
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 17 May 2018

Present:

Cllr Sue Lissimore (Chairman)	Essex County Council
Cllr Susan Barker	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Mike Lilley	Colchester Borough Council
Cllr Jo McPherson	Rochford District Council
Cllr Keith Parker	Brentwood Borough Council
Cllr Wendy Schmitt	Braintree District Council
Asst Chief Fire Officer Dave Bill	Essex Fire Service
Chief Inspector Dan Morrissey	Essex Police

Also present:

Steve Andrews	Essex County Council
Lisa Nicholls	Essex County Council
Colin Batchelor	Braintree District Council
Suzanne Harris	Office of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner
Andy Gribben	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 Rob Gledhill and Cllr Susan Sullivan. There were no declarations of interest
- 2 Minutes and matters arising**
The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to a corrected typographical error.
- 4 Finance update**
The Committee received a financial report from Lisa Nicholls, Finance Business Partner, ECC.
 - 1. 2017/18 outturn position.** Members noted the improved actual outturn position, primarily due to a combination of a £21,031 underspend on supplies and services (due to a reduced number of unauthorised encampments) and a further £24,458 recovery of income from a one-off payment by Highway Services (due to a high volume of unauthorised encampments on Highways land). Overall, the reserve had moved from a deficit position (£26,462 at closure of

2016/17 accounts) to a surplus of £24,927 at closure of 2017/18 accounts.

2. **Budget for 2018/2019 and future years.** The final budget figure of £19,311 was noted for 2018/19. The proposed budget for 2019/20, of £18,533, was based on a 3% increase in contribution from each District/Borough member (ie £240). Two points were raised:

- In response to the suggestion that the ECC should also pay the increase, it was pointed out that the ECC had made a 30% (£80,000) increased contribution in 2017/18, and that the ECC subsidises the activities of the Unit
- The Fire Service pointed out that it wants to clarify the terms of reference, to be certain that its financial contribution (£24,000) is appropriate, given that its contribution relates to improving safety for travellers rather than paying for legal and bailiff costs. It had committed to pay for 2018/19, but wanted to look at the situation in following years

Having given it further consideration, a **2% increase was agreed by the Committee** (equating to £160). The revised figures would be circulated to members after the meeting. It was pointed out that this should maintain the £70,000 reserve, enabling the Unit to deal more effectively with changing circumstances.

4 **Membership status**

Mr Andrews reported no change in the membership of the Joint Committee, with all but three authorities signed up. He added that the agreement was due to be renewed in 2019, and some changes might take place then

5 **High level risk assessment**

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

6 **Operations performance update - key issues**

The Committee received an update from Steve Andrews.

It was noted that the period covered began in November 2017.

Fire safety:

- A promotion based on the 12 tips of Christmas Fire Safety was launched, with an A3 poster in all site offices and A4 flyers given out to 250 families. Much use of graphic material, which usually goes down well with the travelling community
- Safety fire awareness training was given at Crays Hill Primary School. Some of the older children showed an unhealthy interest in playing with fireworks, so this will be referred back to EFRS, with a view to giving further training

- The Fire Safety performance figures were noted
- Six Health and Fire Safety Days are planned. They will be held in spring and summer, at different sites across the County.

Public Health:

- The Essex Traveller Health Needs Assessment was published in February 2018 and has a number of recommendations, relating to increasing awareness of healthy lifestyle, ways of providing access to information, encouraging the use of NHS services, considering ways to focus on children's health, encouraging awareness and collaboration between professionals, raising the priority of good health for Travellers among those bodies working with them, and developing a work strand relating to Traveller health outcomes. These will be taken and turned into objectives in due course
- Mr Andrews demonstrated how two health campaign posters (relating to smear tests and smoking) had been modified to increase their impact on the Traveller community
- Certain statistics in respect of a number of medical initiatives were noted. In response to a concern expressed at the vulnerability of the Traveller community to outbreaks of diseases such as measles, Mr Andrews confirmed that efforts were ongoing to raise levels of immunisation. He **agreed** to check whether anything had become of the suggestion that Travellers might be able to take some medical records with them
- He also **agreed** to consider inviting some expertise on immunisation to the Health and Fire Safety Days.

Education:

- Work continues on facilitating access for children to education, from pre-school to apprenticeships and vocational training
- In response to a query on a consultation about home schooling, and how that would relate to the Traveller community, Mr Andrews stated he had no further knowledge on this as yet, but **agreed** to follow this up after the meeting.

Unauthorised encampments

- Final numbers for the 2017/18 season were almost at the previous year's level. Numbers are still low this year to date but are expected to rise after the Bank Holiday
- The Unauthorised Encampments performance figures were noted. In response to a request from the Chairman, Mr Andrews explained the terminology used to members. A Section 77/8 is the local authority power used to repossess land; it goes through the magistrates' courts, has a seven-day turnaround and can only be used by Local Authorities. Part 55 is the civil option, which goes through the County Court and can take three weeks or more to get

the court order. Section 61 is the Police emergency power and requires no authorisation from the courts

- The seven-day target was particularly noted
- A discussion ensued about the practicalities of dealing with unauthorised encampments. Chief Inspector Morrissey pointed out that the team were now well briefed on the legal requirements and ready to respond quickly. Also, a Silver Commander can be contacted at any time for assistance

Communication

- It was noted that the main route of communication, namely the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) through all information flows, had been getting increasingly diluted; there will be a review of this situation shortly, to enable ECTU to reinstate this approach
- The chairman informed members that it had not proved possible to provide a draft generic letter that councillors could circulate when an illegal encampment was set up in their area; she pointed out that members would have to produce their own wording

Website

- The website now had two shorter URLs, to make it easier to access; live links would be uploaded and it was suggested that the districts' own websites should include a link to the ECC website. It was also suggested that ECTU's successes and good turnaround times might also be included on its website

Training

- A number of sessions and events delivered by ECTU since November were noted.

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Transit site update including GTAA impact

The chairman reported on her visit, accompanied by Cllr Gadsby and Mr Andrews, to the transit site at South Mimms (the nearest to Essex). It had been an interesting experience. The site was clean and well run but rather bleak.

She reminded members that having a transit site in Essex would enable illegal encampments to be moved on more quickly across the whole of Essex (barring Southend and Thurrock); but one district would have to take the hit for the whole of the county. Considerable time had been taken trying to establish a suitable site but none had been found so far.

It was also pointed out to members that having a transit site is a requirement for Essex, and one that opens up the potential use of further Police powers Section 62a, legislation to facilitate the removal of illegal

encampments. It would also help ECTU to keep track of certain families in respect of immunisation, health checks, etc.

A transit camp would need to be owned and run by Essex County Council to be effective, as its legislative impact would stretch across the whole county. Its very existence should strengthen Essex's hand in respect of other level one authorities. A crucial factor would be good and appropriate management of the site. It was not thought practicable to designate part of an existing permanent site as a transit site.

Several views were expressed by members on the potential benefits or drawbacks of having such a site, but the chairman confirmed that its greatest benefit would be the legal leverage it would give the authority. She emphasised the need for all the local authorities to consider a possible location.

8 Police/GTRET update

Chief Inspector Morrissey gave a brief update, reminding members that the flying squad, comprising four constables and a sergeant, works across the county, seven days a week, from 8.00am to 10.00pm. The squad now has a drone, which can be used to follow up on intelligence on fly-tipping, for example, and members of the public were encouraged to contact the team, should they witness what they believed to be illegal activity. CI Morrissey also drew members' attention to recent arrests made in respect of hare coursing in the north of the county.

9 ECTU consultation

Mr Andrews gave a brief update, drawing attention to a few points under the core questions:

- Service delivery – not an appetite to deliver something new – business as usual, at present levels; but with more information sharing.
- Resourcing – no appetite to deliver more, but an acceptance that higher contributions might be needed to maintain the service
- Communications – desire for stronger web presence; but also not for more promotion of ECTU brand externally
- Co-ordination role – some feeling that ECTU could take more of a co-ordinating role
- External/other opportunities – any opportunity of revenue production, to offset the costs of the operations, would be welcome

Mr Andrews pointed out that the resourcing of the Unit reflected a balanced approach to traveller issues, as two officers specialised in illegal encampments and three with health and education, but Fire Safety issues were covered by all 5, plus the site management team.

In response to the suggestion that the Unit might support private landowners with illegal encampments, Mr Andrews pointed out that this has previously been suggested and rejected. Private land owners do not have

the same duties/constraints that Local Authorities have, hence if acting independently could repossess their land far quicker. ECTU would still have to take the same route as on local authority land with the required welfare checks/7 day turn around.

10 Government consultation

The County Council will be making a submission. Mr Andrews pointed out that the ECTU's expertise lies in unauthorised encampments, but there were other issues, ie aggravated trespass, planning and injunctions, about which it knows less, so the districts were invited to contribute.

The Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex asked to be copied in on responses, so they could use these responses to inform their own.

Given the tight timetable for responses, it was **agreed** that a reminder should be circulated to all ECTU members soon after the meeting. [*All members were contacted the following day.*]

11 Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at 10.00am on Tuesday 20 November 2018, at County Hall, Chelmsford.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.22pm

Chairman