

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Tuesday, 20 November 2018

Present:

Cllr Sue Lissimore (Chairman)	Essex County Council
Cllr Susan Barker	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Kevin Blake	Basildon Council
Cllr Keith Parker	Brentwood Borough Council
Cllr Susan Sullivan	Chelmsford City Council
Cllr Mike Webb	Rochford District Council
Asst Chief Fire Officer Dave Bill	Essex Fire Service
Sergeant Paul Downes	Essex Police

Also present:

Steve Andrews	Essex County Council
Lisa Nicholls (<i>item 3 only</i>)	Essex County Council
Adrian Coggins	Essex County Council
Colin Batchelor	Braintree District Council
Matthew Waldie	Essex County Council

- 1 **Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest**
The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Cllr Paul Honeywood and Cllr Wendy Schmitt. There were no declarations of interest.

- 2 **Minutes and matters arising**
The minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

- 3 **Finance update**
The Committee received a financial report from Lisa Nicholls, Finance Business Partner, ECC.

1. **Financial update for 6 months to 30 September 2018.** The 2018/19 budget had a £19,311 surplus. At half year, it showed a £105 k surplus, as all the members' contributions had been collected. The automatically generated forecast outturn for year-end showed a deficit of £1,736. However, based on the actual figures to date - for supplies and services in particular - a slight surplus for the year was anticipated. These figures were noted.

2. **Budget for 2019/2020 and Membership Fees.** The budget figure

of a £13,925 surplus was noted for 2019/20, based on the partnership contribution of £8149 for district, borough and unitary fees, plus £23,148 for Essex Fire & Rescue. AC Fire Officer Bill confirmed that he would like a review of these figures for future years, to ensure that the contribution from Essex Fire & Rescue was appropriate.

3. Reserves

It was noted that the predicted reserves would be £44k at year end 2018/19, increasing to £58k at end of 2019/20, increasing once again the following year. This was a definite improvement, although still short of the ideal figure of £94k, ie the equivalent of three months running costs.

Two points were raised about the position of those authorities who were not members:

- It was confirmed that the Unit would only carry out work within a non-member authority if the actual land was owned by Essex Highways; otherwise that authority would have to make its own arrangements
- Cllr Lissimore confirmed that when ECC had decided to assist Harlow with its initial High Court injunction in 2015, it was with factual information, and at minimal cost, because this case would help the overall situation.

4 High level risk assessment

Mr Andrews confirmed that the only change was an additional risk that one or more authority would not renew its membership of the Unit in April 2019. The Committee noted this.

5 Membership status

Mr Andrews reported no change in the membership of the Joint Committee, with all but three authorities signed up. The agreement was due to be renewed in 2019, and the relevant changes to the subscriptions had already been agreed.

It was noted that there would be local elections held in May 2019, so Mr Andrews confirmed that the renewal details would be circulated to the members within the next two months.

6 Operations performance update - key issues

The Committee received an update from Mr Andrews, as per the report circulated with the agenda.

Fire safety/health:

- It was noted that, although the summer was a relatively quiet period for delivering home fire safety visits, 60 had been carried out and now the figures would escalate, during the winter months
- The campaign of Health and Fire Safety Days was ongoing. Revisiting sites has demonstrated that children had remembered tips from previous visits
- The statistics relating to Fire Safety were noted.

Public Health:

- Several national campaigns have been utilised, with specially modified publicity material to reflect the interests of the travelling community, and this is an ongoing process
- Particularly noted were the outreach bus visits to the Sandiacres site at Braintree and the work of Melanie Pomphrett, the Oral Health Improvement Manager for Essex
- Events gave advice on a range of health and safety matters and there have also been First Aid Training sessions, which were well attended.
- The statistics were noted.

Education:

- Work continues on facilitating educational opportunities for children and supporting them into education. The statistics were noted.

Unauthorised encampments:

- After higher than normal numbers of encampments earlier in the season, these dropped off significantly in the autumn, and there is only one at present in the county
- The statistics relating to land ownership indicate that private land is being targeted more. The question of whether the Unit could assist private landowners (at a fee) was raised. It was pointed out that it was a question of resource at present, with the Unit hard pressed in carrying out its present role. However, the Chairman pointed out that she would like to see the work expanding in this way and that such a possible development should be looked at as part of the review process. Mr Coggins acknowledged the high profile nature of such an issue but stressed the need to consider the work of the Unit in the round
- Members expressed thanks for the good work of the Unit and the Police, who had generally acted swiftly over the past few months. It was suggested that if local officers were able to issue the initial paperwork, before the Unit carried through the legal process, that might help to speed the process up. Mr Andrews agreed that could be useful, particularly during the busy periods. It was also pointed out that local authorities could – and were – helping themselves by

- installing anti-incursion measures on their land
- In response to an enquiry by Braintree DC on the response of the Police to a recent incident at Great Notley, where some criminal damage had been caused, Sgt Downes stated that he would respond to any situation by looking at the legislation, checking whether any of the necessary conditions applied, and then would apply proportionality, before deciding whether the use of a Section 61 clause was appropriate. In this case, there was minor damage and it was not clear who had actually carried it out. He added that the local community had displayed much hostility toward this encampment and a stone had been thrown through a caravan window, although the actual perpetrator had not been identified. He added that, as the Police had a duty of care toward all parties, they would have taken appropriate action against any individual, whether from the travelling or settled community
- In response to a suggestion that the monitoring of sites was inadequate, Sgt Downes refuted this point; he pointed out that resources were limited, but they did liaise with local police. He added that the behaviour of a group at one site can be relayed to the authority when that group moves on to the next site and a section 61 enforced immediately. The Chairman reminded members that, in her view, the problems concerned everyone in the community, not just the Police or the ECTU. Sgt Downes endorsed this, encouraging everyone to act as their eyes and ears. The importance of intelligence being shared between authorities was stressed
- Regarding fly-tipping, it was emphasised that there is a general need to educate the general public about the potential pitfalls of buying a service on the doorstep. It was agreed that local authorities might be provided with material that they could include in their magazines. Sgt Downes added that they used drones to monitor sites for potential fly-tipping

Other work:

- Sgt Downes informed the meeting that his unit had recovered 12 stolen caravans.

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ECTU Review

Mr Coggins gave an overview of the Review. He acknowledged that the Unit had worked well in the six years since its inception; it had grown organically in that time, undertaking difficult and complex work.

The review aims to answer two key questions:

1. What is the ECC's best contribution to the Gypsy & Traveller agenda?
2. How does this align with the ECC's corporate principles?

These are no different to those asked in the restructuring process being undertaken throughout the County Council, but the ECTU had been

excluded from that process, as the Unit involved several external stakeholders, so the ECC could not act unilaterally on this.

The Unit has three broad areas of work:

1. Unauthorised encampments
2. Outreach to and advocacy for travellers (NB the County Council has a statutory duty toward vulnerable people)
3. Ownership/management of the ECC owned/leased Traveller sites.

There are three key principles:

1. The ECC needs to complete an appropriate Equality and Impact Assessment (given its statutory responsibilities)
2. The Review needs to consider how the three broad areas of work interrelate; and there must be proportionate investment in the work
3. All stakeholders must be involved in the process. Mr Coggins asked for the members' support in involving and engaging the districts in the process.

There are four stages:

1. Nov/Dec 2018. ECC signalling its intent
2. Jan 2019. Compile and share findings; establishing facts on which to base the work, including costs
3. Feb 2019. Stakeholder and market dialogue
4. End Mar 2019. Specific set of options, with preferred proposed option, presented to political leadership.

There was no intention that there should be any changes at an operational level while the review was still being undertaken.

Various comments were made:

- The Chairman pointed out that permanent sites had a range of support needs that the Unit was unable to provide at present and this had to be looked at as part of the review
- Regarding the use of a transit site to enable the authorities to move on illegal encampments quicker, the Chairman pointed out that Legal Services had confirmed that the existence of a single site owned by Essex County Council would be effective across the County (excepting Southend and Thurrock). However, it was acknowledged that none of the districts wanted to have such a site in their authority area, and none of the plots of land owned by the ECC were suitable. Sgt Downes confirmed this provision would give the authority extended powers, under Section 62 of the relevant Act, but he pointed out it would require a decision at a high level with Essex Police on how it would be applied. Mr Coggins confirmed that this issue would be analysed and weighed as part of the review. Mr Andrews believed that it might be a tool in managing unauthorised encampments, but there remained practical, capacity issues.

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Date of next meeting

Proposed dates for 2019 would be circulated after the meeting (taking into account the elections in May).

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.11pm

Chairman