

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 1 OCTOBER 2026 at 11.00 am – 12.30 am at The Lion Inn, Boreham

Distribution	* indicates attendance	
*Sue Bardetti		Tendring South
Emily Bartram		North Uttlesford
*Dale Bateman		Epping Forest Rural
*Liz Benjeddi		Billericay
*Heidi Blakeley		Wickford
*Amanda Buckland-Garnett		South Woodham Ferrers
*Luke Bulpett		South Vice-Chair
Dida Burrell		Braintree/Mid quadrant partnership lead
*Terri Chudleigh		Basildon East/Pitsea
*Anna Conley		Witham
*Aaron Cross		Castle Point and Benfleet
*Dawn Dack		Mid Chair/Maldon
*Richard Green		South Chair
*Nick Hutchings		EPHA Vice-Chair/North East Chair/ Colchester West
*Clare James		Dengie
*Claire Jackman		Uttlesford South
*Chris Jarman		West Chair
Becky Keitch		Tendring North
*Ian Kendal		Harlow
*Pam Langmead		EPHA Professional Officer/County Treasurer
*Ian MacDonald		Tendring Mid
*Kerry Malcolm		North East quadrant partnership lead
Richard McIntosh		Chelmsford South
*Mark Millbourne		Colchester East
*Samantha Murrell		Canvey Island
*Stephanie Newland		Halstead
Matt O'Grady		Brentwood
*Lisa Patient		Basildon West
*Nicky Patrick		Harwich and Dovercourt
*Harriet Phelps-Knights		EPHA Chair
*Richard Potter		North East Vice-Chair
*Colin Raraty		West quadrant partnership lead
*Amanda Reid		Mid Vice-Chair/Chelmsford North
Marne Reynecke-Raybould		West Vice-Chair
Adam Squirrell		Colchester South (Tiptree & Stanway)
*Claire Smith		Rochford
Gary Soars		Rayleigh
Nick Taylor		Chelmsford West
*Joanne Willcox		Epping Forest South
*Alan Garnett		NAHT branch officer

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Harriet Phelps-Knights, the EPHA Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, which followed on from the EPHA Annual General Meeting. During that meeting the attendees discussed the priorities for EPHA for the school year ahead.

Harriet particularly welcomed new colleagues on the EPHA Executive, including:

- Emily Bartram, representing headteachers in Uttlesford North
- Claire Jackman, representing headteachers in Uttlesford South
- Stephanie Newland, representing headteachers in Halstead
- Marne Reynecke-Raybould, taking over as West Vice-Chair
- Adam Squirrel, representing headteachers in Tiptree and Stanway

Apologies were received from:

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|---------------------------|---------------------|
| • Emily Bartram | Uttlesford North |
| • Dida Burrell | Braintree |
| • Becky Keitch | Tendring North |
| • Richard McIntosh | Chelmsford South |
| • Matt O'Grady | Brentwood |
| • Marne Reynecke-Raybould | West Vice-Chair |
| • Gary Soars | Rayleigh |
| • Adam Squirrel | Tiptree and Stanway |
| • Nick Taylor | Chelmsford West |

2. BUSINESS INTERESTS REGISTER

All Executive members in attendance completed a business interests' form. It was **AGREED** that Executive members who were not at the meeting should be asked to complete a form at the earliest opportunity.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 7 May 2026 were confirmed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising from this meeting.

4. EPHA REPRESENTATION ON WORKING GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

i) Chair's report and Schools Forum feedback

The EPHA Chair, Harriet Phelps-Knights, referred to her Chair's report shared at the AGM earlier in the morning.

She noted that she had attended a Schools Forum meeting on 30th September, along with a number of other primary headteacher representatives, including Sue Bardetti.

She reported that the Forum had been informed that schools that are eligible for falling rolls funding have been contacted by the LA. She reported back on a number of key issues for primary schools, including the following:

Action

Executive
members not
in attendance

Schools welcome the additional funding committed to support SEND Reform, but there is, inevitably, concern about the pressure of mainstream school inclusion, and the fact that the Inclusive Mainstream Funding is unlikely to make a significant impact on schools' budgets and their delivery of SEND support. Schools have been asked to write yet another report (the Inclusion Strategy) which adds to the pressure on thinly stretched primary headteachers.

The free school meal expansion guidance was published late in the summer term and detailed the tasks that schools needed to undertake going forward: informing parents, encouraging applications and undertaking eligibility checks. However, one change detailed in the guidance in the 2026/27, is that funding for Universal Infant Free School Meals will reduce by 20%, with the DfE assuming that this funding will be replaced by FSM expansion applications in Reception and Key Stage 1. Headteachers have reported that, in many cases, this will mean a loss of funding in their next budget. The school food standards, in force from 1st September 2027, will do nothing to alleviate financial pressures on schools; many of the suggested options are expensive and it seems that there will be no additional funding for schools to manage the change.

Schools are very disappointed that the Sports and PE Funding will cease at the end of the financial year, and the details about how partnerships will continue to support schools are sketchy to say the least. This funding is significant in schools, and there are real concerns about how effectively the new Partnership network will be able to deliver effective sporting activities in every school.

Harriet reported that Schools Forum had discussed the proposed transfer of 1% of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Whilst it is possible to disagree in principle with the proposal it is hard to argue with the Government that schools have insufficient funding when it is the case that the overall balances in Essex schools have increased. School leaders argue that they retain high balances due to uncertainty and the requirement to hold a contingency fund, but it still undermines the argument that there is insufficient money in the system. One headteacher asked if there was a breakdown by category and phase of school, and this was confirmed. Another headteacher asked if there was any link between high balances and SEND spending, but this was not known.

It was confirmed that the DfE tends to define a high balance as above 8% but noted that some MATs have considerably more than that, and there are a number of individual schools with huge balances. Last year the Local Authority did contact schools and academies with over 30% balances to ask for an explanation of their carry forward, but it has little or no control over the finances of MATs and academies,

ii) Professional Officer report

The report gave details of the meetings attended by Pam Langmead on behalf of EPHA. In addition to the attendance at meetings (and writing follow up reports), her work for EPHA has included:

- Information, emails and communications with all headteachers;
- Advice to headteachers, clerks and governors, particularly in relation to complaints, exclusions, headteacher recruitment and where to access support

for a range of issues;

- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise, including attending complaints panel meetings;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers, maintaining lists;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme and capacity support opportunities;
- Briefings to headteacher groups – 27 partnerships/clusters hold termly briefings – researching and writing briefing notes and presentations –and keeping them up to date as new directives, guidance and documents are introduced;
- Termly online education briefing to governors, based on the headteacher briefing notes;
- Termly clerk briefing on behalf of the Essex Clerks Association;
- Managing the Small Schools Support Group, running those meetings, planning October conference;
- Facilitating the Small Schools Governor group and organising and running future meetings;
- Working with the National Head Teachers' Association Network, on their administration group;
- Writing and delivering training to staff, governors and clerks, focused on exclusions and complaints, Ofsted framework and “how to support your headteacher”;
- Planning and organising the Deputy Headteacher conference, EPHA wellbeing conference and WEPHA conference;
- Planning the annual Headteacher conference;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, Ofsted checklist and the Support Directory;
- Writing new 7 minute safeguarding staff meetings (Gender questioning) and updating existing material;
- Organisation and management of the area meetings in the summer and autumn terms;
- Managing requests for headteacher wellbeing support;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), supporting area treasurers, producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Updating EPHA records and website;
- Other tasks as required.

Nick Hutchings, EPHA Vice-Chair, thanked Pam for her work and noted, in particular, the value of the termly headteacher briefings, and thanked the Professional Officer for writing and delivering these each term to heads and governors.

iii) **Small Schools Support Group**

It was noted that Jinnie Nichols is no longer a member of the EPHA Executive, but will continue to chair the Small Schools Support Group for the time being. The Professional Officer explained that the group meets termly, online, and also holds an annual

conference for small school heads which is particularly well attended. It is always challenging for headteachers in schools to attend additional meetings, but they appreciate the support from EPHA and the understanding of their particular challenges. There are a number of small school heads on the EPHA Executive (Marne Reynecke-Raybould, Becky Keitch, Stephanie Newland and Emily Bartram) so their views continue to be well represented.

The Professional Officer facilitates a twice-termly Small School Governor network meeting, which focuses on a range of topics. Their first meeting this term discussed how to hold effective headteacher performance management meetings.

4. HEADTEACHER SUPPORT

Alan Garnett, NAHT Branch Officer, was welcomed to the meeting. He noted that he had met with Clare Kershaw and the Assistant Directors in January 2025 to discuss possible support and supervision for Essex headteachers. Clare delegated Jo Barclay to discuss this further.

Alan noted that the NAHT had launched a number of campaign pledges, including one around the pressure of inspection, and there has been some traction from the new Secretary of State, Lucy Powell. Alan noted that he had recently received a very concerning email from a headteacher following a very challenging inspection. He noted that many headteachers dread the process, and that other school leaders are unwilling to step up to headship, partly as a result of the pressure from Ofsted.

The EPHA Chair reminded the Executive that there had been a discussion at the last meeting in May. The minutes of that meetings stated:

Alan Garnett, NAHT Branch Secretary, had recently met with Clare Kershaw to discuss whether the Local Authority should offer supervision and support to a headteacher following Ofsted inspection. Clare had discussed this idea with the EPHA Chairs at the Super Exec meeting. Her view was that headteachers were able to access support if they needed it, for example from the School Effectiveness Partners, the Education Safeguarding Team or the Critical Incident Team. There was some concern that offering this supervision following every inspection might give the impression that the process will always be negative, which is not the case. However, one Executive member did note that a poor inspection experience does undermine and challenge the leadership decisions made by the headteacher, and they may need support post-Ofsted.

The Professional Officer argued that headteachers do need more support around the most stressful aspects of their job, such as managing complaints and the sheer scale of responsibilities when leading a school.

Alan explained that there is some available support for headteachers and school leaders, for example through Education Support, but the Local Authority is inconsistent in what it can offer in relation to supporting headteachers and governors.

One headteacher noted that going through an Ofsted inspection, however positive the outcome, can be very stressful and some headteachers would welcome a debrief, but

not necessarily from a Local Authority officer. She did stress that when a headteacher feels battered and bruised by their role, they need support.

Another headteacher noted that, in her opinion, the build up to Ofsted inspection is equally or even more stressful than the inspection itself. She talked about the wear and tear of constant mental stress and anxiety and argued that Ofsted needs to reform its approach.

Another headteacher talked at length about how much headteachers “hold”, as well as holding everyone else in their community. This probably has a longer term impact on stress and anxiety. She noted that over 24 years she has experienced a wide range of inspections, one had a fair but negative outcome, and it had a significant impact on staff wellbeing. She had a discussion with the Director of Education who promised a visit from the LA, but this never materialised.

She noted that she is in a good and supportive partnership but has noticed a rise in stress and pressure among headteacher colleagues.

The group discussed some of the support they have accessed. For example, the Dunmow partnership went through training with Maria Brosnan to understand the impact of stress and anxiety. This gave the headteachers strategies to manage and cope, and was very impactful.

Another headteacher noted that her MAT has subsidised the DfE Talking Heads programme, and each head has 6 sessions during the year. This support has been invaluable.

Alan Garnett read out a quote around the “quiet crisis in our schools”, from [an article by Iain Parks](#), Diocesan Director of Education, Blackburn schools.

There is a quiet crisis unfolding in our schools.

It is not a crisis of commitment - our headteachers and staff have never worked harder.

It is not a crisis of ambition - schools continue to strive for excellence for every child in their care. It is a crisis of system design. And unless we are honest about it, we will continue to lose the very people upon whom our education system depends.

Across the Diocese of Blackburn, I see this reality every week. Leaders working late into the night. Teaching heads leading safeguarding, SEND, curriculum and community engagement all at once.

Senior leaders absorbing wave after wave of accountability, expectation and scrutiny.

And increasingly, I am seeing something I have not seen to this extent before: exhaustion, anxiety, and, too often, tears.

This is not sustainable.

A framework that was meant to reduce pressure is doing the opposite

Alan stressed his concern that the duty of care for headteachers is in the hands of volunteers.

It was argued that it wasn't sufficient for the Local Authority to offer support as a “bolt on” to existing officers job specifications; instead, it would be more meaningful if the LA commissioned support for headteachers from independent trained counsellors.

One headteacher argued that the support is in the hands of governors, and that they should be told (perhaps by the Director of Education) that they must provide funding for headteacher support and supervision.

Another headteacher noted that the MAT his school belongs to is getting it right, offering termly supervision and support for headteachers.

The EPHA Chair noted that this discussion would continue at the afternoon meeting with LA Officers.

5. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2026/27 SCHOOL YEAR

Executive meetings (The Lion Inn, Boreham)

Thursday 21st January 2027

Thursday 6th May 2027

Termly headteacher meeting dates

Autumn term 2026

WEST	Wednesday 4 November	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
SOUTH	Thursday 5 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham
N-EAST	Wednesday 11 November	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 12 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham

Spring term 2027

N-EAST	Wednesday 3 March	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 4 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 10 March	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 11 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2027

N-EAST	Wednesday 16 June	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 17 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 23 June	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 24 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham

Conferences

Deputy Headteachers' Conference

Friday 9 October 2026 Weston Community Homes Stadium

Small Schools conference

Wednesday 14 October 2026 The Lion Inn, Boreham

Headteachers' Conference

Friday 19 March 2027 Chelmsford City Race Course

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Harriet Phelps-Knights
Chair of EPHA

Pam Langmead
EPHA Professional Officer