
Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee, held as an online video conference on Friday, 13 November 2020

Present:

Cllr Susan Barker	Essex County Council
Cllr Colin Day	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Mark Durham	Maldon District Council
Cllr Rob Gledhill	Thurrock Council
Cllr Paul Honeywood	Tendring District Council
Cllr Godfrey Isaacs	Castle Point District Council
Cllr Michael Lilley	Colchester Borough Council
Cllr Wendy Schmitt	Braintree District Council
Cllr Jannetta Sosin	Chelmsford City Council
Cllr Mike Webb	Rochford District Council
Cl Terry Balding	Essex Police
James Palmer	Essex Fire & Rescue Service

Also present:

Steve Andrews	Essex County Council
Paul Ashworth	Essex County Council
Colin Batchelor	Braintree District Council
Gemma Bint	Essex County Council
Tim Clarke	Tendring District Council
Adrian Coggins	Essex County Council
PC Neil Fenn	Essex Police
Damien Ghela	Maldon District Council
Will Newman	Essex Fire & Rescue Service
Ali Purdy	Essex County Council

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

1. It was noted that incorrect membership was shown in the agenda. The correct membership of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee was confirmed as:

Cllr S Barker
Cllr G Callaghan
Cllr Colin Day
Cllr M Durham
Cllr R Gledhill
Cllr P Honeywood
Cllr G Isaacs
Cllr M Lilley
Cllr K Parker

Cllr W Schmitt
Cllr J Sosin
Cllr Mike Webb
CI Terry Balding
James Palmer (Essex Fire and Rescue)

2. An apology had been received from Jane Gardner, Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.
3. There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of the names of the Members who proposed and seconded the nomination for the election of the Chairman.

3 Finance update

The Committee received a report from Ali Purdy, Financial Controller.

Key information provided included:

1. **2020/21 outturn position.** Based on the actuals at 30 September 2020, the forecast surplus was a net overspend position of £13,161, which was a variance of £24,331 on the budget figure.
2. **Budget for 2020/21 and future years.** The budgeted surplus for 2020/21 was £11,170, and this would decrease to £2,160 in 2021/22 and then increase to £2,231 in 2022/23.
3. **Proposed 2021/22 Membership Fees.** There were three options – option 1 was a 1% increase of £83, option 2 was no increase and option 3 was a 2.2% increase of £183.
4. **Balance Sheet – Reserves.** The potential impact of an agreed 0% increase to membership fees for 2021/22 on the reserves figures was noted – raising the surplus from £156,432 for 2021/22 and £158,663 for 2022/23. It was advised that there had been adjustments to the reserves due to legal costs and the updated information would be circulated to Members.

It was AGREED, having been proposed by Councillor Durham and seconded by Councillor Isaacs –

That membership fees for 2021/22 would remain unchanged.

4 High level risk assessment

Steve Andrews, Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Manager confirmed that there had been no changes to the risk assessment except for the reference to COVID restrictions.

5 Operations Performance Update

The Committee received an update from Steve Andrews.

Education: COVID had significantly impacted on the ability to deliver certain services as a lot of the work would normally involve face to face visits; some services however had been delivered remotely. This included supporting families in getting children into school, transport applications and providing reassurance about returning to school in September after the first lockdown. Support had also been given around further education where possible and with the free school meal vouchers during lockdown. Post lockdown, work had started with young Traveller people with regards to doing work experience in preschools.

Health and Welfare: There had been continued welfare support with families to ensure they were getting the correct support and benefits and had access to health services. There had been more engagement with Gypsy / Traveller men who required support due to being unable to get to work during lockdown. Work was taking place with MARAC (Multi Agency Assessment Conference) to help support Gypsy Traveller victims of domestic violence. There had been continued support to other agencies working with the Gypsy Traveller community.

Fire: It had not been possible to complete home fire safety visits due to the current restrictions.

Unauthorised Encampments: There had been a slower start to the year due to lockdown; increases were seen in May and by August/September last year's numbers had been exceeded, before declining in October. It was advised that rates were likely to be lower overall in 2020 due to COVID but had this not been the case it was likely the numbers would have been at the same levels as previous years. For the first time a repossession order had been refused, with the magistrate deciding that Traveller should not be moved during lockdown.

Injunctions: It was advised that Harlow Council did not proceed with their extension application.

In response to questioning, Members were advised that although Traveller live on sites in relatively close proximity, social isolation had been very good within the Traveller community. There had been a couple of small outbreaks however the Traveller community had been a model example of how to effectively socially isolate.

Adrian Coggins, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health, confirmed that he was continuing to speak with Harlow Council about joining the ECTU.

6 ECC/ECTU Review

The Committee received a verbal update from Adrian Coggins, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health.

The review had been undertaken over the past 12 months, with the aim of establishing what was Essex County Council's best role in the Gypsy and Traveller agenda, relative to other agencies.

A paper was taken to the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee in June 2020. The Committee had been keen to understand how good accountability for site management would be achieved, and the view expressed that this would be best achieved if a public body was responsible.

One of the recommendations of the review was that ECC would divest of the sites, passing responsibility to another provider subject to assurance around good management and accountability. COVID and the local government review had both had an impact on the review, and it had been decided that ECC would currently be retaining the sites but a different approach may be taken in future. It was confirmed that multi agency site specific management plans were needed for the ECC sites, involving all the agencies who were stakeholders in the sites.

ECC's primary role is to improve health and education outcomes of families in Essex, including the Traveller community who had far worse outcomes in respect of health and education than the rest of the population.

The review had also considered the role of ECTU reference the management of unauthorised encampments. It was considered that ECTU worked very well as a partnership and had received good feedback in terms of how it had worked. The rationale that drove the establishment of ECTU remained just as strong as it did in 2012.

Finally, the review had considered what could be done to improve the health and educational outcomes of the wider Gypsy and Traveller community. COVID had impacted on what was intended to be done, but work had been undertaken on the sites to ensure that people were supported during the pandemic.

7 Member/partner question

The following question had been put to the Committee: "Should ECTU be providing support (in accessing key services including schools, GPs etc) to residents on unauthorised developments/ encampments".

Adrian Coggins, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health, informed Members that a key consideration was the provision of sites and pitches within the appropriate Local Plans throughout the County and this was being addressed at the ECTU Operations Board. It was still early in the process and it was understood that officers were currently focussing on pandemic mitigation work.

CI Terry Balding and PC Neil Fenn, of Essex Police, were invited to provide an update regarding policing. It was advised that the Rural Engagement team now had two Sergeants and eight Constables, soon to be nine, with recruitment for another constable also underway. A representative from the Police Gypsy Roman Traveller Association had recently attended a training day, and another

training day was scheduled shortly where there would be contributions from Travellers in respect of domestic violence. Neighbourhood policing was being explored in respect to the sites, it was still early in the process, but the approach was very much based on joint working principles.

There had been no major issues at the ECC sites. In terms of unauthorised encampments, the pandemic had not caused any disruptions in dealing with these encampments and the use of Section 61 was still applied where necessary. Essex Police were spending more time with Traveller families and building effective rapport with them.

It was suggested by a member of the Committee that it was important to effectively engage with non-Traveller communities in respect of unauthorised encampments to prevent tensions arising. CI Terry Balding reassured Members that the aim of the rural engagement team was to deal with unauthorised encampments consistently taking a “fair but firm” approach. Police officers attending unauthorised encampments would engage with both groups and deal with any criminal offences impartially.

8 Meeting dates in 2021

The next meeting date would be circulated in due course.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.10pm.

Chairman