

Briefing note 'The Countywide Strategy on Gypsy and Traveller Groups'
- Place Services and Economic Growth Policy & Scrutiny
Committee

Author - Steve Andrews, ECTU Manager



AGENDA ITEM 7 PSEGC/17/17

Introduction

This report provides background information in support of the Place Services Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee session on 21st September to discuss the Countywide Strategy on Gypsy and Traveller Groups. The report provides information against the four elements suggested by the Chairman of the Committee:

- Current policies and strategies for the county which relate to Travellers with the aim of improving outcomes for the Traveller community; and this issue in relation to the strategic priorities of the council
- Good practice examples
- Any consultation with stakeholders and partners (including the two UAs)
- Engagement with Traveller and settled communities

Current policies and strategies for the county which relate to Travellers with the aim of improving outcomes for the Traveller community

The **Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU)** was established/launched in October 2012. It is a partnership operation, working under a joint committee arrangement, and funded by its members contributions. Although hosted by Essex County Council (ECC), it is an external small body; hence its operation/budget etc falls under the control of the joint committee.

It was initially set-up under a 3 year joint committee agreement, with founder members including 7 district / borough / unitary' s, Essex Police, incl. an appointed officer, Essex Fire & Rescue, Public Health and ECC's Education and Adult Social Care. The arrangement was renewed in November 2015, for a 3.5 year period and membership has expanded to include 11 of the 14 Essex authorities/unitary (see table on page 2 for full list of members).

History – previous to the setting up of the ECTU, ECC had a Gypsy and Travellers Services, which managed the then 11 permanent caravan sites, and unauthorised encampments on ECC land. It was recognised, that there were significant inequalities experienced by the Gypsy/Traveller (GT) communities, even more so for those not on an ECC sites which benefitted from site manager support. This was reflected in terms of access to key services including health –shorter life expectancy, higher infant mortality rate etc, education – significantly lower attainment, social care, fire safety support etc, and being a highly vulnerable, difficult to access group. In addition, there was significant duplication/ inconsistencies/lack of continuity in the management of unauthorised encampments across Essex, as a group moving through would be greeted by a different set of officers/policies in each authority area. With the creation of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit, we have been able to go some way to addressing these issues.

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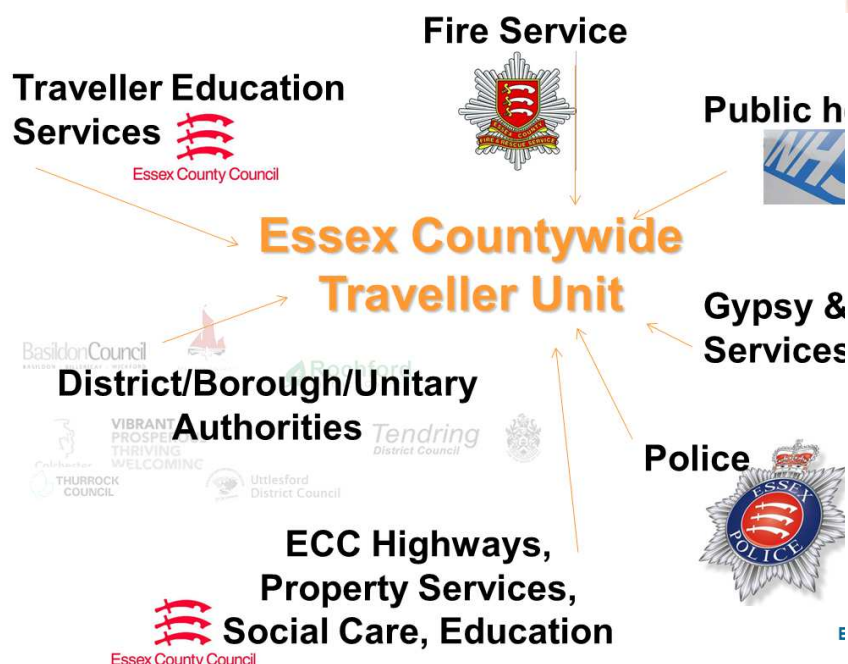


Fig 1. ECTU partner diagram

ECTU Partners

Basildon Borough Council
 Braintree District Council
 Brentwood Borough Council
 Castle Point Borough Council
 Chelmsford City Council
 Colchester Borough Council
 Maldon District Council
 Rochford District Council
 Tendring District Council
 Thurrock Council – Unitary
 Uttlesford District Council
 Essex Fire & Rescue Service
 Essex Police
 Essex Public Health
 Essex County Council – Highways
 Essex County Council – Property Services
 Essex County Council – Country Parks
 Essex County Council – Education
 Essex County Council – Adult Social Care
 Essex County Council – Site Management

Non partners

Epping Forest District Council
 Harlow District Council
 Southend on Sea Borough Council

Funding/structure

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Although operating as a single unit, the site management function is outside of the joint committee structure, hence the associated budget remains part of ECC and not partnership funding. Due to previous issues re accounting processes, the site management budget makes a significant contribution towards ECTU, which we are seeking to rectify in 2018/19 budgets.

The team consists of 7.7 FTE, with some positions* jointly funded through ECTU partnership and ECC site management functions – site managers are exclusively funded by the site management function. The size of the team has been maintained since launch despite significant increases in workload/demand.

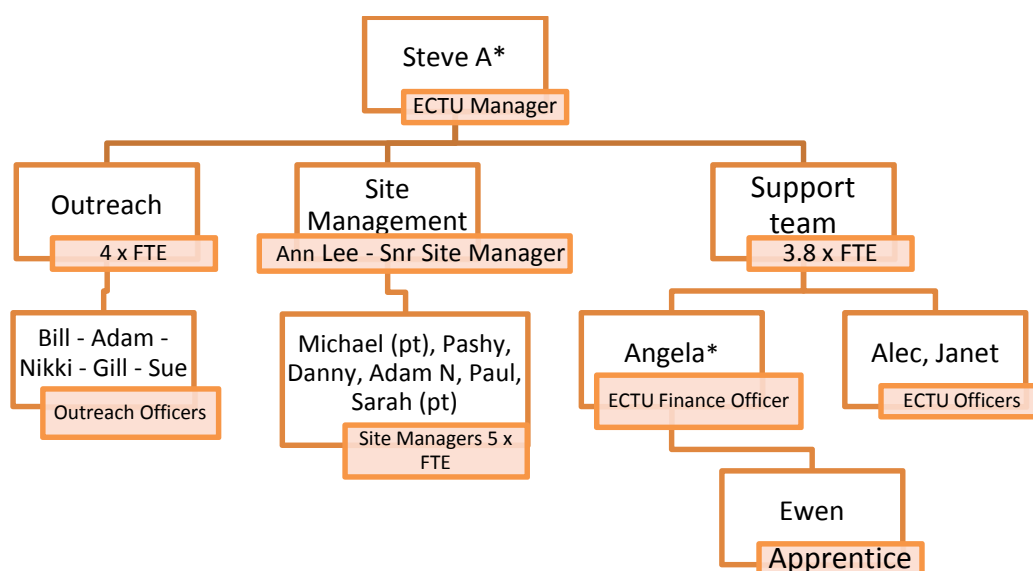


Fig 2. ECTU structure chart

The outreach team collectively cover Health, Welfare and Education outreach, Fire Safety and the management of unauthorised encampments, plus enforcement when required on the ECC sites.

In addition to their normal duties, site managers also support Health, Welfare and Education outreach on their respective sites.

Strategy

The overarching strategy agreed by the Joint Committee is:-

- to ensure services provided to meet the needs of the Gypsy/Traveller community in Essex are provided in a non-discriminatory way and take account of cultural requirements;
- to flexibly plan to meet the future needs of Gypsy/Traveller community members in Essex, particularly in relation to ensuring positive outcomes for children and families;

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- to improve access to local services for the Gypsy/Traveller community in Essex including Fire Safety, Health, Education, Social Care, Support etc.;
- Ensure a consistent and robust Essex-wide approach for the management of unauthorised encampments;
- to inform and educate Gypsy/Travellers travelling through Essex, and on permanent sites, of expected levels of behaviour to minimise negative impact on stakeholders/ the settled community;
- to raise awareness amongst staff in partner organisations and elected members of issues which impact on Gypsy/Travellers locally, including cultural awareness training; and
- to promote positive images of Gypsy/Travellers in local media and to wider community where possible.

Operational policy is covered through the “Schedule of Functions” as part of the Joint Committee Agreements. The headlines of which are:-

The Essex Countywide Travellers Unit (ECTU) will undertake the following activities within the Gypsy/Traveller Community:

- *Fire safety inspections/advice on sites*
- *Improving education access/outcomes*
- *Improving Health and social care access/outcomes*
- *Management of ECC local authority sites*
- *Management of Unauthorised encampments on partner land*

The full Schedule of Functions is provided for information at **Appendix 1**.

The issues in relation to the strategic priorities of the council

The work of the ECTU can be linked to a number of the strategic priorities of the ECC

1. Enable inclusive economic growth

‘Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills’

- By supporting young people/adults from the community into vocational education/training/apprenticeships

2. Help people get the best start and age well

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'Help keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to fulfil their potential'

- Supporting vulnerable children from the community into education from pre-school to secondary, college, on site fire safety awareness, reducing childhood accidents

'Enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care'

- Supporting adults/families with literacy issues, access to key services, budgetary support, communications support

'Improve the health of people in Essex'

- Supporting families to access/register with GPs/Dentists, supporting long term conditions, immunisations, stop smoking, healthy eating etc.

3. Help create great places to grow up, live and work

'Help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities'

- Through effective management of permanent caravan sites, and management of unauthorised encampments.

Good practice examples

The ECTU are at the leading edge of service provision to the Gypsy/Traveller Community. The unit was the first in the country to incorporate Education, Health, Fire Safety, Management of unauthorised encampments, and site management in a single unit.

Benefits/achievements to date

Health:-

- outreach to over 700 people re primary immunisations and flu jabs
- over 400 families confirmed GP registrations
- 120 people identified / supported with long term conditions etc
- Over 250 identified for stop smoking/healthy eating support.
- Over 40 health checks facilitated.

We also hold Health and Fire safety days on various sites in the county, which enable us to access larger numbers of the community at a single location. A recent event resulted in the advice/support being given across entire families. The graph below illustrates number of people receiving advice, and the type of advice, relative to the sex and age group of those involved.

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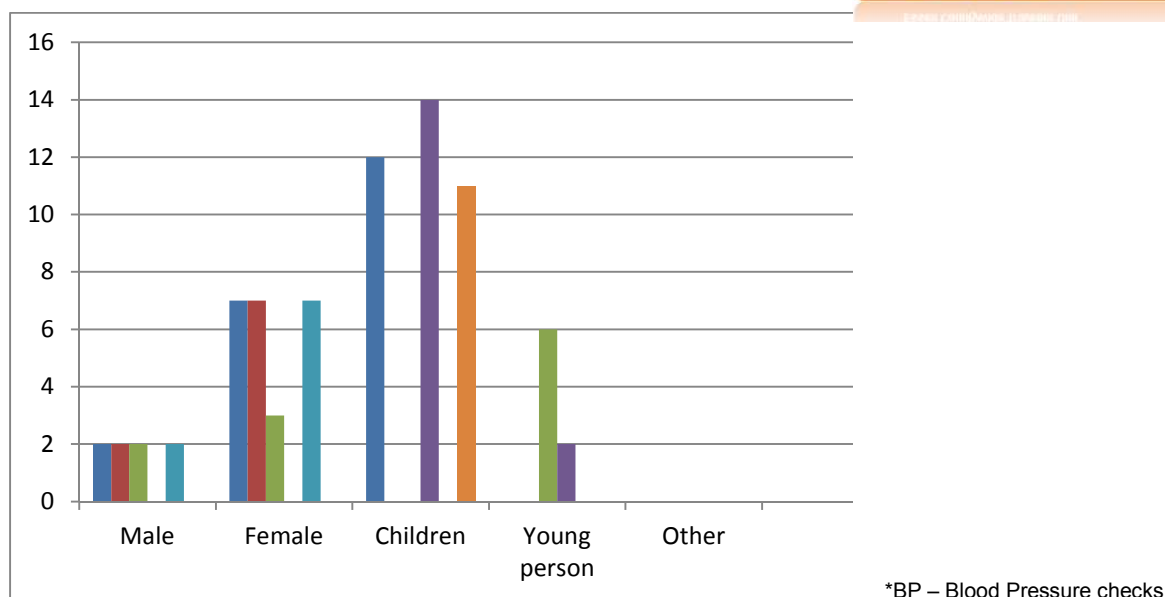


Fig 3. Table showing reach of ECTU health outreach activity

Education:-

- 474 children supported into school – primary and secondary
- 115 2yr olds funded and placed in pre-school
- 65 new families registered with Childrens Centres
- 54 young people supported into further education /apprenticeships.

Fire Safety:-

- 299 home fire safety visits completed
- 367 smoke alarms issued
- site fire safety visits 134 (77% of known sites)

Unauthorised encampments (UE):-

In 2016/17, we have managed over 270 separate encampments on ECC Highways and partner land through negotiated departure or sect 77/78 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

For unauthorised encampments where the full legal process to repossess has to be followed performance figures show that 90% of are moved on within 7 working days and 100% within 10 working days.

Consultation with stakeholders and partners (including the two Unitary Authorities)

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The ECTU was originally set up following extensive consultation with all potential stakeholders/partners, and a working group including representation from all Essex authorities.

Post the commencement of the ECTU, there are two biannual meetings held – one is for partner officers, and is a pre-cursor to the formal joint committees, and the second are the joint committees. These are normally held in June and November.

In addition there is regular, sometimes daily communications with partners on operational issues.

Engagement with Traveller and settled communities

There was initial engagement with Travellers in the set up process of the ECTU. Some of these were employees of ECC, some external groups.

By default, and the nature of our work, we are in daily contact with Travellers across Essex, on Local Authority sites, Private sites, and unauthorised encampments. In the same process, we are regularly engaging with external agencies.

The settled communities normally come into play where they are adversely impacted by a permanent site, or adversely impacted / aware of unauthorised encampments. It is predominantly negative reasons, as there is rarely interest/appetite outside of this.

More recently, working with our Public Health partner, we helped develop a health questionnaire which we then took to the Gypsy/Traveller community to inform the **'GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS IN ESSEX HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2017'**. With over 100 responses, the assessment is currently in early draft format, but will go on to inform Public Health/ECTU's strategy in supporting the community going forwards.

Distribution and demand

LA sites - the 12 permanent local authority/ECC sites located in Basildon, Epping Forest, Harlow x 2, Maldon x 2, Colchester, Braintree x 2, Chelmsford x 2 and Uttlesford x 1

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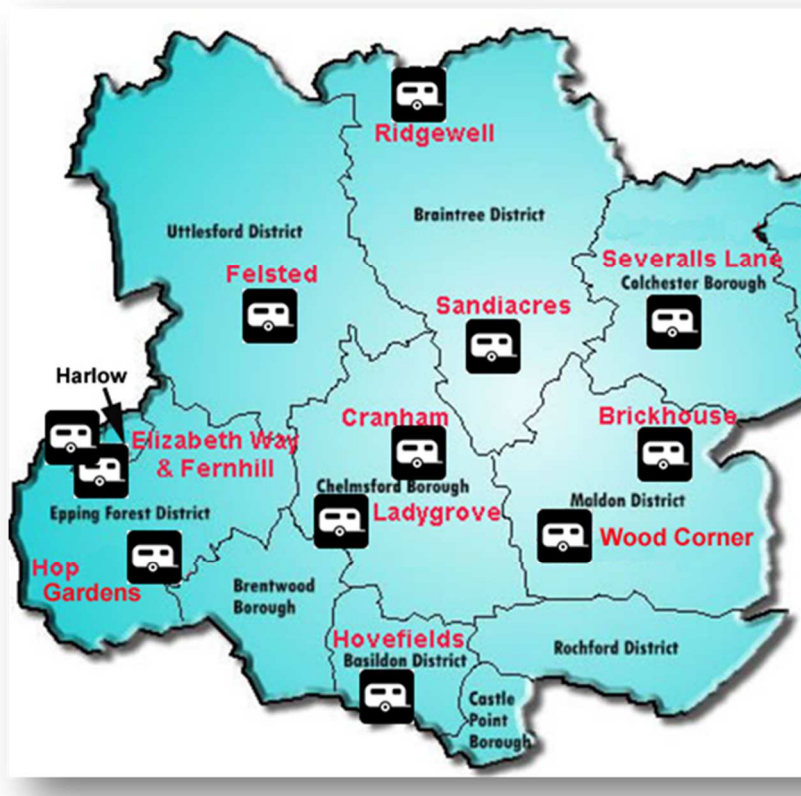


Fig 4. Location of ECC-owned permanent sites

Private sites

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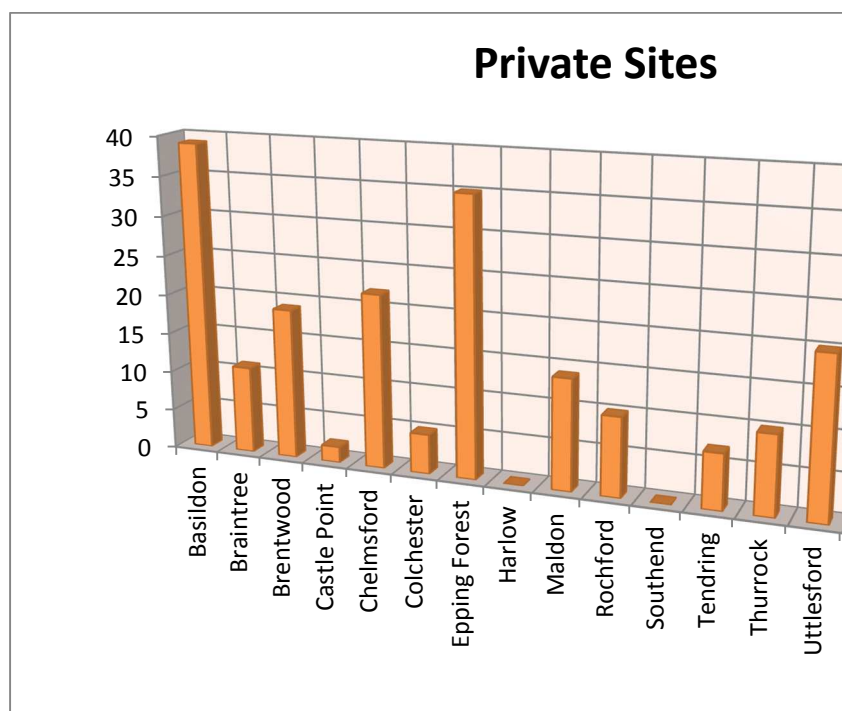


Fig 5. Location of private traveller sites by District

There are in excess of 190 private sites to cover with the 2 x FTE outreach team for health and education issues.

The remaining 2 x FTE cover Fire Safety and the management of unauthorised encampment – see below.

Unauthorised encampments

When the unit was set up, it was in the context of approx. 100 encampments reported per annum. However over the past 4 years we have seen two considerable step changes in numbers, with this current year set to hit record levels approaching 4 times the levels experienced when the ECTU was first setup.

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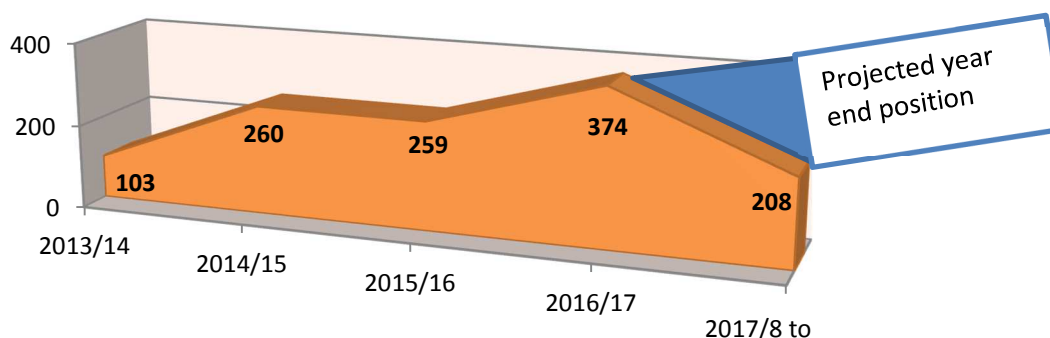


Fig 6. Number of unauthorised encampments recorded by ECTU since 2013/14

The result of this increase is putting considerable strain on resource and budget pressures due to the associated significant rise in associate legal and bailiff costs.

There are plans in progress to increase the dedicated Police presence, along with a newly launched single protocol, but the effect of this is unlikely to be realised until 2018.

There is also a project underway to identify potential transit sites, which will enable some of the Travelling population to access when travelling as opposed to unauthorised camping. This can be through freedom of choice, or via direction from the Police utilising their powers under sect 62a of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 2004.

Appendices

Appendix 1: ECTU Schedule of functions