

Cabinet	<b>FP/727/12/11</b>
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## THE ESSEX COUNTYWIDE TRAVELLER UNIT

Report by Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning

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### Purpose of report

To update Cabinet on the development of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU), to reaffirm commitment by Essex County Council (ECC) to form the ECTU with partners, and to enable an early decision regarding the realignment of ECC resources.

### Recommendations

- Agree to form the ECTU on a staged basis, the first stage being the aligning of existing ECC resources
- Agree to make the following budget transfers in order to facilitate the aligning of resources:
  - £85,215 from the Education and 2012 Games Portfolio to the Communities and Planning Portfolio
  - £14,203 from the Adults, Health and Community Wellbeing (AHCW) Portfolio to the Communities and Planning Portfolio

### Background, context, and area of the County affected

#### Background and context

A multiagency project consisting of ECC, Districts, Boroughs, Unitaries, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) and Essex Police was established to examine the outcomes for Gypsy and Traveller communities living on sites throughout Greater Essex, existing service provision and the costs that are incurred. The scope of the project was as follows:

- Fire safety on sites
- Improving education outcomes
- Health and social care
- Management of local authority sites

- Unauthorised encampments
- Unauthorised developments

The project found that Gypsy and Traveller communities experience worse quality of life outcomes against many measures when compared with the population of Essex as a whole. Both national and local evidence demonstrates that these outcomes also result in high consequential costs to the public sector. The project also found that service provision can be made more effective and efficient through partners taking a more joined up approach.

### Options/Proposals

The multiagency project team drew on best practice in considering a wide range of service delivery options. Following this process, the group of officers drawn from partner organisations and ECC proposed that a single, countywide multiagency unit should be established to lead on the following areas of activity:

- Outreach work to improve fire safety on sites
- Outreach work to improve access to and take up of education opportunities
- Outreach work to improve access to and take up of health services
- Outreach work to improve knowledge of how to access social care services
- Management of ECC's Gypsy and Traveller sites
- Unauthorised encampments which occur on any land owned by partner organisations (including highways)

When requested, the Unit would also work with both communities and planning authorities to help facilitate the resolution of unauthorised developments (i.e. where sites do not have the necessary planning permission) and to reduce the likelihood of unauthorised developments occurring in the future. For clarity, the Unit would not be called upon to undertake enforcement action against unauthorised developments or to advise on planning for new locations for Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision.

Whilst there is significant commitment from partners, a small number are still in the process of finalising their financial contribution to the Unit. Until this is complete, and to ensure more joined up delivery of ECC services to Gypsy and Traveller communities as well as clearly indicate ECC's own commitment to the project, it is considered that the conjoining of the Gypsy and Traveller Services function (in Environment, Sustainability and Highways) with the staff providing education outreach to Gypsies and Travellers currently located in the wider Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) (in Schools, Children and Families), using existing budgets, together with a contribution from AHCW to replace previous Supporting People funding, is a logical first step. This combined budget will be used to deliver a single service which will be overseen by the Head of Environmental Planning and managed by the Head of the ECTU.

## Conclusions

The ECTU will help improve quality of life for residents and create opportunities to improve efficiency relative to current service provision. ECTU will have greater capacity to improve outcomes through preventing duplication by establishing consistency throughout the County. The high level benefits of forming ECTU will be as follows:

- Reduced risk of injury and death on site through reduced likelihood of fires on site
- Increased take up of compulsory education and consequent achievement
- Increased knowledge of and access to all learning opportunities
- Improved health outcomes and awareness
- Improved access to and take up of GP services
- Improved links to social care to ensure equality of access and opportunity
- Unauthorised encampments tolerated/resolved in a firm, fair and consistent manner

## **Relevance to the EssexWorks Corporate Plan 2012-2017 and other Strategic Plans**

As outlined in the high level benefits listed above, the ECTU will directly contribute to the following priorities in the corporate plan:

- Improving public health and wellbeing
- Protecting and safeguarding vulnerable people
- Enabling every individual to achieve their ambitions by supporting a world-class education and skills offer in the county
- Giving people a greater say and a greater role in building safer and stronger communities

In addition, forming ECTU will directly contribute to the Essex Diversity and Equalities Strategy 2012-2015 by directly addressing and focusing service delivery on the three key priority groups:

- Gypsy, Roma and Travellers
- Vulnerable Families
- People with impairments or disabilities

As well as the three priority Diversity and Equality themes:

- Education and skills
- Housing
- Rural isolation

The ECTU will also address priorities of other partner organisations involved in this project, including site safety (ECFRS), health inequalities (health partners), and improved community engagement (Essex Police).

### **Internal and External Consultation**

- All partners (Districts, Boroughs, Unitaries, PCTs, ECFRS, Essex Police) have been met by ECC officers as co-ordinators and briefed both individually and through partnership meetings
- The project from inception through to implementation stage has been developed by partners working together
- Regular updates have been provided to Portfolio holders throughout the project
- Discussions with affected ECC staff and with partners are ongoing

### **Legal Implications (Monitoring Officer)**

There are no legal implications in relation to the proposals to affect the transfer of resources internally to establish the unit. Any changes in staffing or recruitment will be carried out in accordance with ECC's usual policies and practices.

There are a number of ways in which a joint unit could be constructed and discussions are underway with partners and the legal advisers to determine the most effective solution. The governance arrangements will need to address staffing and assets, including any possible TUPE transfers, sharing of information, use of legal powers to tackle issues on site, highways powers, property rights, delegations from other authorities, issuing of legal proceedings etc.

The Cabinet is asked to have regard to the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment (attached) and to note the response to those findings in the equalities section of this report.

### **Finance and Resources Implications (Section 151 Officer)**

A staged approach to the creation of the ECTU is being undertaken initially aligning existing ECC activity in this report. A further report will be produced to deal with the planned agreement with external partners.

The proposal is based on support from the County Council that is currently budgeted for:

- £85,215 from the Education and 2012 Games Portfolio (to be transferred to the Communities and Planning Portfolio)
- £14,203 from Adults, Health and Community Wellbeing Portfolio (to be transferred to the Communities and Planning Portfolio)
- £107,492 within the Communities and Planning Portfolio for Traveller Services

Implementation costs are not included in the figures above. These costs are estimated to total £45,000 comprising: database (£25,000); recruitment costs

(£11,000); and, training and systems testing (£9,000). Implementation costs have been modelled on the Northamptonshire experience and Improvement East has agreed formally to provide funding to meet these costs.

### **Human Resources Implications**

This first phase of forming ECTU will bring together Gypsy and Traveller Services (which run ECC's Gypsy and Traveller sites and provides the enforcement function) and the outreach function of EMTAS. This will amount to 12.6 FTE (Gypsy and Traveller Services plus EMTAS outreach).

The next phase of forming the ECTU will be covered in a future report to Cabinet. This will see the Unit take on additional functions (fire safety, health outreach and encampment enforcement on the behalf of partners) and a potential increase in the number of posts from 12.6 FTE to 15 FTE (as well as the Police Officer secondment).

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken (attached as an appendix). The key findings and implications are as follows:

- ECTU will promote equality through helping increase awareness of services, how to access them and to support access to these if required
- ECTU will also be in a position to encourage the uptake of services where current use is disproportionately low and particularly where this is resulting in poor outcomes and high consequential costs
- The Unit will help improve community cohesion in the broadest sense by promoting understanding and demonstrably upholding rights and responsibilities
- ECTU will implement a consistent approach to managing unauthorised encampments which is visibly fair and proportionate in the action it takes which is understood by Gypsies and Travellers, communities in the broadest sense and partner organisations. The experience of Northamptonshire demonstrates that this can reduce the number of problematic incidents associated with encampments, benefit community cohesion, improve access to services and increase the number of encampments where enforcement action is not required

### **Background papers**

- Equality Impact Assessment