



**Cumberland  
SEND  
Partnership**

# **Joint Commissioning Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 2025 to 2027**

## **Our approach to joint commissioning in Cumberland**

Cumberland Council

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board



## Introduction

The Joint Commissioning Strategy for Children and Young People with SEND sets out how we will jointly commission services in Cumberland, working together with children and young people and their families to ensure those services provide the best outcomes.

The **Cumberland Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024 - 2028** [Families Information | Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy](#) sets out our ambition to ensure children and young people with SEND get the right support at the right time so that they go on to live their best lives. We believe that children and young people with SEND and those who are educated in Alternative Provision in Cumberland deserve high quality, local support, services and provision.

We recognise that no single organisation can do this alone. This document sets out our commitment to ensuring that effective joint commissioning arrangements are in place to deliver services to meet the needs of Children, Young People and their families in Cumberland.

This document is intended to be the foundation for partners to develop integrated commissioning arrangements and will be subject to more frequent review and update as a result of feedback from Children, Young People, their families and wider stakeholders. An action plan to deliver these priorities will be created. This action plan will be monitored through the Cumberland SEND & Alternative Provision Strategic Partnership.

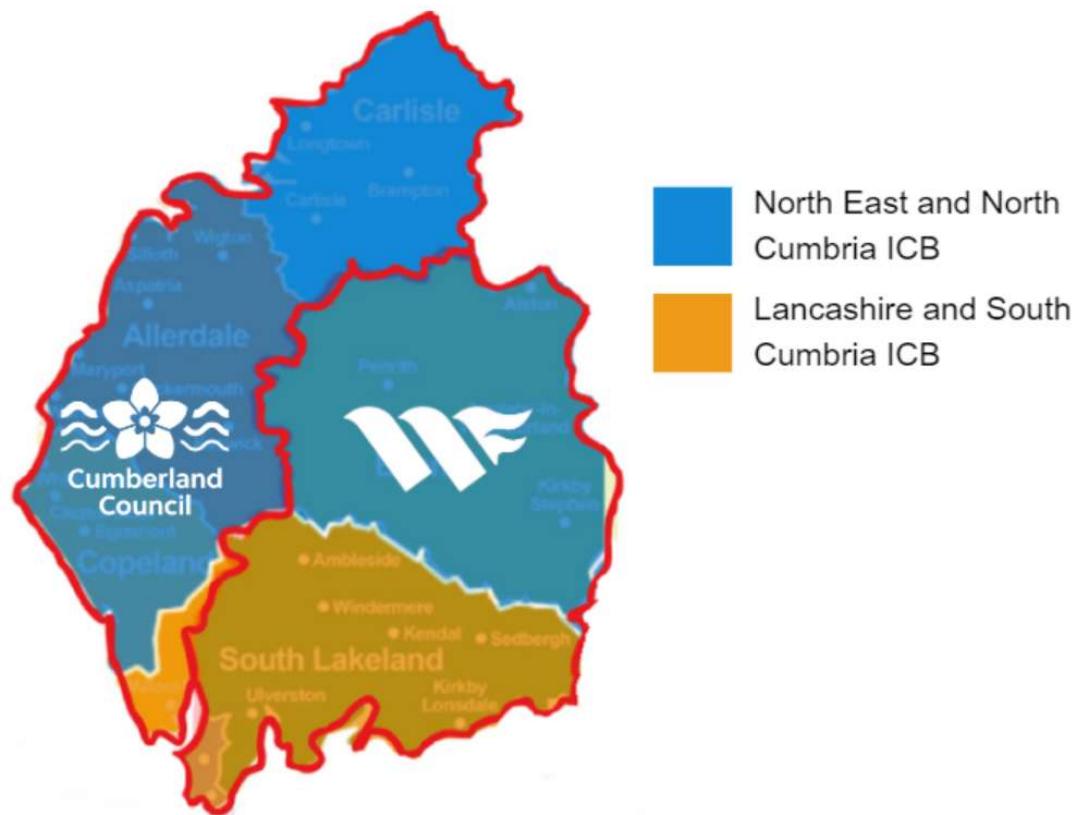
The partners involved in commissioning services for children, young people and families with SEND include:

- Cumberland Council – Cumberland is a new local authority, created as a result of Local Government Reorganisation in April 2023, this is known as the “local authority” and refers to all early years, social care and education provision provided as well as universal health services such as health visitors and school nurses.
- Educational establishments including schools, academies, colleges and free schools – this may include speech and language services, pastoral care and counselling services to support pupils.
- NHS North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (“NENC ICB”) and NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (“LSC ICB”) the “ICBs” were created in July 2022 with the majority of Cumberland being served by NENC ICB\*
- NHS England are the commissioner for specialist provision such as specialist children’s hospitals, tier 4 beds and elements of the SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre).

\* The ICBs are responsible for ensuring that high quality and safe health services are accessible to communities. They have a wide range of functions including promoting integration of health and care services, improving people's health and wellbeing, and reducing health inequalities.

A map of the ICB footprints is shown below. The ICB footprint is not co-terminus with the Cumberland Council boundaries, with Millom being in the LSC ICB footprint and Eden being served by Westmorland and Furness Council.

#### Map of Cumbria LA's & ICBs



## About Cumberland and our People

Cumberland inspires pride of place, but it is also an area of stark contrast. We are home to some of the world's most stunning rural and coastal landscapes, but we also have areas in our city and towns in need of renewal.

Our economy contains strong agricultural and tourism sectors, but we are also a manufacturing economy that boasts some of the most famous brands in the world. We are an economy of small businesses, but we also host the largest nuclear site in Europe. Household earnings in some areas are amongst the highest in the northwest, but we have pockets of real deprivation and have more households living in fuel poverty than the national average.

More information about Cumberland can be found in the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) [Cumbria Observatory – JSNA – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\)](#) and in Cumberland SEND Sufficiency Plan 2024. These key documents will form the baseline data for commissioning activities.

The following trends relate to children and young disabled people:

- Persistent academic attainment gaps, starting with school readiness, through to GSCE and post-16 attainment compared to non-disabled pupils (with impact on life-time earnings);
- Increased early diagnosis of neurodiverse conditions, increased numbers of young people with long-term mental health conditions, and potential increase in mobility impairments linked to childhood obesity
- The three most prevalent primary needs recorded for children and young people with an EHCP in Cumberland are, in order of prevalence:
  - Communication and interaction needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
  - Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN)
  - Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has increased.
- There are long waits for increasing numbers of children and young people awaiting an autism and ADHD assessment
- More Children and Young People are being referred with Speech, Language and Communication Needs with waiting lists.
- Children and young people on the occupational therapy waiting list are seen within 18 weeks.
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health are significantly increasing.

- There is significant increase in referrals into the neurodevelopmental pathway with a number awaiting assessment
- To access CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) the waiting list for children and young people depends on if they have an EHCP, who are generally seen sooner than those without.
- There are high numbers of children and young people being cared for by Cumberland Council, though this is decreasing. 8% of cared for children in Cumberland were recorded as having a disability, and 107 (21.3%) had an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)

## Legislative Context

The strategy is being implemented against a backdrop of significant government reforms to education, health and social care for children and young people with SEND and their families and/or carers:

- Children and Families Act, 2014
- Care Act, 2014
- SEND Code of Practice 0-25, 2014
- Equality Act, 2010.

The overall purpose of these reforms is to join up support across health, education, and social care from birth to 25 years, with the aims of ensuring early intervention, putting children and families at the centre of decision-making, and ultimately facilitating better outcomes for children and young people. Local partners have the flexibility to decide how systems will work in their area, and to make arrangements which are most effective to meet the needs of the children and young people they support, with a duty to ensure there is no gap in care and support.

In addition to education, health and social care reforms, key reforms of public sector procurement legislation are also underway. The Provider Selection Regime (PSR), a set of rules for procuring health care services, came into force on 1 January 2024. The Procurement Act, which replaces the current Public Contracts Regulation (PCR) has been implemented from February 2025.

It is anticipated that these procurement reforms will give opportunities for increased flexibility and creativity in the design, commissioning, and procurement of services, as well as greater co-production with stakeholders, including Children and Young People and their parents/carers and families.

Cumberland embraces the principles of the Preparation for Adulthood protocol around transition planning for individuals with Educational Health Care Plans. The [Market position statement for adult social care services 2025 to 2029 Cumberland Council](#) sets out our understanding of the local market so that well-informed business and investment decisions can be taken. It is used as tool to strengthen our care market and bolster the Cumberland economy. In summary, it sets out that Cumberland has a mixed adult social care market within a blend of local and national independent sector providers and in-house services, which work together to meet the diverse needs of the community. The **Adult Social Care & Housing Commissioning strategy, will be finalised in Summer 2025** and will outline how Cumberland will meet the care and support needs of adults in their community and deliver the vision of **“People live fulfilled, healthy, independent lives in the place that they call home”**.

Supported Living Services for Adults are currently commissioned individually via mini competitions under a Framework. Where applicable services are jointly funded and commissioned. As the Framework is due to end in 2026, work is underway to enhance the partnership including the approach to capital commitments and protocols to work with accommodation developers so that meet the needs of the young people, as move into adulthood. The new arrangements will further increase opportunities to forward

plan support for young people and work with the market to ensure that suitable accommodation and support is available.

For young people, where Residential Care is required **The Cumberland Framework Agreement for the Provision of Enhanced Residential Services for Primarily Working Age Adults with Disabilities and/or Mental Health Needs**, this Framework has been commissioned and can be accessed by the ICBs as required.

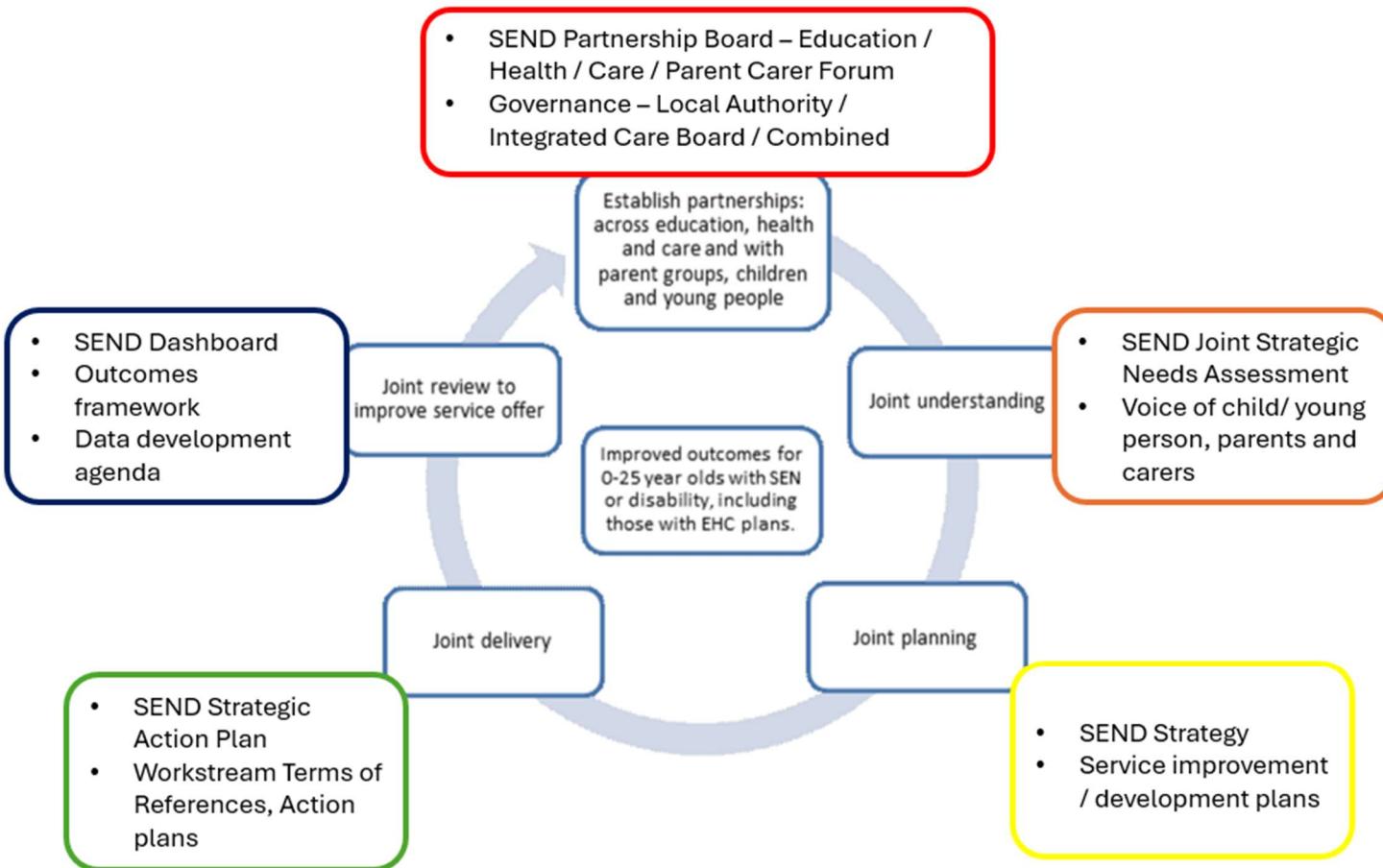
## **Commissioning**

In some cases, it may be better for public bodies to buy in services and expertise from external organisations rather than delivering themselves. Commissioning is a term used to describe this process. Broadly, commissioning includes assessing need, planning, organising, procuring services and monitoring for quality and effectiveness. SEND Commissioning requires public bodies to work together with partners to develop effective systems for identifying needs, providing support, and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

## **Joint Commissioning**

Partners have agreed that joint commissioning in Cumberland is how we:

- understand the needs of our SEND population
- describe our plans to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND
- deliver to meet the needs of the children and young people with SEND
- review the effectiveness of existing commissioning arrangements in meeting need



We understand that there are many challenges around the delivery of commissioned services, these include:

- the availability of finance and resources
- the number of providers in the market
- provider workforce pressures

We will work with the market to identify how we can support them to:

- deliver innovative services
- build further capacity
- deliver resilient services
- deliver good quality services
- deliver flexible and responsive services

We want our joint commissioning to be outcomes-based, using data to predict demand, improve services, and measure success.

We are collaborating at all stages of the joint commissioning process, from the assessment of needs to the planning and procurement of services and monitoring of service delivery for our children and young people with SEND in Cumberland.

In practice, this means that the Council and the NENC/LSC ICB will:

- share children and young people and families' feedback and lived experience and our market intelligence
- consider how we conduct our engagement and consultation together
- review the services that we commission separately and consider whether and how these could be brought together
- commit to considering combining resources where appropriate in order to secure the best effective services for Cumberland children and young people with SEND
- agree between us which organisation should take the lead on a particular procurement
- ensure evaluation panels contain representatives from both the Council and NENC/LSC ICB where appropriate
- share contract performance and management information
- take a joint role in quality monitoring of jointly commissioned arrangements
- share responsibility and accountability for the impact of the services we put in place
- take a lead on promoting consistency in the commissioning of services across the Cumberland area so that children and young people have access to quality and equitable provision

It is our aspiration to involve children and young people, and their families in all stages of the commissioning process. This includes:

- implementing mechanisms to have ongoing dialogue with children, young people and their families about what's important to them, the challenges they face and what works well. Examples of how we will do this include the work of SEND Alliance for Cumbria (SENDAC). These ongoing conversations help inform our future commissioning plans.
- a commitment to co-production, working with children, young people and their families in the design of our service offers.
- involving children, young people and their families in tender evaluations where appropriate.
- a role for children, young people and families in the monitoring of contracted delivery.

Joint Commissioning also includes the support provided to Children and Young People which is jointly funded by the Council and ICB. For example, a child with complex needs may require services which include health care, education and social care. Their care package may be funded jointly by the ICB and Council. In cases where the child's needs are such that they qualify for Children's Continuing Care, the Council may provide support for social care needs via a Direct Payment, for example, as appropriate to needs of the family. A regular meeting is in place to discuss children and young people with complex needs, attended by NENC ICB, education and social care representatives.

Alternative Provision is another priority area of commissioning which requires joint working across the Council and schools. Local partners have committed to work to implement a consistent and equitable approach to Alternative Provision that includes mainstream education, SEND provision and services, Early Help, social care, and local health services. Most Alternative Provision in Cumberland is commissioned directly by schools, with a small amount via the Local Authority, so there is a need to promote consistency in commissioning and quality assurance of provision. The Council will take a role in providing support, oversight and quality assurance to ensure consistency in commissioning, working alongside schools.

Collaboration will also take place across the region. In particular, this will be important within the Cumbria area, due to the footprints of the Local Authorities and ICBs not being co-terminus. Developing a shared understanding of commissioning plans and co-ordinating pathways will be important to ensure there is equitable service provision across boundaries, in particular in the Millom area.

Regional working, whether with the North East or North West, has potential benefits in bringing access to additional services, where there is not already sufficient capacity in the Cumberland area, and through providing greater buying power. Both the Council and the ICBs will seek to share learning and innovations from within these regions to support the delivery of innovative services and commissioning approaches in Cumberland.

## **What are our Children, Young People with SEND and their families telling us?**

Feedback from children, young people and their families is gathered regularly and in a variety of formats, including an Annual Survey, a rolling 'tell us' survey format, short form social media surveys, posts and polls, and conversations at engagement events and support groups.

Families tell us that they would like a system that is 'joined up', where services work together to support their children and young people, so they don't have to repeat their 'story' or concerns over and over. Particularly, families want services and provision capable of providing good support to their children and young people that is local to their homes and communities.

Young people tell us that they need services with sufficient capacity to support them so that they 'don't have to wait so long to get help'.

As part of our commitment to listening to and acting upon what Children, Young People and their Families tell us, we will ensure that these priorities are reflected in our approaches throughout the design, commissioning, and procurement cycle:

1. We will present the voice of children and young people with SEND in market engagement, as a key element of the services we are looking to buy
2. We will embed these key themes in our service specifications; and
3. We will include these themes when we monitor outcomes as part of our contract monitoring and quality assurance processes.
4. We will measure the positive impact commissioned services have in the areas that children and young people have told us are most important.

## **Learning From Experience and Continuing on our Improvement Journey**

A SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Partnership was set up in Cumbria to implement a major improvement programme across the county following a joint inspection of services by CQC and Ofsted for children and young people with SEND in 2019. The subsequent inspection in 2025 reflects the progress which has been made, identifying the passion and energy within the Partnership and the realistic understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. In relation to commissioning, it was recognised that there are strengths in:

- Effective use of joint strategic needs assessment to inform commissioning;
- A coproduced framework for AP is improving quality and sufficiency in most areas;
- Positive collaboration for specialist residential placements in remote areas.

The inspectors identified that further work is required to strengthen the understanding of the impact of the Partnership's work to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND, including to inform strategic planning. This Joint Commissioning Strategy will support the Partnership to continue to deliver improvements in understanding of need and outcomes and for this to inform commissioning of services.

Work continues to deliver the strategic vision that children and young people with SEND and those who are educated in Alternative Provision in Cumberland deserve, to provide high quality, local support, services and provision via the agreed Local Area Partnership's six priorities of:

- Working together
- High quality, local provision and services
- Improving outcomes
- Preparing for and moving into adulthood
- A supportive and effective Alternative Provision offer
- Achieving best value for our children and young people in Cumberland

## Current Commissioned Services Delivering to Children and Young People with SEND (at July 2025)

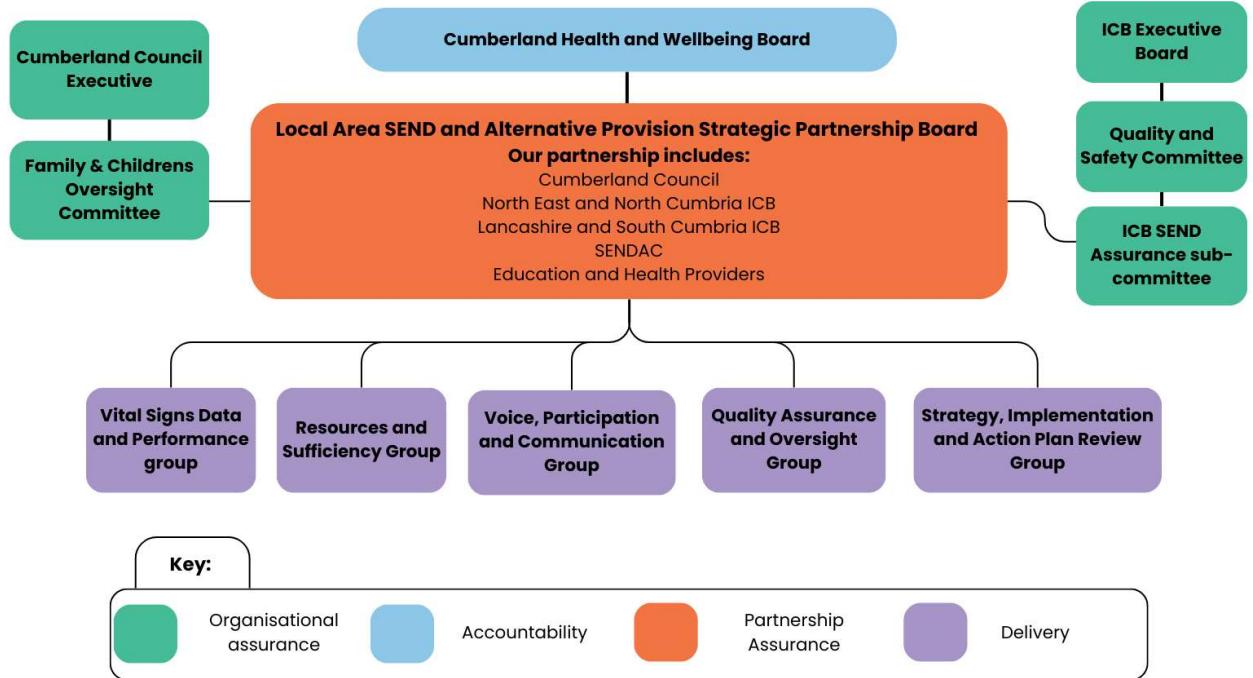
Service	Current Provider	Commissioning Arrangement
Occupational Therapy	North Cumbria Integrated Care	Cumberland Council NENC ICB
Speech & Language Therapy	North Cumbria Integrated Care	Cumberland Council NENC ICB
Preparation for Adulthood course (16-18 year olds)	Triple A Project	NENC ICB
Autism awareness course (for autistic 18-24 year olds (and older))	Team Autism	NENC ICB
Support for Children & Families where a child has a complex and/or health need	Eden Valley Hospice	NENC ICB
Holiday Activities Fund	Various providers	Cumberland Council
Overnight Short Breaks	West House	Cumberland Council
Targeted Short Breaks and Specialist Short Breaks	Carlisle Mencap Endorphins People First West House	Cumberland Council NENC ICB
Habilitation Service for Children & Young People with a Visual Impairment	Guide Dogs for the Blind	Cumberland Council
0-19 Healthy Child Programme	Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust	Cumberland Council
Link Workers	Barnardos	NENC ICB

<b>Service</b>	<b>Current Provider</b>	<b>Commissioning Arrangement</b>
Family Autism (Information, Advice & Guidance) Support	Carlisle Mencap	Cumberland Council
Residential SEND School	Various	Cumberland Council
North West Commissioning Framework- Alternative Provision	Various	Cumberland Council
Targeted Careers Information Advice & Guidance	Inspira	Cumberland Council
Direct Payment Support Service	People First	Cumberland Council
Mediation, Resolution & Disagreements Service (MRDS)	Collis Mediation	Cumberland Council
Transition from acute mental health inpatient services	Carlisle Mencap	NENC ICB
Mental Health in School Teams (MHSTs)	Barnardos	NENC ICB

## Governance

Clear governance is important to ensure that we deliver on our strategy and to provide useful challenge and strategic direction. It also means that there is clear visibility and clarity across the whole SEND system of what we are trying to achieve together. We have set out our governance structure below.

### Integrated Governance – Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategic Partnership Board



To ensure sufficient oversight of commissioning for the children with the highest and most complex needs, there is a Resource Allocation Management Panel in place where bespoke and high-cost packages are discussed/agreed between partners.

## Dispute

All partners agree that good communication and an open and transparent approach is integral to partnership working. Organisations operate in different contexts with different statutory duties. It is important that organisations understand and respect these differences. Each partner agrees that issues must be communicated at an early stage.

It is recognised that there are rare occasions where organisations have different priorities and are not able to agree on an approach. In cases such as these a mechanism is required to work through the disputes and come to a resolution, escalation should only occur as a last resort.

Matters which cannot be resolved will be escalated to the Local Area SEND Executive Board. If a final decision is required, the accountable officers are the Director of

Nursing (ICB) and the Director for Children and Families (Cumberland Council) who will decide on the resolution.