

DSL Cluster Minutes 11 March 2026

- **Stronger Families Multi-Agency Hub Transformation:** Indeeep Sethi provided a comprehensive overview of the transformation of the Stronger Families service into a Multi-Agency Hub, detailing the integration of early help, social care, and partner agencies, and explaining the new structure, roles, and collaborative processes to the group including Nicole, Laura, and other stakeholders.
 - **Service Integration and Locality Teams:** Indeeep Sethi explained that the Stronger Families Hub, Early Help, and MASH teams have been merged into the Family Help service, now operating as three locality-based teams (Southeast, Southwest, North), each with multiple sub-teams, to streamline support for families and improve service delivery.
 - **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** The Hub now includes regular participation from internal and external partners such as HDAS, health practitioners, police, probation, Youth Justice Service, Access (for exploitation risk), and SEND representatives, with the aim of providing holistic, timely support and leveraging expertise from various disciplines.
 - **New Roles and Functions:** New roles such as Lead Child Protection Practitioners have been introduced to lead on child protection inquiries, strategy discussions, and conferences, while key workers and social workers from each locality rotate through the Hub to manage contacts and ensure appropriate allocation and follow-up.
 - **Communication and Decision-Making Improvements:** Efforts have been made to improve communication with housing, Border Force, and other agencies, and to ensure that families receive coordinated responses, reducing the need for families to repeat their stories and aiming for more effective safeguarding and positive outcomes.
 - **Ongoing Development and Feedback Mechanisms:** Indeeep highlighted ongoing work to address gaps for families not meeting strict thresholds, the importance of evidence-based decision-making, and the intention to share further updates and case studies with the network to support understanding and referral processes.



STRONGER FAMILIES MULTI-AGENCY HUB OVERVIEW

Collaborative support to empower and strengthen families

PURPOSE AND CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE STRONGER FAMILIES MULTI-AGENCY HUB

Centralised Early Intervention

The Hub acts as a single integrated front door to streamline early support for children and families effectively.

Collaborative Multi-Agency Work

Brings together diverse practitioners to work collaboratively, improving safeguarding and reducing service fragmentation.

Effective Communication and Decision-Making

Multi-professional perspectives enhance assessment accuracy and quality, ensuring timely responses to family needs.

Co-location of Partner Agencies

Family Help teams co-located with partner agencies create streamlined workflows, reducing delays and improving outcomes.

CO-LOCATED TEAMS AND COLLABORATIVE WORKING APPROACH

Unified Multi-Agency Collaboration

Co-located teams work together in one setting to enable real-time consultation and integrated problem-solving across agencies.

Accelerated Decision-Making

Shared environment reduces delays by allowing simultaneous input from police, health visitors, and social care practitioners.

Enhanced Professional Relationships

Co-location fosters trust, shared responsibility, and promotes reflective practice and consistent approaches across agencies.

Improved Workforce Wellbeing

Practitioners benefit from peer support in managing complex and emotionally demanding cases in a shared environment.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF KEY SOCIAL CARE TEAMS

Triage Team Role	New Beginnings Support	Child Protection Leadership	Continuous Emergency Response
Triage Team provides initial guidance and assesses urgency to direct families to appropriate support pathways.	New Beginnings offers trauma-informed care to vulnerable expectant mothers, promoting early parent-infant bonding.	Child Protection team coordinates statutory enquiries and ensures evidence-based safeguarding decisions.	Out of Hours Team provides emergency response and support during high-risk situations outside normal hours.

- **Education and Social Care Partnership Challenges:** Adam, Ayo, Helen, Cecelia, and other education professionals raised concerns to Indeeep Sethi and Nicole about communication gaps, inconsistent feedback, and the need for

stronger, more responsive partnerships between schools and children's social care, prompting commitments to review processes and improve collaboration.

- **Communication and Feedback Issues:** Multiple DSLs reported delays or lack of responses to referrals, inconsistent updates following MASH checks, and confusion over points of contact, leading to frustration and concerns about safeguarding continuity and risk management.
- **Escalation and Accountability Processes:** Nicole and Indeeep clarified the existence of escalation procedures for unresolved cases, advising schools to document risks and escalate to assistant directors when necessary, but acknowledged that these processes are not always effective or consistently followed.
- **Strategic and Operational Forums:** Adam suggested establishing dedicated forums or working groups to address education-social care interface issues, share best practice, and manage professional disputes, with Indeeep agreeing to raise this with senior leadership and consider more structured engagement.
- **Role of Schools as Statutory Partners:** There was discussion about recognising schools as the fourth statutory partner in safeguarding, ensuring their involvement in strategic decision-making, and improving the translation of high-level reforms into practical, day-to-day support for education professionals.
- **Commitments to Improvement:** Indeeep and Nicole committed to reviewing the meeting transcript, sharing feedback with Family Help, and working with education representatives to address identified gaps, including ensuring schools are always consulted in assessments and improving general communication.
- **Elective Home Education (EHE) Processes and Safeguarding:** Patricia Noel and Linda Hiskail presented the EHE process to Nicole, Laura, and the group, outlining legal requirements, referral procedures, safeguarding checks, and the collaborative approach with schools and SEND teams to ensure suitable education and child welfare.
 - **Legal Framework and Parental Responsibilities:** Patricia explained that parents choosing EHE assume full responsibility for their child's education, with no obligation to follow the national curriculum or school schedules, provided education is efficient, full-time, and suitable to the child's needs as per Section 7 of the Education Act.

- **Referral and Off-Rolling Procedures:** Schools must receive written notification from parents, offer a meeting to discuss responsibilities, and complete an EHE referral via the EYES portal; children with CIN, CP, or EHCP status are not off-rolled until all checks are completed and professional input is considered.
- **Safeguarding and Suitability Checks:** The EHE team conducts informal inquiries, requests education plans, and assesses suitability, with more frequent checks for vulnerable children; if education is unsuitable or there are safeguarding concerns, referrals are made to Children Missing Education or MASH as appropriate.
- **Collaboration with SEND and Social Care:** For children with EHCPs or complex needs, the EHE team works closely with SEND coordinators, annual reviews are aligned, and off-rolling decisions are made in consultation with the SEND panel, ensuring multi-agency oversight and safeguarding.
- **Process Timelines and Communication:** A local five-day window is used for initial checks before off-rolling, which may be extended if concerns arise; schools and professionals are encouraged to maintain communication with the EHE team, and contact details are provided for ongoing queries.

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ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE)

Patricia Noel and Linda Hiskail

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Definition – Elective Home Education(EHE)

- ▶ Elective Home Education (EHE) is when a parent chooses not to send their child to school but assumes full responsibility for ensuring their child receives suitable education.
- ▶ There are no specific legal requirements as to the content of home education, provided the parents are meeting their duty in s.7 of the Education Act 1996.
- ▶ Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that: "The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause them to receive efficient full-time education suitable: (a) to his/her age, ability and aptitude and (b) to any special education needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."
- ▶ There is no obligation to follow the 'school day' or have holidays which mirror those observed by schools.

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Reasons parent may choose to EHE

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Dissatisfaction with the school
- Risk of exclusion
- Philosophical and preferential reasons
- Religious reasons
- Did not get school preference
- Other – E.G – Moving in and out of borough
- Lifestyle choice

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Process – Elective Home Education (EHE)

When a parent communicates their wish/intention to EHE, they must put this decision in writing to the school.

The government recommends that schools should offer a meeting/discussion regarding parent's decision and inform the parent of their responsibilities/expectations should they proceed with EHE. The parent may decline a meeting, but this should be offered by schools to ensure that parents are fully informed of their practical and financial responsibilities with EHE.

Schools notify the Local Authority by completing a EHE referral form through the Early Years Education System (EYES) portal.

If child is CIN , CP, EHC Plan, an open referral and/or if any other agencies are involved with the family, we will make checks of all these and open dialogues with the professionals involved. School will be advised to remove the child from roll once all the necessary satisfactory checks have been made.

EHE officers attend social care meetings- all Initial Child Protection conferences and all reviews. Also core groups. This is to ensure that the parents have the ability /means to educate.

05: EHE Team responsibilities

EHE Team responsibilities

- ▶ Make informal enquiries regarding the education that is being provided for EHE children of compulsory school age
- ▶ Assess the education being provided for EHE children of compulsory school age as to suitability
- ▶ Determine frequency of checks to be made with families – generally it is annually if the education has been assessed as suitable. It can be more often for disadvantaged families or CIN/CP children.
- ▶ Identify children who are at risk and 'not receiving a suitable education.
- ▶ Maintaining an up-to-date database of EHE children in the borough

05: EHE Team responsibilities

What we ask of parents

- ▶ An education outline plan or report that indicates:
 - ▶ Subjects being studied (Literacy and numeracy are the main expectation)
 - ▶ Resources used- Tutor/online resources/textbooks/online school
 - ▶ Any SEN – how will the needs be met?
 - ▶ Does the child have opportunities to socialise with other children of a similar age/extra-curricular activities?
 - ▶ How does the child feel about EHE?
- ▶ **Expected progress**
- ▶ If nearing post-16, have parents explored options – further education/apprenticeship/training and employment

05: EHE Team responsibilities

What if the education is unsuitable?

- ▶ We ask for more details, make further enquiries, offer advice and support where needed.
- ▶ Seek advice/support from other professionals working with the family such as Social Workers or other teams within the LA
- ▶ If there is no response to our contact and enquiries and there is concern, a referral to Children Missing Education is made, which can on occasion lead to a School Attendance Order (SAO).

05: EHE Team responsibilities

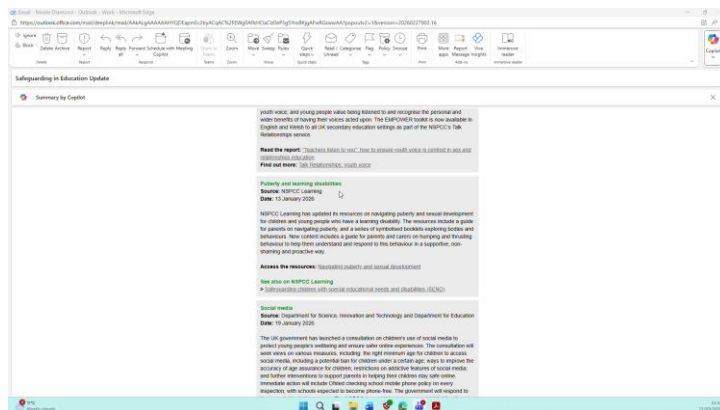
Useful information currently available on Leap

- A Simple Guide to Elective Home Education in Hillingdon
- EHE Procedure for Hillingdon Schools
- EHE Webinar for schools presentation slides
- London Borough of Hillingdon Elective Home Education Policy
- EHE- Transitioning from Homeschooling to School: A guide for parents/carers
- EHE 5-minute guides for:
 - Hillingdon schools
 - Professionals
 - Social Care
 - Guidance for Parents

Contact EHE team: ehe@hillingsdon.gov.uk www.hillingdon.gov.uk/ehe

- **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team Support for Schools:** Asif Akram and Aminah from the ASB team explained their role, processes, and available support to Nicole and the school network, clarifying how schools can engage with the team for anti-social behaviour cases, early intervention, and partnership work with Access and other agencies.
 - **ASB Case Management and Multi-Agency Working:** The ASB team investigates and manages anti-social behaviour cases referred by residents, police, or schools, working closely with police, Access, social care, and other agencies to gather evidence, support victims, and engage perpetrators.
 - **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs):** Aminah described the use of voluntary ABC contracts as early intervention tools to set behaviour expectations for young people, prevent escalation into criminality, and monitor progress, with meetings involving families and, where appropriate, schools.
 - **School Engagement and Preventative Work:** The team can participate in school assemblies, contextual safeguarding training, and direct interventions, including for primary schools, and is open to adapting approaches for different age groups and community contexts.
 - **Referral Pathways and Cross-Borough Collaboration:** Schools can contact the ASB team directly or in conjunction with Access, and the team coordinates with other local authorities when incidents involve students from outside Hillingdon, ensuring appropriate case management.
 - **Next Steps and Capacity Considerations:** Nicole and the ASB team agreed to circulate contact details and explore expanding preventative work in primary schools, with follow-up planned to assess effectiveness and potential for broader implementation.
- **Safeguarding Audit and Education Wellbeing Support:** Amandeep, the new Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing Officer, introduced their role to Nicole and the group, clarified the safeguarding audit process, and addressed questions about audit submissions, templates, and available support for schools.
 - **Audit Submission Flexibility:** Amandeep confirmed that schools may submit either the provided audit template or their own action plans, aiming to reduce administrative burden and focus on effective safeguarding self-assessment.

- **Support and Resources:** Amandeep offered to provide guidance, resources, and operational support for safeguarding compliance, audits, and wellbeing initiatives, encouraging schools to reach out directly for assistance.
- **Navigating Puberty and Safeguarding for SEND Pupils:** Nicole raised the issue of managing puberty-related behaviours in pupils with special educational needs, prompting discussion with Ayo, Adam, and others about resources, referral thresholds, and the need for further training and collaboration with special schools.
 - **Resource Sharing and Parental Engagement:** Nicole highlighted NSPCC resources on puberty and learning disabilities, suggesting their use with parents and staff to support understanding and management of sexual development behaviours in SEND pupils.
 - **Referral and Support Pathways:** Adam and Ayo discussed the importance of clear referral processes, contextual safeguarding, and the need for schools to receive support from key workers and social care when managing complex cases involving safeguarding and SEND.
 - **Future Training and Collaboration:** Nicole proposed organising a session with special schools to share expertise and resources, with Ayo and others expressing willingness to participate and support mainstream schools facing these challenges.



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- **Cross-Borough Safeguarding Communication Challenges:** Ayo and Michelle raised difficulties in liaising with neighbouring boroughs' social care teams regarding safeguarding referrals, and Nicole acknowledged the complexity and offered to help identify contacts or escalate cases where possible.
 - **Referral Process Variability:** Nicole explained that structures and roles differ across local authorities, making it challenging to identify the correct

contacts or escalation routes, and suggested gathering examples to seek further clarification or invite representatives from other boroughs.

- **Escalation Support:** Nicole offered to assist with individual cases by attempting to contact counterparts in other boroughs or advising on escalation procedures, while noting the limitations of cross-borough influence.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Threshold Document Circulation:** Send the updated threshold document to Nicole for wider circulation among the network. (Indeep)
- **Threshold Document Case Studies:** Prepare and bring case studies to future meetings to review the threshold document with DSLs and clarify referral levels. (Indeep)
- **Education and Social Care Collaboration:** Arrange a conversation with Nicole to discuss forming a working group or forum to strengthen the relationship between schools and children's social care, ensuring adequate education representation. (Indeep, Nicole)
- **Escalation Contacts for Family Help:** Share Bailey's contact details and information about the three Family Help service managers and assistant director with the DSL network for escalation purposes. (Nicole)
- **Feedback to Family Help on Communication Issues:** Review the meeting transcript and share feedback with Family Help regarding poor communication and lack of consultation with schools during assessments. (Nicole, Indeep)
- **ASB Team Primary School Engagement:** Send a communication to primary DSLs with ASB team contact details and information about potential support, after discussing capacity and approach with ASB team managers. (Aminah, Asif, Nicole)
- **EHE Team Contact Details Update:** Update the LEAP page with EHE team mobile numbers for easier pre-referral discussion access. (Patricia)
- **Special Schools Safeguarding Resource Sharing:** Organise a session with special schools to share expertise and resources on managing puberty and safeguarding concerns for children with additional needs in mainstream settings. (Nicole, Ayo)