

Supporters Summit 2014

SAGs - who are 'ya?

PANEL

Amanda Jacks – Football Supporters Federation
Dale Haslam – MUST & RedsAway curator
Ruth Shaw – Sports Ground Safety Authority Chief Executive Officer
Dave Tomlinson - Crewe Supporter Liaison Officer

Safety Advisory Groups: just who and what are they? A SAG is a collective body of individuals run by local authorities, set up following the Hillsborough Report.

The group includes representatives from organisational staff, police and the emergency services, advising authorities on a host of safety related issues.

Although SAGs should include a supporter representatives and consult with supporter groups, in reality local councils are often reluctant to do so for a wide variety of issues. In the experience of Dale Haslam, a member of the Manchester United Supporters Trust, local authorities had concerns surrounding confidentiality.

"They didn't think we would keep things confidential, that we would turn the meetings into rows", said Haslam, who founded the RedsAway website which provides travel tips for all supporters visiting Old Trafford.

However, one Club dispelling these concerns is Crewe Alexandra. As a regular supporter, Dave Tomlinson began shadowing Crewe Alexandra staff across a number of departments, before being invited to sit on the SAG and be involved in key safety decisions.

And Sports Ground Safety Authority Group CEO Ruth Shaw is in no doubt that the ideal SAG model requires cooperation from all sides.

"There needs to be a true partnership with all agency representatives", Shaw remarked, following searching questions from Summit delegates.

But it's the decisions made by SAGs that are under most scrutiny - and delegates were keen to learn more of SAGs' decision making process. Kick off times in particular proved to be a hot topic, and Shaw was quick to acknowledge delegates' concerns.

"Kick off times are particularly topical at the moment.

"There are issues, including public safety certificates being used against issues outside the ground, when they only cover inside the ground".

So the question remains: are SAGs necessary? In short, yes. Yet the resounding message from delegates is that supporter engagement and involvement is crucial.

"We can certainly encourage supporter involvement and we think it's a good thing", said Shaw.

It is however a relationship that needs to be 'built and strengthened over time' - a quick overnight fix is certainly out of the question.

Lee Bradshaw

Blues Trust Board Member