into adult education. For several years, local areas have been operating in a challenging SEND system that has often felt fragmented and difficult to navigate. We recognise that this has placed significant and growing pressures on services, and we do not underestimate the difficult decisions that many have taken to drive support for children and young people.

On Monday, 23rd February, this government published its Schools White Paper, setting out a clear and ambitious plan to create an education system where every child and young person can achieve and thrive. Our ambition is to raise standards, improve inclusion and broaden children's experiences so that every child leaves school with strong foundations for life and work. This is backed by over £7bn of investment over the next 3 years to embed inclusive practice in mainstream schools, deliver easy access without statutory assessments to experts including Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists and create tens of thousands of new school places for children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings, with thousands of new inclusion bases, and in special schools. The funding and support to deliver these changes begins from 2026/27 and families must correspondingly start to feel this change now. Delivering this

ambition requires strong, transparent system leadership and a relentless focus on children's outcomes at every level of government.

It is important to reflect on what comparable data tells us about how outcomes for children and young people with SEND have played out locally, and what is now needed to drive a step change in transformative improvement. Despite all local areas operating within the same challenging system, we have seen wide variation in local outcomes that cannot be explained by systemic changes alone. We want to ensure that government investment is being spent in a way that delivers the best outcomes for children and all young people have access to local support that meets their needs at the earliest point.

With the Schools White Paper setting out a clear, ambitious plan to reform the education system, our expectations across local services are now unequivocal. We expect every local area to rise to the challenge and embed a robust approach to local system leadership, financial discipline and operational delivery to bring forwards a sustainable system that delivers strong outcomes for children and families. Government officials stand ready to support you in delivering this change.

We are commissioning each local area partnership to develop and submit a Local SEND Reform Plan in June 2026, underpinned by a Local Partnership Maturity Assessment. These documents should be used to clearly set out how you will improve and further strengthen your system, tilting provision towards stronger inclusive practice and early intervention, and ensuring that the conditions underpinning effective long-term outcomes are in place. This will help to identify and spread best practice as we work collectively to reform our SEND system.

For local areas with the most acute performance concerns, officials will be placing heightened scrutiny on the extent to which you are doing everything within your control to implement the reforms effectively. This includes a close examination of leadership capability, the pace and grip with which you act, and clear accountability through a named Senior Responsible Officer. The Department for Education will also use returned Local SEND Reform Plans to assess ongoing performance and delivery, in order to best allocate the support and challenge that we will offer throughout this period of reform.

To support the development of high-quality, ambitious plans, the attached commissioning pack contains the templates and guidance you will need, alongside further detail on timelines, plan expectations, and funding streams to support the delivery of local reform. In the delivery of high-quality plans, you will need to evidence sustained improvement and leadership-backed action to achieve agreed milestones.

As you develop and implement these plans, you will receive ongoing support and challenge from government officials, alongside your assigned SEND Advisers and Financial Advisers. We have asked officials for regular updates on your progress. Where exemplary practice from local areas is seen we will work with you to spread it recognising improvements, even in challenging conditions, are being delivered. Where progress does not materialise the Department for Education will act decisively. When failure is persistent, we will not hesitate to use the full range of intervention powers including removing the licence to deliver SEND services.

All local authorities with a SEND deficit will be eligible in 2026–27 to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of their High Needs related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025–26. This grant will only be paid once each local authority has secured approval of their local area's Local SEND Reform Plan. Payments will be made from Autumn 2026 for local authorities whose local area plans are approved in the first round of assessment.

Where a local authority's plan does not meet the threshold for approval, they will be required to revise and improve their plans, with continued support from advisers, to ensure they meet the required standard. Where revised plans meet the required approval threshold, payments will be made in Spring 2027, within the 2026-27 financial year. Local authorities will not receive any payments until their Local SEND Reform Plan has been approved.

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 to establish an Experts at Hand offer.

All children with SEND and their families deserve a system that they can trust - one that is responsive, inclusive, and provides the conditions which enable every child to achieve and thrive. This is a shared responsibility across central and local government, working alongside schools, health partners, early years settings and post-16 providers. We are determined to transform our SEND system and to demonstrate the pace, grip and transparency essential for delivering change. We are asking your local area for the same clear commitment and credible action and stand ready to work with you to deliver the changes required to ensure that every child can achieve and thrive.

Yours Sincerely,

Bridget Phillipson

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

Wes Streeting

The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care