

# ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

# MINUTES OF THE EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2022 at 9.15 am – 12.00 noon at The Lion Inn, Boreham

#### Distribution

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George Athanasiou	West Vice-Chair
Dawn Baker	Chelmsford West/Mid Treasurer
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*Becky Keitch	Tendring North
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*Ian MacDonald	Tendring Mid
*Richard McIntosh	Chelmsford South
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*Hayley O'Dea	Rochford
*Matt O'Grady	Brentwood
Richard Potter	North East Vice-Chair
*Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair
Amanda Reid	Mid Vice-Chair/Chelmsford North
*Angela Russell	Basildon West
*Gary Soars	Rayleigh
*Karen Tucker	Canvey Island
Jonathan Tye	Harlow
*Joanne Willcox	Epping Forest South

#### Also in attendance

Gavin Freed

Juniper Education



## 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Harriet Phelps-Knights, the EPHA Chair, welcomed everyone to the first face to face meeting of the Executive since January 2020. New colleagues on the EPHA Executive include:

- Becky Keitch representing headteachers in Tendring North
- James Newell representing headteachers in Tendring North

Apologies were received from:

- George Athanasiou West Vice-Chair
- Dawn Baker Chelmsford West/Mid Treasurer
- Matt Curzon
  Uttlesford South
- Ceri Daniels Colchester South (Tiptree & Stanway)
- James Newell Tendring North
- Richard Potter North East Vice-Chair
- Amanda Reid Mid Vice-Chair/Chelmsford North
- Jonathan Tye Harlow

#### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Executive meetings held on 30 September 2021 and the special meeting on 11 November 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record. It was noted that all matters arising had been completed, including business interests forms for all Executive members.

#### 3. EPHA REPRESENTATION ON GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

#### i) Chair's report – Harriet Phelps-Knights

A brief report today to say Happy New Year to everyone (albeit nearly the end of January) and thank you yet again for your hard work and determination to provide a quality education for the children of Essex. I'm not sure this term has been any easier than previous terms and in some ways I think it has been harder with no real guidance; I'm not sure about you, but it feels like we've been left to make our own decisions and sort through the Covid sticky road of parental expectations, lack of staff and ever-changing Covid isolation rules that couldn't get any more confusing could it?

A huge thank you to Pam and Nick for managing the on-line meetings so effectively it's so difficult to talk, read the chat and listen all at once so thank you both for making this easier for me, and thank you to Dawn who thanked Mike and ended the webcast last week when I got chucked out - dodgy internet!

Thank you to those who attend and represent Primary heads at meetings and particularly Schools Forum reps, this meeting seems to get more confusing and to have the longevity of those who have sat in the forum for a while: Richard, Pam and Sue particularly, I think this helps our understanding and ability to respond accordingly. Jinnie, I hope you've not been put off but thank you for being part of the Forum.

I'm sure the trials of Covid are not over and with the relaxing of restrictions I believe we will still have challenges as school leaders as the prevalence of the pandemic is still high

Action



(1:20) and I am sure we will still have staff absences and parent expectations to manage.

We have a packed agenda today with some decision to make and discussions to be had around SEND, payroll, well-being so thank you all for making the time to attend today.

# 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, including in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme;
- Briefings to headteacher groups 28 partnerships/clusters are now holding termly briefings – researching and writing briefing notes and presentations –and keeping them up to date as new directives, guidance and documents are introduced;
- Running the headteacher wellbeing survey, and follow up circulation of the report;
- Writing 7 minute staff meetings, including managing complaints;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Organisation and management of the area meetings in the autumn and spring terms;
- Organising and running webcasts with Clare Kershaw, Mike Gogarty, Andrew Hemmings;
- Organising Managing Complaints training for the spring term;
- Setting up the mid-year admissions webcast with Shamsun Noor;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), supporting area treasurers, producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Managing the bookings, organising the Deputy Headteacher conference, future planning for Heads' conference;
- Updating EPHA records and website;
- Other tasks as required.

It was noted that the webcasts run by EPHA are generally helpful for headteachers, although there was some concern about the advice given in the last webcast with the Essex Public Health Director; the usual clear direction given by the Director of Education was definitely missed on this occasion.

Nick Hutchings, Vice-Chair of EPHA expressed his thanks to the Professional Officer for her work and support for Essex headteachers.



# iii) Small schools representation

The Professional Officer noted that she had received an email from a headteacher of a small school (fewer than 120 pupils) asking for support and a link to other heads in the same circumstances. It was agreed that there are unique challenges when running a small school, linked to limited capacity and resources. The headteacher who got in touch was finding delivery of the curriculum a challenge, In addition, governance can be a real issue, and also the number of children with special educational needs, as parents often believe that a small school will be particularly supportive and nurturing. It was noted that Alison Fiala (ECC) has led a "small schools group" but this has focused on sustainability rather than existing challenges. It was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer will contact the headteachers of small schools and suggest creating a group, that can offer mutual support and guidance.

iv) Brentwood Education Partnership

Matt O'Grady noted that the Brentwood headteachers had discussed the purpose of the ECC Sustainability toolkit, launched last term. It was **AGREED** that this would be discussed with the Local Authority officers at the afternoon meeting.

## v) Attendance steering group

The Executive members discussed the current attendance in schools, which is very low in some cases as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Although the Attendance Specialist team is currently advising that as long as a school can explain their attendance figures they will be supported, there is some concern that, at some point, Ofsted will start to judge schools harshly if they have poor attendance. Indeed, some inspection reports have mentioned absence as an issue and have been critical of schools.

The DfE is very focused on attendance, and is concerned at the numbers of pupils who are out of school. A significant number of headteachers noted that they are receiving requests for term time holidays in the summer term, and this is likely to add to the absences in school. To add to the confusion, schools are now being told to use Code I (general illness) when a child tests positive for Covid, rather than Code X. This means that absence due to Covid is not being recorded as such, and will add to the rates of absence in schools. However, the change in use of codes is not being applied consistently (with some schools continuing to use X for all covid-related absence) and so the data is not reflective of what is actually happening in schools.

One headteacher noted her concern that when using penalty notices the LA doesn't always take a family's context into consideration; she has one family who are in very difficult circumstances, but are being pursued through the courts. This could potentially result in a custodial sentence. It was **AGREED** that this would be discussed with the Local Authority officers at the afternoon meeting.

The Professional Officer **AGREED** that she would contact the Attendance Compliance team to discuss the intended use of penalty notices and the application of different coding, particularly as the pandemic lessens and there is a renewed emphasis on attendance.

Professional Officer

Meeting with LA officers

Meeting with LA officers

Professional Officer



#### vi) SEND provision

Members of the Executive expressed their concern about the support for SEND, and the impact on resources and staff wellbeing. For many there is a lack of specialist staff within the authority who can assist, advise and support schools. Some teams are short of staff, but there also seem to be internal arguments about who is responsible for what. In some cases, specialists have been redeployed to new teams and then drop their previous caseloads.

Small schools in particular often get a reputation for being "nurturing" and so are favoured by parents whose children have additional needs; this puts additional pressure on small schools whose budgets and resources are tight, and are often located in rural areas with limited local support.

Executive members generally agreed that the management and resourcing of SEN is a major factor in staff well-being, and a number of schools have lost their experienced SENCos because of lack of support from the LA along with insufficient funding and apparently insurmountable barriers.

Most, if not all schools have seen an increase in children with complex needs, without the additional support that is then needed. For some, families are deferring entry which will result in increased pressures on future cohorts.

There was a discussion about children who arrive at school in, for example Year 2 or 4, having had no schooling at all. In one case the child had no paperwork and was unknown to the Local Authority; this child had extremely complex needs and there was little or no support or funding to assist the school. It was **AGREED** that the problem of managing children who have apparently missed education, should be raised with the LA Officers.

The Executive was asked what outreach support, if any, they received from special schools. In some cases there was none, although some schools did receive support from special schools: Lexden Springs had given helpful support to a school in Harwich. Another school in Clacton had been offered a tutor from Green Lodge for 6 weeks, which has been a significant help for a particularly challenging pupil. A Braintree headteacher noted that her school had benefited from excellent support from Lyons Hall, and also from Edith Borthwick special school.

It was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer and Chair of ESSET (Essex Special Schools Education Trust) should be invited to the next meeting of the EPHA Executive in May to discuss outreach support.

One headteacher, whose school includes an enhanced provision, noted that the EnPro schools are keen to offer outreach in their specialisms, but are unable to do so without additional funding. It was **AGREED** that this should be raised with the LA Officers.

The lack of Speech and Language Therapists was a problem for many schools. In addition one headteacher expressed her concerns about the current referral process. Her school had made 11 referrals for speech and language therapist support at the beginning of the autumn term but had received no response, until they received a

Meeting with LA officers

ESSET reps to attend Executive meeting 19/05/22

Meeting with LA officers



letter this term saying that 3 pupils (who had never been seen) were being discharged.
 When challenged, the Inclusion Team explained that referrals have to be repeated on a termly basis, otherwise the referral will/may be dropped. It was AGREED that this should be raised with the LA Officers.

One headteacher noted that a member of the SENDIASS team has been suggesting to parents that they should apply for an EHCP for their child despite contrary advice from the school. It was noted that one of the challenges faced in Essex at the moment is the huge volume of EHCP applications, and this advice places unnecessary and additional stress on the system. It was **AGREED** that this should be raised with the LA Officers.

Concerns were raised about the limitations of IPRA funding, which can only be used for medical needs or transition. As a result of the lack of funding, more schools are immediately seeking funding through EHCPs adding to the pressure on the system.

The Professional Officer had received a letter from the Chair of the Harlow Education Consortium Primary Headteachers' Group (circulated to the Executive in advance of the meeting), expressing their concern about the shortfall of funding for SEND and the requirements identified in pupils' Education, Health and Care Plans. The letter asked for EPHA's official position regarding SEN funding, whether EPHA is lobbying ECC and whether EPHA is willing to make a case to Schools Forum to increase High Needs funding. In addition, they asked what role EPHA is playing in the SEN funding review.

The EPHA Chair explained that a number of workstreams are taking place as part of the SEND strategy. These include the introduction of the Inclusion Framework, a review of SEND funding, and a deep dive into the experience of SEN management in schools.

A number of headteachers and SENCos are involved with the SEND funding review, working with ISOS to review the current banding descriptors, and to explore whether they are being applied consistently and transparently.

It was agreed that EPHA is not a union and therefore isn't "lobbying" ECC around SEND provision and funding, but discussions with the Executive and through other groups and forums are ongoing. Primary headteachers are represented on these groups, including on Schools Forum and a sub-group of that committee, the High Needs Review Group. Alex Abercrombie, a Local Authority office who is leading on the SEN Strategy, is working with the five EPHA Chairs to conduct a deep dive into the SEN experience in their schools. EPHA members will continue to feedback the experience of SEN provision and funding in primary schools to the Local Authority through these committees, as well as through the Executive meeting.

It was noted that the level of school balances continues to be high, and this is an ongoing argument by the DfE as to why additional funding is not needed by schools. The combined balances for maintained schools and academies at all phases and sectors in Essex at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 was £136 million. (An <u>average</u> of around £157k in a primary school, and £592k in a secondary school.)

Meeting with LA officers

Meeting with LA officers



#### vii) Schools Forum report

The Chair of EPHA is a representative on the School Forum; other EPHA Executive members on the Forum include Richard Green, Sue Bardetti, Jinnie Nicholls and the EPHA Professional Officer. The EPHA Chair noted that there has been a DfE decision to remove funding from Local Authorities for school improvement activities, and as a result the Local Authority has proposed to de-delegate funding from maintained schools. The Schools Forum representatives for maintained schools voted against this course of action, but it is likely to be allowed by DfE.

The Professional Officer gave a brief update on the schools funding settlement, including the introduction of a Schools Supplementary Grant to cover the additional cost in 2022/23 of the Health and Social Care Levy, and the planned increase in Pupil Premium Grant rates. She suggested that these rises are likely to mean that there is no additional Recovery Premium in the next financial year, although this is not certain.

An Executive member asked if there would be financial help for schools to alleviate the impact of rising fuel costs. It was **AGREED** that this question would be raised at the meeting with LA Officers, but it was felt that it was unlikely.

#### 4. JUNIPER PAYROLL

Gavin Freed was welcomed to the meeting and was thanked for attending the Executive, as well as attending the termly area meetings in November. Gavin is the Executive Chairman of Juniper Education, who took over payroll from Essex County Council in April.

Gavin reminded the Executive that, at the November meetings, he set out a plan for improvement, including releasing schools from their existing contracts with no penalties, if they wished to leave immediately. He stated that Juniper was prepared to lose around half of the 280 Essex primary schools within payroll, in order to ensure that the system was manageable and run successfully for the remaining schools. However, the response from schools at that time was not as expected, and the majority of the headteachers stated clearly that they did not wish to leave by wanted an improvement in the continuing service. Since November around 35 schools have given notice to leave the service.

In response to questions, Gavin explained that CR Payroll are getting to the end of their contract. Their task has been to bridge the experience gap in the workforce and, gradually, inexperienced staff have been replaced with more capable and experienced staff members. Juniper has appointed a full time Payroll Director, a Pensions Expert and an assistant, to help support the team. In addition a couple of the senior team at Juniper, including a data expert and data analyst, are dedicated to the payroll service. They also continue to be supported by Deloitte, a leading global provider of audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax, and related services.

Gavin explained that Juniper has created a Customer Forum of school representatives, which meets every fortnight to feed back their experience and to ensure that individual schools are not working in isolation.



Gavin stated that the payroll processes in November, December and January were working more smoothly although there continue to be some schools that are having problems. In terms of improving data, the service offered advances to schools:

- In July 94 advances were made (there are around 18,000 Essex school staff on the system);
- In September 115 advances
- In October 26 advances
- In November 26 advances
- In December 8 advances.

Whilst Gavin did not underestimate the concerns and problems this raised for the individual and their school, it does suggest the service is improving.

The communications with schools are generally improving; not all schools need a weekly meeting, and most are having a monthly meeting along with the opportunity to call when there are issues. Gavin did note a couple of positive emails that he has recently received which have acknowledged an improvement in the service.

Historical corrections are gradually being worked through, and most are now being processed correctly. There are some outstanding issues, such as the overpayment of some apprenticeship levy funding, which are being addressed. The 55 schools that were central payment in May owe payments for the Apprentice Levy which was not collected at the time; Juniper will pay this on their behalf.

AVCs (Additional Voluntary Contributions) are now being directed to the right place, but there are still some historical errors which are being corrected.

Gavin confirmed that 31<sup>st</sup> March is a realistic deadline for the service to be correct and properly functioning. He accepted that some schools were concerned that the cost of the service management and support that Juniper has bought in would be passed on as a price rise in the new financial year, and Gavin confirmed that this would not be the case and there will be no price increase. Juniper is producing a clearer Service Level Agreement for schools.

A couple of additional problems were raised: some schools still don't have a named contact (or their previous named contact has left and had not been replaced). Gavin confirmed that the team has a meeting scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> February to discuss staffing and links for all schools.

A school that is leaving Juniper has reported that they are only being given one month's worth of data, and their new provider is asking for two months. Gavin agreed that this data should be available and he will take this concern back to the team.

One headteacher asked if Juniper would continue to need CR Payroll when their contract officially ends. Gavin noted that they are consultants and have shared the expertise and information that was needed by Juniper. They will maintain the relationships with Deloitte and other pension experts.

Gavin was asked if the teams have now returned to working in the office. Gavin said that this is increasing, but that they have had regular team meetings at least a couple of



times a month throughout the pandemic.

Another headteacher stated that she has noticed improvements in the service, but asked when the system would build in algorithms which will make automatic changes to payroll, for example when a pregnant staff member reaches 18 week gestation. Gavin agreed that the system should include this sort of formula.

Gavin was asked to produce a paper clarifying the relationship and differences between the payroll and pensions services, and setting out the roles and responsibilities of each service, including the role of schools. He agreed to provide this.

Gavin was thanked for attending the meeting and giving a useful update.

Contact details Gavin Freed gavin.freed@junipereducation.org

#### 5. FINANCE REPORT

## Current account income and expenditure 31.07.21 – 31.12.21

	Expenditure	Income
Miscellaneous	£234.20	£0.00
DSG		£0.00
Subscriptions		£0.00
Supply	£4,368.00	
Travel & mileage	£2,665.44	
Professional Officer	£25,983.43	
Meetings	£12,903.06	
Colleague Supporter	£496.62	
Totals	£46,650.75	£0.00

The Professional Officer expenditure for August – December 2020 is broken down into

		£25,983.43
٠	expenses paid on behalf of EPHA	£1,869.23
٠	mileage	£434.20
٠	professional fees	£23,680.00

With the return of in-person meetings the expenditure on meetings has increased once again. We continue to pay a monthly subscription of £100.79 on Zoom.

# Bank statements for account 00795978

02.08.21	£336,283.02
17.12.21	£294,697.56

# The Conference account Income and Expenditure 02.08.21 – 16.11.21

Expenditure

Totals	£28,447.95	£8,220.00
WEPHA conference September 2021	£2,025.00	£2,570.00
Headteacher conference 2022	£5,100.00	£0.00
Deputy conference 2021	£21,322.95	£5,650.00
Income		



Please note that the income and expenditure relates to this 4 month period, and therefore doesn't record the overall income and expenditure for each event. The Deputy conference was held in-person once again, and so there was a charge per delegate. There are still some payments for places at the conference outstanding, which I am chasing.

Bank statements for account 0079597802.08.21£35,437.2016.11.21£20,019.25

# 6. PURSUIT HEARTHEALTH PILOT/ EPHA HEADTEACHER WELL-BEING SUPPORT

Executive members were referred to a report circulated in advance of the meeting, which was produced after the pilot study of the Pursuit HeartHealth programme with 12 Essex headteachers. Five took part in one to one sessions, whilst 7 heads participated in a group programme.

The results of the pilot, both in measurable physical improvements to heart rates, and anecdotal feedback, were extremely positive. Maria Brosnan, the lead consultant has contacted the EPHA Professional Officer to discuss the next steps, if any, and EPHA's possible involvement.

After discussion, it was **AGREED** that the programme should be one of the suites of support options that EPHA is confident to recommend to headteachers. The Association bought the technical equipment needed for the programme (the InnerBalance Biofeedback sensor and phone app) and these could be lent to future participants. It was agreed that EPHA should refer interested people to the report and the headteachers who took part would be willing to give feedback if asked.

In respect of funding, it was agreed that EPHA would not subsidise the whole cost of future participation, but it may be possible to offer support to heads with funding if necessary. The EPHA Chair will discuss with the Education Taskforce the possibility of accessing headteacher/senior leader wellbeing funding and Dida Burrell (treasurer for the Essex branch of the NAHT) is applying to the NAHT for some funding to support wellbeing. She noted that Essex does not tend to apply for funding as headteachers are generally well supported by the Association, but wellbeing is a priority for the NAHT this year. It was agreed that it was important to understand and utilise the role and expertise of unions, in particular to support individual heads when they have problems. EPHA can offer advice and guidance, but does not represent individual heads in the same way as their union representative does.

The EPHA Chair mentioned the funded DfE coaching/counselling sessions that are currently available for heads and deputies, delivered by Education Support. It was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer will circulate the information about this to all primary heads.

The Executive discussed the importance of governors understanding the reality of the ongoing impact of the pandemic, and knowing how much pressure headteachers are still under. Jo Barclay is currently conducting a survey with governors around headteacher wellbeing. Governors are, of course, volunteers, but they do need to be



proactively supporting the wellbeing of heads and senior leaders.

The EPHA wellbeing survey run in November 2021 highlighted the challenges faced by headteachers, which have been exacerbated by the demands and pressures of the Covid pandemic. EPHA is expanding its offer of support to headteachers including facilitating a range of support in addition to the current EPHA offer, which will include signposting or brokering practical help for heads in crisis, such as:

- Coaching or counselling individually or in a group
- Colleague Support for any headteacher in need (not just new heads)
- Capacity help in a school headteachers or deputies seconded to help add leadership capacity for a limited time
- Governance advice and support, including recommending clerks who can manage "statutory" meetings
- Legal support for complaints
- Bespoke training, including joint training on complaints for headteachers and governors

The Executive discussed the previously available Heads in Waiting programme, training for aspiring headteachers. It was agreed that this is something that EPHA should consider developing as a training programme.

# 8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

# a) Items for the Local Authority update to headteachers

It was noted that the Local Authority update to heads will be held online this term, on Tuesday  $1^{st}$  March, from 10.00 am – 12 noon. It was agreed that they should be asked to give a response to the results of the EPHA Headteacher wellbeing survey, as well as giving an update on the SEND strategy and funding review.

# b) Changes to the teachers' pension

It was noted that some aspects of the teachers' pension scheme are changing from 1<sup>st</sup> April, including final salary and career average calculations, and changes as a result of the McCloud judgement (do to with age-discrimination). It was felt that many headteachers are unaware of the implications of the changes, and it was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer will set up a couple of webcasts led by the Wesleyan financial adviser team.

# 9. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2021/22/23 SCHOOL YEARS

**Executive meetings** (The Lion Inn, Boreham) Thursday 19 May 2022 Thursday 29 September 2022 Thursday 19 January 2023 Thursday 18 May 2023

#### Area Heads Meetings

Spring term 2022 Local Authority update Tuesday 1 March online LA update in March

Professional Officer

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N-EAST SOUTH WEST MID	Wednesday 2 March Thursday 3 March Wednesday 9 March Thursday 10 March	Colchester Community Stadium Greenwoods Hotel, Stock Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth The Lion Inn, Boreham
Summer terr	n 2022	
N-EAST	Wednesday 15 June	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 16 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 22 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 23 June	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
<b>.</b>	2022	
Autumn tern	-	
WEST	Wednesday 9 November	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
MID	Thursday 10 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham
N-EAST	Wednesday 16 November	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 17 November	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
Spring term	2023	
WEST	Wednesday 1 March	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 2 March	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
N-EAST	Wednesday 8 March	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 9 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham
Summer terr	n 2023	
WEST	Wednesday 14 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 15 June	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
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VVEST	Wednesday 14 June
SOUTH	Thursday 15 June
N-EAST	Wednesday 21 June
MID	Thursday 22 June

#### Conferences

Headteachers' Conference Friday 25 March 2022 Chelmsford City Race Course

Deputy Headteachers' Conference Friday 7 October 2022 Colchester Community Stadium

> ..... Harriet Phelps-Knights Chair of EPHA

**Colchester Community Stadium** 

The Lion Inn, Boreham

Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer