

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY 21 JANUARY 2021 starting at 11.15 am**

The meeting was held virtually (using Zoom) as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. 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	Assistant Director – South	lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Alison Fiala AF	Education and EY Lead Mid	Alison.fiala@essex.gov.uk
Alex Abercrombie AA	ECC	Alexandra.Abercrombi@essex.gov.uk
Jo Barclay	Schools Safeguarding Manager	Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
Yannick Stupples-Whyley	Senior Finance Business Partner	Yannick.Stupples-Whyley@essex.gov.uk
Lois Ashforth	EPHA Dengie	head@coldnorton.essex.sch.uk
George Athanasiou	EPHA West Vice-Chair	head@greatsampford.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Baker	EPHA Chelmsford West	ceo@heracademy.co.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
John Clements	EPHA Uttlesford South	jhclem@hotmail.com
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 and Rochford	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
Pam Langmead PL	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Kate Mills	EPHA Braintree	head@johnrayinfants.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
Donna Parker	EPHA Tendring North	head@st-marys-ardleigh.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair	Head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
HPK		
Richard Potter RP	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Angela Russell	EPHA Basildon West	angelarussell@st-anneline-inf.essex.sch.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Karen Tucker	EPHA Canvey Island	head@canvey-jun.essex.sch.uk
Jonathan Tye	EPHA Harlow	head@churchgate.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk

1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from:

- Mary Jo Hall Uttlesford North
- Ian MacDonald EPHA Tendring Mid
- Amanda Reid Chelmsford North
- Ceri Daniels EPHA Colchester South

Harriet Phelps-Knights welcomed the Local Authority officers who had joined the meeting.

Before the formal meeting started there was a discussion with Jo Barclay (who leads on Headteacher Wellbeing) about working with governors and clerks. In some cases they are failing to recognise the exceptional pressures on headteachers and are insisting on “business as usual”. It was suggested that some guidance for governors and clerks, for example about what should and should not be on meeting agendas at the current time, would be particularly helpful.

The EPHA Chair thanked Clare Kershaw and her team (with particular thanks to Alex Abercrombie) for their support, advice and guidance, which continues to be extremely helpful for Essex schools.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EPHA EXECUTIVE MEETING EARLIER

HPK noted that a number of issues had been raised at the EPHA Executive meeting, and asked CK to respond to the following:

i) **Contact with School Effectiveness Partners out of normal office hours**

It was explained that headteachers are having to work at weekends and holiday periods and would welcome support from their SEP out of hours. CK agreed to follow this up, but reminded headteachers that they are always able and welcome to contact her directly with any queries.

CK

ii) **Admissions**

Requests for deferments

It was noted that many schools have experienced an increased number of parental requests for deferments in September 2021, where they consider that their child is not ready to start school. CK agreed to check the numbers with the admissions team. She confirmed that although each request should be considered on a case by case basis, the LA doesn't generally support the deferment of a place unless it is absolutely critical. The view of the Education Team is that the sooner a young child can start school with appropriate and tailored support, the faster they will progress and develop.

Pupils moving schools

A headteacher explained the current problem of children who move schools. The Admissions team is agreeing new placements, but apparently without the

understanding that a new school cannot get to know a new pupil and their family in the normal way, particularly if that child is not entitled to a place in school at the moment. CK agreed to discuss the matter with Shamsun Noor and to ensure that there is a consistent and reasonable approach to the movement of pupils.

CK

iii) Support for test and trace during the holiday period

It was noted that Cambridgeshire and Gloucestershire ran the test and trace process for schools during the holiday period and the Executive asked, once again, if a similar approach could be taken by Essex LA. CK noted that Cambridge authority runs their test and trace in-house, whilst in Essex this is contracted to Provide. She agreed to follow this up, but felt that it would be unlikely that this responsibility could be undertaken solely by Provide.

CK

iv) Half term arrangements

CK recognised the urgent need for schools to know what the arrangements for half term will be and has pressed the RSC and DfE to make a decision as soon as possible. She accepted that headteachers didn't achieve a break during the Christmas holiday at all. On the whole she was in agreement that schools should not open during the half term break, but with the caveat that the health system should not be destabilised during that week. Her approach at this point was that schools might be asked to offer childcare/supervision to a very limited group of critical worker children. If this was the case, CK agreed that there would need to be clear guidance about which pupils would be offered places.

Note: following the meeting (26/01/21) the DfE published the announcement that all schools would be closed during half term and would not be expected to provide places or meals for any pupils.

v) Attendance in schools

CK agreed that the numbers of children in school are greater than in the first lockdown in the summer term. The average attendance the previous week in Essex schools was 9%, equating to about 18,000 children. That is split across phases:

- Primary – 13.5%
- Secondary – 2.5%
- Special – around 25% with a degree of part time provision

CK suggested that the numbers seemed to have settled and agreed that the Local Authority could reiterate to parents the importance of keeping children at home wherever possible, in order to mitigate the spread of the virus.

It was suggested that it would be helpful if the Local Authority could give the same message to employers; schools in North Essex had been particularly impacted when the University of Essex reminded its staff that they were entitled to school places for their children. CK noted that there was no absolute right to critical worker status, but also noted the competing pressures on employers at the current time. She reminded headteachers that if their risk assessment suggests that on-site and remote education are compromised by their numbers in school, they are able to restrict their provision accordingly.

vi) Testing – including Lateral Flow Tests

Secondary schools – Essex has advised secondaries not to test pupils on site,

parents can continue to access tests for their children at community centres. Secondary schools continue to test their staff on site, but the process is different from the single Lateral Flow Tests being distributed in primary schools. Secondary schools received additional funding to cover the cost of volunteers administering tests, but this is not likely to be offered to primary schools as the process takes place at home. CK did however, agreed to take back the query to the DfE about additional funding for administrative tasks incurred by primary schools in relation to Covid.

CK

At this point, the Local Authority was still waiting for further guidance from the DfE (*Note: the LA guidance has been circulated on 27/01/21*) but their advice confirmed that staff can take the LFT the night before, so that schools can be informed of a positive result in a timely fashion, enabling school leaders to make arrangements for the working day ahead.

The Executive questioned whether it was necessary to report negative test results to the NHS (currently a requirement) given that schools will also have to register all results. A number of questions about the guidance were discussed at the meeting, which have been picked up in the latest guidance, including advice about allergies, veganism, void tests, re-ordering and so on.

AA was asked whether unused tests should be recycled to be used by other staff. She agreed to follow up on this question.

AA

Nick Hutchings noted that he has written a letter to send to parents explaining the introduction of Lateral Flow Testing in primary schools, and agreed to forward this to the Local Authority.

NH

vii) Vaccination

CK noted that four additional mass vaccination centres are being planned – the locations will include Harlow, Chelmsford, Colchester, South Woodham Ferrers and Bishops Stortford.

It was explained that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough authorities had offered surplus vaccinations to education staff, but that this decision had been reversed.

She confirmed that ECC is lobbying the Government to prioritise vaccination for school staff. It is likely that special school staff, who are in many cases offering intimate and/or medical care, will be prioritised. CK remains positive that the education workforce will be added to the priority list in due course.

viii) Education Health and Care Plans

CK confirmed that the DfE has stated that there will be no easements to the requirement to deliver EHCPs “unless new evidence comes to light”. Currently, all health professionals have not been redeployed as they were during the first national lockdown, so they should be available. She suggested that if parents are setting unreasonable expectations that cannot be met by the school, headteachers should contact the quadrant Inclusion Partner for support.

One headteacher confirmed that his school had been extremely well supported by

the Local Authority, but noted that parental anxiety and expectations in relation to SEND have increased, and fulfilling these demands may be to the detriment of other pupils. CK agreed to have a further discussion with Ralph Holloway to discuss what additional support may be given to schools managing parental expectations around EHCPs.

ix) The future of Ofsted, SATs and assessment

CK confirmed that the Local Authority continues to ask for clarity and information from Ofsted and the DfE about the future of inspection, SATs and assessment.

3. SAFEGUARDING AND WELL-BEING

a) Welfare checks

Jo Barclay confirmed that the CYP Response Plan has been updated in relation to welfare checks. Essentially, it is for the school to decide on method and frequency of checks, following a risk assessment process (however that is undertaken). The advice is that engagement with lessons does not replace a welfare check, but it will be some reassurance to the school, where the child is engaging with their learning offer, that they at least have eyes on the child. What that will not tell you (necessarily) is how the child is and whether there are any issues or concerns they are currently experiencing. She noted that this lockdown feels more critical than before and we cannot predict what may affect a family in the current circumstances and, just because it's a child / family for whom there have been no previous concerns, it does not mean that they cannot be affected by loss, bereavement, financial hardship, mental health issues etc.

Therefore, the recommendation is weekly contact, but schools can decide what is appropriate. What is not acceptable is one phone call every couple of months (as the LA was hearing in some cases last summer) - schools must be thinking about how they keep their children as safe as possible, bearing in mind they are not in school – how do they extend existing safeguarding arrangements to keep children safe under current circumstances?

For vulnerable children in particular, JB stressed the importance of planning and risk assessing jointly with Social Care and other agencies to ensure that they are involved. This will include Early Years, the Child and Family Wellbeing Service and school nurses. If there are multiple factors causing concern the school can hold a TAF meeting, with support from the TAFSo. However, non-contact will not meet the Social Care threshold.

She noted that if there is no response at all from a family the school can consider a home visit (taking care to risk assess and to follow appropriate social distancing). In extreme cases a school can ask the police to do a check, but accepted that this may not be carried out in most cases.

Schools need to record each contact, and a welfare checklist is available to support schools (though its use is not mandatory).

One headteacher noted that they have a case where a family is refusing to attend meetings and is failing to send their child to school, even though this is being

advised by the Social Worker. JB noted that this must be addressed through a robust Child in Need or Child Protection Plan and a discussion via a CP conference with an appropriate response taken. She explained that parents not engaging with education would not, in itself, wouldn't lead to Social Care progressing a case, but if it is in the context of other significant concerns it may do.

It was confirmed that the LA will send out information about support for families and there are links on the CYP Response Plan.

b) Child Protection policies

JB noted that there are two updated Child Protection Policies available for schools to use: the substantive Child Protection Policy, updated in December following changes to Working Together to Safeguard Children, and the school closure addendum.

c) Safeguarding Forums

Two sessions will be held, both online. Schools have been asked to hold the date – either **22nd March (2.00pm – 4.00pm)** or **25th March (9.00am – 11.00am)**. These sessions are offered to Designated Leads or Deputy Designated Leads only – further details of how to join will be sent out nearer the time.

d) Headteacher wellbeing

JB explained that the focus will be on governors again this term to reinforce the messages about them supporting the wellbeing of headteachers. A training session is being held at the beginning of February; around 200 governors attended the last training session in the autumn term. This will include the development of a short checklist for governors relating to headteacher wellbeing. She noted the discussion earlier in the meeting about the need to ensure that governors are not putting undue pressure on headteachers, and are focusing on current priorities.

e) Early Years sector

JB confirmed that she is working with the Early Years sector around safeguarding, focusing on replicating the work in schools on information sharing and maintaining effective records, to improve the work with primary schools.

f) Essex Echo request for children's photos and details

JB highlighted a recent request from the Essex Echo for families to share photos and information about their children working remotely. She confirmed that the post, on Facebook, has now been removed (following intervention by the LA), but reminded headteachers to stress to parents the need to safeguard their children and their personal information.

4. SCHOOL FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2021/22

Yannick Stupples-Whyley, ECC Senior Finance Business Partner, was welcomed to the meeting.

He reported that a number of decisions have been made following a consultation with schools in the autumn term, including moving the Essex Funding Formula to align with the National Funding Formula over a 2 year period, with the exception

of reducing the primary lump sum over a 3 year period. Key changes:

- Free school meals – ever 6 formula
- Mobility factors
- IDACI moving to 2019 data

The Teacher's Pay Grant and Teachers' Pension Contributions Grant will be delivered through the DSG (no longer a separate grant). There is an additional £180 per primary pupil to cover these grants. YSW agreed to show this as a separate cost centre on the budget allocation, to make it clear within the budget. The lump sum for primary in 2021/22 will be £135,933 (currently £145,000) (compared to NFF lump sum of £117,800).

Primary AWPU will be increasing to £3,153.82.

The Local Authority has submitted the Essex Formula so that the ESFA can calculate the allocation to academies. Maintained schools must be notified by Friday 26th February (a statutory requirement) but YSW confirmed that once the Essex formula has been accepted, the LA will notify schools of their budget share. (Academies notified by ESFA by 31st March). The deadline for maintained schools to submit their basic budget plan is Tuesday 4th May 2021.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

CK noted the actions that she has agreed to follow up on.

There was a brief discussion about remote learning. CK noted that the LA will be producing updated remote learning guidance shortly. She was asked about the Local Authority role in relation to parental complaints to Ofsted. AF noted that the LA guidance includes an appendix around parental expectations and whether there is a legal obligation for parents to participate. The LA has asked for Ofsted's view on this. AF assured the Executive that they will always communicate with the school about any complaints, and will usually defend the school while following proper protocols.

CK noted that she continues to meet regularly with the Professional Officer and asked headteachers to continue to send their questions and concerns via her, or directly to the School Comms team.

Clare concluded by thanking the headteachers once again, who she said were continuing to do a brilliant job in exceptionally difficult times, along with their staff. The impact of the current lockdown on everyone is extremely challenging; she repeated the offer of support from the LA to all of the schools in Essex and thanked everyone for their hard work and exceptional leadership.

7. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2020/21/22 SCHOOL YEARS

Executive meetings

Thursday 29 April 2021

Thursday 30 September 2021

Thursday 20 January 2022

Thursday 5 May 2022

Area Heads Meetings

Spring term 2021

N-EAST	Wednesday 3 March	virtual meeting
SOUTH	Thursday 4 March	virtual meeting
WEST	Wednesday 10 March	virtual meeting
MID	Thursday 11 March	virtual meeting

Summer term 2021 (Online or at venues – to be confirmed)

N-EAST	Wednesday 16 June	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 17 June	Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST	Wednesday 23 June	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 24 June	Chelmsford City Football Club

Autumn term 2021

N-EAST	Wednesday 10 November	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 11 November	Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST	Wednesday 17 November	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 18 November	Chelmsford City Football Club

Spring term 2022

N-EAST	Wednesday 2 March	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 3 March	Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST	Wednesday 9 March	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 10 March	Chelmsford City Football Club

Summer term 2022

N-EAST	Wednesday 15 June	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 16 June	Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST	Wednesday 22 June	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID	Thursday 23 June	Chelmsford City Football Club

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm
Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer