

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2021 starting at 12.45 pm**

The meeting was held at The Lion Inn, Boreham. It followed on from the EPHA Executive meeting held during the morning.

In attendance	Representing	email address
Clare Kershaw CK	Director of Education	clare.kershaw@essex.gov.uk
Lisa Fergus LF	Assistant Director – South	lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Alison Fiala AF	Education and EY Lead Mid	Alison.fiala@essex.gov.uk
Catherine Hutley	Assistant Director – Mid	Catherine.Hutley2@essex.gov.uk
Jo Barclay JB	Head of Education Safeguarding	Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
Lois Ashforth	EPHA Dengie	Head@coldnorton.essex.sch.uk
Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk
Nicky Barrand	EPHA South Chair/Basildon East & Pitsea	headteacher@cherrytree-pri.essex.sch.uk
Isobel Barron	EPHA West Chair	head@roseacres.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
Dida Burrell	EPHA Braintree	Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk
Anna Conley	EPHA Witham	head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Mid Chair/ Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Emma Dawson	EPHA Castlepoint	Head@thundersley.essex.sch.uk
Paula Derwin	EPHA Colchester East	headteacher@hazelmere-jun.essex.sch.uk
Richard Green	EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk
Nick Hutchings NH	EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair	head@hamiltonprimary.com
Becky Keitch	EPHA Tendring North	Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Ian Macdonald	EPHA Tendring Mid	headteacher@elmstead.essex.sch.uk
Jinnie Nicholls	EPHA Halstead	head@sgasa.uk
Hayley O’Dea	EPHA Rochford	head@greatwaking.essex.sch.uk
Matt O’Grady	EPHA Brentwood	Matt@westhorndon.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights HPK	EPHA Chair	Head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Karen Tucker	EPHA Canvey Island	head@canvey-jun.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk

1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from:

George Athanasiou	West Vice-Chair
Matt Curzon	Uttlesford South
Ceri Daniels	Colchester South
James Newell	Tendring North
Richard Potter	North East Vice-Chair
Amanda Reid	Chelmsford North
Jonathan Tye	Harlow

Clare Kershaw welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EPHA EXECUTIVE MEETING EARLIER

a) Attendance

The Executive noted the current levels of absence in schools, which are comparatively high as a result of the ongoing pandemic, and asked for the current LA stance on attendance. There were general concerns about the DfE guidance on coding, which now instructs schools to record all pupils who test positive with Covid as I (illness) instead of X. This makes the school's absence figures appear much higher and it is not possible to analyse absence as a result of Covid. CK acknowledged the problems, reiterating that the official DfE and LA approach is that all children should be in school, but accepting that this is not always possible due to current isolation guidance. Unfortunately the reduction in self-isolation time (now 5/6 days) is failing to make a great deal of difference to the numbers who can return early.

CK advised that if a school is being criticised by Ofsted about absence which is out of their control, they should seek support from the School Effectiveness Partners.

One headteacher voiced her concerns about the use of penalty notices, saying that she has one family who are being pursued by ECC, which may lead to a criminal conviction, despite their vulnerable circumstances. She felt that pursuing this family seems to be entirely counter-productive in this case. CK **AGREED** to discuss this case with the headteacher.

CK

The use of attendance coding and, in particular, using I for positive Covid cases rather than X was discussed further. The Executive noted that schools are using both systems, and the data across schools, both in Essex and more widely, is therefore inconsistent, and leads to unfair comparisons.

AF noted that she is meeting with colleagues to analyse attendance data; in fact Ofsted reports suggest that Essex schools are doing reasonably well in comparison with some other authorities. She accepted that it continues to be important to understand the levels of Covid, in comparison with other illness.

b) SEND issues

The Executive shared their concerns about the lack of specialist staff available to support schools. It was accepted that there is specific support for pupils who are hearing or visually impaired, but it is more difficult to seek advice and guidance for more general additional educational needs, in particular those that are due to SEMH. There is also felt to be a lack of support from health professionals. CK acknowledged the latter and said that the education team continues to work with health to try to improve the support available to schools. The workstream on joint commissioning has this as a key focus, but it is a complex picture across the Local Authority.

A number of headteachers noted that their SENCOs have resigned because they cannot cope with the system, including the barriers and lack of support for children with SEND.

LF noted that there has been a recent recruitment campaign to increase the number of specialist staff and some started in January; the increase should start to have a positive impact on the system. She advised headteachers to speak to SEND Quadrant Managers if a specialist is not available in their area.

CK noted that the EPHA Chairs are working with the LA to undertake a deep dive into schools to find out the consistent themes in relation to SEND. It was agreed that it could be helpful to hold a workshop with representatives from health, the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service, and others, to discuss the challenges.

There was a lengthy discussion about the lack of Speech and Language Therapists (SALT). There is insufficient capacity nationally as well as locally, and particularly in Mid Essex. CK noted that the Authority is making strategic changes which will take time to have a positive impact.

One headteacher explained that her school is currently being advised that children need to be referred termly, and some pupils have been discharged before they have been assessed, because they were not re-referred. CK **AGREED** to follow this up with the North East Assistant Director and SEND Quadrant Manager.

CK

CK explained that the DfE is aware of the national deficit of SALTs and EPs. In Essex, Kate Martin and Marie Gascoigne are leading on a strategy – the Balanced System – mapping the whole therapist workforce and provision across the county, including the availability of early intervention and training for the school workforce. ECC has signed off additional funding for therapist provision, but the lack of trained therapists in the system as a whole is a significant and ongoing problem.

Headteachers stressed that many schools are training staff in speech and language support using programmes such as ELKLAN, but ultimately school staff are not qualified therapists and need support from specialists in complex cases.

There was a discussion about special school outreach support. CK noted that this is currently up to individual schools. She noted that Emily Welton, the ESSET Professional Officer is considering their priorities. *(Emily Welton and Dan Woodham, ESSET Chair, will attend the next EPHA Executive meeting to discuss this further.)*

One headteacher noted that mainstream schools with enhanced provisions are keen to offer specialist help and support to other schools but cannot do this without additional funding. CK **AGREED** to discuss this further with Ralph Holloway, head of SEND Strategy and Innovation.

CK/RH

The Executive members stressed the challenges faced by school staff and the impact of supporting and managing children with severe and complex special needs on staff wellbeing and school resources.

One headteacher fed back that a representative from SENDIASS was advising parents to seek EHCPs in some cases where this was not being considered necessary by the school. It was agreed that this added unnecessary pressure on the already overloaded system, and CK **AGREED** to follow this up.

CK

One headteacher shared her experience of a child who has entered education late (Year 2) and the lack of support from the team in the LA who were aware that this child had been missing from education. The LA has emailed the school, discharging their responsibility for the child in question. CK **AGREED** to follow this up with the school's SEP.

CK

c) Financial pressures

CK was asked if schools (and in particular, small schools) would be offered financial support by the DfE or the LA for rising fuel costs. CK accepted that this will be a challenge for many schools and **AGREED** to follow this up with the DfE (though she was not very optimistic that additional funds would be forthcoming).

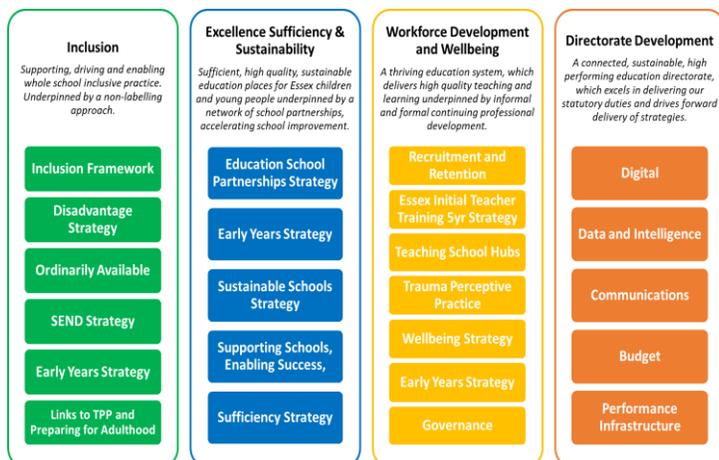
CK

d) Admissions webcast

The Professional Officer passed on EPHA's thanks to Shamsun Noor for the very helpful webcast he had delivered advising schools on the forthcoming changes to the mid-year admissions process from April.

4. EDUCATION PRIORITIES (NON-SEND)

a) CK reminded the EPHA Executive members of the current key strategies for the service. These include:



She reiterated that the strategies are being developed to support schools and the system, and that schools should use them as and when they have the capacity to do so, including

- Launch of the new Essex Early Years and Childcare Strategy - 2022 – 2027
- Disadvantaged strategy
- Refresh of the Schools' Partnership Strategy
- The work and projects determined by the Education Taskforce

b) LA School Improvement funding

CK explained that the DfE published a consultation last term proposing the staged removal of the local authority monitoring and brokering grant; a decrease of 50% in the coming financial year, and a total removal in 2023/24. The proposal argued that local authorities no longer play a part in school improvement or intervention. ECC sent a robust response, arguing that the early intervention activities that are carried out mean that formal intervention is not required in many cases.

Despite 70% of the respondents objecting to the DfE proposal, the decision has been made to remove the funding. Essex will lose £450k next year, and just under £1 million the following year.

At the meeting in January, the Local Authority asked the maintained Schools Forum representatives to de-delegate the equivalent funding from the Schools Block, to support the service. This was refused by those representatives. However, the LA had the right to ask the DfE to disapply this decision; the Secretary of State approved the Authority's disapplication request on 25th January 2022. CK noted that there will be no change to the school improvement offer for the 2022/23 school year and stressed the importance of their relationship with all schools, whether maintained or academies. The DfE is due to publish a White Paper on future school structures, and the implications will be considered when it is available.

c) Sustainable Schools survey and toolkit

Alison Fiala reported that around 50 schools had returned the survey; this was aimed particularly at those maintained schools that have concerns about sustainability. The toolkit has recently been updated with current census information.

When a survey is completed by a school the LA is able to offer support and advice to the school leaders and governing body. The toolkit is being developed to take into account different structures that schools might consider, such as federation; there is a new dashboard available. AF confirmed that the outcomes of the survey are confidential to each school.

One headteacher asked for clarification of who sees and holds the data and how it is used. AF noted that, in the LA, Mark Gant (Education Performance Manager) is the only person to receive the data. She noted that there is no risk to schools in undergoing the sustainable schools survey, and only schools with a deficit budget would be scrutinised in relation to their viability.

One headteacher asked about the LA's intelligence in relation to planning applications and local forecasting of pupil numbers. CK confirmed that the ECC 10-year plan

includes forecast planning data and the information had been updated the previous week; she noted that the forecasting is reasonably accurate.

d) Essex Year of Reading

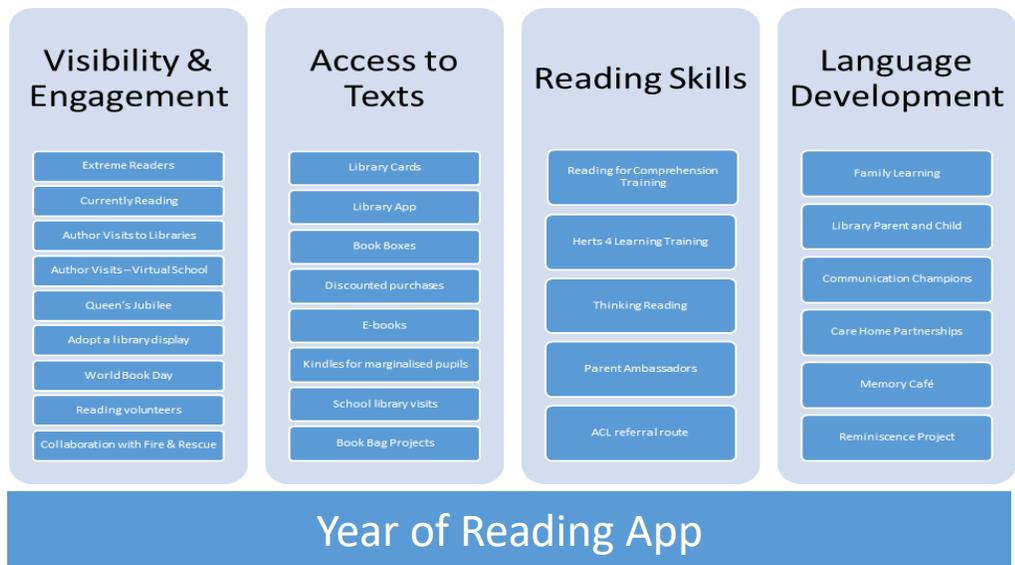
CK showed a presentation giving an outline of the plan for the Essex year of reading, a project that is focused on the whole community. The Education Taskforce has committed £1 million to the project over 12 months and there will be an official launch on the 23rd February, with a number of satellite events in libraries over half term.

Gareth Honeyford, Education Delivery Manager, is leading on the project, supported by Ian Fisher, Project Administrator.

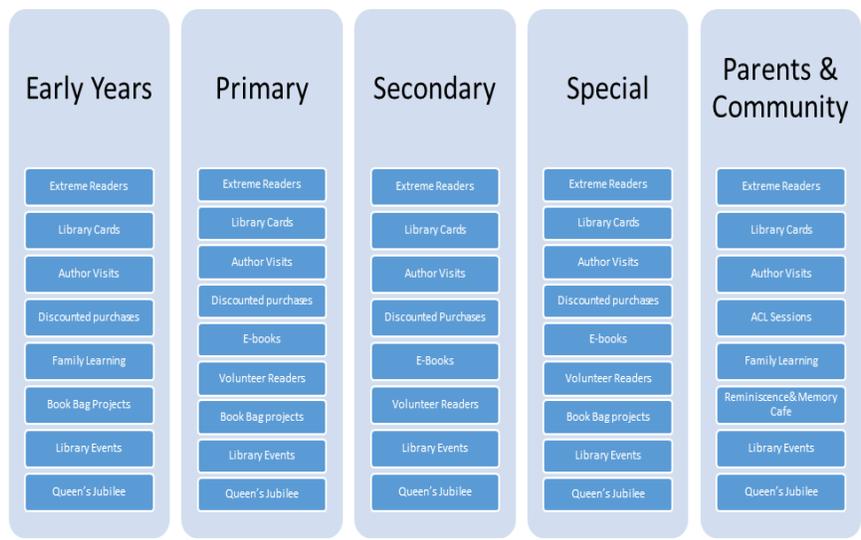
Ian.Fisher@Essex.gov.uk – Project Administrator

Gareth.Honeyford@Essex.gov.uk – Project Lead#

The following strategies are being included:



The audience and activities include:



3 Primary and 1 secondary teachers have been seconded to lead at school level. The School Effectiveness team have met with the four quadrant partnership lead headteachers, in order to support the delivery and engagements of the project. The engagement of partnerships and the Teaching Hubs will be vital, and the English Hubs are offering support. SEPs will be working locally with subject leads, and will support the assessment of reading, and in particular new teachers. A key development will be an online “hive” for English subject leaders offering resources and shared practice.

5. SEND STRATEGY UPDATE INCLUDING EHCP IMPROVEMENT WORK

CK noted that the improvement work around SEND continues and the work on the Strategy is progressing, alongside the other 2 strands highlighted in the area inspection, including the over-identification of MLD, and the effectiveness of joint commissioning.

The SEND Strategy sets out the vision for SEND in Essex

A local area strategy that sets out our vision, aims and ambitions for the SEND System in Essex, how we will achieve them and how we will measure our success.

- The strategy includes:
 - Purpose/ Introduction
 - Our Pledge
 - Vision for SEND in Essex
 - The strategy test
 - Actions
 - Outcomes
 - Success measures

Timescale

- Consultation - March 2019
- Further discovery work throughout 2020
- Draft strategy content June – Sept ‘21
- Design work - September ‘21
- Governance - October ‘21
- Launch Late - Autumn Term

The Inclusion Framework is a key part of delivering effective SEND support, particularly focusing on early intervention. The framework is a non-academic framework that is suitable for all ages, focusing on the skill sets that a child/young person needs to seek eventual employment, including independence, resilience, health and well-being.

The Inclusion Framework aims to avoid unnecessary complex (and expensive) intervention, including EHCPs where they are not absolutely necessary. This will help reduce the burden on statutory administration and intervention, and should offer appropriate support to those children and their schools.

Catherine Hutley explained that the LA is piloting the Framework with a number of schools (particularly in Mid) and involving other children’s services such as Social Care. Following the development and discussion of the Framework in phase 1, the rollout of phase 2 is now taking place – working with individual and small groups of children, particularly those in crisis or at risk of exclusion.

ECC has commissioned an external company to undertake research and evaluation of the Inclusion Framework pilot. They plan to send out a wider survey to all schools to determine what is currently missing in the system, including support, intervention and advice.

CH gave some examples of the current projects, which are predominantly focused on children who have suffered trauma, or those who have been particularly affected by the restrictions and lockdown as a result of the pandemic.

The EPHA Vice-Chair questioned the scalability of the framework, given the level of need across the school system as a whole. CK noted that the research piece will address this question, but suggested that the more Inclusion Partners can use the Framework principles as a basis for offering support and advice the sooner it will be effective. She confirmed that the SEN workforce is ready structurally to deliver this.

It was suggested that a flowchart of the process of seeking support would be helpful – this is already under development. It was confirmed that the funding for the Inclusion Framework projects is being taken from the High Needs Block.

One headteacher stressed how critical it is that this framework has the intended impact, as managing and delivering SEND provision is a major factor contributing to staff stress and poor wellbeing, as well as challenges around complaints and admissions, and the pressure on resources. CK agreed, explain that Helen Lincoln and Councillor Tony Ball are both committed to funding the delivery of the framework.

EHCP needs assessment

CK confirmed that there has been an investment of £1 million from the Local Authority to create short-term posts to address the backlog of needs assessments. There are new EHCP processes in places, and there has been good feedback from inclusion panels, which are offering some mutual understanding and transparency in the system. The panels take place each Tuesday in each quadrant, and SENCOs are invited to take part, giving a regular opportunity to hear from them.

6. SAFEGUARDING

Jo Barclay (Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing) gave an update on current safeguarding issues, noting that a briefing has been sent to schools that week.

a) Vulnerable children

The DfE guidance on vulnerable children has been expanded, and JB has reminded schools to reinstate (or continue) welfare checks if children are away from school for any length of time. She noted that there is a lot of professional anxiety at the moment, and undoubtedly Covid has had a negative impact on vulnerable children's lives; schools continue to be a critical part of the safety network.

b) Effective Support – ESCB October 2021

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) has just published the updated [Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex \(October 2021\)](#). This updated

document has been agreed by the Essex Statutory Partners (Essex Police, NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and Essex County Council) who are responsible for the [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in Essex](#). The document will always be accessible from the homepage of the [ESCB website](#).

As well as making some sections clearer, the [Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex](#) has been updated in line with current practice. It now refers to submitting a request for support online, the Team Around the Family Support Officers (TAFSOs), support for children with disabilities, risk in the community & child exploitation and support for young carers.

c) Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) Safeguarding Audit

The audit will be available for schools to use as an internal evaluation tool, but it will not need to be submitted to ESCB this academic year, recognising the pressure on schools at the present time.

d) Safeguarding forums for schools – spring term dates

The spring term 2022 Safeguarding Forum presented by Jo Barclay, Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing and team is taking place virtually on Tuesday 22 February 2022 (10.30 am – 1.00 pm) or Wednesday 23 February 2022 (1.30 – 4.00 pm). The forum will provide the opportunity to share safeguarding updates and key information to support settings in safeguarding.

e) Education Information Sharing Protocol

A number of schools have still not signed up to the Education Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) and the service addendums to the Protocol 2021-2024, which govern the sharing of personal information between ECC, schools and education providers. This can be found on the Essex Schools Infolink.

f) Harmful Sexual Behaviour – training for primary phase schools

In person training in the summer term. Online briefing for all phases, 17th March 2022, 2.30 – 4.00 pm. JB noted that schools should focus on seeking and understanding the pupil voice and experience, in particular.

g) Training and support for governors

The LA has increased its offer of support to Chairs and the link governor for safeguarding, to strengthen strategic oversight of safeguarding in all settings. They introduced safeguarding forums last term and the first one held in November was accessed by over 300 governors. This session was recorded and can be viewed [here](#). They will continue with these forums going forward and they will be held termly as online sessions.

The dates for the Spring and Summer term are:

Spring Term: 15 March 2022, 18.00 – 19.00

Summer Term: 28 June 2022, 18.00 – 19.00

Additional training for governors will be offered, to increase their knowledge around safeguarding. Future planned sessions are:

- Inspecting Safeguarding (Governors) 8 February 2022, 18.00 – 19.00
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (Governors) 30 March 2022, 16.00 – 17.30

Booking details are sent direct to the Chairs of Governors.

h) **Keeping Children Safe in Education Consultation for September 2022 version**

The DfE has launched a consultation on KCSiE for September 2022.

Although, there are a few new ideas to consider, the biggest proposed change is that the stand-alone non-statutory guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment is fully merged into KCSiE. As part of this change, the phrase 'peer-on-peer' abuse is to be altered to 'child-on-child' abuse.

Whilst many governors have had safeguarding and child protection training, it has never been statutory. In the consultation documents, the DfE say, 'We are proposing to strengthen KCSiE and explicitly set out that all governors and trustees should receive safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety) at induction. We will also say the training should be regularly updated.'

Recognising the ubiquity of social media and that people's online behaviour may indicate something of their personality and attitude, the DfE say that schools should consider online searches as part of their due diligence checks on shortlisted candidates. They say that 'this would explore anything that is publicly available online which may be worth testing at interview.'

The proposed revisions and consultation document can be found here:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-schools-team/kcsie-proposed-revisions-2022/>

The consultation questionnaire can be found here:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-schools-team/kcsie-proposed-revisions-2022/consultation/intro/>

Deadline for consultation responses is: Tuesday 8th March 2022

i) **Early Years safeguarding processes**

JB noted that she has been working with Early Years' settings to ensure that their safeguarding processes are robust and in line with the expectations of schools. She has been replicating the support and training for schools, offering settings briefings and forums. Schools should now be receiving child protection files from settings.

j) **Reasonable force and restraint/physical intervention**

JB noted that she has been working with Steve Whitfield to determine the approach within Trauma Perceptive Practice in relation to physical intervention. She reminded the Executive that the preferred approach and provider in Essex for some years was Steps, however the LA is unable to incorporate Steps into the TPP programme. Steve Whitfield is developing a model with Price, that can be delivered as Module 10 of TPP. This can be fast-tracked if needed sooner by participating schools.

One headteacher noted the importance of ensuring that the training takes into account appropriate intervention for the youngest children; JB **AGREED** to make sure this was taken into account.

7. **SPRING TERM LA UPDATE TO PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS**

It was agreed that the following information should be included in the Local Authority update to primary headteachers, which this term is being held online on Tuesday 1st March, at 10.00 am – 12 noon:

- Inclusion Framework
- SACRE curriculum changes
- Update on the Education Taskforce, including the launch of the Essex Year of

Reading

- A response to the outcomes of the EPHA headteacher wellbeing survey, carried out in November.

8. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2021/22/23 SCHOOL YEAR

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

N-EAST Wednesday 2 March

SOUTH Thursday 3 March

WEST Wednesday 9 March

MID Thursday 10 March

online

Colchester Community Stadium

Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth

The Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2022

N-EAST Wednesday 15 June

MID Thursday 16 June

WEST Wednesday 22 June

SOUTH Thursday 23 June

Colchester Community Stadium

The Lion Inn, Boreham

Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth

Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

Autumn term 2022

WEST Wednesday 9 November

MID Thursday 10 November

N-EAST Wednesday 16 November

SOUTH Thursday 17 November

Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth

The Lion Inn, Boreham

Colchester Community Stadium

Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

Spring term 2023

WEST Wednesday 1 March

SOUTH Thursday 2 March

N-EAST Wednesday 8 March

MID Thursday 9 March

Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth

Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

Colchester Community Stadium

The Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2023

WEST Wednesday 14 June

SOUTH Thursday 15 June

N-EAST Wednesday 21 June

MID Thursday 22 June

Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth

Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

Colchester Community Stadium

The Lion Inn, Boreham

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm
Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer