Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Written submission from Kenneth MacInnes

I saw your request for information and views on policing in West Dunbartonshire in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Reporter Newspaper.

I am an HGV driver and spend my day driving through Dumbarton and the surrounding areas and across the bridge to Ayr.

I observe on a daily basis that the policing and driving authorities seem to set out to impede the local drivers in their jobs and on a number of occasions, without due cause.

From my personal experience, I was stopped back in April by two police officers and accused of being on a hand held mobile phone whilst driving my lorry on the A82. I was not doing so, and immediately offered my phone to the police officers to check and told not to argue with them and they became very aggressive in manner towards me, very quickly. They were not prepared to enter into any form of civilised conversation and their manner was such that the ticket was forced upon me as I remained calm throughout this whole incident and remained respectful to the officers at all times. When I finished work that day, I also went down to the local police office in Dumbarton to explain what had happened. I once again offered my phone to the officer on the desk to check and was told that he wasn’t interested and to get a lawyer.

I have now had to engage a lawyer at my own expense and have to go to court in February and March 2014 regarding this issue. I even have a witness who saw me at the same time the police say, and he can verify I was not using a phone.

In conversations with other people, this seems to be a common occurrence in this area and a frequent comment throughout is the attitude of police officers. The way they speak to members of the public is confrontational right from the start, without allowing the members of public to get their point across.

From what I hear, a number of drivers just pay the fine and have to take points on their licences as they can’t afford to go to court. As an HGV driver, getting points on a licence can have a lasting impact on you, as some employers see this as a case for instant dismissal. As a private driver, any points given also impacts on your personal insurance costs. I feel that I need to fight this and take on the expense of going to court, even though from what I hear, it seems unlikely that it will make a difference to the final outcome. I was not at any point using a mobile phone whilst driving and this can be verified by phone records. If the police had taken two minutes of their time when they first stopped me, all this could have been avoided by checking my phone.

I am writing to let you know of the pressures that drivers are put under in this area and feel that there has to be some measures to protect drivers from over-zealous
policing, where it seems to be target driven and it doesn’t matter whether the charge is justified or not.

Kenneth MacInnes
16 November 2013