



Home Office

Rt Hon Damian Green MP
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Joanne McCartney AM
Chair of the Police and Crime Committee
London Assembly
City Hall
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28 JUN 2013

Dear Jo McCartney,

Thank you for your letter to the Home Secretary of 30 May regarding the governance of Taser. I am replying as the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice.

You raise a number of issues with regards to Taser statistics, the role of Police and Crime Commissioners in the authorisation of less lethal weapons, and the latest technology currently being considered by Home Office officials. I will take each of your points in turn.

Taser statistics

The Home Office is committed to publishing *Police Use of Taser* statistics, and will do so in the Autumn. As a key tool in the police's ability to deal with challenging and potentially violent situations, this data will provide valuable information on use of Taser by police forces. The data takes the form of a force by force breakdown setting out each use of Taser (drawn, aimed, arced, red dotted, discharged, drive stun and, recently, angled drive stun).

Due to problems arising from the transfer to a new database, there has been a considerable delay since the last publication of this data. Thankfully, the transfer problems have now been resolved and an extensive validation exercise is currently underway to ensure the accuracy of the figures held on this database.

As these figures will be managed as Official Statistics, we will pre-announce the date of publication and at the same time, announce the dates of subsequent statistical reports.

Role of Police and Crime Commissioners

The Home Secretary's role, as set out in the Home Office Code of Practice on Police Use of Firearms and Less Lethal Weapons and in the police led Authorised Professional Practice, is to authorise any less lethal weapons which could be used by the police in England and Wales. Before giving her authorisation, the Home Secretary requires detailed information from the police on the police operational requirement, the technical requirement, training and tactics, a detailed medical statement on the likely risk of injury from the independent Science Advisory Committee on the Medical Implications of Less Lethal Weapons (SACMILL), and an assessment of the potential impact on the community. The introduction of Taser and the Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP - often named 'baton rounds') have both followed this stringent process.

Whilst the Home Secretary approves the introduction of less lethal weapons at a national level following a request from the police, we would expect the Chief Constable to consult Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) on the introduction of any new less lethal weapon within their force area. There are a number of potential options for PCCs to properly engage with this process. For any introduction, we would expect a thorough Community Impact Assessment to be carried out. The results of this would provide a basis for discussion with the Chief Constable. Secondly, public engagement exercises could be delivered which would enable PCCs to hear directly from the members of the public who could be affected. Both these options would provide information which the PCC and Chief Constable could discuss before the introduction of new less lethal technology into their force area.

Once authorised, the way in which less lethal technology is deployed would be an operational decision for the relevant Chief Constable in the light of a thorough strategic threat and risk assessment.

Home Office research on a link between the use of Taser and a decrease in the risk of violence to officers and/or the public

Our key aim is to ensure that data on the use of Taser by police forces is publicly available. The publication of the data will also enable others (for example, academics) to analyse it and draw conclusions. Whilst we have not specifically undertaken any research into the link between the use of Taser and a decrease in the risk of violence, we are aware of several anecdotal cases where Taser has prevented the police from having to use lethal force.

'Developmental' less lethal weapons

The Home Office Centre for Applied Science and Technology (CAST) has a programme of work to 'horizon scan' new technologies and determine whether they could more closely meet the Police Operational Requirement for Less Lethal options. The work supports the Government's obligations under article 2 and 3 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force.

The technology currently being considered by CAST includes new variants of existing equipment such as Taser and work advising the police on the authorisation requirements for water cannon. I would reiterate that all technologies are subject to the Home Secretary authorisation process before they can be used by the police in England and Wales.

I hope that this addresses the issues you have raised.

Yours sincerely,
Damian Green

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