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## Road Policing in West Yorkshire

*Chief Inspector Gary Parker of the Operations Support Division (Roads Policing) provides an update on current practice, based on his talk at the Road Safety Seminar In Keighley .*

West Yorkshire Police, by working with our partners, aim to make our roads safer and reduce road user related crime. Through our policing activity we look to improve road user behaviour and reduce the number of fatal and injury collisions. We attend and investigate all serious road traffic collisions and in collaboration with other agencies we encourage the development of safer roads and safer vehicles.

We adopt a consistent approach to detecting and prosecuting offences of speeding. Speed is a contributory factor in just over one third of all collisions and is by far the biggest single contributor to casualties on our roads. Around 70% of all casualties are car occupants. Despite this too many people continue to take a cavalier attitude to speed.

Traffic speeds are also a factor in air pollution, emissions of green house gases and noise, all of which affect people's health and quality of life.

Ultimately the goal for any Speed Management Strategy must be for drivers to take responsibility for their own actions and abide by speed limits. For limits to be respected they not only need to be appropriate for the road, but also to be understood. Inappropriate speed limits are often ignored and lead to lack of respect for the speed limits. Consistency in setting speed limits is extremely important, and they should conform to national guidance.

Our speed management measures are effective but the challenge is how to encourage drivers to choose appropriate speeds over all of our roads. To achieve this we need the co-operation and understanding of drivers and their respect for speed limits.

Our vision is to work with our partners (West Yorkshire Casualty Reduction Group, district councils, the Highways Agency and the health authority) to change drivers' attitudes and behaviour through education and publicity campaigns and, for those that refuse to heed the message, enforcement and penalties.

We actively target through an intelligence led approach those criminals using the road system. We have established and maintain appropriate standards and resource levels for road policing duties, which I will describe in greater detail later. These officers are equipped with appropriate skills to deal effectively with the incidents they face on a daily basis.

This force has over 5,000 police officers, of whom around 1,000 are deployed on specialist duties. That leaves over 4,000 officers to perform day-to-day policing duties. In addition to the police officers the force has a further 3,000 full time equivalent police staff members. Clearly we police round-the-clock 365 days a year. So in order to achieve this less than a quarter of our officers can be on duty at any one time.

Out of this number there are 285 constables and sergeants dedicated to roads policing throughout 11 divisions across the county. Additionally, located centrally within my division there are a further 93 officers who focus on the motorways, accident investigation and specialist support.

To give you an idea of what demands are placed on this force here are a few facts.

Just over 2 million people live in West Yorkshire. That means that there is on average one officer on duty for every 2,000 people.

In a typical day West Yorkshire Police respond to over 1,106, '999' calls with many more of a routine nature and attend 1,818 incidents. We deal with 892 new crimes, making 276 arrests, attend at 276 road traffic accidents and patrol a distance of 24,585 miles of the county's roads ("Who says you can never find a police officer when you need one").

When we look at the number of calls that this force handles the numbers are staggering—over 2.1 million telephone calls every year. That is one every 15 seconds. We receive more than 9,300 '999' calls per week, that is at a rate of one per minute. Each year the force handles three quarters of a million incidents, of which 500,000 are attended by a police officer. Around 1 in 4 are prioritised as requiring an immediate response, almost 90% of them are attended within 15 minutes.

In order to provide you with some idea of scale, on average each police officer must cover an area of two square kilometres, containing 880 houses, 1,400 cars, 2,000 people and 11 kilometres of roads.

The county has almost 7,000 miles of roads and 1.4 million vehicles licensed to West Yorkshire residents. Around 450 police vehicles are available to patrol these roads and respond to incidents. That equates to one police vehicle to every 3,000 cars on the road. These police vehicles cover some 15 million miles per year.

To underline the scale of the problem with regard to road policing this can be illustrated by comparing the following statistics. In 2002 there were 886 murders in this country while 3,431 people were killed on the roads.

Working with all our partners our approach to improving road safety can be summed up as education, enforcement and engineering: educating drivers, enforcing the law and ensuring roads are engineered to reduce the risk of accidents.

The police can educate drivers, many forget the effect that poor weather can have on driving conditions – how a wet road, for example can double braking distance. On average, accident rates double in wet weather.

To move onto the issue of safety cameras, on average 7,000 tickets are issued each month, of which approximately 70% are paid on time. A specific example of how effective these devices can be is illustrated by Thornton Road in Bradford, it had 24 casualties in 2000. This rose to 43 in the following year. Safety cameras were installed in 2002 and the number of casualties dropped to 11.

According to the findings of a government report published in June 2004, casualties have fallen by 72% on roads in West Yorkshire where safety cameras have been introduced. Since 2001 the number of road deaths in the county has fallen from 144 to 102.

Finally, I would like to mention automatic number plate recognition (ANPR). This is the latest crime fighting tool available to the police and is the process by which moving cars have their number plate read via video camera and matched against various computer databases. ANPR is estimated to be around ten times more effective than normal traffic policing methods, primarily because its system can identify suspect vehicles that may not normally attract police attention. During the past year over 13,000 cars have been stopped in West Yorkshire as a consequence of ANPR activity and this has resulted in almost 800 arrests being made.