
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held at 10am on Friday, 10 June 2022

Present:

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| Cllr Mark Durham | Essex County Council |
| Cllr Jane Fleming | Maldon District Council |
| Cllr Paul Honeywood | Tendring District Council |
| Cllr Godfrey Isaacs | Castle Point District Council |
| Cllr George Jeffrey | Basildon Borough Council |
| Cllr Anthony McQuiggan | Essex County Council |
| Cllr Keith Parker | Brentwood Borough Council |
| Cllr Jannetta Sosin | Chelmsford City Council |
| Cllr Maggie Sutton | Uttlesford District Council |
| Cllr Richard van Dulken | Braintree District Council |

Also present:

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| Chante Adjei | Essex County Council |
| Paul Ashworth | Essex County Council |
| Freddey Ayres (Clerk) | Essex County Council |
| Alec Baker | Essex County Council |
| Gemma Bint | Essex County Council |
| Sgt Paul Brady | Essex Police |
| Nicola Coates | Essex County Council |
| Susan Enwere | Essex County Council |
| Carron Nason | Essex County Council |
| Donna Norman | Essex County Council |
| Damian Williams | Tendring District Council |

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

The clerk opened the meeting. The membership as presented in the agenda papers was noted:

Apologies had been received from the following:

- Councillors Robert Gledhill; Thurrock Council
- Councillor Wendy Schmitt; Braintree District Council
- Councillor Arthur Williams; Rochford District Council
- Councillor Julie Young; Colchester Borough Council
- Adrian Coggins; Essex County Council
- Jane Gardener; Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
- Will Newman; Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Election of Chairman

In response to the clerk inviting nominations for Chairman for the municipal year, Councillor Isaacs nominated Councillor Durham, which was seconded by Councillor Jeffrey. No other nominations were received and by general consent Councillor 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 Isaacs, which was seconded by Councillor McQuiggan. There being no further nominations, and by general consent, Councillor Isaacs was elected Vice Chairman.

4. Minutes of 23 November 2021 and matters arising from that meeting not covered in agenda.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 November 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

5. Operations Performance Update

Outreach Report

The Committee received a report from Susan Enwere - ECTU Outreach Officer, ECC and Nicola Coates - ECTU Outreach Officer, ECC. A verbal update was provided from Paul Ashworth - Wellbeing, Place & Communities Lead.

Post-COVID outreach visits had been gradually increasing but are not yet at the same levels as pre-COVID visits. Families are happy with interactions using phones, WhatsApp and Emails etc. Support with various services were on-going.

Health and Wellbeing: Joint visits with Health-visitors are ongoing. ECTU had been assisting with the Mid and South Essex Health and Care Partnerships inequality workshops, also Suffolk NHS inequality workshop. Plans are being arranged for collaborative work with the Local Delivery Physical pilot project, which works to improve activity levels and health outcomes, a progress report will be given at the November meeting. There is a joint project run by the council and NHS to allow younger persons voices to be heard in relation to healthcare services. It was also expressed that discussions had been held with women of the GRT communities to feedback research to develop workshops and initiatives against the risks of domestic violence.

Education: The Outreach Team had been assisting with attendance appeals. They were continuing work on an Education project with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to try and help GRT communities access education, including work on raising the number of GRT pupils transferring from Year 6 into Year 7.

Projects: As addition to the projects in the report it was also explained that the mobile library and outreach service are keen to start work on providing reading materials to GRT communities with help from donations from members of the public and other bodies. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had planned to visit Essex as part of the grant funding given for the Education Project this was to be undertaken on the 23rd of June so that they could attend the Health Day and visit Crays Hill Primary School in one visit.

Health Days: Ten Health Days will be undertaken; these will be on-site multi-agency visits throughout the months of June to October around Essex. One session is being held on the 23rd of June at Oak Lane, Basildon (a non-ECC site). A health bus attends sites to perform health and wellbeing checks. There had been some engagement with the Essex Youth Service including the providing of fire safety advice. The Papyrus trust has also been talking with members of the GRT community to address mental health issues and suicide prevention.

E-Learning: The Outreach Team had also developed an e-learning package in respect of cultural awareness, this had gone to GRT families for feedback before being distributed to schools and organisations.

Challenges: In relation to education there were issues around the access to distance learning which correlates to challenges in behaviour and attendance. The school/college application process can be difficult for GRT families, and the outreach team have been trying to assist with this as much as possible. It was also reported that there were high levels of poor mental health, and the issues of support are due to long waiting lists and reluctance to talk about how they are feeling.

In response to questioning it was shared that data on the accurate figures of those in the GRT community that are attending secondary school are not easy to attain due to issues with communication and engagement. The outreach officers are trying to encourage attendance but it is not always a success but there have been some successes and that is a positive. The young people are more inclined to want to return to school for years 10 & 11.

There was also a discussion held around college entry requirements being lowered to support those in GRT communities, it was revealed that some colleges had lowered the entry requirements but have since raised the criteria. Young GRT men seem to want to take courses relating to a trade but are then discouraged when they are required to undertake a foundation year first.

A question was asked around the accessibility of online applications and whether this was an issue for members of the GRT community, it was shared that the issue is not always around not having the devices available for the application but also issues around literacy and the outreach team are doing what they can to assist with this.

It was asked whether detailed figures of GRT children of school to college age could be supplied to the committee and whether bullying and discrimination towards GRT children was also an issue in schools. It was shared that this figure is hard to accurately gather due to the nature of GRT communities and that bullying and racist incidents are common and hard to tackle in a school setting. Awareness training and education would be beneficial for schools, and this is being developed.

A question was asked about how ECTU perform in relation to other Counties it was stated that although there is not any data on this ECTU had attempted some work with National Association of Gypsy Traveller Officers (NAGTO) to work more closely across the authorities and Paul Ashworth, Wellbeing, Place & Communities Lead is to report back to this committee.

Unauthorised Encampments Report

The Committee received an update from Alec Baker, ECTU Officer, Essex County Council.

It was reported that the 2021/22 figures are in line with previous years as in 2018/19.

The comparison between the November and May periods in 2021 and in 2022 showed that there was not much correlation between the encampments, the only similarities were in November and May August for both years. There had been a reduction in the number of unauthorised encampments this year, down to single digits in the winter months of 2022.

The current trend data in relation to previous years showed a marked reduction of unauthorised encampments within Essex. The main reason for the reduction was likely that since ECTU had been established, there are fewer regular travelling families travelling to Essex. Other reasons include past injunction legacy, police engagement, cost of living and the after effect of COVID-19.

In terms of Unauthorised Encampments, the three main places that were targeted between November 2021 and May 2022 were Chelmsford, Tendring and Uttlesford.

An update in relation to an injunction appeal from Thurrock Council that took place at the end of May 2022 will be shared at the next meeting.

From questioning it was shared that members would like to receive a regular email update on the statistics of unauthorised encampments prior to each meeting.

Rural Engagement Team Update

The Committee received a presentation from Sgt Paul Brady, Essex Police.

Key changes to legislation:

- Creation of new offence (S60c 2022 Act)
- S60c 2022 will be for more serious incidents
- S61 adds damage, disruption or distress and no longer needs to be "significant"
- Police can now make the request to leave S60c
- Highways now covered under S61

Sgt Paul Brady attempted to answer the questions asked but the overall response was that more will be known once the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) guidance has been released and once there is more case law in relation to the new statutory changes to set a precedent.

Members were advised to contact Sgt Brady by email to arrange for presentations to be delivered to local authorities and parish councils.

6. Finance Update

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

Key information provided included:

- (i) **2021/22 Final Outturn Position as at 31st March 2022.** The final outturn position as at 31 March 2022 was a net surplus £136,712.
- (ii) **Budget/Actuals for 2021/22 and agreed Budget for future years.** The assumptions around the 2022/23 agreed budget were outlined which included a 3.25% increase for Employee budgets (2% staffing and 1.25% NI Uplift) and a 4.1% RPI increase for Supplies & Services and Transport budgets.
- (iii) **2022/23 Membership Fees.** This report was summarised.
- (iv) **Balance Sheet - Reserves –** This report was summarised.

It was **AGREED** by general consent to note:

- the 2021/22 financial position
- the budget for 2022/23 and to note the proposed budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25
- the 2022/23 Membership Fee
- the Balance Sheet Reserves

7 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be arranged for November and the agreed date would be circulated in due course

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11:44am.

Chairman