

Torbay SEND Improvement

Priority Action 1: Delivery and Impact

Governance, co-production, communication and parent/carers relationships

The Task and Finish Group is asked to:

- note the progress made in strengthening PA1 governance, co-production and parent/carers relationships;
- recognise that improved parent/carers confidence is not yet demonstrated consistently but work is ongoing and impact changes are likely in the coming months;
- Comment and advise on how the partnership can continue to improve and consider the need for a further impact update showing what changed for children, young people and families.

1. Executive summary

This paper sets out the Torbay Local Area Partnership response to the March 2025 Area SEND inspection findings relevant to Priority Action 1 (PA1). It presents the position at inspection, the changes made since inspection, the evidence currently available and the impact that can be demonstrated at September 2026.

Overall judgement: governance and partnership arrangements are significantly stronger. Accountability, oversight and routes for children, young people and parent/carers to influence decisions have improved. There is evidence that stronger governance is contributing to better performance in some services. However, the partnership cannot yet demonstrate that communication, timeliness and parent/carers confidence have improved consistently across the whole SEND system.

- Governance has moved from unclear strategic ownership and limited impact reporting to an independent, six-weekly partnership board cycle, named priority leads, strengthened risk and escalation routes, and more systematic performance and quality assurance.
- Spotlight reports, audits and dashboard information provide evidence of regular scrutiny and assurance activity.
- Co-production reach has grown. SEND Family Voice Torbay reported 778 members, 1,300 online reach and 460 contributions in 2025/26; more than 30 children and young people participated in SEND Pledge co-design.
- The Local Offer remains a key delivery and inspection-readiness risk. A five-month project plan from September 2026 to January 2027 has been developed, it includes content audit, revised content, user testing, feedback governance, analytics, communications and final assurance.
- Parent/carers feedback remains mixed, increasing positive examples of person-centered support sit alongside continuing concerns about communication, delay, clarity and escalation.

2. Purpose and context

The Area SEND inspection took place from 17 to 21 March 2025. Priority Action 1 requires the Local Area Partnership to strengthen the systems that support collaborative work, including governance arrangements that ensure SEND improvement is timely.

It also includes two linked areas for improvement: embedding co-production and continuing to improve working relationships with parents and carers.

This paper is structured around the inspection findings. For each finding it sets out:

- the inspection baseline;
- the partnership response;
- evidence of delivery and emerging impact;
- any current limitation or confidence gap

3. Inspection finding 1: strategic priorities and accountability

“Those responsible for governance do not have an accurate understanding of the local area partnership’s strategic SEND priorities.” Source: inspection report

Before inspection	Position now
Leaders did not have an accurate, shared understanding of strategic SEND priorities. Accountability and multi-agency challenge were unclear, and leaders had limited line of sight across performance, quality, risk and outcomes.	An independent chair, a six-weekly SLAIP cycle, named Priority Impact Leads, broader partnership membership and dedicated SEND transformation capacity provide clearer ownership and challenge. Governance is being aligned to the SEND Reform Plan and associated delivery and assurance requirements.

Partnership response

- Established independent leadership of SLAIP and a six-weekly board cycle.
- Clarified roles for the independent chair, Priority Impact Leads and the SEND Transformation Lead.
- Expanded links with education, health, social care, schools, SEND Family Voice Torbay and wider strategic boards.
- Introduced clearer trackers, milestones, RAG reporting, risk management and escalation routes.
- Adapted board membership and reporting to encompass the SEND Reform Plan, including finance and Schools Forum links.

Evidence and impact

- **Cross-priority outcomes enabled by stronger governance;**
Evidence shows governance and a stronger grip on assurance and reporting enabling wider outcomes: 100% of phase transfers were completed. (A phase transfer is the review and update of

an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) when a child moves to a new stage of education, such as secondary school). Suspensions reduced by 60% among children and young people in a recent pilot, around 1,300 additional neurodiversity assessments were completed and the neurodiversity waiting list has reduced considerably; the number of children aged under four and a half waiting for Speech and Language Therapy reduced from 300 to 14, with 91% seen within 18 weeks; and the number of young people with an EHCP who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) reduced by approximately 55% between January and May 2026.

- Nine spotlight reports were considered by SLAIP between June 2025 and September 2026, demonstrating themed scrutiny across each of the priority areas.
- The September risk register recorded 22 active and eight closed risks. The new risk register includes a front sheet outlining changes to risks overtime and enables SLAIP to scrutinise and challenge when movement isn't evident.
- Board challenge is increasingly explicit. Members challenge whether activity completion equated to impact and asked for lived-experience testing before actions were treated as fully assured.
- Reporting is focused more and more on impact of actions that have been put in place.

Examples:

- **Strategic leaders** including those involved in governance have a clear understanding of local area partnership's strategic SEND priorities
 - The priority action tracker is presented at each SLAIP meeting with leads owning each update.
 - SLAIP members directly contributed to the refresh of the SEND vision and Goals. They also supported engagement with parent / carers to understand what is important to them.
- **Education practice:** the Leaders of SEND Forum has involved more than 20 schools and contributors from six schools or trusts, focusing on inclusion bases, SEMH, emotionally based school avoidance and complex needs. A headteacher reported that forums, briefings and newsletters strengthened partnership working and informed improvements to the Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycle.

4. Inspection finding 2: reporting impact, not only activity

“Too often, the strategic updates requested by those responsible for governance do not accurately identify the impact of decisions made and work done for children and young people with SEND.” Source: inspection report

Before inspection	Position now
Updates described activity but did not reliably show the difference made for children, young people and families. Governance could not consistently triangulate delivery, quality and lived experience.	Dashboards, scorecards, spotlight reports, audits, case studies and feedback are being brought together. Reporting has shifted towards a line of sight from action to evidence to impact.

Partnership response

- Strengthened the Performance and Quality Assurance arrangements, including themed deep dives, multi-agency audits and action tracking.
- Developed a PA1 scorecard and impact statement that separates confirmed data, useful indicators and feedback or case studies.
- Co-production feedback informs strategic updates and tests the impact of decisions, with a stronger focus on children and young people's voice, parent carer voice and school engagement. A new school liaison worker is now in post and will start to strengthen this further in the coming weeks.
- Introduced a Your Voice in Action framework with five template types to show whether feedback led to a change, work in progress, exploration, a considered decision or a summary of what was heard.
- Used case studies and feedback alongside quantitative data to test whether procedural improvements are felt by families.
- Communication of impact is improving with the new communication and engagement oversight group coordinating updates on our improvement journey. This new group reports directly into SLAIP.

Evidence and impact

- Nine distinct audit or review programmes have been identified since June 2025, covering EHCPs, SEND support, advice, annual reviews, transport, preparation for adulthood and AP/EOTAS tracking.
- EHCP timeliness was reported as improving from 6% in January to 41% in July 2026.
- March 2026 EHCP audit evidence reported 80.6% for Section E (Outcomes) and 96% for Section F (Special educational provision) at Silver or above.

Example 1: Locality Pilot — triangulating performance, quality and lived experience

- **Performance:** 29 of 31 primary schools and five early years providers engaged; £1.099 million was allocated to 29 providers; more than 30 co-production meetings involved over 100 professionals and more than 50 parent/carers.
- **Quality:** linked therapists and Educational Psychologists supported training, earlier intervention pathways and more consistent identification of speech, language and communication needs through the graduated response.
- **Lived experience:** reported outcomes included improved communication and self-regulation, reduced distress, better engagement and families feeling seen and heard.
- **Governance contribution:** leaders can combine reach, investment, evaluation and family feedback through the PIP tracker and assurance cycle, then use challenge and escalation to target further action.

5. Inspection finding 3: monitoring, prioritisation and escalation

“Governance arrangements did not sufficiently support the partnership to understand, monitor and prioritise strategic actions.”

Before inspection	Position now
Oversight, escalation and programme grip were weak. Leaders could not consistently identify drift, prioritise corrective action or track whether barriers were resolved.	Priority leads, delivery and assurance groups, a partnership risk register and escalation routes now provide a clearer line from operational issue to SLAIP, senior organisational leaders and regional or national escalation where required.

Evidence of governance in action

- The board has used escalation routes on issues including ICB statutory compliance and challenge to the DfE Regions Group concerning academies.
- The September SLAIP discussion recorded six risks as reduced over the preceding three months, while also recognising that risk updates had not always been maintained consistently.
- The board requested a focused risk session before the next meeting to examine recurrent risks more thoroughly.
- At the September board used the PIP analysis to focus attention on lower-progress and higher-risk areas, including Local Offer content and navigation, Educational Psychology capacity and the need to strengthen communication of improvement activity. Demonstrating a relentless focus on impact and understanding, monitoring and prioritising strategy actions focuses on the Inspection findings.

This demonstrates a stronger assurance culture, but it remains important to distinguish between a governance mechanism being present and evidence that it has resolved the underlying issue.

SLAIP member testimonial

“I have observed SLAIP develop into a much more effective strategic partnership board, with a clearer sense of purpose, accountability and shared ownership of improvement, particularly over the last year. Members have been actively involved in shaping the SEND vision, priorities and reform plan, with a wide range of perspectives brought together and critically led by the voices of children and young people and their parents and carers. Recent improvements to performance, risk and progress reporting are enabling better challenge, stronger strategic oversight and decision-making. Feedback from members has also informed governance arrangements and strengthened the risk register, creating greater transparency and a stronger collective understanding of priorities, risks and delivery progress. Most importantly, SLAIP’s culture is increasingly focused not simply on completing actions, but on achieving tangible improvements in the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.”

SLAIP Board member testimonial

Governance roles and assurance cycle

- **SLAIP:** independently chaired by Alison Hurley, meeting six-weekly to set vision and pace, assure Priority Impact Plan delivery, challenge barriers and keep children, young people and families’ lived experience central.

- **Programme assurance:** the Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-group brings together dashboard analysis, audit findings and multi-agency assurance. The Communication and Engagement Oversight Group, formed in June 2026, coordinates participation and communication activity and escalates risks to SLAIP.
- **A Transformation lead** role has been introduced on a permanent basis – strengthening to governance and oversight, communication with partners and focus on Impact.
- **Priority leadership:** named leads oversee delivery, resources, risks and impact evidence across governance, commissioning, multi-agency working, waiting times and preparation for adulthood.
- **Escalation:** issues move from the Priority Area Lead to the operational delivery or assurance group, then to SLAIP, organisational senior leaders and, where required, DfE or regional partners. Leadership assurance follows a consistent cycle: record, review, challenge and act.

6. Area for improvement 1: embed co-production

“Leaders across the partnership should consider ways to further improve and embed the way that co-production is used across the partnership.”

Before inspection	Position now
There were effective examples, but co-production was not consistently embedded across all SEND improvement areas and there was not a consistent evidence trail showing what changed as a result.	SEND Family Voice Torbay is positioned as a strategic partner; parent/carers and young people's voice is represented through governance, engagement and co-design activity; the SEND Pledge and Your Voice in Action provide a framework for influence and feedback.

Delivery and emerging impact

- SEND Family Voice Torbay reported 778 members, a 61% increase, 1,300 online reach and 460 contributions, up from 100. These are separate measures and should not be added together as unique participants.
- More than 30 children and young people participated in SEND Pledge co-design workshops.
- Parent/carers input has informed the Torbay SEND vision and goals, the Graduated Response review and work on EHCP and annual review approaches.
- A family liaison role and the Communication and Engagement Oversight Group provide additional infrastructure to broaden engagement and coordinate communication activity.
- Co-production is a standing agenda item on SLAIP.
- A co-production charter has been developed with partners and parent carers to further improve and embed the way co-production is used across the partnership.
- Five Your Voice in Action template types have been developed. The evidence confirms the infrastructure, but not yet the number of published updates or their measured effect.
- Recent mapping of all co-production activities and feedback is informing the development of the SEND strategy and Self Evaluation and has enabled an emerging baseline picture of parent carer confidence.

- SEND Pledge: more than 30 children and young people co-designed the six promises and associated imagery. SEND Youth Forum members are developing training videos explaining what the promises mean in practice. The pledge has also been tested with parent/carers; a partnership sign-up process, champion scheme and proposed quality mark are intended to support consistent implementation.
- Your Voice in Action: five template types: Change Made, We're Working On It, We're Exploring It, We Considered and We Listened provide a consistent route from feedback to visible action. One example records that parents wanted clearer information about EHCP times; the automatic email response and signposting were updated so families receive clearer information sooner.

Current limitations and next test

Participation and reach have increased, but this does not yet prove that involvement is representative or that it has changed services consistently. The next test is to consistently show, for each significant co-production activity, what people said, what decision or practice changed, and whether children, young people and families experienced an improvement.

7. Area for improvement 2: relationships, communication and confidence

“The local area partnership should continue to build on the work that has already been started in improving working relationships with parents and carers.”

“The resulting lack of strategic working and effective joint commissioning has resulted in poor communication and collaboration between the local area partnership and families.”

Before inspection	Position now
Parental dissatisfaction, long waits, poor communication and difficulty navigating support contributed to low confidence. Some parents reported that they felt they had no option other than home education.	Communication routes, engagement capacity and feedback mechanisms are stronger. Positive service-specific experiences are visible and engagement has increased considerably, however feedback from parent carers still identifies concerns about communication, delay, clarity and escalation.

Impact position

- The partnership can demonstrate positive examples of the work underway to improve relationships these include; stronger SEND Family Voice reach, increased routes for families to participate, 179 compliments reported across Child and Family Health Devon pathways since January 2026, and examples of families valuing person-centred and relational support.

- The evidence does not yet demonstrate a consistent improvement in parent/carers confidence across the whole system. The partnership is establishing a baseline and measures to assess whether communication, trust and family experience improve over time.
- **Plan to build parent/carers confidence:** the Communication and Engagement Oversight Group is coordinating work to improve communication, make support easier to find, show how feedback leads to change, strengthen relationships with families and measure whether confidence is improving. The Local Offer is central to this plan..
- **Clear communication standards:** A new Communication charter sets expectations for timely, accurate and consistent communication with parent/carers. Standard templates, automatic replies, clearer case records and regular updates will help families know that their message has been received, when they can expect a response and what will happen next.
- **Information that is easy to find:** work is in progress to audit the current information and rewrite priority Local Offer content, improve search terms and navigation, and connect families clearly to SENDIASS, health services, Family Hubs, support pathways and escalation routes.
- **Visible feedback and co-production:** use the SEND Pledge, Co-production Charter and Your Voice in Action updates to show what families said, what the partnership decided and what changed. New Local Offer pages are starting to describe the improvement journey and participation opportunities with strong links to the SEND family voice Torbay website.
- **Relationship-based support:** strengthen family liaison in schools, empathy and clarity in communication, earlier advice and the graduated response so families feel respected, informed and supported while they wait.
- **Measure and govern improvement:** establish a parent/carers confidence baseline and scorecard, review communication and escalation themes, use surveys and case audits, and report progress through the Communication and Engagement Oversight Group to SLAIP.
- **Test the Local Offer with families:** parent workshops and user testing in the autumn/winter will check whether information is clear, accessible and easy to navigate. Feedback will inform content changes and the longer-term options for the website.
- **Keep the Local Offer accurate:** assign content owners, introduce regular reviews and feedback governance, and use website analytics to understand what families search for, where they leave the site and which pages need improvement.
- **Delivery and assurance:** the September 2026 to January 2027 plan includes content review and rewriting, user testing, feedback and analytics, an awareness campaign and stakeholder briefings, followed by final inspection readiness assurance.

Examples: communication, health support and family experience

- **Communication and engagement priorities:** set clear communication standards; make information proactive and easier to navigate; close the feedback loop; strengthen relationship-based support; and measure, learn and govern change. Intended measures include timely contact, understanding next steps, ease of finding information, visible feedback to action and fewer repeat contacts or escalations.
- **Child and Family Health Devon:** support was reported as 42% above target; 179 compliments had been received since January 2026; Speech and Language Therapy waiting lists reduced by 33%; Occupational Therapy waiting lists reduced by 19%; and all Torbay children had been offered a mental health appointment within 18 weeks, with 14 still waiting beyond 18 weeks mainly because of cancellations or missed appointments.

- **Support while waiting:** neurodiversity support includes online LEAP workshops, parent workshops, consultation advice and community or SENCO support. Lumi Nova was used by more than 1,000 children; 90% reported a stable reduction in presenting difficulties and 41% of users reported SEND.
- **Transitions:** earlier planning includes joint CAMHS and Adult Mental Health meetings and rheumatology, diabetes, epilepsy and cardiac transition clinics. Young people reported feeling better prepared and that leaving children's services felt less daunting. Transition packs, Easy Read resources, Family Hub information and clearer advice on Direct Payments and Adult Social Care provide more accessible guidance for families.

8. Before inspection and now: summary view

Theme	Before inspection	Position now	Next test
Strategic ownership	Priorities not accurately or consistently understood.	Independent chair, named leads, six-weekly oversight and clearer partnership ownership.	Test whether shared priorities drive faster, better decisions.
Impact reporting	Updates focused on activity rather than difference made.	Scorecard, dashboards, audits, case studies and feedback are increasingly triangulated.	Complete all baselines and repeatable data feeds; link decisions to outcomes.
Risk and escalation	Weak programme grip and unclear escalation.	Partnership register, clearer escalation routes and board challenge.	Track formal escalations, resolution and sustained risk reduction.
Co-production	Effective examples but inconsistent embedding and weak evidence of influence.	Strategic parent/carers voice, youth co-design, SEND Pledge and Your Voice in Action. Stronger understanding of CYP and parent/carers feedback and actions in place to focus on impact.	Measure representation and show what changed because of feedback.
Communication and Local Offer	Poor communication, collaboration and navigation contributed to dissatisfaction.	Oversight group, stronger communication planning and a five-month Local Offer improvement plan.	Demonstrate timely, accessible, consistent communication across audiences.
Parent/carers confidence	Dissatisfaction and legacy distrust; some families felt forced towards home education.	Greater reach and positive service examples, but feedback remains mixed. Parent/carers communication standards and service expectations in place from September. A confidence baseline is being developed using the co-production mapping across the system	Report on impact and continue to monitor progress of the work that has been put in place.

9. Conclusion

Torbay has made clear and demonstrable progress in strengthening PA1 governance. Leadership, accountability, programme management, risk escalation and quality assurance are more established, and children, young people and parent/carers have stronger routes to influence decisions. The evidence also shows that stronger governance is contributing to measurable improvements across the SEND system, including Education, Health and Care Plan timeliness, statutory phase transfers, Speech and Language Therapy waiting times and preparation for adulthood outcomes. Co-production has influenced the SEND Pledge, the Graduated Response, communication approaches and other service improvements.

However, impact is not yet consistent across all parts of PA1. In particular, the partnership cannot yet demonstrate a sustained improvement in parent/carer confidence across the whole system. The next phase should focus on completing the parent/carer confidence baseline, testing the Local Offer with families, measuring communication standards and maintaining a clear evidence trail from feedback to decision, change and outcome.

The evidence demonstrates clear progress in PA1 governance. Leadership, accountability, programme management, risk escalation and quality assurance are stronger, and children, young people and parent/carers have clearer routes to influence decisions.