# 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.

Clare Kershaw Director of Education Lisa Fergus Assistant Director, South Lisa fergus Strate Cogan Strategic Intermal Audit Manager Sarah Collins Senior Auditor Jo Barclay Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing Sue Bardetti Liz Bartholomew EPHA Tendring South Liz Bartholomew BPHA Epping Forest Rural Liz Bartholomew DPHA Epping Forest Rural Liz Benjeddi Heidi Blakeley EPHA Wickford Amanda Buckland Garnett Luke Bulpett Dida Burrell EPHA South Woodham Ferrers Garnett Luke Bulpett Dida Burrell EPHA South Vice-Chair Lize PHA Witham Anna Conley EPHA Witham Anna Conley EPHA Witham Anna Conley EPHA South Vice-Chair Dawn Dack EPHA South Vice-Chair Dawn Dack EPHA South Vice-Chair Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Witham EPHA South Vice-Chair Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Witham EPHA South Vice-Chair Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Witham EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Witham EPHA Woodham Ferrers Dawn Dack EPHA Harlow EPHA Tiprice Processes Sch.uk Head@govewood.essex.sch.uk Head@govewood.essex.sch.			
Lisa Fergus Strate Coogan Strategic Internal Audit Manager Sarah Collins Senior Auditor Jo Barclay Jo Barclay Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing Sue Bardetti Liz Bartholomew EPHA Harwich and Dovercount Dale Bateman Liz Benjeddi Heid Blakeley EPHA Wickford Barantt Liz Benjeddi EPHA South Woodham Ferrers Garnett Like Bulpett EPHA Bouth Woodham Ferrers Dida Burrell EPHA Bailloricas EPHA Bailloricas EPHA Bailloricas Lix Benjeddi EPHA South Woodham Ferrers Garnett Lixe Bulpett EPHA Bouth Woodham Ferrers Garnett Lixe Benjeddi EPHA South Vice-Chair Dida Burrell EPHA Bailloricas EPHA Bailloricas EPHA Bailloricas EPHA Witham Anna Conley EPHA Witham Anna Conley EPHA Middon Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Dawn Dack EPHA Maldon Richard Green EPHA Dengie Clare James EPHA Dengie Clare James EPHA Dengie Clare James EPHA Dengie Clare James EPHA Harlow Benku Chair BehA West Chair BehA West Chair BehA Head@esperieriessex.sch.uk Head@esperierierierierierierierierierierierierie		•	email address
Stuart Cogan         Strategic Internal Audit Manager         stuart.cogan@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@anyflowerprimary.com           Dale Bateman         EPHA Billericay         head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk           Heidi Blakeley         EPHA Billericay         head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk           Amanda Buckland         EPHA South Woodham Ferrers         dag@collingwood.essex.sch.uk           Garnett         Luke Bulpett         EPHA Braintree         Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk           Luke Bulpett         EPHA Braintree         Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk           Live Burrel         EPHA Witham         head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk           Anna Conley         EPHA Witham         head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk           Anna Consex         EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet         head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk           Pawn Dack         EPHA Maldon         head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk           Richard Green         EPHA South Vice-Chair         head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk <tr< td=""><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr<>			
Sarah Collins Jo Barclay Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing Sue Bardetti EPHA Tendring South Beardetti EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt Dale Bateman EPHA Epping Forest Rural Liz Benjeddi EPHA Billericay Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Head @bouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Aranda Buckland EPHA South Woodham Ferrers Garnett Luke Bulpett EPHA Braintree EPHA Braintree Head @brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk Terri Chudleigh EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea Anna Conley EPHA Witham Head @knowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Dawn Dack EPHA South Vice-Chair Head @knowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Dawn Dack EPHA South Vice-Chair Head @knowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Dawn Dack EPHA Wick-Chair/NE Chair Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head @knowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Head @knowbridge-i	_		
Jo Barclay  Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing  Sue Bardetti  EPHA Tendring South  Admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk  head@mayllowerprimary.com  Dale Bateman  EPHA Epping Forest Rural  Head@coopersaletheydongarmon.essex.sch.uk  head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk  head@whoterout.essex.sch.uk  Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk  head@horbrighte-pri.essex.sch.uk  head@horbrighte-pri.essex.sch.uk  head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk  head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk  head@ourdadyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.uk  head@	_	•	
Wellbeing Sue Bardetti EPHA Tendring South admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk Liz Bartholomew EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt Dale Bateman EPHA Epping Forest Rural Head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk Liz Berholder EPHA Billericay head@abacus.essex.sch.uk Heidi Blakeley EPHA Wickford head@abacus.essex.sch.uk Amanda Buckland EPHA South Woodham Ferrers abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk Carnett Luke Bulpett EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk Dida Burrell EPHA Braintree Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk Dida Burrell EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea t.chudleigh@heartsacademy.uk Anna Conley EPHA Witham head@hombridge-lift.essex.sch.uk Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair head@hamiltonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain EPHA West Chair Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Pam Langmead EPHA Frofessional Officer Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Colchester East head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Part Langmead EPHA Professional Officer Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Colchester East head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Partie Phelps-Knights Richard Potter EPHA Basildon West head@sgasa.uk Head@genedow.essex.sch.uk Head@genedow.essex.sch.uk Head@genedow.essex.sch.uk Head@genedow.essex.sch.uk Head@anedow.essex.sch.uk			
Liz Bartholomew EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt Dale Bateman EPHA Epping Forest Rural Head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk Liz Benjeddi EPHA Billericay head@oouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Heidi Blakeley EPHA Wickford head@oouthgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Amanda Buckland EPHA South Woodham Ferrers abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk Bulpett EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea Lchudleigh@heartsacademy.uk Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Anna Conley EPHA Witham head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Anna Conley EPHA Witham head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Aaron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Aaron Cross EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Aaron Cross EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@kingroveood.essex.sch.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.uk Lendleigh@heartsacademy.	Jo Barclay		Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
Dale Bateman Liz Benjeddi EPHA Billericay head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Heldi Blakeley EPHA Wickford head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Heldi Blakeley EPHA South Woodham Ferrers abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk Amanda Buckland Carnett Luke Bulpett EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk Dida Burrell EPHA Braintree Head@wifitecourt.essex.sch.uk Terri Chudleigh EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea L.chudleigh@heartsacademy.uk Anna Conley EPHA Wittam head@hombridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Aron 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@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair head@mintonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain EPHA West Chair Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer head@urladyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.uk Rerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Carl Messer EPHA Tiptree and Stanway cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Colchester East headteacher@prettygateschools.co.uk North East Partnership Lead Head Lisa Patient EPHA Basildon West head@opaddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@opaddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@opaddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA West Vice-Chair headdenandenanden essex.sch.uk North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA West Vice-Chair headdenanden essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair headdenanden essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair headdenanden essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair headdenanden essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Rayleigh gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk	Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk
Liz Benjeddi EPHA Billericay head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk Heidi Blakeley EPHA Wickford head@abacus.essex.sch.uk Amanda Buckland EPHA South Woodham Ferrers abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk Garnett 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 Aaron Cross EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain EPHA West Chair Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Professional Officer pam@langmead.me.uk Rerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South head@ourladyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.uk Rerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Colchester East headteacher@prettygateschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Colchester East headteacher@prettygateschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Chair Head@st-gessex.sch.uk Nicky Patrick North East Partnership Lead Head Hariet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair EPHA West Vice-Chair head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Nicky Patrick North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair EPHA West Vice-Chair head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk Nicky Patrick North East Partnership Lead Head Marme Reynecke- EPHA Mid Vice-Chair headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk Rarpould Claire Smith EPHA Rayleigh gsoars@edwarffancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West	Liz Bartholomew	EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt	head@mayflowerprimary.com
Heidi Blakeley EPHA Wickford head@abacus.essex.sch.uk Amanda Buckland EPHA South Woodham Ferrers Garnett Luke Bulpett EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk Dida Burrell EPHA Braintree Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk Terri Chudleigh EPHA Braintree Head@hrightside-pri.essex.sch.uk Terri Chudleigh EPHA Braintree Head@hrowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Anna Conley EPHA Witham head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Anna Corley EPHA Witham head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Anna Corley EPHA Maldon Head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Airon Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet head@ghowbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk Bown Dack EPHA Maldon drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@ghamiltonprimary.com Richard Green EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair head@hamiltonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-gerges-pri.essex.sch.uk Ian Kendal EPHA West Chair Head@st-gerges-pri.essex.sch.uk Ian Kendal EPHA Harlow head@ourladyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.uk Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head head@st-dawrence-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 Millibourne EPHA Colchester East headtener@prettygateschools.co.uk Jinnie Nichols EPHA Basildon West head@pasa.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Basildon West head@pasex.sch.uk North East Partnership Lead Head head@pspringmeadow.essex.sch.uk Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair head@pnoadhridge.essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA North East Vice-Chair head@pnoadhon.essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair admingerryfieldsrmary.co.uk Amanda Reid EPHA North Celmsford Head mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk Amanda Reid EPHA North Leat Vice-Chair admingerryfieldsrmary.co.uk Amanda Reid EPHA North Celmsford Head Rortheryfore sexex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Rochford c.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Rortheryfore Spexas Sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk	Dale Bateman	EPHA Epping Forest Rural	Head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk
Amanda Buckland Garnett Luke Bulpett Dida Burrell EPHA Braintree Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk Anna Conley EPHA Witham Aron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Dawn Dack EPHA Maldon Brichard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Dengie Clare James EPHA West Chair Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Professional Officer Pam@langmead.me.uk Rerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South PeHA Chelmsford South Bead@est-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Bead@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk Bead@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk Bead@est-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Bead	Liz Benjeddi	EPHA Billericay	head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk
Garnett 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 Wastlepoint and Benfleet head@kingston.essex.sch.uk Aaron Dack EPHA Maldon drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair head@hamiltonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@majlandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain EPHA West Chair Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer pam@langmead.me.uk Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Tiptree and Stanway cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Telorester East head@sadowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk Jinnie Nichols EPHA Basildon West head@spsas.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Basildon West head@spsas.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Sasildon West head@spsas.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Sasildon West head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Arriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Arriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@naekbridge.essex.sch.uk Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair head@naekbridge.essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair dead@naekbridge.essex.sch.uk Bead@naekbridge.essex.sch.uk Bead@	Heidi Blakeley	EPHA Wickford	head@abacus.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 Braintree         t.chudleigh@herdsacademy.uk           Anna Conley         EPHA Witham         head@whordige-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@grovewood.essex.sch.uk           Nick Hutchings         EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair         Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk           Nick Hutchings         EPHA Dengie         cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk           Clare James         EPHA Dengie         cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk           Chris Jarmain         EPHA West Chair         Head@gst-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk           Becky Keitch         EPHA West Chair         Head@gst-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk           Berky Keitch         EPHA Tendring North         Head@gst-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk           Pam Langmead         EPHA Professional Officer         pam@angmead.me.uk           Kerry Malcolm         North East Partnership Lead Head         head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk           Kerry Malcolm         North East		EPHA South Woodham Ferrers	abg@collingwood.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 Aron 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@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair head@hamiltonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain 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 Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Carl Messer EPHA Tiptree and Stanway cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Colchester East headteacher@prettygateschools.co.uk Jinnie Nichols EPHA Basildon West head@spasa.uk Lisa Patient EpHA Basildon West head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Richard Potter EPHA West Vice-Chair head@analt-jun.essex.sch.uk Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair head@analt-jun.essex.sch.uk Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair head@analt-jun.essex.sch.uk Marne Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith EPHA Roylford c.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Gary Soars EPHA Royleigh gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West		EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.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@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@amsiltonprimary.com Clare James EPHA Dengie cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain 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 headdeacher@prettygateschools.co.uk Jinnie Nichols EPHA Basildon West head@sgasa.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Basildon West head@sgasa.uk Nicky Patrick North East Partnership Lead Head head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk Alarriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk Richard Potter EPHA West Vice-Chair head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair head@inmegringmeadow.essex.sch.uk Andrew Price EPHA Wid Vice-Chair admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk Marna Reid EPHA North Uttlesford Head Marna Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith EPHA Rochford c.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Raybould Claire Smith EPHA Chelmsford West headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	-	EPHA Braintree	Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk
Anna Conley Aaron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Aaron Cross EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet Aaron Cross EPHA Maldon Ardack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk  Richard Green EPHA South Vice-Chair Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk Richard Green EPHA Dengie Cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk Chris Jarmain EPHA West Chair Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk Becky Keitch EPHA Professional Officer Pam Qiangmead.me.uk Kerry Malcolm North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South Ark Millbourne BPHA Tiptree and Stanway EPHA Tiptree and Stanway Carl Messer EPHA Tiptree and Stanway EPHA Colchester East Head@asaa.uk Lisa Patient EPHA Basildon West North East Partnership Lead Head North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Basildon West Asad@noakbridge.essex.sch.uk Nicky Patrick North East Partnership Lead Head North East Partnership Lead Head Rariet Phelps-Knights EPHA Sasildon West Andrew Price EPHA North East Vice-Chair Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair Andrew Price EPHA Mid Vice-Chair Andrew Price EPHA North Uttlesford Amanda Reid EPHA Rochford C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Aranda Reid EPHA Rochford C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Rary Soars EPHA Rayleigh Soars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West Neadleacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Terri Chudleigh	EPHA Basildon East and Pitsea	t.chudleigh@heartsacademy.uk
Aaron Cross Dawn Dack EPHA Maldon Dack EPHA South Vice-Chair Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair Clare James EPHA West Chair Becky Keitch EPHA Harlow Pam Langmead EPHA Porfessional Officer Berha Clare Hastead Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South Becky Keitch EPHA Professional Officer Berha Chelmsford South Beckery Malcolm Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South Berha Halstead Dinnie Nichols Lisa Patient Berha Basildon West North East Partnership Lead Head North East Partnership Lead Head Richard McIntosh EPHA Basildon West North East Partnership Lead Head Bead@st-awrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Bead@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Bead@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South Bead@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk Bead@stadence-granden.essex.sch.uk Bead@stadence-granden.essex.sch.uk Bead@anetduke.essex.sch.uk Bead@anetduke.essex.sch.		EPHA Witham	head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk
Dawn DackEPHA Maldondrdack@wentworth.essex.sch.ukRichard GreenEPHA South Vice-ChairHead@grovewood.essex.sch.ukNick HutchingsEPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chairhead@hamilitonprimary.comClare JamesEPHA Dengiecjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.ukChris JarmainEPHA West ChairHead@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.ukBecky KeitchEPHA Tendring NorthHead@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.ukIan KendalEPHA Harlowhead@ourladyoffatimatrust.essex.sch.ukPam LangmeadEPHA Professional Officerpam@langmead.me.ukKerry MalcolmNorth East Partnership Lead Headhead@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.ukRichard McIntoshEPHA Chelmsford Southhead@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.ukCarl MesserEPHA Tiptree and Stanwaycmesser@stgeorgesschool.orgMark MillbourneEPHA Colchester Easthead@sgasa.ukJinnie NicholsEPHA Halsteadhead@sgasa.ukLisa PatientEPHA Basildon Westhead@noakbridge.essex.sch.ukNicky PatrickNorth East Partnership Lead Headhead@springmeadow.essex.sch.ukHarriet Phelps-KnightsEPHA Chairhead@homefarm.essex.sch.ukRichard PotterEPHA North East Vice-Chairhead@homefarm.essex.sch.ukAndrew PriceEPHA West Vice-Chairhead@homefarm.essex.sch.ukColin RaratyWest Partnership Lead Headmr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.ukAmanda ReidEPHA Mid Vice-Chairhead@ashdon.essex.sch.ukMarme Reynecke- RaybouldEPHA Rochfordc.smith@riversideprimary.co.ukClaire Sm	,	EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet	head@kingston.essex.sch.uk
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Becky Keitch EPHA Tendring North Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk lan 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 head@homefarm.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 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	_	EPHA Dengie	cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk
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Kerry Malcolm Richard McIntosh EPHA Chelmsford South head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk Carl Messer EPHA Tiptree and Stanway mark Millbourne EPHA Colchester East headteacher@prettygateschools.co.uk Jinnie Nichols EPHA Halstead Lisa Patient North East Partnership Lead Head Head@sgasa.uk Lisa Patirick North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights Richard Potter Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair Colin Raraty West Partnership Lead Head Marne Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith EPHA Rochford Gary Soars EPHA Chelmsford West  head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@prettygateschools.co.uk headdeacher@prettygateschools.co.uk headdeacher@prettygateschools.co.uk head@sgasa.uk head@sgasa.uk head@noakbridge.essex.sch.uk head@noakbridge.essex.sch.uk head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@homefarm.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk damin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk  C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West	Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Richard McIntosh Carl Messer EPHA Tiptree and Stanway Cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org Mark Millbourne EPHA Colchester East Jinnie Nichols EPHA Halstead Lisa Patient North East Partnership Lead Head Harriet Phelps-Knights Richard Potter EPHA West Vice-Chair Colin Raraty West Partnership Lead Head Amanda Reid EPHA Mid Vice-Chair Marrie Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith EPHA Rochford EPHA Rochlord EPHA Rochemsford West  head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk cmesser@stgeorgesschool.org headdeacher@prettygateschools.co.uk headd@sgasa.uk head@sgasa.uk head@sgasa.uk head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk headd@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk headd@janetduke.essex.sch.uk headd@alnetduke.essex.sch.uk  headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk  Mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk  C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk Gary Soars EPHA Rayleigh gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West	_	North East Partnership Lead Head	head@st-lawrence-pri.essex.sch.uk
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 headdeacher@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 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	Richard McIntosh	EPHA Chelmsford South	head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk
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Nicky Patrick Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair Richard Potter Andrew Price Colin Raraty Amanda Reid Marne Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith Gary Soars North East Partnership Lead Head Head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk head@ahomefarm.essex.sch.uk headteacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk  C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Jinnie Nichols	EPHA Halstead	head@sgasa.uk
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Richard Potter Andrew Price EPHA West Vice-Chair Andrew Price Colin Raraty West Partnership Lead Head Marne Reynecke- Raybould Claire Smith Gary Soars Nick Taylor EPHA North East Vice-Chair EPHA North East Vice-Chair head@homefarm.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk headdeacher@manuden.essex.sch.uk  Marne Reynecke- EPHA Mid Vice-Chair admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk  C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Nicky Patrick	North East Partnership Lead Head	head@springmeadow.essex.sch.uk
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Colin Raraty  West Partnership Lead Head  Amanda Reid  EPHA Mid Vice-Chair  Marne Reynecke- Raybould  Claire Smith  Gary Soars  Nick Taylor  West Partnership Lead Head  mr.raraty@rodingsprimary.co.uk  admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk  Head@ashdon.essex.sch.uk  C.smith@riversideprimary.co.uk  gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk  headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Richard Potter	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	head@homefarm.essex.sch.uk
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Raybould 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	Amanda Reid	EPHA Mid Vice-Chair	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
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Gary Soars EPHA Rayleigh gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Raybould		
Nick Taylor EPHA Chelmsford West headteacher@writtle-jun.essex.sch.uk	Claire Smith	EPHA Rochford	
,	Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	
Joanne Willcox EPHA Epping Forest South iwillcox@hillhouse.efspt.org	Nick Taylor	EPHA Chelmsford West	•
The state of the s	Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	jwillcox@hillhouse.efspt.org

#### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

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

СК

# 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 in 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 <u>catherine.wallis@essex.gov.uk</u>
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

School Comms update

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. <a href="https://www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk/essex-year-opportunity">https://www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk/essex-year-opportunity</a>

#### DfE reforms

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

- 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.

SC

Contact details

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

#### 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 <u>Education Act 1996</u> 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 26<sup>th</sup> November. They have also introducesd 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.

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

# **Executive meetings** (The Lion Inn, Boreham)

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026 Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2026

### **Area Heads Meetings**

Auti	ımn	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**