



Home Office

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Rt Hon Harriet Harman KC MP
House of Commons
London
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22 October 2023

Dear Harriet,

Thank you for your letter of 3 October on the police use of Taser against vulnerable groups including elderly people.

The first duty of Government is to keep the public safe. This requires policing to have the resources, tools and powers they need to keep themselves and the public safe. The proper use of conducted energy devices ('Taser') provides an important tactical option for police when facing potentially violent situations. It also gives our front line officers the capability to respond to serious incidents that might otherwise have to be attended by armed police.

In circumstances where police must use force to achieve a lawful objective, their use of force must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary and police officers are accountable through the law for their actions.

Articles 2 and 3 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials set out that governments should develop a broad range of less lethal weapons and ammunition for police use to allow for a differentiated use of force and firearms. Taser helps government to meet this objective.

Home Office annual [Use of Force statistics](#) show that in 2021/22, total Taser use decreased by 0.4% from the previous year. There was a 3% decrease in Taser firings as a proportion of all Taser uses. In 2021/22 and 2020/2021, 90% of Taser uses were non-firings. This indicates that although the number of reported Taser incidents have risen over the past five years possibly in-part as a result of improvements to reporting, in the vast majority of cases the device is not fired, for example the device is 'red-dotted'. This data indicates that Taser can help to resolve an incident without police having to resort to potentially more injurious forms of force.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on specific cases however police are expected to be able to explain their use of force. The questions you have raised are important and I have addressed each below.

1. Are you satisfied that College of Policing guidance and the training that police officers received deal adequately with the proportionality of using Tasers against vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly? Do you consider that the College of Policing APP has been updated appropriately in accordance with the recommendations of the IOPC review of cases involving the use of Tasers?

Any police use of force must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary This is set out in College of Policing (CoP) Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and in Taser training for police.

All officers who volunteer and are selected to use Taser must pass a comprehensive training programme which includes an appreciation of the physical and psychological effects of the devices. Officers are trained on assessing each situation to factor in the potential vulnerability of every person including their age (for both elderly and young people), their physical stature and mental health. All Taser trained officers must undergo annual refresher training in line with the most up-to-date training curriculum.

CoP training for conflict management and de-escalation was updated on 1 April 2020 and APP was updated to reflect this, with learning materials made available for officers to better recognise and respond to people with vulnerabilities including acute behavioural disturbance and other mental health conditions.

In April 2023 the CoP in conjunction with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) introduced a re-designed training standards which includes awareness of mental health conditions, recognising and responding to vulnerabilities and de-escalation skills. This was introduced to police forces on 1 April 2023 and all forces are expected to have implemented this new training by 1 April 2024.

These updates to training and APP take into account recommendations made by the IOPC from their review of 101 cases involving police use of Taser over five years. I am therefore satisfied that College of Policing has met IOPC's recommendation.

2. Have you conducted a review of the "collection, collation and presentation of use of force data" as recommended by the IOPC? Is data gathered on the age and vulnerability of those who are subjected to Taser use?

The Government is committed to transparency and accountability for police use of force. The Home Office publication of police use of force data provides unprecedented public insight into a complex area of policing, ensuring the public is better informed about the types of force police officers use and the context in which it occurs.

Police Use of Force data are collected from police forces under a Home Office Annual Data Requirement since 2017 and they have been published annually since the year ending March 2018. Initially, the data was classed as experimental statistics to allow time for the collection to develop and to improve. Since 2021 this data has achieved the designation of official statistics which means the data has been assessed as fully compliant with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Published data includes the personal characteristics of those who experience police use of force including their age, gender, ethnicity and whether they have physical or mental health conditions. In 2021, for the first time, the published report included an open data set to allow better accessibility and data tables which allow the reader to see intersections between characteristics including race and age.

Home Office continues to annually review the scope of the data set with the NPCC and other stakeholders with the aim of improving its quality and usefulness and, in doing so, meeting the IOPC's recommendation.

3. Are you satisfied that providing Tasers to all frontline officers who want them is consistent with ensuring that Tasers are only deployed where strictly necessary in response to an identified threat?

Only specially trained officers may carry a Taser. Officers must volunteer to become specially trained in the use of Taser and pass a comprehensive training programme in order to be authorised to carry. It remains an operational matter for Chief Officers to determine the number of approved Taser they purchase. This is based on their force's strategic threat and risk assessments.

Taser remains an important tactical option for officers trained to use it and this allows for a differentiated use of force from firearms and other uses of force with potentially less injurious outcomes in line with Articles 2 and 3 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Officers able to respond to incidents with Taser can also free up armed officers to deal with other incidents and this can mean potentially faster response times. This was referenced in Lord Harris' 2022 report '[London Prepared](#)'.

4. Are you taking any further steps to ensure that Tasers are not used against vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly, who do not pose a serious threat

Police use of Taser, as for any use of force, must be necessary, proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances and it is essential that decisions taken by officers to use force of any kind are subject to proper scrutiny.

The scrutiny framework in place for police use of Taser includes HMICFRS inspections and IOPC oversight which I am satisfied are robust in holding officers to account. Home Office recently announced a review of the framework of investigatory arrangements for police use of force and police driving, so that the public and officers can have clarity and confidence in this framework. Home Office is also currently consulting on a new framework to assist Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces to establish and maintain effective local Community Scrutiny Panels to enable a consistent approach nationally.

Taken together, the Government's position is that the legal, accountability, training, safeguarding and scrutiny frameworks in place around police use of force are sufficiently robust. They allow specific cases to be scrutinised and officers held to account if appropriate and lessons learned, or good practice shared. I trust this clarifies the Government's position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Philp', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire