

## **1. Essex Countywide Traveller Unit**

The Cabinet has received an update on the development and funding arrangements for the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU) partnership and has agreed to enter into Joint Committee arrangements with partner authorities across Essex.

Establishment of the Unit had been agreed by the Cabinet at a previous meeting on the basis that it would be mutually beneficial to all partner agencies and would deliver an efficient, effective, economic and consistent approach to traveller service provision across Essex and provide interaction with and inclusion of the traveller and settled communities.

The Joint Committee will be a partnership of local authorities within Essex, comprising representatives of the City, Borough, District and Unitary Councils and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. The Unit will also have the benefit of working with the Essex Police Authority/Essex Police and Crime Commissioner and Essex Primary Care Trusts, which will work with the Joint Committee and contribute financially but will not be a voting member.

The key areas of activity for the ECTU will include:

- Improving fire safety on sites;
- Improving education outcomes;
- Improving health and social care outcomes;
- Management of local authority sites;
- Managing unauthorised encampments;
- Reducing the risk of unauthorised developments; and
- Providing outreach services to authorised sites not under ECC site management.

Essex County Council will act as host Council for the Unit, and will be responsible through its officers for the operational requirements of performing the functions of the Joint Committee.

### **Recommended:**

That the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee be included under Paragraph 13.3 (Executive Functions) of the Constitution as a joint body exercising Executive Functions in accordance with the agreement currently in operation.

## **2. 2011-12 Annual Report**

The Cabinet has received the Council's Annual Report for 2011/12, the key purpose of which is to show where the Council spent taxpayers' money during the year, demonstrate achievements in delivering against the EssexWorks priorities, show the impact of those achievements and identify where future focus on improvement is needed.

Key achievements centred upon reducing costs while working more efficiently, providing a safe and stable environment for children and young people, supporting economic growth and maximising opportunities and strengthening partnership working to deliver better integrated services. In addition, the Council had made significant progress in improving corporate governance, and had received recognition for its efforts by the Audit Commission.

In considering the Annual Report, the Cabinet emphasised that the Council's strict control of its finances had made it possible to maintain services and make improvements in some areas. Members were also pleased to note that the Council had delivered on nine of the ten EssexWorks pledges, with reporting on the tenth still awaited, and congratulated the Chief Executive and her staff on achieving this in challenging financial circumstances.

### 3. Economic Growth Strategy

The Cabinet has approved the Essex Economic Growth Strategy.

The Strategy sets out the Council's economic vision for the County and outlines how we will work with partners to unlock growth now, secure jobs and earnings tomorrow and create the conditions for long term economic growth and strengthening communities.

Its vision statement affirms that:

"Essex is an economically vibrant and successful entrepreneurial County. Our **economic vision** is of a county where businesses and our residents can grow and fulfil their potential, making Essex the best place to live and work."

Delivery of the Strategy will be supported by a supplementary Implementation Plan (to be prepared) which will inform the Council's work programme and start to exemplify tangible benefits related to the proposed actions.

All of the proposals in the Economic Growth Strategy are designed to achieve five objectives:

- to enable Essex businesses to be more productive, innovate and grow, creating jobs for the Essex economy;
- to enable Essex businesses to compete and trade internationally;
- to help individuals to prepare for and access better paid jobs through an education and skills offer that meets the needs of our businesses;

- the life chances of people in the most deprived areas are improved by ensuring that residents are able to access jobs and public services; and
- securing the highways, infrastructure and environment to enable businesses to grow.

The Cabinet welcomed the Strategy, noting the significant work that would be required in its implementation and delivery, and thanked all who had been involved in producing it.

#### **4. Country Parks Strategy**

Following a review of country parks, the Cabinet has approved the advertisement for bids for a commercial lease of Marsh Farm to be run as a family visitor attraction and the advertisement of opportunities for partnership working by way of a service contract or concession at Cressing Temple Barns heritage site. The land surrounding Marsh Farm visitor attraction and the entire Cressing Temple Barns site will remain under the management and in the ownership of Essex County Council.

Marsh Farm Visitor attraction and Cressing Temple Barns are two of nine sites in the Essex County Council Country Parks estate. They provide different customer services and attractions when compared with the other country parks.

Marsh Farm visitor attraction consists of a working farm with a small shop and tea room and outdoor and indoor play areas. It is visited by in excess of 110,000 visitors a year and won the Farm Visitor Attraction of the Year Award in 2011. In 2010/11 the Council invested substantially in the visitor attraction - this level of investment is needed on an ongoing regular basis to provide value for money and keep up with competitors.

Cressing Temple Barns is a small scale visitor attraction, welcoming in excess of 47,000 people every year. The site covers about 10 hectares, including the 11th century barns, walled garden, a conference room and meeting rooms, shop, tearoom and farm house. Cressing Temple is a scheduled monument and the barns are Grade I and II listed buildings. Cressing Temple has various sources of income including hiring of rooms, "Tudor" event days for schools and public, larger scale events including Car Shows and Food Fairs, along with some private hires for weddings and other functions. Compared to similar venues this site is not achieving its full potential. Any proposals for the future management and operation of the site must be handled sensitively in line with the degree of protection the site is under.

The Cabinet noted that, for each site, the review had considered the possibility of a lease, service contract or concessions, with the lease option and the service contract or concession options being the recommended approaches for Marsh Farm and Cressing Temple Barns respectively.

In agreeing the recommended options, the Cabinet acknowledged that a scrutiny task and finish group had been consulted as part of the review process.

## 5. Community Asset Transfer Policy

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is the process by which smaller parcels of land and assets held by Essex County Council (ECC) are transferred to local community groups. This has the advantage of empowering the community (in line with the Government's Localism agenda) and also in reducing the on-going maintenance costs to the Council where there is limited medium or longer term use of the asset proposed.

ECC recognises the opportunity through CAT to empower the County's third sector and strengthen the wider community in line with the Council's strategic aims at the same time as minimising its future financial liability. The Cabinet has agreed to adopt a formal policy to support and facilitate the transfer of property to the third sector.

The policy has been drawn up in accordance with a number of principles identified by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme and the Cabinet Member for Localism and Planning. It sets out the basis on which an asset will be transferred and adopts a different approach for different sized organisations:

- For Parish Councils and large charities (those with turnover of more than £1m p.a.) the asset will be transferred on a freehold basis. A clawback of 75% would apply in the event of redevelopment.
- For all other groups the asset will be transferred with a Leasehold interest of up to 999 years.

The criteria for the transfer of an asset are that:

- The asset is not required for ECC's operational purposes or for the delivery of another ECC strategy (such as the property transformation agenda), and has been declared surplus to requirements;
- The asset has a value of £50,000 or less (current use value);
- Assets with a current use value of over £50,000 (and where eligibility criteria are met as set out in sections 2 and 3 of the Policy Paper "Essex County Council Community Asset Transfer") could be acquired by Groups using the existing ECC Assisted Purchase Scheme, whereby a Group may purchase the asset at market value subject to a discount of 25% to a maximum discount of £80,000;
- A clear business case to establish the running and use of the asset is provided by the Group;
- No dowry will be provided to the Group by ECC nor improvements made to the asset prior to transfer;

- The Group would meet their and ECC's reasonable legal and surveying costs; and
- No on-going support would be provided by ECC, but this would not restrict the Group from applying for any funding or commissioning opportunities that may emerge.

This approach provides a balance between protecting ECC's interests and empowering the community to take over and run the smaller assets that are currently held by ECC. A process for assessing applications was outlined in the policy provided as an appendix to the Cabinet report.

Assets could end up in the ownership of bodies which operated outside of Essex, although this is most likely with the big national charities. ECC could add additional protections into the lease or transfer documentation of non-Essex based organisations (say for example that they would need to ensure a level of access for Essex residents) if required. This will be considered on a case by case basis and appropriate protections put in place.

Each individual CAT would be the subject of a decision taken by the Cabinet Member responsible for property (currently the Deputy Leader).

## **6. Tender for Adult Mental Health Formal Advocacy Service**

Advocacy empowers people to have their voices heard and improve their use and experience of services. The current working age adult mental health advocacy services in Essex, funded by both health and social care, are provided by seven voluntary organisations. They have developed piecemeal and there is a variation in cost and delivery that needs to be addressed. In addition, there is a separate contract for advocacy within Adult Social Care that does not include working age adult mental health.

Cabinet has agreed to an open tender process for working age mental health formal advocacy services across Essex for a period of 12 months, to commence on 1 April 2013. This interim arrangement will allow time for commissioners to address the inconsistencies in the current advocacy contracts, realise savings and align working age adult mental health formal advocacy with Adult Social Care advocacy in future.

## **7. Award of Contracts – Education and Social Care Transport and Domiciliary Reablement Services**

Following successful tender processes, Cabinet has agreed to award contracts for the provision of Education and Social Care Transport (various providers) and for Domiciliary Reablement Services (Essex Cares). The process in respect of Education and Social Care Transport will result in efficiency savings of £1.766m.

Peter Martin  
Leader of the Council