

Aldridge's Farm
Maple Lane
Wimbish
SAFFRON WALDEN
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14 April 2014

Amy Naphine
Transport Safety Commission Manager
Transport Safety Commission

Dear Ms Naphine

I am writing in response to the questions posed by the Commission in relation to road safety. My comments relate solely to the first question raised – who should be responsible for road safety?

I am the independent Chairman of the Uttlesford Road Safety Working Group, which reports to the local Community Safety Partnership. It is a voluntary position which I took up in 2004.

However this letter is written in a personal capacity.

The Uttlesford district is a large rural area in north-west Essex. It has boundaries with Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire as well as being only 3 miles from the Suffolk border. It is the largest district in Essex by area but has one the smallest populations (80,000).

Generally speaking it has one of the lowest, if not the very lowest, crime rates in the county. However when it comes to road safety things are rather different. With a vast number of single carriageway roads its casualty statistics are high. For many years it had the highest accident rate (based on population) of any district in the county, although in the last few years it has fallen to second place.

Road Safety is, of course, the primary responsibility of County Council and after many years when it received little attention funding was increased about 6-7 years ago. This was apparently a response to a central government initiative when increased grants were available to councils with improved safety records. Although the connection cannot be proved, casualty statistics did begin to show significant improvements.

However in the last 2-3 years the county council have outsourced the function and resources have been dramatically reduced. Following this the improvement rate in casualty figures has reduced, although again we cannot be certain that there is a connection.

The reduction in road safety officers means that the County Council is unable to send any representative along to our quarterly meetings, which are nevertheless regularly attended by the district council, the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service.

It has always been my view that responsibility for road safety should rest with the organisation that bears the cost when it fails. In this particular respect the county council has, sadly, little incentive to promote the function.

This leaves three contenders:

The NHS – this has little resource or expertise.

The Police – this has significant expertise but relatively little spare resource

The Fire and Rescue Service – this has significant expertise and more resource.

Also as a proportion of its total costs, dealing with road collisions is far greater for the Fire and Rescue Service than it is for the other organisations.

I am aware that a Memorandum of Understanding has recently been agreed between Road Safety GB (that represents County Council Road Safety Officers) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). This acknowledges that Road Safety Officers will continue to lead on road safety programmes but will be “supported by Fire and Rescue colleagues who will help deliver road safety on the ground locally and regionally”.

My view is that we should go further and give the Fire and Rescue Service full and overall responsibility for road safety.

Yours sincerely

Michael Young
Chairman Uttlesford Road Safety Working Group