

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY 2021 at 9.00 am – 11.00 am

The meeting was held virtually, as a conference call, as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

* indicates attendance

Distribution	*Lois Ashforth	Dengie
	*George Athanasiou	West Vice-Chair
	*Dawn Baker	Chelmsford West
	*Sue Bardetti	Tendring South
	*Nicky Barrand	South Chair/Basildon East & Pitsea
	*Isobel Barron	West Chair
	*Liz Bartholomew	Harwich and Dovercourt
	*Dale Bateman	Epping Forest Rural
	*Liz Benjeddi	Billericay
	*Heidi Blakeley	Wickford
	*Amanda Buckland-Garnett	South Woodham Ferrers
	*John Clements	Uttlesford South
	*Anna Conley	Witham
	*Dawn Dack	Mid Chair/Maldon
	Ceri Daniels	Colchester South (Tiptree and Stanway)
	*Emma Dawson	Castle Point and Benfleet
	*Paula Derwin	Colchester East
	*Richard Green	South Vice-Chair
	*Mary Jo Hall	West Treasurer/Uttlesford North
	*Nick Hutchings	EPHA Vice-Chair/North East Chair/ Colchester West
	*Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer/County Treasurer
	Ian MacDonald	Tendring Mid
	*Kate Mills	Braintree
	*Jinnie Nichols	Halstead
	*Hayley O'Dea	Rochford
	*Matt O'Grady	Brentwood
	*Donna Parker	Tendring North
	*Richard Potter	North East Vice-Chair
	*Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair
	Amanda Reid	Chelmsford North
	*Angela Russell	Basildon West
	*Gary Soars	Rayleigh
	*Karen Tucker	Canvey Island
	*Jonathan Tye	Harlow
	*Joanne Willcox	Epping Forest South

Also in attendance

Sue Baldwin

Regional Schools Commissioner

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Harriet Phelps-Knights, the EPHA Chair, welcomed everyone to the Executive meeting.

Apologies were received from:

- Ceri Daniels Colchester South (Tiptree and Stanway)
- Ian MacDonald Tendring Mid
- Amanda Reid Chelmsford North

Dale Bateman was welcomed as the new representative for Epping Forest Rural.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 7 October 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record. The following matters arising were raised:

a) Business interests forms (Minute 3 refers)

It was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer will contact all Executive members who have not yet done asking them to complete a form at the earliest opportunity.

b) EPHA Webcast with Clare Kershaw (Minute 4d refers)

It was noted that a total of four webcasts have been run by EPHA, giving headteachers the opportunity to hear from, and question, Clare Kershaw, Mike Gogarty and other key officers involved with the pandemic response. The next webcast will be held on Thursday 4th February at 2.30 pm. The link to the webcast has been sent out to headteachers.

3. DISCUSSION WITH SUE BALDWIN, REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER

It was **AGREED** that the following key issues should be raised with Sue Baldwin:

- Concerns about the communication, timing and inconsistency of information given by Government and the DfE and, in particular, the fact that headteachers are not notified of key policy changes before they are released to the press and wider public.
- What, if any, decisions have been made about the half term week?
- What expectations will be there in relation to assessment of pupils, following the cancellation of formal tests and assessments in the summer term?
- What work is the RSC office doing to support schools?

Sue Baldwin joined the meeting at 9.15 am

Regional Schools Commissioner office

The EPHA Chair welcomed Sue to the meeting, and asked her to share what the Regional Schools Commissioner office has been focusing on to support schools during the pandemic.

Sue firstly noted her thanks to headteachers and their staff and governors for their efforts, recognising that the last few months have been a huge challenge. She explained that the RSC team has refocused its activities to respond to Covid-19. She chairs the

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East of England REACT committee and, working with the Local Authorities, keeps a close eye on vulnerable children in particular. Part of that conversation is understanding the data provided by schools. She noted that the completion of the daily attendance return in schools provides critical information to the DfE and Government, which in turn helps them understand the increase in cases and resulting pressures on the NHS.

The RSC office has also been engaged with brokering school to school support, offering links with LLEs and NLEs, or identifying support from a Multi Academy Trust where appropriate. This has offered speedy support to schools, for example around remote learning, leadership and so on.

In addition the RSC has been trying to ensure there is the necessary support to help schools interpret and implement the guidance from the DfE.

February half term arrangements

In response to a question from the EPHA Chair, Sue Baldwin noted that no decisions have yet been made about the February half term week, but accepted that the arrangements need to be clarified as soon as possible so that schools understand the expectations. The EPHA Vice-Chair reminded Sue that, in the summer term, childcare provision was put into place which avoided the need to open all schools. In addition, during this lockdown parents have alternative options for childcare, such as childcare bubbles. Sue noted that she was very aware that headteachers and school staff haven't had a decent break for some time (an Executive member noted in the chat: "for almost a year"). She accepted that the function of schools is to provide education.

Resumption of routine Ofsted inspection

The Executive asked for an update on the DfE's position on the reintroduction of Ofsted inspection. Sue confirmed that in December last year, the DfE announced that Ofsted's routine graded inspections would remain suspended during the spring term, and that during this period Ofsted would carry out monitoring inspections of schools most in need – those judged inadequate and some that require improvement. On 12 January, Ofsted confirmed that it has decided to use remote approaches to inspection for this half term ([Ofsted article remote inspections](#)). Ofsted will however conduct on-site inspections where necessary, and in particular where it has serious concerns about safeguarding or the quality of education being provided. It will keep the arrangements under review. Ofsted intends to start rolling out the spring term monitoring visits from w/c 25 January. It has published a revised operational note setting out how the inspections will be conducted. The inspections will have a strong focus on remote education and an emphasis on being supportive to schools. The operational note is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/january-2021-maintained-schools-and-academies>

The Professional Officer asked whether Ofsted were considering an interim framework, before a full return to Section 5 inspections based on the 2019 inspection handbook. Sue confirmed that there would not be a "nonsensical" return, but noted that a number of schools have said they would welcome an inspection that could alter their existing grade.

Vaccinations for school staff

Sue confirmed that she is lobbying on behalf of schools to ensure that school staff are seen as a priority group for vaccination.

Timing and consistency of communication

The EPHA Chair noted headteachers' concerns and frustration that the timing and consistency of communications and announcements from the DfE and Government made life more difficult for schools leaders, trying to manage the impact of changes within their schools and communities. One Executive member argued that it was a matter of professional courtesy to ensure that school leaders were aware of changes in advance of announcements to the press and general public. Sue noted that there are formal weekly meetings with ministers, the DfE, Unions and school sector representatives, so there is plenty and regular of engagement. One Executive member noted his worry that there are apparently mechanisms to hear concerns from numerous representatives in the education sector, but that this does not seem to translate into effective communication.

Assessment

The EPHA Chair asked if there would be guidance about the assessment of primary pupils, following the cancellation of tests and formal assessment in the summer term. Sue agreed to follow this up.

4. COVID-19 – CURRENT CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

i) Attendance in schools

Executive members expressed their concern about the number of children in school during the current lockdown; one headteacher noted that initially she had 123 pupils in schools, from the usual roll of 384. This has made managing staffing in school and delivering remote learning very difficult, and has increased the anxiety among staff. However, reducing the numbers now would be very problematic. Some schools are offering part-time provision, but keeping track of large number of pupils coming and going can be a challenge.

It was noted that Colchester University wrote to all of their staff, the majority of whom work from home, reminding them that they are critical workers and therefore can access a place for their child(ren) in school. This has increased the pressure on local schools. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Local Authority to put pressure on employers, reminding them of the desirability of reducing numbers in school to help mitigate the spread of the virus.

ii) Support from the School Effectiveness Partner team

It was noted that the SEPs are not answering emails at the weekend (or during holiday periods), although headteachers are frequently managing notification of positive cases, and are having to contact Test and Trace as a result, as well as notifying impacted staff and families. It was argued that additional support would be welcome at this challenging time.

iii) Test and Trace

It was noted that Cambridgeshire and Gloucestershire LAs managed contact tracing on

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behalf of their schools during the Christmas holiday period. It was **AGREED** that the Executive should once again ask Clare Kershaw if this would be a possibility for Essex schools during any holiday periods.

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iv) Governors

It was suggested that it would be helpful if the Local Authority could remind governors and clerks that it is currently not “business as usual”, and that they need to be aware of current priorities. The Professional Officer noted that Jo Barclay’s current headteacher wellbeing focus will be on training governors, and that this should be discussed during the meeting with LA officers.

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v) Staffing

The Executive discussed the challenge of managing sufficient staff in school as well as managing remote learning.

Once again it was noted that the support from Clare Kershaw, the School Communications Team and, in particular Alex Abercrombie, has continued to be extremely helpful for Essex schools. They have also continued to represent the views of Essex schools, and have lobbied both the DfE, Unions and RSC office. There is sometimes some inconsistency of approach of the SEP team. However, it was also stressed that in many cases the support from SEPs has been excellent.

vi) Welfare checks

It was agreed that it would be helpful if primary heads could give feedback to the Local Authority about the challenge of completing regular welfare checks for all families; this has been raised as an issue by some secondary schools. It was noted that some schools have been asked to do home visits, which may be a problem to implement for health and capacity reasons. A number of headteachers noted that the School Nurse team had been very supportive. The group discuss the problem of families who refuse to engage with the school; Liz Benjeddi noted that she wrote to parents explaining that the school may have to contact Social Care or the police if they have no contact, and this generally gets a result. She **AGREED** to share the letter template with the Executive.

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Liz Benjeddi

vii) Teaching Awards

It was agreed that the Executive would ask for a brief update on the progress of the Teaching Awards nominations this academic year.

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viii) Education Health and Care Plans

A headteacher noted that he had received a complaint from parents stating that the school was failing to deliver the requirements of their child’s EHCP. It was agreed that this issue should be raised at the meeting with LA officers.

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ix) Admissions

A number of issues around admissions was raised. An increased number of schools have had requests from parents to defer entry to Reception in September. Also, schools are being asked to admit new pupils and immediately offer remote learning and support; it was argued that this is inappropriate when a school has never even met a pupil and their family, and that it would make more sense for a child to continue on the roll of their previous school until the system reopens. It was agreed that this issue

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should be raised at the meeting with LA officers and that there should be a consistent message from the Local Authority on all admission decisions.

x) Vaccines and testing

A number of issues were raised, including the location of vaccine test centres, whether primary schools would receive additional funding for staff to deliver the test programme, and the problem of being asked to report (and then record) every test result including negatives. There was also a question around the use of Lateral Flow tests when an individual had tested positive in the previous 90 days. It was agreed that these issues should be discussed at the meeting with LA officers.

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5. EPHA MEMBERSHIP

a) Executive representatives

The EPHA Executive membership list was circulated with agenda for the meeting. As previously noted, Dale Bateman has been elected as the new representative for Epping Forest Rural schools.

There are two other vacancies on the Executive: Mid Vice-Chair and Chelmsford South. The Professional Officer **AGREED** to approach possible candidates for the roles.

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b) Independent Schools – associate members of EPHA

The Professional Officer noted that she had been contacted by a primary-phase headteacher of an independent school in Essex, who has asked if she could become a member of EPHA. The Executive agreed that this would be endorsed, as long as this does not impact on the Professional Officer's capacity to offer support. It was **AGREED** that:

- the Professional Officer will contact the headteacher to offer membership;
- the school will be asked to pay an annual subscription of £320 (in line with the de-delegated amount paid by all Essex schools);
- the headteacher will be invited to attend the local group briefing (with the agreement of the Lead Headteacher);
- this protocol will be followed if any more independent heads request membership.

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6. EPHA REPRESENTATION ON GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

i) EPHA Chair's report

The EPHA Chair, Harriet Phelps-Knights, gave the following report to the Executive:

I started the AGM back in October with 'Wow'! I'm not sure I have any better words this term – harsh, draining, tired, challenging, stressful, emotional; I'll let you finish the sentence "I have never felt this..."

But, aside of that, we have to focus on our achievements and everything that we have achieved and the fantastic job you have all done under extreme pressure, an ever-changing message from the government, unrealistic expectations from parents. Now more than ever as a headteacher we are expected to be everything to everyone, and have all the answers and the knowledge despite no one else having a clue; I'm sure this how it feels at times to us all.

The positives of what we have achieved have been tremendous over the last year; keeping schools open throughout lockdown 1, navigating the Edenred system, leading and managing staff, addressing everything that was thrown at us in a positive and professional manner, although many of us didn't feel that inclined at times I'm sure. Last term saw us navigate through a full opening with infection rates rising, track and trace frustrations, as well as schools full of pupils eager and willing to learn.

And now with the most recent lockdown we have again managed to continue along the same path and endure the trials that are thrown at us. We are still working throughout, we have addressed the needs of all staff, pupils, parents and the community. I just hope that every headteacher in Essex is finding a bit of time to relax and unwind at some point throughout the week to be able to cope with the challenges and look after themselves at this difficult time.

I cannot thank Pam enough for her continued hard work on behalf of Essex Primary heads with endless meetings with the LA. She has a wealth of knowledge around the guidance and being able to answer our questions and find out if she doesn't know there and then. Also arguing the case for Primary heads whenever the need arises and continuing to provide the excellent briefings that we all could not manage without.

I would like to think that the light at the end of the tunnel is getting a bit brighter but in reality I think there is a long way to go with many mountains to climb before we enter back into a near normal world.

I wanted to finish on a positive thought and, although this is a little cheesy, I would like us all just to take a minute to reflect on something positive and consider this positive affirmation. I am not going to ask you to share but please finish this sentence either written down or just think. "Right now, I am grateful for..." think school, home, work, family whatever comes into your head "Right now, I am grateful for..."

So onwards and upwards, we can do this, and we will get through this!"

ii) Professional Officer report

The report gave details of the meetings attended by Pam Langmead on behalf of EPHA. In addition to the attendance at meetings (and writing follow up reports), her work for EPHA has included:

- Information, emails and communications with all headteachers, including in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme;
- Briefings to headteacher groups – 29 partnerships/clusters are now holding termly briefings – researching and writing briefing notes and presentations –and keeping them up to date as new directives, guidance and documents are introduced;
- Writing and delivering governor training on the new Ofsted framework, pupil exclusions and governor monitoring;

- Writing 7 minute staff meetings, including updating all data protection staff meetings and updating all existing resources;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Organisation and management of the area meetings in the spring term;
- Organising and running webcasts with Mike Gogarty (Public Health director) and Clare Kershaw;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), supporting area treasurers, producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Managing the bookings, organising and running the Deputy Headteacher conference, future planning for Heads' conference;
- Updating EPHA records and website;
- Other tasks as required.

iii) Finance report

Current account income and expenditure 31.07.20 – 09.12.20

	Expenditure	Income
Miscellaneous	£1,018.76	£0.00
DSG		£0.00
Subscriptions		£0.00
Supply	£1,734.00	
Travel & mileage	£1,748.45	
Professional Officer	£21,773.68	
Meetings	£0.00	
Colleague Supporter	£93.00	
Totals	£26,367.89	£0.00

The Professional Officer expenditure for August – December 2020 is broken down into

• professional fees	£20,520.00
• mileage	£56.70
• expenses paid on behalf of EPHA	£1,196.98
	£21,773.68

As we are not currently using venues, the meeting expenses are non-existent for the time being, but part of the PO expenses paid on behalf of EPHA is a monthly Zoom subscription of £100.79 which supports the online meetings, briefings, conferences and webcasts run by the Association.

Bank statements for account 00795978

17.08.20	£295,506.52
09.12.20	£273,358.08

The Conference account Income and Expenditure 31.07.20 – 18.12.21

	Expenditure	Income
Deputy conference 2020	£8,206.00	£0.00
Headteacher conference 2021	£5,700.00	£0.00
Totals	£13,906.00	£0.00

Please note that the income and expenditure relates to this 4 month period, and therefore doesn't record the overall income and expenditure for each event. The conferences are currently being offered as free events as they are being held online. Therefore there has been a significant reduction in the balance of the conference account – this time a year ago the balance was £31,565.78. However, the current account balance is higher – this time a year ago the balance was £218,959.02. In effect the current account is currently subsidising the conference account.

Bank statements for account 00795978

01.07.20 £27,317.20

18.12.20 £13,411.20

iv) Feedback from headteacher representatives

Small Schools Strategy

George Athanasiou noted that the meetings are generally useful, but there have been none held since the last meeting.

v) Schools Forum report

The EPHA Chair noted that she, Sue Bardetti, Richard Green and the Professional Officer had attended meetings of the Schools Forum in December and January. Yannick Stupples-Whyley, the Senior Finance Manager, was attending the Executive meeting with LA Officers and would give an update on school funding decisions.

7. MATTERS TO BE RAISED WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Issues as noted above:

- Half term arrangements
- Headteacher wellbeing and link with governors
- The future of Ofsted, SATs, assessment.
- Vaccines and testing
- EHCPs
- Welfare checks
- Attendance in schools
- Support from SEPs
- Possible support with Test and Trace during holidays
- Admissions
- Teaching awards

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nick Hutchings, EPHA Vice-Chair thanked the EPHA Chair for her hard work and continued commitment to the Association and to fellow headteachers.

9. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2020/21 and 2021/22 SCHOOL YEAR

Executive meetings

Thursday 29 April 2021

Thursday 30 September 2021

Thursday 20 January 2022

Thursday 5 May 2022

Area Heads Meetings

Autumn term 2020

N-EAST Wednesday 11 November virtual meeting

SOUTH Thursday 12 November virtual meeting

WEST Wednesday 18 November virtual meeting

MID Thursday 19 November

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

Conferences

Headteachers' Conference

Friday 19 March 2021 online

Deputy Headteachers' Conference

Friday 8 October 2021 Weston Community Homes Stadium

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Harriet Phelps-Knights
Chair of EPHA

Pam Langmead
EPHA Professional Officer