

MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025 starting at 1.00 Pm

The meeting was held at The Lion Inn, Boreham.

In attendance	Representing	email address
Clare Kershaw	Director of Education	Clare.kershaw@essex.gov.uk
Lisa Fergus	Assistant Director, South	Lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Stuart Coogan	Strategic Internal Audit Manager	stuart.coogan@essex.gov.uk
Sarah Collins	Senior Auditor	sarah.collins2@essex.gov.uk
Jo Barclay	Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing	Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk
Liz Bartholomew	EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt	head@mayflowerprimary.com
Dale Bateman	EPHA Epping Forest Rural	Head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk
Liz Benjeddi	EPHA Billericay	head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk
Heidi Blakeley	EPHA Wickford	head@abacus.essex.sch.uk
Amanda Buckland Garnett	EPHA South Woodham Ferrers	abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk
Luke Bulpett	EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk
Dida Burrell	EPHA Braintree	Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk
Terri Chudleigh	EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea	t.chudleigh@heartsacademy.uk
Anna Conley	EPHA Witham	head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk
Aaron Cross	EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet	head@kingston.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Richard Green	EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@grovetwood.essex.sch.uk
Nick Hutchings	EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair	head@hamiltonprimary.com
Clare James	EPHA Dengie	cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk
Chris Jarman	EPHA West Chair	Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk
Becky Keitch	EPHA Tendring North	Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk
Ian Kendal	EPHA Harlow	head@ourladyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.uk
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Kerry Malcolm	North East Partnership Lead Head	head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk
Richard McIntosh	EPHA Chelmsford South	head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk
Carl Messer	EPHA Tiptree and Stanway	cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org
Mark Millbourne	EPHA Colchester East	headteacher@prettygateschools.co.uk
Jinnie Nichols	EPHA Halstead	head@sgasa.uk
Lisa Patient	EPHA Basildon West	head@noakbridge.essex.sch.uk
Nicky Patrick	North East Partnership Lead Head	head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair	head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
Richard Potter	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	head@homefarm.essex.sch.uk
Andrew Price	EPHA West Vice-Chair	headteacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk
Colin Raraty	West Partnership Lead Head	mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk
Amanda Reid	EPHA Mid Vice-Chair	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Marne Reynecke- Raybould	EPHA North Uttlesford	Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk
Claire Smith	EPHA Rochford	c.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Nick Taylor	EPHA Chelmsford West	headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	jwillcox@hillhouse.efspt.org

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Matt Curzon EPHA Uttlesford South
- Ian MacDonald EPHA Tendring Mid
- Samantha Murrell EPHA Canvey Island
- James Newell EPHA Tendring North
- Matt O'Grady EPHA Brentwood

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EPHA EXECUTIVE MEETING

a) Neurodiversity summit – Mid and South Essex ICB

Richard Potter reported that he had attended a conference organised by the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board, responsible for ensuring the right health services are in place for children and young people.

The conference focus was on their medium term plan; one of the key workstreams is Learning Disability and Autism (for all ages). Within this area, there are a number of different workstreams – one of which is system transformation for neurodiversity and LD as a whole. The key deliverable for year 1 was to bring the system together to start discussions around how the system moves from a diagnosis-led model for children and young people to a needs-led model. Richard explained that this was the focus of the summit. He noted that he was a lone education voice at the meeting (no one from the LA was in attendance) and was concerned to learn that the proposal is for schools to be solely responsible for making referrals for paediatric support. He noted that there was a fundamental lack of understanding of what capacity and resources there are in schools, and asked that the Local Authority would support EPHA by adding their weight to our concerns at the next summit. Clare **AGREED** that someone from the LA will attend.

CK

NB, Clare has subsequently confirmed that Carly Clarke attended from the Autism Strategy Team.

b) Locality protection for access to SEND hubs

A concern was raised that a provision has opened in North Uttlesford (an area where there are no special schools) but that all the available places have been allocated to children from Mid Essex. By contrast, another headteacher noted that at the SEMH hub at her school the applications are determined by a panel in North East, and the Head of the provision sits on that panel; in their case, the applications are being managed well and appropriately, and places are being allocated to North East children. Clare **AGREED** to follow up on this issue.

CK

NB, Clare has followed up this issue and can confirm the following:

There 8 places at the ASC hub. 4 pupils from the west quadrant have been placed at the hub. Of the other 4 places, 3 pupils come from the mid quadrant and 1 from the NE quadrant. The NE pupil was named via a tribunal and 1 of the mid pupils was

named to resolve an appeal. All admissions go via the ASC Panel, where all the hubs are represented, and if it is collectively agreed that the pupil is ASC appropriate the hub closest to the home address will be asked to admit. If they are unable to admit due to capacity, the LA will then ask the next closest ASC provision, so there are circumstances where there are pupils attending from other quadrants if there is space.

CK

c) Early requests for information for annual reviews

One headteacher raised the issue of being asked for documentation at least 12 weeks before an annual review is due, i.e. at 9 months rather than at the point of a full year, which is both challenging for the school and does not give the full picture of a child's situation. Clare **AGREED** to follow up on this issue.

CK

d) EHCP top-up funding payments

The EPHA Executive had welcomed the recent Schools Forum decision to bring forward the payment of EHCP top-up funding to 20 weeks, in advance of the EHCP being agreed. However, there has not yet been a communication to schools about this change, and Clare was asked to undertake this as soon as possible. She **AGREED** to do so.

CK

There was also a discussion about the transparency of funding and information about what sums of money would relate to an individual pupil; it can be difficult for schools to know which top-up fund relates to which child. Clare **AGREED** to discuss this further with Candice Thompson (SEN Provision Lead), but warned that a changed system must not be too complex to administrate.

It was noted that there will be a process whereby schools can discuss exceptional cases, if they believe that they have been under-funded through the interim payment.

NB, Clare can confirm an initial letter was sent to schools in the weekly email dated 13th October 25.

e) Inclusion Framework

The EPHA Executive reported that heads were being given inconsistent messages about the criteria and access to Inclusion Framework funding. Lisa Fergus explained that the framework and criteria for eligibility is being reviewed and tweaked. However, there is a finite pot of money and the October panel has been deferred, in advance of submitting a paper to Schools Forum in November to request additional funding to bridge the gap until the new financial year. Some schools may be told that their bid is being delayed. Lisa noted that there have been more bids for larger sums of money, for example to create alternative provision in a school. It was noted that some of those projects might be funded by alternative means, such as through Planning and Admissions, or Early Years.

Lisa confirmed that they are considering case study examples, to understand what difference a larger bid has made and whether it is delivering value for money.

She explained that every quadrant has a pre-panel that looks at the bids that will progress to a panel decision; these can pre-empt difficult questions and may

determine whether a bid is going to be ultimately successful. Lisa agreed that the criteria will be shared with Inclusion Partners as well as schools, so that there is consistency across the system.

Jinnie Nichols noted that Catherine Hutley had attended the Small Schools group meeting in July and had assured the headteachers that there was plenty of money still in the fund. She also advised that copious paperwork and detailed presentations are not a prerequisite for a successful bid; Jinnie argued that headteachers' different experiences are deterring people from applying to the Inclusion Framework.

Lisa noted that the Inclusion conference was taking place on Monday 6th October, and she would ask Catherine to share the current criteria at that event. She noted that the Inclusion Framework has funded 180 projects to date, at a cost of about £5million.

3. **DATA OVERVIEW, EDUCATION PRIORITIES 2025/26, GOVERNMENT REFORMS AND INVOLVEMENT OF RISE TEAMS IN ESSEX**

Clare thanked the headteachers for another great set of results in Essex, she noted that children are achieving very well. GLD has increased. She confirmed that more pupil and district level data will be shared at the termly headteacher meetings in November. However, the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils remains wider: at Key Stage 2 the gap is 9 months, increasing to 23 months at KS4.

Inclusion work continues to be the main priority for the education directorate this year. They are continuing to work with the DfE and consultants Newton Europe to shape and develop inclusion provision and support; Clare noted that Essex is ahead of many local areas. The EP agency, Liquid Personnel, has been contracted for a further year to complete over 1900 outstanding needs assessments.

One headteacher asked at what point should heads be raising concerns about the length of time a needs assessment is taking, **where there are concerns that the needs of the child have changed since the initial decision to assess was made**, and who should they contact. Clare confirmed that schools should contact their quadrant SEND Operations Team Lead in the first instance. They are:

Mid	Catherine Wallis	catherine.wallis@essex.gov.uk
North East	Sarahe Harris	sarahe.harris@essex.gov.uk
South	Cathy Gregory	cathy.gregory@essex.gov.uk
West	Lauraine Pryor	Lauraine.Pryor@essex.gov.uk

It was **AGREED** that an update will be included in the School Comms reminding headteachers about the contact details and the inclusion framework criteria.

Clare noted the **Year of Opportunity**, and the excellent work that is going on to support this, including the My Futures programme.
<https://www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk/essex-year-opportunity>

DfE reforms

There is a new ministerial team at the DfE following the recent reshuffle.

School
Comms
update

- Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, and Minister for Women and Equalities
- Georgia Gould, Minister of State for Education, school standards
- Baroness Smith, Minister of State for Education, skills
- Josh McAlister, Parliamentary Under-secretary
- Olivia Bailey, Parliamentary Under-secretary
- Seema Malhotra, Parliamentary Under-secretary

Clare noted a number of Government reforms and White Papers coming our way: **The Schools White Paper**, which will focus on families of schools (though not automatically academisation;

“Achieving and thriving” – focused on inclusion priorities and outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people;

The Best Start in Life Strategy.

Clare confirmed that she received a letter from the DfE in August, confirming the GLD target for Essex for the end of the 2027/28 school year, which is 78.4%. This is greater than the national target of 95%, and will be a challenge but fits with the aspirations for children in the county.

One headteacher questioned how this target is achievable given the number of young children with special educational needs. Clare noted that ECC is able to track old outcomes through the 2-year old check, and is increasingly able to forecast future development and attainment.

Ofsted framework

This has been published, but there is still no absolute clarity about the timing of inspections. Pilot inspections are taking place at the moment (though not in Essex), but there is less information about the volunteer inspections that will take place when the framework begins in November.

We are still waiting for the outcome of the **Curriculum Review**.

DfE accountability reforms, including the introduction of School Report Cards and the RISE programmes. This has a targeted element supporting “stuck” schools (usually 2 x RI judgments). Currently there are 8 schools in Essex that are part of the programme: 7 academies and 1 maintained school, 2 of which are primary schools. The Universal Level will offer access to support to every school. The four national priorities are

- Better Attendance
- Attainment with a focus on English and Maths
- Reception Year Quality (which links to the Best Start in Life strategy)
- Inclusion in mainstream schools

Clare noted that she is working closely with Ian Jacobs, the Regional DfE adviser. He has been very clear about the importance of partnership working.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Clare confirmed that in May 2026 there will be mayoral elections for Greater Essex, which will give a stronger voice at mayoral level, some changes in statutory organisation and management and potential funding.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The government's long-term vision is for simpler council structures, which make it clear who is responsible for services.

At present, in the Essex County Council area, services are split between the County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Thurrock Council and one of 12 city, borough or district council in a 'two-tier' arrangement. These services are delivered alongside parish and town councils.

Reorganisation would see all 15 councils in Essex - those in the Essex County Council area, along with Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council which are already unitary councils - replaced with a number of all-purpose 'unitary' authorities. They would be responsible for all local authority services in their area. The Essex County Council proposal recommends moving to a three council model. This would consist of one council each for north, mid and south Essex. These new councils would replace the existing 15 councils and be designed around real communities, local economies and the services you rely on.

[View our proposal for three new councils, one bright future.](#)

There will be a public consultation in Autumn 25 with the government decision announced in March 2026, and schools are encouraged to engage and express their views.

4. FINANCE AUDIT OUTCOMES

Stuart Coogan, ECC Strategic Internal Audit Manager, and Sarah Collins, Senior Auditor, were welcomed to the meeting.

Stuart explained that a set of high level audit tests have been completed against a set of pre-defined key controls for a sample of schools, with the aim of providing greater audit coverage and an additional level of assurance to stakeholders.

Each school was provided with an individual report and an overall assurance rating and the headteacher and governing body were accountable for implementing any action arising from the report.

Stuart shared a report which provided an overview of the common themes identified during the audit work, with the aim of providing additional information for other schools. This will be shared on the Essex School Infolink.

Stuart explained that a number of common issues are identified, in particular in relation to caretaker properties and governance and finances.

He shared a draft checklist that schools could use to ensure that they were compliant with a range of themes, including:

- Governance arrangements
- Budget monitoring
- Bank account

- Purchasing
- Income
- Payroll

One headteacher asked if it would be possible to add an additional column to enable schools to make comments or notes on the checklist; Stuart **AGREED** to do this.

Contact details

Stuart Coogan Strategic Internal Audit Manager stuart.coogan@essex.gov.uk
 Sarah Collins Senior Auditor sarah.collins2@essex.gov.uk

SC

5. EDUCATION ACCESS UPDATE

Clare explained that Julie Keating had retired at the end of the academic year, and Nicky Turp is now the Education Access Manager.

The team is split into three key areas:

- Medical referrals
- Exclusions
- Section 19 (Section 19 of the [Education Act 1996](#) places a statutory duty on local authorities to arrange suitable education for children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school due to illness, exclusion, or other reasons.)

The Professional Officer raised the issue, discussed at the last two Executive meetings with the LA about the workload and impact of data collections; for example, how does the DfE use the information about suspensions in schools, or the data around part-time timetables. Schools are asked for huge amounts of data and the workload involved is considerable, and it is often hard to see the benefit to children and young people.

It was argued that often the data collection processes are inefficient and time consuming; for example, there is no way to store information about a pupil on a part-time timetable, and so schools have to repeat this data input every half term. The Executive questioned the need for this data to be collected on a half termly basis, and, at the last meeting, asked Lisa Fergus to find out if this was a statutory requirement or specifically the approach by ECC (and, if the latter, this could be changed to a termly data collection).

Executive members asked whether the requirement for local authorities to collect information about sickness absence, which requires an individual and detailed return for every child registered as absent using Code I for 15 consecutive schools days, or when the pupil's total number of school days missed during the current school because of illness (whether consecutive or cumulative) will reach or exceed 15 days. It is still unclear as to why the DfE needs this information directly from schools as it is recorded in their daily attendance data collection. Keeping track of the many children who reach this 15-day limit is time consuming and increases workload for school staff and each return requires detailed information about individual children.

6. EDUCATION SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

Jo Barclay, Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing, was welcomed to the meeting. She shared the following information:

There continues to be a vacancy for the safeguarding adviser in the South and the Mid adviser is currently off sick; these roles are being covered for the time being by the wider Education Safeguarding Team.

Jo noted the introduction of the Families First Partnership Programme, LA guidance which gives a national framework for social care. This emphasises early help support for children and young people. In addition we expect to see system changes as a result of the forthcoming Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Bills, for example the introduction of multi-agency child protection teams.

Jo is waiting for the data analysis outcomes from the safeguarding audit; this was completed by over 95% of schools. She confirmed that the information is used by the team to inform their support and focus for schools. The report is likely to be considered by the Essex Safeguarding Children Board in December.

Jo reminded the Executive that in addition to the Level 3 DSL training, the Education Safeguarding Team is delivering Safer Recruitment training as part of a course focused on safeguarding culture – the first event is on 26th November. They have also introduced termly, online Level 2 training, at a cost of £25 per attendee.

400 Early Years settings have been trained (around 25% of all EY settings in Essex). Jo noted the safeguarding changes in the new Ofsted framework.

Jo referred to the recent unrest in relation to community cohesion and far-right extremism, nationally and in Essex. She explained that she and the team are responding to situations as and when they arise, but urged headteachers to get in touch if they have any issues or concerns. The Home Office has given funding to support the challenging situation in Epping.

She noted that she is working with Essex police on a process and guidance document, but has delayed the publication of the Prejudice-based incident guidance for the time being.

One headteacher noted that the political and social landscape may become even more challenging. Jo agreed that school need to continue to be factual and impartial, focusing on British values and offering a neutral and safe space for discussion of challenging topics.

One headteacher noted that it would be helpful to have clear guidance on what rights parents have in relation to the curriculum. Jo referred to the current Prevent training, which focuses on permissive behaviour and language, and reminded the group about the Education against Hate website, which offers resources and support.

Headteachers were urged to continue as normal, but to contact the Education Safeguarding Team if they have any concerns.

7. AUTUMN TERM PRIMARY HEADTEACHER MEETINGS

JB

The autumn term meetings will include input from Peter Stonier, Senior HMI.

The EPHA part of the meeting will include a presentation from Jan Bloomfield about harassment and threats in schools, and how Essex police will respond and support headteachers.

8. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2024/25/26 SCHOOL YEARS

Executive meetings (The Lion Inn, Boreham)

Thursday 22nd January 2026

Thursday 7th May 2026

Area Heads Meetings

Autumn term 2025

WEST	Wednesday 5 November	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 6 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham
N-EAST	Wednesday 12 November	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 13 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham

Spring term 2026

WEST	Wednesday 4 March	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 5 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham
N-EAST	Wednesday 11 March	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 12 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2026

N-EAST	Wednesday 17 June	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 18 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 24 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
MID	Thursday 25 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm
Pam Langmead
EPHA Professional Officer