

Professional Officer Report for EPHA Annual General Meeting 2025

In January 2025 I reached a significant personal milestone – 20 years working for EPHA (and yes, this time I really did!). When I started I was working as a clerk for ECC and for some time simply attended meetings, taking the minutes.

Forgive this unusually long report, but I thought you might find it interesting to read some of the highlights and changes in education and the LA, and the progress of EPHA in the last two decades.

In **2005**, Ruth Brock was the EPHA Chair, Carey Bennet was the Head of Schools, and Alison Fiala was the Principal Primary Adviser. There were just 14 headteachers on the EPHA Executive, and engagement at meetings across the county was relatively poorly attended. This was the year that a new structure of meetings was introduced, with both input from EPHA and the LA, with input from Area Steering Groups.

In **2006** there was an excellent example of “nothing is ever new in education”. A minute at a meeting with the LA reads: “Serious concerns were expressed about the introduction of the on-line School Profile. The EPHA Executive fed back views from headteachers who felt that the timeframe was unacceptable and that the pre-populated data could be misinterpreted by parents.”

At that meeting it was also noted: “The meeting discussed the recent funding miscalculation which has resulted in schools having to return an amount of their budget allocation.”

That went down really well, as you can imagine!

EPHA ran a headteacher conference, and the first Deputy Heads conference, which both continue to be very popular. In July, Dawn Dack was elected EPHA Chair.

In **2007** EPHA developed the EPHA and Partners Collaborative, and appointed Maggie Owens to lead on this. The LA introduced School Improvement Partners in schools (formerly Schools Development Advisers). The EPHA subscription was £100 at this point (most schools paid!)

2008 Terry Reynolds was appointed Director for Learning. The EPHA website was created, meaning that information and minutes were no longer published on the Infolink and creating a really helpful resource for headteachers.

2009 Claire Claydon took over as the Chair of EPHA (Dawn left headship for a stint at the LA). I was “promoted” to EPHA Manager (previously admin assistant)! The EPC was disbanded as no longer financially viable, and Maggie Owens left the Association.

2010 Mike Blant was appointed as the EPHA Liaison Officer, mainly representing EPHA at a raft of LA meetings. The Executive discussed the intention of some schools to boycott the 2010 SATs tests, following notice from the NUT and the NAHT that they will be recommending that their members on the leadership spine take industrial action by refusing to administer Key Stage 2 tests. Terry Reynolds reminded heads that they would be in breach of contract if they did so!

South headteachers were “enjoying” their meetings at The Belvedere. (Our worst ever venue? – there have been some strong contenders!). The Conservative Government was elected and introduced an expectation that all schools would become academies.

2011 Karen Springett was elected EPHA Chair. At the AGM, Mike Blant reported that “*So far, 32 Essex primary schools have become, or are in the process of becoming academies. This represents about 6.5% of all Essex primary schools. Around 50% of secondary schools have, or are, converting.*”

The EPHA subscription increased to £120 per school.

Helen Lincoln was appointed as Director for Children’s Social Care.

2012 Tim Coulson was appointed ECC Director for Education and Learning. The EPHA Chair reported record levels of dissatisfaction from headteachers, frustrated by a fast changing system:

“The main themes of concern were:

- *Ofsted - including quality assurance of Inspectors and who do we turn to when we get ‘the phone call’?*
- *Academies – including forced academies and the myths surrounding academy status; Academy status in Basildon*
- *SEN funding and the provision of EP's*
- *Desktop RAG exercise for 'satisfactory' schools*
- *Head and staff morale*
- *Commissioning of LA support (and the withdrawal and replacement of staff)*
- *SEN comparative data withdrawal*
- *NQT provision and training*
- *UPS 2 and 3 - how to ‘up the workload’ of longstanding UPS2's and UPS3's*
- *Capital building projects and reduced budgets*
- *IRT and social care service*

Having taken these concerns and worries to Tim Coulson, I am saddened to report that I have not had a satisfactory reply to any of them.”

2013 Harriet Phelps-Knights took over as Chair of EPHA. At the AGM she reported that the relationship between EPHA and the Local Authority “seems to be quite strong at the moment”, helped by Tim Coulson’s keenness to communicate regularly with EPHA Executive officers, for example through a regular meeting at the beginning of each term. Harriet also noted that the LA seems to be accepting the need to focus on headteacher well-being, for example through introducing and promoting Headspace, a well-being and support programme for headteachers.

EES (Essex Education Services) was established, offering traded services rather than in-house.

2014 The shape of the termly headteacher meetings changed, with the LA requesting that their input was scheduled at the beginning of the day. Tim Coulson left Essex and Chris Kiernan stepped in as Interim Director of Learning and Education.

A review of ESS was carried out, and feedback from headteachers noted: The following comments were made about the services:

Headteachers were universally appreciative of Human Resources, but did note that whilst initial advice and support was always good, sometimes HR seems to lose its nerve when seeing through difficult cases. Action, for example against failing teachers, can therefore take longer than it should. Payroll was described as “disastrous”, with numerous and frequent mistakes. It was feared that this service will get worse in the autumn term when varied pay for teachers is introduced.

2015 Clare Kershaw took over from Chris Kiernan appointed as Interim Director of Commissioning, Education and Lifelong Learning.

2016 Nigel Hookway was appointed as the EPHA Executive Director following a restructure of the EPHA Leadership Team. I was “promoted” to Professional Officer.

EPHA achieved the Schools Forum agreement for top slicing schools contribution which has made collection of subscriptions easier and more consistent. The funding contribution was set at £320 per school. At the AGM Harriet reported that: *“We have raised the profile of EPHA further with the establishment of a corporate image with our new logo and website launch this term, which has been a positive addition to the organisation.”*

The termly headteacher briefings were introduced for all schools (having been delivered for a couple of years to the Chelmsford Education Partnership). Thousands of headteachers have been tormented over the years by the termly do-list.

School Led Improvement Partnerships were introduced, replacing the Local Delivery Group system.

2017 The 7-minute staff meetings were introduced. EPHA also started to offer regular free training sessions, including Coaching for the Soul, and RAISEonline training (remember that?!)

2018 Low points of the year included the School Broadband debacle and the introduction of GDPR! Nigel Hookway retired from EPHA and the leadership group restructured once again. His responsibilities passed to the Professional Officer.

2019 Juniper Education took over EES. Ofsted introduced a new Inspection Framework. More positively, EPHA introduced the Colleague Support programme.

2020 The Essex Payroll system “novated” to Juniper. Oh, and we had a pandemic! The EPHA conference was cancelled at the very last minute as we all went in to lockdown – although schools stayed open. Meetings and conferences moved online and we all became very familiar with Zoom and Teams!

2021 The pandemic continued and Ofsted returned. *“Nearly 19 months ago, midway through March 2020, none of us could have anticipated the impact and challenges that a global pandemic was about to unleash on the whole of society, both personally and professionally. However, Essex primary, junior and infant schools have soldiered on throughout, and have managed – somehow – to get to grips with constantly changing (and sometimes, downright confusing) operational and educational guidance. Schools enjoyed a brief respite from the stress of the Ofsted call and SATs, but these are now back with a vengeance, alongside the continued challenges of Covid-19. EPHA is well aware that it is NOT YET “business as usual” and recognises the stresses as well as the joys of primary headship.”*

2022 Schools returned to “near” normal, but EPHA recognised the toll that the last couple of years had taken on headteachers. We continued to develop wellbeing support, including subsidising a number of programmes and support for heads. The Small Schools Support Group was established in March 2022 and continues to give those headteachers a voice and recognition of the challenges that they face.

2023 EPHA held its first Small Schools Headteacher conference, which was very well received. It has become a firm annual fixture in the calendar for small school heads. The other conferences we run continue to be very popular and we regularly have around 200+ delegates at both the Head and Deputy annual conferences. The 2023/24 school year started with a new and unexpected challenge for schools, the discovery of RAAC, and the part (or, in one case, total), closure of schools. This has been exceptionally difficult for headteachers who have had to manage this in their schools.

2024 The EPHA contribution was increased to £400 per school/academy. We are aware that we are very well funded, particularly in comparison to some other headteachers associations across the country, but hope and believe that EPHA gives good value for money, and essential support to primary headteachers.

2025 EPHA joined the newly established National Head Teachers’ Association, and hopes to gain from working with other like-minded colleagues across the country.

EPHA takes the wellbeing of Essex primary, infant and junior heads very seriously and our main aim is to support them through the work of the association; my role as Professional Officer is as busy as

ever and, I hope, has added value for headteachers and their schools during this year. We have responded to the increased number of complaints and exclusions by providing advice and support, including offering free training, and I have extended the termly briefings to governors, partly intended to ensure that governors realise the extent of the role of headteacher.

I believe that EPHA offers real value when we can offer free resources that save individual headteachers time and energy, allowing them to focus on leading their schools effectively; for example, I have updated and recorded a new version of the safeguarding training for governors at the beginning of the autumn term 2025, along with updated safeguarding resources based on the new version of KCSiE.

As always, the headteacher briefings continue to be key part of my role, taking up lots of time in the first few weeks of each term, delivered as a mix of online or in-person meetings, depending on the preference of each partnership. I am delivering the briefings to 27 clusters across the county, plus an “overspill” meeting for those who can’t attend a local meeting, as well as the governor briefing. I have calculated (very approximately) that about 360 headteachers across the county (and beyond!) attend these briefings; that’s a lot of people wading their way through the “do-list” each term!

I attend numerous meetings on behalf of EPHA, as detailed in my termly report to the Executive. In addition to attendance at those meetings, my work for the Association has included:

- Information, emails and communications with all headteachers;
- Advice to headteachers, clerks and governors, particularly in relation to complaints, exclusions, headteacher recruitment and where to access support for a range of issues;
- 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 and capacity support opportunities;
- Briefings to headteacher groups – 27 partnerships/clusters hold termly briefings – researching and writing briefing notes and presentations –and keeping them up to date as new directives, guidance and documents are introduced;
- Termly online education briefing to governors, based on the headteacher briefing notes;
- Managing the Small Schools Support Group, running those meetings, planning October conference;
- Facilitating the Small Schools Governor group and organising and running future meetings;
- Working with the National Head Teachers’ Association Network, on their administration group, liaising with Schools Week;
- Writing and delivering training to governors and clerks, focused on exclusions and complaints;
- Planning and organising Deputy Headteacher conference, EPHA wellbeing conference and WEPHA conference;
- Planning Headteacher conference;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Writing new 7 minute safeguarding staff meetings (Hate Crime, and Misogyny) and updating existing material;
- Writing the support for headship paper;

- Organisation and management of the area meetings in the spring and summer terms;
- Managing requests for headteacher wellbeing support;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), supporting area treasurers, producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Updating EPHA records and website;
- Other tasks as required.

As ever, it is a great privilege to work for and support primary-phase headteachers in Essex and a particular thank you to the EPHA Chairs and the Executive for being a joy to work with.

Thank you all for your friendship, and for leading our schools so wonderfully.

I look forward to the future supporting EPHA – perhaps not another 20 years, but it has been a blast!

Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer, October 2025