

Future of the Essex Countwide Traveller Unit

For decision (to agree a course of action)	X
For discussion (to generate ideas or formulate a position)	

Purpose

The Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU) was established in 2012, creating a specialist multi-agency team to work with the Gypsy and Traveller Communities in a proactive and coordinated way. Working on behalf of partner organisations its focus has been on promoting equality through improving health outcomes, educational attainment, community engagement, fire safety and the management of unauthorised encampments in a fair and consistent manner. Over the past five years the environment in which the ECTU operates has seen various emerging issues, primarily related to the proliferation of and management of unauthorised encampments. Views are therefore sought to reviewing the future strategy and operation of the ECTU to ensure it remains at the forefront of how the public sector works with Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Recommendation

To undertake a review of the current ECTU strategy to establish whether its current role needs redefining and resources are sufficiently adequate to ensure the service remains at the forefront of Gypsy and Traveller and partnership working over forthcoming years.

Issue

Over the past five years the environment in which the ECTU operates has seen various emerging issues:

- Unauthorised encampments in Essex (UE's) have increased circa 190% (120 UE's – 2012, 350 UE's 2016), with a trend in larger, prolific encampments.
- Essex Local Authorities have sought to attain injunctions to suit their particular local circumstances.
- Increased calls upon Government to strengthen laws to tackle UE's.
- Changing the definition of Gypsy and Travellers for planning purposes.
- A call for a national approach to tackling UE's through the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, seeking better coordinated solutions.
- Cabinet Member motion to attain better working relationships between Essex Local Authorities and Police
- Increased interest in pitch provision, developing transit sites, short-term or negotiated stopping places.

Consideration should therefore be given but not limited to:

- What role the ECTU has in terms of consultation and co-ordination in partner, non-partner and national initiatives that impact upon Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities.
- A greater co-ordinated approach to the alternative management of UE's. e.g. long and short term pitch provision.
- Whether human and financial resources are sufficient to meet and address growing demands.
- Whether the membership of the ECTU is broad enough to deal with in a collaborative and co-ordinated manner wider issues that may be associated to UE's, e.g. environmental or economic detriment.
- That the outcomes in terms of promoting equality throughout the Gypsy and Traveller communities are being sufficiently attained.