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**Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held at 2pm on Thursday, 1 July 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.**

**Present:**

Cllr Mark Durham	Essex County Council
Cllr Rob Gledhill	Thurrock Council
Cllr Paul Honeywood	Tendring District Council
Cllr Godfrey Isaacs	Castle Point District Council
Cllr George Jeffrey	Basildon Borough Council
Cllr Beverley Oxford	Colchester Borough Council
Cllr Jannetta Sosin	Chelmsford City Council
Cllr Arthur Williams	Rochford District Council

**Also present:**

Paul Ashworth	Essex County Council
Alec Baker	Essex County Council
Tim Clarke	Tendring District Council
Nicola Coates	Essex County Council
Adrian Coggins	Essex County Council
Paul Downes	Essex Police
Graham Hughes (Clerk)	Essex County Council
Carron Nason	Essex County Council
Jane Gardner	Deputy Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Simon Ward	Thurrock 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 Councillors Jane Fleming, Wendy Schmitt and Chief Inspector Terry Balding.

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 Cllr Durham, which was seconded by Councillor Williams. 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**

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

#### 4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2020 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

#### 5. Finance Update

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

Key information provided included:

- (i) **2020/21 Final outturn position as at 31 March 2021.** the final outturn position as at 31 March 2021 was a net surplus £42,166, which was a favourable variance of £30,996 on the budgeted figure.
- (ii) **Essex County Council's contribution to the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit was £310,115 across internal partners.**
- (iii) **Legal fees and bailiff costs continued to be managed within the budget allocated.**
- (iv) **Balance Sheet - Reserves** - The year-end underspend position had increased the reserve from a surplus position at the closure of the 2019/20 accounts of £143,103 to a surplus of £185,268 at the close of the 2020/21 accounts.
- (v) **Budget for 2021/212 and proposed budget for future years.** The assumptions around the 2021/22 proposed draft budget were outlined which included a 2.2% increase for Employee budgets and a 2.2% RPI increase for Supplies & Services and Transport budgets. The assumptions for future years were also outlined in the agenda paper.
- (vi) **Proposed 2021/22 Membership Fees.** It was proposed that there would be no membership fee increase and no charge to Essex Fire and Rescue.

It was AGREED by general consent to note:

1. The 2020/21 financial position;
2. The proposed budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24;
3. The 2021 Membership Fees; and
4. The Balance Sheet Reserves.

#### 6 Operations Performance Update

### Outreach Report

The Committee received an update from Nicola Coates, ECTU Outreach Officer, Essex County Council.

It had been a challenging time to deliver outreach work particularly as the pandemic had had a disproportionate impact on the community. Access to many benefits and services had moved on-line and this had required providing additional support to those in the community who needed to develop those on-line skills and who may have had limited access to the internet. This challenge had been exacerbated as some in the community had low levels of literacy and in some cases less experience of face to face contacts, particularly by telephone.

There was no evidence to suggest that Covid infection rates were any higher in this community compared to the general population. However, it was possible that some in the community may have had pre-existing respiratory and other conditions that might make them more susceptible to a worse case of the virus.

Members questioned how difficult it would now be to fully re-engage with the community. It was stressed that some contacts had been maintained throughout the pandemic with many families contacting the ECTU direct for assistance. However, it was acknowledged that some sites were more transient and that it had been more difficult to keep in contact with those. It was expected that there could be difficulties for some in the community re-engaging with schools.

It was highlighted that the Domestic Abuse Board was looking to further understand the barriers in the community which might prevent the reporting of domestic abuse and that a further update on this could be provided to the Committee in due course.

During lockdown, many children from the GRT communities had difficulty accessing the online learning provided by schools, either because of lack of devices, lack of internet access or lack of parental guidance. This had meant that many Traveller pupils would be returning to school further behind than their peers which could lead to an increased gap in attainment. The move to online application and interviews for colleges was also greatly increasing the barriers to young people in the GRT community to accessing college places.

The ECTU had also continued to provide support for school place applications, free school meal vouchers, GP registrations and domestic violence referrals. On a strategic level the Outreach Team had contributed to the NHS equality impact assessments for the delivery of the Covid vaccination, and had met members of the digital media and sports department to support the development of a campaign to counteract misinformation regarding the vaccine within the GRT community.

### Unauthorised Encampments Report

The Committee received an update from Paul Ashworth, ECTU Officer, Essex County Council on authorised encampments including a year-on year analysis,

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five-year trend, District/Borough and Landowner analysis, and an update on injunctions.

There had been a near doubling of unauthorised encampments during 2020/21 with 119 recorded compared to 56 in the previous year. Whilst November to February figures were broadly comparable to previous years, the Government lock-down in March and April had reducing movement and impacted on numbers. An anomaly in November was highlighted which had involved a known family group migrating around the Chelmsford industrial area and there were now ongoing discussions with the City Council regarding any additional protections that could be put in place to protect industrial areas from inappropriate use in future.

Notwithstanding the above, the five-year trend indicated an overall downturn in unauthorised encampments.

With regard to the use of injunctions, it was advised that previously injunctions could, as well as naming individuals, also specify 'persons unknown'. Following a recent ruling such wording was no longer favoured; it was felt to be too early to know if this would have an impact. However, as injunctions had always, and would continue to, name people and families who were prolific in undertaking Unauthorised Encampments any such impact may be limited.

In terms of performance targets, there had been a slight underperformance on section 77 notices completed within seven working days with slight delays due to the impact of the pandemic on the operation of magistrate courts. It had not impacted on the ability to manage authorised encampments.

#### Rural Engagement Team Update

The Committee received an update from Sargeant Paul Downes on the activities of the Rural Engagement Team.

The team managed all unauthorised encampments within the relevant legislation and the National Police Chiefs guidance. The team also dealt with poaching matters, heritage crime and domestic violence.

There was a proposed change in legislation in relation to unauthorised encampments, but it was too early yet to assess its impact on policing operations locally. Once this was clearer then appropriate engagement with partners could begin locally and an appropriate plan of action would be developed.

Some members expressed concern about the serving and enactment of section 61 notices and local frustration with the process. It was highlighted that the powers did not apply if on the highway. All reports of anti-social behaviour would be followed-up by the Police, but allegations needed to be adequately evidenced and the police approach and actions would be in line with NPCC guidance. It was **agreed** by general consent that:

- (i) a historical flow diagram showing each step of the section 61 process would be re-circulated to members for information; and

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- (ii) that officers should ensure the completeness of the information on the section 61 process was available on-line.

## **7 High Level Risk Assessment**

Paul Ashworth confirmed that there had been no material changes to the risk assessment. Members accepted the existing and future risks identified and the supported the officers' suggestion to look at further assessing the risk of the pandemic.

## **8 Meeting dates in 2021**

The next meeting date would be circulated in due course. It was suggested that the meeting cycle should revert to a November and June pattern.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.58pm.

**Chairman**