



**REPORT of  
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

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**to  
COUNCIL  
14 FEBRUARY 2019**

**ESSEX COUNTYWIDE TRAVELLER UNIT (ECTU) CONTRACT RENEWAL**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To update members on the current position of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU) and seek approval to renew the Council's membership arrangements from 1 April 2019.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council's membership of the Essex Countywide Traveller Committee is renewed in April 2019 for a three year period.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 The Essex Countywide Traveller Committee was established as a joint committee in 2012 to co-ordinate and oversee the operation of the ECTU. A legal agreement between member authorities provides for the operational Traveller Unit to discharge certain functions of member authorities in respect of Gypsies and Travellers on payment of an annual sum.
- 3.2 The Community Services Committee considered the original arrangements at its meeting on 28 February 2012 and, at a meeting on 12 April 2016, was presented with a review of the services and renewal of the Council's membership arrangements appropriate at that time.
- 3.3 The three year membership agreement will expire on 31 March 2019. The current cost of membership for 2018 / 19 is £7,989 with a 2% increase applied for 2019 / 20 to £8,149.
- 3.4 A key benefit to the Council is the ability of the Traveller Unit to deal with unauthorised encampments on partner land, avoiding the high cost and resource implications often associated with moving on travellers. The Unit has procedures in place for serving necessary papers and preferential access to the courts to help reduce eviction times. It also has a team of outreach workers, its own police support and specialist legal advisors.
- 3.5 Associated with this role is a high level of shared intelligence about traveller groups which can provide advanced warnings of traveller movement and shorten the time

taken to deal with known groups. Anecdotally, membership may also offer a deterrent to traveller groups.

- 3.6 Other services provided through the Traveller Unit aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the traveller community and deal with the significant health inequalities of this social and ethnic group. Fire safety inspections and advice have improved safety on sites and the outreach workers have improved access to education and health care within the traveller population. A briefing note from ECTU is attached in **APPENDIX 1** detailing statistical data of the services provided, in particular to Maldon District Council over the period of the previous contract.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 Essex Countywide Traveller Committee and Traveller Unit provide an innovative and effective control over unauthorised encampments with the added benefit of outreach work aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of the traveller community. Maldon District Council has benefitted from this approach since being members of the partnership and offers a resource which has historically proved extremely valuable.

#### **5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS**

- 5.1 Continued membership of the Essex Countywide Traveller Committee contributes to the corporate goal of strengthening communities to be safe, active and healthy. It helps protect communities from the potential of crime and anti-social behaviour arising from unauthorised encampments. The outreach work of the Traveller Unit helps safeguard children and vulnerable adults and encourages more healthy lifestyles within the travelling community.
- 5.2 The Unit's activities in relation to established traveller sites helps protect and shape the District by meeting housing need, reducing waste and encouraging a clean local environment.
- 5.3 Working in partnership to deliver controls and benefits to the travelling population helps deliver value for money, contributing to the goal of delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services.

#### **6. IMPLICATIONS**

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Continued membership of the Essex Countywide Traveller Committee will provide influence over the delivery of outreach services to the local travelling community. It also enhances the ability to deal with unauthorised encampments and manage the fears, concerns and prejudices within the wider population.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are protected as ethnic groups under the Equality Act. Working in partnership with a common approach across Essex helps ensure against unintended discrimination. The

traveller population also suffer from severe health inequalities and good progress has already been made by the Traveller Unit to improve take up of health care and education.

- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Membership helps deal with the risk of unauthorised encampments on public land.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Renewing membership has an ongoing annual cost implication of £6,462.90 which is already provided for in current budgets. Failure to renew will expose the Council to unknown, but likely to be considerable, costs of dealing with any future unauthorised encampments.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** - Continued membership requires officer and Member attendance at quarterly board and joint committee meetings. Membership considerably reduces the human resource input required to deal with unauthorised encampments and includes the Traveller Unit providing an effective out of hours service.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – Reduced environmental impact through better management of unauthorised encampments and permanent sites.

Background Papers: None.

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