

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2021 starting at 1.00 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	Assistant Director – South	lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Alison Fiala AF	Education and EY Lead Mid	Alison.fiala@essex.gov.uk
Roy Blatchford RB	Essex Education Taskforce, Chair	royb88@gmail.com
Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk
Nicky Barrand	EPHA South Chair/Basilidon 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
Matt Curzon	EPHA Uttlesford South	ht@st-marys-stansted.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Mid Chair/ Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Ceri Daniels	EPHA Colchester South	Head@eightashgreen.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
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 HPK	EPHA Chair	Head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
Richard Potter RP	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk

1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from:

Lois Ashforth	Dengie
George Athanasiou	West Vice-Chair
Dawn Baker	Chelmsford West
Emma Dawson	Castlepoint and Rochford
Ian MacDonald	Tendring Mid
Richard McIntosh	Chelmsford South
Angela Russell	Basildon West
Karen Tucker	Canvey Island

Clare Kershaw welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed her pleasure that the meeting was, once again, in person. The last EPHA Executive meeting held face to face was in January 2020.

2. PAYROLL DEBRIEF

Graeme Lennon and Janet Tindall, from the ECC People Operations team, were due to attend the meeting to discuss the concerns and problems experienced by schools as a result of the novation of the Payroll contract from ECC to Juniper Education.

One headteacher expressed his concerns and the impact that the change has had on his school, but problems with technology prevented a wider discussion from taking place. It was **AGREED** that an online meeting would be arranged to hold the discussion.

Further to the Executive meeting, it was agreed that the online meeting will be held on Tuesday 9th November at 3.15 pm and a Zoom invitation has been sent out to the EPHA Executive and Local Authority officers.

Professional
Officer

3. 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) Covid guidance for schools

It was noted that there continues to be contradictory guidance from NHS Test and Trace, the national Covid helpline, and Essex test and trace around a number of issues, in particular the information given to parents about isolation, seeking PCR tests for close contacts, and so on. CK explained that she and the Essex Test and Trace team have met to try to resolve these inconsistencies, but that often the advice given depends on the training that helpline staff have been given.

One concern has been that parents have been told that they shouldn't take their child for a PCR test if identified as a close contact and some have been told that PCR tests will run out if they do so. CK noted that she has discussed this at length with Essex

Public Health and is comfortable with the guidance that Essex is giving. However, she did suggest that parents should be advised to access an at-home PCR test, and that schools only need to send a letter about a positive case once a week (not repeatedly, in the event of further cases).

CK stressed that the government and DfE approach is that education and attendance is the top priority, with Covid and infection control being a lower priority.

It was noted that there continues to be inconsistency around contact tracing. CK explained that if NHS test and trace can't contact a positive-case family within 24 hours they will contact Essex Test and trace, who should make contact within another hours (i.e. 48 hours as a maximum). She stressed that schools are not expected to carry out contact tracing.

There has also been contradictory guidance and confusion about what constitutes an outbreak, and it is currently quite likely that the majority of schools will see 5 cases within a 10 day period. CK stressed that if a school needs support to manage their Covid cases they should contact Essex test and trace. If a school is operationally unviable – i.e. does not have sufficient staff to oversee classes – they should contact their School Effectiveness Partner to discuss the situation; Essex Test and Trace will not advise on school operation. It remains the case that schools should aim to close classes/bubbles/year groups for the shortest time possible.

The DfE is particularly concerned about provision for vulnerable children (not key workers) and may contact schools to challenge their provision if year groups are closed.

4. EDUCATION PRIORITIES

CK explained that the Local Authority is introducing three key strategies this school year.

The **Early Years and Childcare strategy** will be introduced in January 2022, with the aim of strengthening the system for 2 – 5 year olds, and creating a new definition of school readiness. It is currently the case that 75% of children meet the expectations of Good Learning Development (2019 data), but by definition, 25% do not. ECC is developing a multi-agency strategy with the support of the early years' sector. One challenge is that the only formal accountability for pre-school settings is Ofsted, and there is a real need for greater consistency. ECC can only have an impact or control on those children with a fee entitlement.

One headteacher warned that future levels of GLD are likely to be considerably lower than 75% as young children currently start school with very little or no formal pre-school education and experience, and an increasing number of parents who continue to work from home may choose not to access pre-school in order to save money. There are real concerns about the impact on social, emotional and educational development of young children, which will have an impact for years.

The new leader of the council, Councillor Kevin Bentley is developing a new strategy

for Essex – **Everyone’s Essex**. Councillor Tony Ball, ECC Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Skills and Training, is working on a lifelong learning strategy, which includes a focus on effective business links with education. This is probably more secondary focused, but CK acknowledged that many primary schools are doing excellent work in relation to future careers information.

The **Partnership Strategy**, led by Nicola Woolf, is also being refreshed.

Education Task Force

CK noted that Roy Blatchford had attended the EPHA Annual General Meeting in the morning and had fed back to her about the discussions. She noted that the Task Force has allocated funding to headteacher/senior leader wellbeing and agreed that greater support will be welcomed.

Academisation

The Professional Officer asked CK to outline the current stance of the local authority in relation to academisation. The previous Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, stated his aim that all maintained schools would become academies, within multi-academy trusts, but it is unclear whether this remains a priority for Nadhim Zahawi, the new SoS. CK agreed that this had been Gavin Williamson’s preferred approach for schools, but that she couldn’t see how a whole MAT system could be incentivised without funding. This is unlikely to be the main priority for Government at the moment. There is the added problem that many secondary schools (including in Essex) are individual Trusts, not within MATs as the DfE would prefer. She explained that the Local Authority is neutral on the subject of academisation, but does encourage the involvement in partnerships, as set out in a document published in the summer.

Afghanistan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP)

Afghanistan refugees have been housed temporarily in three hotels in Essex, the Rose and Crown in Colchester, the Atlantic Hotel in Chelmsford, and the Harlow Hotel (the former Park Inn). The ECC team has assessed the families, and are providing EAL courses and advising the families of how to apply for a school place. However, school placement is unlikely to happen soon as the families don’t yet know where they will live permanently. CK explained that, unfortunately, there is unlikely to be any additional funding for schools who admit these children, as the support is having to come out of the LA’s existing budget.

A fourth hotel in Stansted, the Ibis, is being used to house asylum seeking refugees. Their situation is even more temporary, as they may be moved by the Home Officer to another location at any point. ECC is also assessing the families in this accommodation.

5. SEP SUPPORT FOR THE AUTUMN TERM

Alison Fiala noted that the School Effectiveness Team carried out a desktop exercise in the summer to identify schools that could be in line for Ofsted inspection, and have decided to prioritise those schools for support. They identified 261 schools that could be inspected soon, or needed additional support because of a change of leadership, where there are significant concerns about sustainability, or schools that are

expanding. Every SEP has been allocated time to contact their schools.

The Executive gave some feedback about the letter that had been sent to schools explaining the support that would be offered. Schools are no longer RAG rated (red, amber, green), but have been identified as needing low, medium or high support based on their likelihood of inspection. There was some concern that, by focusing on Ofsted, the LA is perpetuating the fear of inspection; Ofsted's own stance is that schools should not be doing anything special or different to prepare for Ofsted. Some schools have also experienced LA reviews which have focused on 2019 data, again something that is no longer required or encouraged by Ofsted. Lisa Fergus and Alison Fiala agreed that this should not be the approach by SEPs and asked for feedback if this was happening.

The letter sent out suggested that this information should be shared with the Chair of Governors, and one headteacher said that this had caused a difficult conversation, trying to explain why his previously "green" school was now rated as needing medium support.

The LA Officers accepted the feedback and agreed that the work of the SEPs was intended to support schools not to add pressure on senior leaders.

6. SEND STRATEGY UPDATE INCLUDING EHCP IMPROVEMENT WORK

CK noted that the improvement work around SEND continues behind the scenes; she is committed to developing the best SEND system for children and young people, their families and for schools in Essex. The SEND inspection in October 2019 informed the key areas for improvement. Ralph Holloway has led on the SEND Strategy developments along with the Assistant Directors and SEND leads in each quadrant team. Like schools, the LA has experienced challenges in the system during the pandemic. They are currently waiting re-inspection, though this may be delayed by around 6 months.

CK reminded the Executive that the three work-streams resulting from the inspection are:

Quality of EHCPs – work-stream led by Clare Kershaw

- End to end process review and re-engineering to deliver improved EHCP processes (including annual review)
- Develop options for new processes
- Review funding options
- Implement practices to drive improvement in quality of plans (including training, multi-agency moderation, quality assurance)

Over identification of MLD/ Accurate Identification of Need – work-stream led by Ralph Holloway

- Understand the scale and reason for over-identification of MLD
- Deliver training, support, guidance and resources to improve identification of need across the system
- Develop and deliver guidance around recording of CYP needs on the census

- Implement process to highlight and respond if data deviates from expected

Joint Commissioning – work-stream led by

Richard Watson - Deputy Chief Executive / Director Strategy and Transformation (NECCG) and

Chris Martin – Director Of Commissioning & Policy (ECC)

- Develop SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy
- Develop SEND joint data set
- Undertake mapping and gap analysis of services across the local area
- Jointly commission services around:
 - ASD/ADHD
 - Therapies: Speech and Language, Physio and OT
 - Equipment
 - SENDIASS
 - Local Offer

In relation to the quality of EHCPs, key outputs are

1. EHC Needs Assessment Guidance
2. Decision Making:
 - *Scheme of delegation*
 - *Involvement of health and social care*
 - *Panel terms of reference*
3. Quality Assurance of EHCPs
4. Support for CYP with medical needs
5. Annual review guidance
6. Ordinarily Available offer
7. Preparing for adulthood and ceasing plans

The implementation approach is as follows



Over-identification of MLD - key outputs

1. Data analysis

2. Discovery discussions
3. Training and resources for schools/settings
4. Census recording guidance
5. Analysis of impact and identifying next steps
6. Capturing case studies

Joint commissioning – key outputs

1. Joint Commissioning Strategy/ framework
2. Joint data set
3. Jointly commissioned services:
 - Neurodevelopmental pathways
 - Therapies
 - Equipment
 - SENDIASS
 - Local Offer

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 offer will include an interactive guide
<https://view.pagetiger.com/cjktoyi/1/?ptit=93299723F38885673DE7F>
 and a monthly newsletter.

CK noted that the number of applications for Education Health Care Needs Assessments has risen significantly in the last two years.

2019 - 20

Requestor	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Total
Parent	53	51	73	45	67	64	47	38	41	58	53	28	618
School	67	111	108	164	146	116	116	65	62	97	131	36	1219
Other	12	23	23	28	8	16	8	6	15	19	13	22	193
Total	132	185	204	237	221	196	171	109	118	174	197	86	2030

2020-21

Requestor	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Total
Parent	60	80	68	43	68	42	68	63	59	72	60	35	718
School	76	78	112	144	130	144	207	124	205	166	205	54	1645
Other	35	33	26	29	19	31	31	25	27	25	35	15	331
Total	171	191	206	216	217	217	306	212	291	263	300	104	2694

She stressed that there isn't the funding or capacity in the system to cope with the increased demand for Education Health and Care Plans, and reiterated the need for schools to have a conversation with LA officers before making an application for an EHCP.

A headteacher suggested that this was an inevitable response to the increasing demands caused by the pandemic. Another head noted that another pressure is that children who were born prematurely and have complex physical and emotional problems are now entering the education system. It was argued that the SEND system is broken nationally and schools and local authorities simply cannot cope with the demand. A head stressed the need to manage parent expectations about EHCPs, and warned that the number of applications will grow rather than reduce. One headteacher noted that he had seen a change in attitude from Inclusion Partners, advising against applications for EHCPs, and presumed that this linked to the increase in numbers.

Another headteacher warned that many pre-school and early years' children have not been picked up at all on the assessment spectrum, and this adds to the workload when they arrive in Reception. She noted that schools do not commit to going through the EHCP process lightly, and do recognise the capacity pressures on the system, but school leaders are stuck between the demands of staff, parents and children, as well as the Local Authority.

CK stressed once again that there simply isn't sufficient workforce in the LA to manage the number of applications, and assessments are taking well over the recommended number of weeks to process. The EPHA Chair asked what the Association could do to support the process and the problem, and CK agreed to hold a further meeting to discuss the issue.

7. AUTUMN TERM HEADTEACHER MEETINGS

It was **AGREED** that the focus of the termly headteacher meetings would be discussed outside the meeting.

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

Executive meetings Lion Inn, Boreham

Thursday 20 January 2022

Thursday 19 May 2022

Area Heads Meetings

Autumn term 2021

N-EAST	Wednesday 10 November	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 11 November	Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 17 November	online
SOUTH	Thursday 18 November	Holiday Inn, Basildon

Spring term 2022

N-EAST	Wednesday 2 March	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 3 March	Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST	Wednesday 9 March	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
MID	Thursday 10 March	Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2022

N-EAST	Wednesday 15 June	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 16 June	Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 22 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
	Thursday 23 June	Holiday Inn, Basildon

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