



**Department for Education**

2025-0048087

**The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP  
Secretary of State for Education**

Chris Coghlan MP  
By email: [chris.coghlan.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:chris.coghlan.mp@parliament.uk)

17 February 2026

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your correspondence of 18 December, regarding special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision in Surrey. In your letter, you also note your continued concern around safeguarding in Surrey, including in relation to the tragic murder of Sara Sharif.

My department is committed to working closely with local authorities (LAs) and their partners to improve multi-agency child protection and safeguarding. I am sure you agree that effective multi-agency child protection arrangements are vital to prevent children from slipping through the cracks. This is why we are providing £2.4 billion over the next three years for the Families First Partnership Programme to support local areas to embed reforms across Family Help, multi-agency child protection, and family group decision-making – making a real difference for children and families.

My department works alongside safeguarding partnerships to ensure consistent approaches in line with multi-agency safeguarding arrangements so that leaders at the right level are making the right decisions for local children and families. At a local level, my officials meet regularly with Surrey County Council to discuss a range of topics, including child protection and safeguarding.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel worked with Surrey throughout their Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, so that the right multi-agency learning was identified for the different partners responsible for child protection. The panel are also taking forward activity in response to the recommendations made to them. The government has also reviewed national practice, including legislative changes recommended to ensure we can keep children safe.

I would like to provide clarification on the points raised in your letter about Surrey's targeted deep dive, which was undertaken during October and November 2025. As noted in your correspondence, my department has supported Surrey for over two years through the appointment of department-procured SEND advisers, all of whom are professional experts in their field and are commissioned to provide independent and objective advice.

In April 2025, my department took the decision to appoint a new SEND adviser to support Surrey, in order to provide a fresh perspective on the quality of Surrey's services and improvements to date. This adviser was subsequently commissioned to undertake the deep dive, enabling her to draw on the understanding of local context she has built during her six months working with Surrey, in order to make a robust assessment of progress to date, the effectiveness of actions taken by Surrey, and to make a set of clear recommendations.

The review focused on Surrey's progress against three priority areas identified during the meeting between my department and NHS England in July 2025: improving communication with families, strengthening data development, and enhancing governance arrangements to monitor the impact of improvements. In addition, it examined the specific complaints raised in the open letter you delivered to me in July 2025.

The SEND Adviser focused on assessing Surrey's progress in implementing actions to address these priorities and complaint areas, identifying any areas of slippage, and setting out recommendations to ensure continued improvement of services. The review particularly considered the impact of improvements from the perspective of children and young people, families and schools.

My department does not intend to publish the deep dive report in full, on the basis that it was drafted as a highly operational, internal report, to provide assurance to my department on Surrey's progress, and to be as rigorous and practically useful as possible for those in Surrey responsible for delivering improvements. However, in the interest of transparency which you rightly note in your letter, I have annexed a summary of the findings for each improvement area, outlining the key issues identified, further progress required, and the overall conclusion of the deep dive. I hope that you find this useful, and that it provides some assurance to your constituents of the work being undertaken by Surrey County Council to improve local SEND services.

My officials continue to closely monitor Surrey's services, with the most recent joint Department for Education-NHS England review of Surrey County Council's progress against its SEND strategic plan having taken place at the end of January 2026. The review demonstrated that Surrey is continuing to make progress against all four areas of their SEND strategic plan, though some aspects still require further improvement.

Finally, regarding your offer of a visit to Surrey, the Minister for School Standards would be pleased to continue this dialogue and to hear directly from families about their experiences. During this visit, the Minister would also welcome the opportunity to meet with the Surrey Primary Headteachers Phase Council to discuss their concerns in further detail. Please get in touch with Minister Gould's Private Office at: [gould-diary.ps@education.gov.uk](mailto:gould-diary.ps@education.gov.uk) and her team will arrange the visit as soon as possible, including exploring whether it may also be possible to meet with the Chair of Surrey's Education Select Committee during the trip.

Thank you again for writing to me and raising these important concerns about Surrey County Council's SEND services. I hope that this response is useful.

Yours,

Bridget

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## **2025-0048087 – Chris Coghlan MP**

### **Annex A: Summary of Surrey SEND Deep Dive (Autumn 2025)**

Summary findings in relation to three priority areas: communication with families; data development; and governance arrangements to monitor the impact of improvements.

#### **Governance**

- In relation to governance, arrangements have strengthened considerably through the appointment of an independent chair (André Imich, previously DfE's SEN and Disability Specialist Adviser), clearer scrutiny and challenge, improved board effectiveness, and enhanced information sharing. These changes are increasing transparency and strengthening oversight of improvement activity.
- There is growing evidence that partners have a clearer understanding of priorities, roles and planned improvements, supported by regular reviews of board membership, member induction, and plans to strengthen impact reporting.
- Further improvement is required to strengthen inward and outward communication so that feedback more clearly informs strategic decision-making, to consistently evaluate the impact of governance (particularly the role of the strategic board), and to ensure all board members are actively engaged in reviewing progress and assessing both actions and impact against the post-Ofsted strategic plan.

#### **Communication with families**

- Communication and engagement have started to improve through a more structured and targeted approach, including regular newsletters, tailored messaging for different audiences, improved signposting, and increased involvement of families and schools in shaping engagement activity.
- Early evidence of impact includes more positive feedback from families and schools, a material reduction in complaints, and staff feeling more confident in communicating with families following training.
- However, there remains a need to: strengthen the consistency and quality of communications; broaden engagement to better reach under-represented families and young people, and those who have interacted with the SEND system in previous years; and embed robust systems to evaluate feedback, demonstrate impact, and evidence sustained improvement over time.

## **Data development**

- The use of data has strengthened, with more refined dashboards, deeper analysis of core indicators, and improved public access through the local offer. This is enabling more informed strategic discussion and data led decision-making, including tangible service improvements such as changes to alternative provision and the restructuring of SEN services. -led decision-making, including tangible service improvements such as changes to alternative provision and the restructuring of SEN services.
- Board members' confidence and capability to scrutinise data is increasing through targeted data and information sessions.
- Further progress is required to present board level data in a more streamlined and accessible format aligned clearly to strategic priorities, to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to better demonstrate impact, and to continue building trust through consistent and transparent sharing of key data with families and education settings.-level data in a more streamlined and accessible format aligned clearly to strategic priorities, to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to better demonstrate impact, and to continue building trust through consistent and transparent sharing of key data with families and education settings.

Overall, the SEND Adviser's conclusion was that, during the period of the deep dive review, Surrey had been working at pace to drive improvement and was able to demonstrate a clear determination to bring about change. In relation to the themes within the complaints in the July 2025 open letter, it was concluded that there is now a clear commitment within Surrey to resolve issues and sustain improvement across SEND services. However, it is important to note that this review focused only on specific themes and did not cover the entirety of the SEND strategic plan. An assessment of Surrey's progress against the wider strategic SEND plan will be made at the next joint DfE-NHSE review taking place at the end of January 2026.

My department has met with Surrey to discuss the findings of the deep dive, during which officials emphasised that it is essential for momentum to be maintained, and for the recommendations made to be acted upon to embed and build on this progress.