

## **Professional Officer Report for EPHA Annual General Meeting 2026**

Much of the 2025/2026 school year was taken up with trying to fathom out the proposals to reorganise the Greater Essex two-tier authority system. In March the Government announced that it was “minded to” adopt a 5 unitary authority structure, getting rid of the existing 15 councils. We were looking at the demise of both ECC, and possibly EPHA, in 2028, and trying to work out the future became a distracting priority for all. Then, much to everyone’s surprise, and our relief, the new Andy Burnham Government announced that the proposal would be paused, if not scrapped entirely.

### **EPHA lives to fight another day.**

Notwithstanding all of that, the year was as demanding as ever for school leaders, and I think it is fair to say that managing pupils with SEND and complex needs continues to be one of the greatest challenges, impacting schools in numerous ways, including adding to the pressure on budgets and staff. Heads are also managing extremely difficult complaints from parents, plus a number of suspensions and permanent exclusions. All of these issues take time and knowledge, and can be very demanding. All that, and a bewildering number of new initiatives and requirements – at times, the pace of change feels overwhelming for schools.

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. We have responded to the increased number of complaints and exclusions by providing training and support, including offering free training to staff and governors. Courses this year have included training on “managing complaints”, “suspensions and permanent exclusions”, the “governors role in the new Ofsted framework”, and “how to support your headteacher” – a really important topic.

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. In addition, I also run a termly session for governors, with about 380 on the email group, and now deliver the termly briefing for the Essex Clerks’ Association. 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 2026, along with updated safeguarding resources based on the new version of KCSiE.

The EPHA Colleague Supporter programme continues to support headteachers across the county. At the time of writing I am arranging Colleague Support for the new headteachers and heads of schools who have taken up posts this term – there are around 45 new heads and many of them are brand new to headship and/or Essex. Thank you to those serving headteachers who continue to give their time and expertise to the programme.

The “Seven-minute staff meetings” remain popular with headteachers and school leaders. Although they mainly focus on safeguarding issues, they also include topics such as data protection and Ofsted; recent subjects have included a focus on the gender questioning guidance set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education.

The Small Schools Support Group has gone from strength to strength and offers small school headteachers support, information and resources, such as paid-for membership of NASS (National Association of Small Schools) and also access to FundEd. The Small Schools Support Group comprised of around 60 headteachers in schools with fewer than 120 pupils. We hold two meetings a term, and are running our fourth conference in October, following a very successful and popular event last year.

The meetings focus on the particular challenges that small schools face, but we also aim to celebrate the positive aspect of these schools and offer support and a network for these headteachers. In addition, I run a small school governors' network, and they meet online twice a term to discuss the challenges they face and to share good practice. Last year's themes for discussion included SEND, Local Government Reorganisation, and succession planning; we start this term with a focus on effective headteacher performance management.

Our annual conferences for Headteachers and Deputies continue to be very popular and the conference in March was extremely well attended; these are definitely a highlight in the year for school leaders.

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;
- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise, particularly around complaints, exclusions and other challenges;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme and capacity support opportunities;
- Termly briefings to headteacher groups, governors and clerks;
- Managing the Small Schools Support Group, running those meetings, planning the annual conferences, managing the governor network;
- Writing and delivering training to governors and staff;
- Planning, organising and running the conferences during the year;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Organisation and management of the area meetings;
- 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 the website;
- Other tasks as required.

As ever, it is a great privilege to work for and support primary-phase headteachers in Essex and I look forward to another busy year in 2026/27.

*Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer, October 2026*