
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Wednesday, 13 November 2019

Present:

Cllr Godfrey Isaacs
Cllr Colin Day
Cllr Mark Durham
Cllr Rob Gledhill
Cllr Chris Hossack
Cllr Wendy Schmitt
Cllr Jannetta Sosin
Moir Bruin

Castle Point District Council (Chairman)
Uttlesford District Council
Maldon District Council
Thurrock Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Chelmsford City Council
Essex Fire & Rescue Service

Also present:

Steve Andrews
Adrian Coggins
Lisa Nicholls
Colin Bachelor
Donna Burnett
Suzanne Harris
Matthew Waldie

Essex County Council
Essex County Council
Essex County Council
Braintree District Council
Thurrock Council
Office of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner
Essex County Council

1 Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

Apologies had been received from Cllr Susan Barker (Essex), Cllr Paul Honeywood (Tendring), Cllr Keith Parker (Brentwood), substituted by Cllr Hossack, Cllr Mike Webb (Rochford), substituted by Cllr Butcher, and CI Terry Balding (Essex Police).

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Public speaking

There were no public speakers.

4 Finance update

The Committee received a financial report from Lisa Nicholls, Finance Business Partner, ECC.

1. **2018/19 outturn position.** Based on the actuals at 30 September 2019, Members noted a £19,725 forecast surplus on net expenditure for the 2019/20 financial year, which was a favourable variance of £5,799 on the budget figure. It was noted that these figures were based on a 2% increase in fees from the districts/boroughs (as

agreed at the June 2019 meeting) and an extra £20,000 from the County Council.

2. **Budget for 2019/2020 and future years.** The budgeted surplus for 2019/20 was £13,925, and this would decrease to £11,170 in 2020/21 and £8,155 in 2021/22, at present membership rates.
3. **Membership fees.** A rise in membership fees was proposed. Members considered three options – 1% (actual increase £81), 2% (£163) or 2.8% (£228).

There was some debate on this matter. It was noted that the unpredictability of either what might be required of the Unit each year, or how much might be carried out in each district, made it hard to match funding precisely with actual expenditure in any forthcoming year. Although there was general agreement that the fees represented good value for money, in the package of activities undertaken by the Unit, and that at each meeting the Committee had received information on the Unit's activities, it was suggested that more financial information should be made available to Committee members. Consequently, it was **agreed** that each future report should include a breakdown of operating costs and how financial resources had been used.

Option 2, the preferred option, was proposed, seconded and agreed by Members. Each Member would have to have this raise ratified by their own authority.

4. **Balance Sheet – Reserves.** The potential impact of an agreed 2% increase in fees for 2020/21 on the reserves figures was noted – raising the surplus from £92,281 for 2019/20, to £103,451 (2020/21) to £111,606 (2021/22).

In response to some questioning of the level of the reserve, Members were reminded that the target level was three months' operating costs for the Unit (almost £100,000), and that the unforeseeable events of a very busy year could make enormous demands on the Unit's resources.

5 **High level risk assessment**

Mr Andrews drew Members' attention to the risk assessment, as circulated. He confirmed that he had downgraded the likelihood rating of both Risk 2, Insufficient funding to deliver service, and Risk 5, Insufficient partner buy in/funding to deliver service, to 1. Otherwise, the assessment values were as circulated.

The Committee noted the report.

6 **Membership status**

Mr Andrews confirmed there was no change in the membership of the Joint Committee, with all but three authorities (Epping Forest, Harlow and

Southend) signed up; and no change was expected in the foreseeable future.

Signed agreements were outstanding for three members: Basildon, Brentwood and Essex. It was hoped the processing of these could be expedited.

Members noted the situation.

7

Operations performance update - key issues

The Committee received an update from Mr Andrews, as per the circulated report, and he responded to questions raised by Members.

Fire safety:

- 532 smoke alarms have been issued; these come from the Fire Service, free of charge. CO alarms would need to be purchased and are not issued at present. However, the Unit is looking into the possibility of purchasing these to issue; and residents are encouraged to acquire their own
- Mr Andrews agreed to produce some statistics relating to levels of risk that have been recorded during site visits
- It was noted that any representations to residents could only be made on an advisory basis, as the Fire Brigade had jurisdiction in respect of commercial premises but not domestic ones (unless in case of an actual fire)
- In response to a request, Mr Andrews **agreed** to send Cllr Gledhill details on the Unit's work in Thurrock in respect of Fire
- The Fire Safety performance figures were noted.

Public Health:

- As well as supporting the specific objectives listed in the report, there are several other issues that arise because officers are on site, such as those relating to mental health. The Unit also continues to facilitate joint visits by other agencies who might have difficulty getting access to the Traveller community
- Nearly doubling the number of events compared to 2018 has led to some new venues being visited. A particularly good outcome has been the response to a visit to the Hovefields Avenue site in Basildon. This had been considered a potentially challenging site but has resulted in positive response from a good number of adult males – historically a difficult group to engage with – and this has led to several being referred to GPs
- Funding has been secured for the SOS Bus, to visit the Hovefields and Oak Lane sites every two weeks for a year; it was hoped this will be extended to weekly for 3 years
- The first aid training was focused on the likely wounds that the Traveller community might encounter. These included some

techniques that could be extended to horses, which had drawn in several younger males

- With regard to funding, it was noted that a large percentage of it came from the public health line, which formed part of the County Council's contribution. Mr Andrews suggested that a lot of it was included in the staff costs, but Mr Coggins pointed out that the Unit's highly skilled and motivated staff covered a lot of areas, and it was important to strike a balance, utilising the skills of other agencies appropriately
- It was also noted that the Unit comprised 5 outreach officers, 3 office staff, some of whom also visit sites on occasion, plus Mr Andrews as manager.

Education:

- A good number of children have been helped in their education, by assisting them through the process of applications into school, from school to school and into further education
- The Chairman emphasised the importance of education and specifically praised the Unit for its work in this sphere.

Unauthorised encampments:

- The downward trend has continued, with a return to pre-2015 numbers. Mr Andrews could not suggest any particular reason for this but added that it was reflected across the Eastern region. He did point out that the arrival of one family travelling/staying in Essex can send the numbers up significantly
- It was noted that the Police Unit was now called the Rural Engagement Team, which had a broader brief than just dealing with the Traveller community. It was currently staffed by 7 officers but the aim, by the end of the financial year, was to raise this to 12, including two sergeants
- Public consultation on the Government's intended legislative changes to criminalise trespass or enhance Police powers on moving people on has now opened, with a closing date of March 2020. In response to the Chairman's request, Mr Andrews **agreed** to circulate the relevant documentation to Members, to assist them, should they wish to make representations.

Injunctions

- It was noted that Thurrock would decide on whether to proceed with a full application, depending on the result of the Bromley Appeal, which would be heard in early December
- Cllr Gledhill suggested that there might have been some reticence on the part of his local Police to enforce an injunction and he wished to ensure this was not repeated in future. The Chairman pointed out that this was an operational matter but it was **agreed** that this

concern should be channelled in the appropriate direction, through the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

8 ECC/ECTU Review

Mr Coggins provided an update.

Essex County Council has been looking to establish its best role in respect of all the parties involved. It acknowledged the work of the Unit on the ground, dealing with immediate issues, but a more strategic view of the issues was required, as long-term outcomes in the areas of health and education were much worse for the Traveller community.

There was a need to work with other agencies to improve these outcomes, eg with the NHS, Public Health England and other parts of the ECC, such as Schools Admissions.

Two questions that need to be addressed are

- What outcomes do we want?
- Who is best placed to deliver these?

The Leader has agreed that this process should involve engaging with the subscribing authorities at the highest level and Mr Coggins intends to visit each of these and meet with the CEO/relevant Cabinet Member. The County Council cannot take a unilateral view but must act in conjunction with all other stakeholders.

Mt Coggins expects to produce a report in the spring, when it will be submitted to the normal scrutiny, review and governance processes.

The Chairman echoed these views on how all stakeholders would have to work together. He added that should there was a need to be respectful to all parties.

9 Dates of meetings in 2020

The two meeting dates for next year would be circulated in due course. They were likely to be in either May or June and November.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.35 am

Chairman