
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Wednesday, 15 November 2017

Present:

Cllr Sue Lissimore (Chairman)	Essex County Council
Cllr Ricki Gadsby (Vice Chairman)	Essex County Council
Cllr Alan Ball	Basildon Borough Council
Cllr Susan Barker	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Mark Durham	Maldon District Council
Cllr Rob Gledhill	Thurrock Council
Cllr Paul Honeywood	Tendring District Council
Cllr Susan Sullivan	Chelmsford City Council
Asst Chief Fire Officer Dave Bill	Essex Fire Service
Chief Inspector Denise Morrissey	Essex Police

Also present:

Steve Andrews	Essex County Council
James Cook	Essex County Council
Colin Batchelor	Braintree District Council
Tim Clark	Tendring District Council
Matthew Waldie	Essex County Council

1 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Cllr Wendy Schmitt, Superintendent Darrin Tomkins (substituted by Chief Inspector Denise Morrissey) and Cllr Mike Webb.

2 Minutes and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Finance update

The Committee received a financial report from James Cook, Finance Business Partner, ECC.

Mr Cook pointed out that there had been several omissions from the paper circulated with the agenda and he confirmed that he would circulate a complete copy to members after the meeting.

He made several points:

- The forecast outturn for 2017/18 is £18,000, but that is based on the assumption that the increase provisionally agreed at the July meeting is collected
- In the draft budget going forward, a recommendation (omitted in the papers) is that a further 3% increase be put in place for the 2018/19 year
- This is a potentially volatile area, so certain assumptions have to be made - so it is assumed that the spending will remain similar. It is thought better to generate a surplus, to about £91,000 (ie three months of spend). This will take several years; and the question can be asked, on what to do about the surplus, at that point
- A breakdown of figures by district is included.

Various views were expressed in response:

- Each agency/district needs to be sure they are getting value for money
- The spending is directly related to activity; and the ratios being used are the same as when the scheme started, in 2012
- A three-month surplus mirrors that of parish councils and is quite reasonable. Once this level is reached, a view may be taken on what action should be taken
- In response to a query on whether this was a managed process - It is virtually impossible to predict activity; and the last increase was a reaction to the previous decision, to reduce contributions, which led to a shortfall. The inflationary increase is likely to be a regular event.

In conclusion, it was suggested that a review of the process would be beneficial at this stage.

With reference to the increase provisionally agreed at the June meeting, all those members yet to confirm their position were asked to do so as soon as they could.

With reference to the 3% inflationary increase referred to by Mr Cook, members agreed to this.

Access to Partner Resources.

Mr Andrews pointed out that partners may have resources available ie vehicles/plant, which could be used in enforcement action, thus saving the ECTU monies in hiring third party contractors.

Parish Council charging structure.

Mr Andrews raised the issue of whether parish councils should continue to be included in the membership structure of the Joint Committee, or should they have to join, each in its own right. After a brief discussion it was

agreed that the present arrangements should continue, as trying to deal with each parish council separately would be impracticable.

It was suggested that an article should be submitted to the Journal of the Essex Association of Local Councils, to raise awareness of the work of the ECTU.

5 Membership status

Mr Andrews reported no change in the membership of the Joint Committee: Epping Forest, Harlow and Southend still declined to join. Cllr Lissimore had been in dialogue with Epping Forest, but they remained content with their own approach to these matters.

6 High level risk assessment

Mr Andrews noted that there had been no further developments. The Committee noted the report.

7 Operations performance update - key issues

The Committee received an update from Steve Andrews.

Updated data will be circulated to the Committee within the next few days.

Fire safety:

- An updated fire safety leaflet is being well received by the traveller community
- A year of health and safety site group visits has proved to be successful and the intention is to continue into next year. (They are mostly outdoor events, held in spring and summer.)
- The Christmas safety campaign will be going out shortly
- Felsted fly tip - now cleared; looking into turning this into additional plots.

Public Health:

- The Traveller Health Needs Assessment is nearing completion; this will be the driver for future operations and targets
- Health Days seek to raise awareness of health matters and provide advice. Mr Andrews suggested that members should attend a day if possible and agreed to circulate the dates for 2018 when they are confirmed
- Material on mouth cancer is being distributed this month
- It was noted that this creates a crossover in activities with the County Council and Unitary health departments, which may impact the respective budgets. It was agreed that this issue should be addressed outside the meeting
- It was agreed that the report should be forwarded to the Health & Wellbeing Board.

Education:

- There is nothing in particular to report; work continues on encouraging and helping children into education.

Unauthorised encampments

- Although numbers were initially high, there was a quicker drop off in September compared to previous years, with lower numbers currently. All known incidents are included in the figures and numbers given probably represent about 95% of incidents
- Numbers can fluctuate for various reasons - eg families responding to different local definitions of traveller, requiring them to be on the road for certain periods of time, the dispersal of families into smaller groups and the need for them to move on within seven days. the generally higher numbers are reflected as a trend across the eastern region
- Braintree has installed some 'defensive' structures, to restrict access, with some success; and this is reflected in the statistics. Cllr Lissimore drew attention to a similar approach by Colchester, with similar success. She suggested that the ECTU was in a very good position, in having significant knowledge and expertise and so being able to provide advice and assistance to those encountering problems
- The single protocol is still at an early stage
- It was noted that Harlow and Basildon had injunctions in place; these solve the problem in the immediate area, but move it on to the next weak link. A more coordinated Essex approach could help
- Essex Police's Gypsy Traveller Rural Engagement Team now consists of a sergeant and three PC's in place, with access to a fifth in busy times. Each is issued with body camera
- The development of a stand-alone website is progressing.

Training

- Training continued to be given, assisting those dealing with traveller issues in cultural and practical concerns. Particularly noted was the training given to health staff in hospitals, as travellers visiting A&E departments can create an unusual dynamic.

Police

- Concern was expressed over the role of the police and a certain lack of consistency shown. Chief Inspector Morrissey acknowledged there may have been some issues in the past; which had led to the new arrangements, with a sergeant and four officers working seven days a week, from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm. In response to a query on the publicity being given to these new arrangements, she confirmed that she would ask Paul Downes to find out after the meeting and

send on the details.

8 **Transit site update including GTAA impact**

The Committee received an update on Transit Sites. Mr Andrews informed Members that Accommodation Needs Assessment advice had confirmed that not many transit sites would be required; but the problem of finding a suitable location or locations remained.

It was suggested that it would be important to coordinate the launch of these sites across the whole of the county, to prevent consequent movement of groups into particular areas.

Also queried was the impact of current legislation's time limit of three months, which was unreasonable, as was the potential for confusion between different police forces. Mr Andrews added that the legal definition, in planning terms, did not help matters.

Cllr Lissimore pointed out that there were two principal issues here:

- the practical benefit of these sites to greater Essex
- the legal impact of such sites on the county.

9 **Parliamentary debate**

It was noted that a motion relating to Travellers had been put to the full meeting of Essex County Council on 10 October, in order both to raise awareness of issues and to draw attention to some more positive aspects. By coincidence, a parliamentary debate was held the night before and several Essex MPs contributed to the debate. Following on from this, there will be a consultation on these issues but it is not yet clear either the timeframe for this or who will be asked to contribute (eg whether representations will be expected from all districts or just from County Councils/unitaries, etc).

Several points were noted:

- If separate submissions were expected from individual authorities, they should ensure consistency of approach
- Certain legal aspects should be raised, eg the definition of "Highways Land", the three-month period for transit sites and the position in respect of planning regulations. Although a sensible approach must be taken in assigning responsibility for such activities as fly-tipping, current legal requirements made this difficult
- Travellers as a group do not form a separate entity, they are just like any other group of people and should be treated as such – subject to the same rules as everyone else
- Residents must be encouraged to help here, for example by not employing people to remove rubbish unless they have a relevant licence. The website could be useful here, providing information for residents and parish clerks and
- Information gathering is important and the Travellers Unit distributes

information when it can

- A press launch could raise these issues, with a relaunch in time for the new season in 2018. It is important to ensure Thurrock is included.
- It is important not to demonise the entire travelling community, many of whom are law abiding.
- As soon as further details are available, they will be passed on.

10 The future of ECTU - discussion paper

There is a need to ensure that the Unit is financially secure.

There is a need to carry out a review, the results of which will be presented at the meeting before the start of the season.

Consideration should be given to extending the services of the Unit, even if these require further resources.

11 Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at 10.00am on Tuesday 10 April 2018, County Hall, Chelmsford.

It was noted that, looking forward, April may not be a good time, because of potential local elections, but the importance of having a meeting shortly before the start of the season was also noted.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.49am

Chairman