
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held at 10am on Wednesday, 21 June 2023

Present:

Cllr Mark Durham	Essex County Council
Cllr George Jeffrey	Basildon Borough Council
Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Essex County Council
Cllr Jannetta Sosin	Chelmsford City Council
Cllr Chris Criscione	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Deborah Arnold	Thurrock Council

Also present:

Freddey Ayres (Clerk)	Essex County Council
Emma Tombs	Essex County Council
Insp. Terry Jacobs	Essex Police
Sgt. Paul Brady	Essex Police
Paul Ashworth	Essex County Council
Carron Nasson	Essex County Council
Susan Enwere	Essex County Council
Nicola Coates	Essex County Council
Alec Baker	Essex County Council
Phil Carver	Thurrock Council
David Cater	Brentwood Borough Council

1 Welcome, Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The clerk opened the meeting.

The clerk noted the following changes to the membership since the publication of the agenda:

- Castle Point Borough Council representative: Cllr Russell Savage
- Uttlesford District Council representative: Cllr Chris Criscione
- Braintree District Council representative: Cllr Lynette Bowers-Flint

The amended membership, and membership as presented in the agenda papers was noted:

Apologies had been received from the following:

- Cllr Andy Baker; Tendring District Council
- Cllr Paul Smith; Colchester City Council
- Cllr Jade Hughes; Maldon District Council
- Cllr Russell Savage; Castle Point Borough Council
- Cllr Andrew Jefferies; Thurrock Council (Cllr Deborah Arnold substituting)
- Will Newman; Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Election of Vice-Chairman

In response to the clerk inviting nominations for Chairman for the municipal year, Councillor Anthony McQuiggan nominated Councillor Mark Durham, which was seconded by Councillor Jannetta Sosin. No other nominations were received and by general consent Councillor Mark Durham was elected as Chairman of the Committee and invited to take the chair.

3 Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman invited nominations to serve as Vice Chairman for the municipal year and he nominated Councillor Anthony McQuiggan, which was seconded by Councillor Jannetta Sosin. There being no further nominations, and by general consent, Councillor Anthony McQuiggan was elected Vice Chairman.

4 Minutes of 31 October 2022 and matters arising from that meeting not covered in agenda.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 31 October 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

5 Finance Update:

The Committee received a report from Carron Nasson, Management Accountant, Essex County Council.

Key information provided included:

- (i) **2022/23 Outturn Position as of 31st March 2023** – The 2022/23 forecast outturn position was a net pressure of £4,907. Contribution to the Essex Countywide Travellers Unit (ECTU) across internal partners for 2022/23 was £306,145. This outturn position assumed that legal fees and bailiff costs would continue to be managed within the allocated budget. The year-end position had reduced the reserve from a surplus position at the closure of the 2021/22 accounts of £321,980 to a surplus of £317,073 at the close of 2022/23.
- (ii) **Budget/Actuals for 2022/23, agreed Budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and the Proposed Draft Budget for 2025/26.** - The 2024/25 agreed budget assumed the following:
 - No increases to membership fees. The budget had increased to reflect the full amount of fees from both ECC, and its internal and external partners, as this was previously understated.
 - 3.25% increase for Employee budgets (2% Staffing and 1.25% NI Uplift).
 - 2.8% RPI increase for Supplies & Services and Transport budgets.

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- 2025/26 proposed draft budget (excluding membership contributions) had all been increased by the RPI figure which was currently 3.0% as per the latest information available.
 - A draw from reserves would be required if the costs exceed the budget.

(iii) **2023/24 Membership Fees**

The 2023/24 Membership fees were summarised. It was noted the total subscription of £413,547 was now incorrect and should be revised to be £401,547. This was due to the removal of Essex Fire and Rescue and the subtraction of their membership fee of £12,000. Membership discussions with Essex Fire and Rescue were ongoing. The Chairman stated that conversations should be held with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to stress the importance of collaboration.

(iv) **Balance Sheet – Reserves**

The opening balance of 2022/23 was £321,980. A drawdown of £4,907 was needed to balance the position due to position in the previous year. The closing balance was £317,073. It was noted that the reserves in future years did include a drawdown in reserves which was shown in a previous table. Members had queries in relation to reserve caps and it was shared that any caps would need to be agreed by this committee. The Chairman explained how each year is different and the amount spent on legal fees can differ depending on how much action is needed.

It was **AGREED** by general consent:

- To note the 2022/23 financial position.
- To note budgets for 2023/24 and future budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- To note 2023/24 Membership Fees
- To note the Balance Sheet Reserves

6 Rural Engagement Team (RET) Update:

RET Update – June 2023

The Committee received an update from Insp. Terry Jacobs and Sgt Paul Brady, Essex Police.

Key information provided included:

In the twelve months leading to June 2023 there had been 61 unauthorised encampments. All had been attended by the RET. The criteria for police eviction powers was met on 15 of these occasions. 2 of these occasions the criteria for S60 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022 was met and powers were utilised. In the preceding 12 months the RET had dealt with 95 incidents. There had been a consistent decline over the past 6 years. It was reported that it was as yet unclear whether the reduction had been due to the

collaboration with the ECTU and the next 12 months would allow for the team to assess whether the new legislation and ECTU partnership has had a role to play in the reduction or whether the numbers would begin to rise again. Feedback received had shown that encampments that are disorderly are not coming to Essex due to swift enforcement. Ones that have come to Essex have been more orderly.

Unauthorised Encampments Procedure Update:

The Committee received an update from Insp. Terry Jacobs and Sgt Paul Brady, Essex Police.

The chair expressed the importance of sharing this with members in respective authorities and Essex Police expressed that they would be happy to attend any local authorities and give briefings. It was expressed that a factsheet could be provided if requested.

Members asked a question in relation to whether there seemed to be an increased level of fly-tipping and if this has been blamed on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community. It was shared that the issue seemed to be with commercial fly-tipping and that they would not be able to say with certainty that there was any correlation between the new booking system at recycling centres and fly-tipping in the GRT communities. There had been situations where the GRT community had been blamed for fly-tipping. It was expressed that members of the GRT communities may have issues with literacy and digital access to the booking system. It was shared that there were procedures in place with staff at recycling centres that they would aid GRT communities from a customer services viewpoint.

Members noted the Unauthorised Encampments Procedure Update.

7 Operations Performance Update

Outreach Report

The Committee received a report from Susan Enwere, ECTU Outreach Officer, ECC and Nicola Coates, ECTU Outreach Officer, ECC.

Key information:

The outreach team had been assisting the GRT community with form filling and data entry etc. It was reported that the team had developed GP Cards which allowed GRT's to apply for GP surgeries bypassing the requirement to provide a passport or other identification documents that they may not have had access to.

There had been 4 successful multi-agency Health Days where members off the GRT community would be seen to get help with health concerns. They have babies weighed and have dental health information for children etc. There were twelve health days booked for the year of 2023.

Education

Key information:

Education support was continuing to be provided which included completing school applications, supporting admission process etc. The amount of support needed had increased due to harder application processes. College applications had also become more difficult due to online processes. The outreach officers had been liaising with the employability and skills team to look at what information would be helpful to provide to communities. Advice had been supplied to assist with home education to help families understand the responsibilities involved. The outreach team had been working with Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) social policy team who had developed a Higher Education pledge to promote inclusivity and support to those in the GRT community. Connected communities' events had been arranged and had been attended by the ECTU team and it was expressed that collaborative work with Essex County Council, ECTU, ARU and the Traveller Movement be undertaken to co-host an event to formulate a programme with education and access to education. Employers could also be invited to assist.

The Library Outreach Bus has been continuing. It was shared that this had been received well by GRT communities. Current issues identified were supporting young people with SEND and struggles with education pathways.

In relation to a question asked about young women in the GRT community in relation to non-attendance to school. It was shared that due to cultural reasons and bullying that takes place when they are in schools it would be hard for the ECTU team to make an impact. It was explained that the best option would be to work with the schools and support GRT but to also supply home education advice.

Members had requested statistics on education attendance by gender and explore how data could be gathered in the future and the possibility that it could be referred to a scrutiny meeting to address the issues raised.

Unauthorised Encampment (UE) Report

The Committee received an update from Alec Baker, ECTU Officer, Enforcement Lead, ECC.

Key information:

Between November 2022 & May 2023, data between November to May (2020 TO 2023) of all encampments recorded by the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit encampments was shared it was reported that 2022/23 and 2021/22 had exactly the same number of UE's at 46. Encampments will remain low for the second year in a row but it should be noted that this is the winter period so numbers were predicted to be lower.

The current and historic 10-year trend for UE's in partner areas in Essex was showing a continual reduction since 2019. At the time of this meeting, it was reported that the UE count sat at 37 but was likely to rise in the summer. The final amount of UE's in 2023 is predicted to be the lowest since the inception of ECTU.

Biggest hit of encampments when considering non-partner areas was Uttlesford. It was reported that there was a formatting error on figure 3 in that it states that

Chelmsford had 7 UE this number should be 3. It also stated that Colchester had 3 UE's and this should be 7.

The breakdown of encampments by landowners showed that 10 was on private land with the other highest being Colchester with 6 UE's.

It was shown that the encampment of the GRT family in the case study was left tidy. It was also explained that the vehicle of choice for GRT seems to be camper vans this was a change from the traditional vehicle with a caravan.

There are currently 1 live injunction in Thurrock Council.

Stats were provided in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and it was reported that it was all positive.

A question was asked about whether it would be possible to shorten the 7-day target to a lower figure. It was explained that the timeline was established at the beginning of ECTU with the help of the legal team. It was shared that if any changes would want to be made then this would need to be formally proposed. The ECTU team explained that the timeline works in relation to KPI's and the 7-day period was reasonable.

8 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be arranged and circulated in due course

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11:41am.

Chairman