

# LEARNING THE LESSONS

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*Ask yourself:  
Could it  
happen here?*

## Bulletin 21: Taser

Learning the Lessons bulletins summarise investigations conducted by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) or police forces where learning opportunities are identified. Police forces facing similar situations to those described can use the experience of other forces to improve their policies and practices. The bulletin challenges forces to ask “Could it happen here?”

### Issues covered in this bulletin:

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## Foreword



**James Dipple-Johnstone  
and Cindy Butts**  
IPCC Commissioners with  
responsibility for Taser

Recent Home Office figures show that police use of Taser in England and Wales is continuing to rise. In 2009 police forces introduced specially trained Taser units and between 2009 and 2013 Taser use increased by 232 per cent. However, increases in Tasers being fired or used in drive-stun, have been lower than the overall increase (139 per cent and 116 per cent increase respectively).

Taser remains a contentious and emotive issue for many. The IPCC is generally supportive of police use of Taser – as long as it is used appropriately and monitored by police forces correctly.

In light of public concern, since 2009 the IPCC has required police forces to refer any complaint or conduct matter arising from the use of Taser to us, for us to determine how they should be investigated. This has provided us with an important opportunity to identify emerging themes and ensure that any organisational learning can be shared effectively across the police service.

This bulletin includes a small number of cases, which broadly represent many of the key issues we have seen, ranging from cases where Taser was used disproportionately and inappropriately, to others where its use was proportionate, well-judged and where it defused a dangerous situation.

In researching a large number of Taser investigations in order to produce this bulletin it became apparent that there is a growing disconnect between the national media and the general public's perceptions of Taser and those of police officers on the ground.

Taser is often viewed by the media and sections of the public as a high level use of force whereas, increasingly, officers who have used Taser to resolve a situation say, when interviewed, that it was the lowest form of force that was available to them.

It is important to remember that no form of force can be considered non-lethal. Whenever force is used it carries risk. Taser, when used appropriately, is a valuable tool, which can assist officers with the often dangerous and challenging situations that they are forced to face while serving the public.

Our experience, as set out in the IPCC's report on Taser, has led us to be concerned about a number of issues, including about how Taser is used:

- in confined spaces such as custody suites
- in drive-stun mode
- on young people
- on people with mental health problems

We recognise that use of Taser may sometimes be justified in these instances, however, where these factors apply, these cases will be subject to greater scrutiny because of the greater potential for its use to be disproportionate or carry more risk of adverse outcomes for those involved. We are currently undertaking a wider piece of work on police use of force, which will incorporate outcomes from use of Taser.

Robust oversight of cases involving Taser, transparency around how and when it is used and a visible demonstration of police forces learning from their experiences of using it are essential for maintaining public confidence in Taser. We are confident that the cases explored in this bulletin will add to that learning.

  
James Dipple-Johnstone

  
Cindy Butts

## Case summaries:

### 1. Taser ignites CS spray

Police were called to attend a residential property to deal with a report of a man in his early 20s cutting his wrists with a knife and holding the knife to his neck. Police were told that there was concern for the man's mother and a child who also lived at the property.

Two officers arrived at the property, one of whom was trained to use and was carrying a Taser. The officers spoke with the man's mother outside the property. Following this, they entered the house believing that they could talk to and reason with the man and that although he had a knife, he did not pose a threat to them.

The officers made their way upstairs and approached the man's bedroom door. When the officers were close to the man's bedroom door, he emerged suddenly from the bedroom. The man was wearing only boxer shorts and had a number of cuts on his torso. He was also carrying a knife in one hand. He moved quickly towards the officers.

Fearing for their safety, one of the officers sprayed approximately half of his CS spray at the man, before moving into a nearby doorway to avoid the man. The other officer who was behind him was unaware that he had used CS spray. This officer then used his Taser, which caused the man to fall to the floor. The officer then cycled his Taser again. This allowed both of the officers the opportunity to start restraining the man.

When the officers went to restrain the man they saw that his hair and head were on fire. This had been caused by the Taser igniting the flammable CS spray. The officers quickly extinguished the flames using linen that was lying nearby.

The man was taken to hospital for treatment and for a mental health assessment.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- Does your police force policy and training emphasise the risks around using Taser in conjunction with CS spray or the danger of using Taser around flammable substances, as set out in the national training guidance?
- Does your police force provide officers with guidance on using Taser on people who are threatening to self-harm or are in the process of self-harming?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- If time allows, before entering residential properties or areas of confined space, do you and your colleagues plan which order you are to go into the

property, as part of your risk assessment? Do you take into consideration what personal protective equipment each officer has been issued with and whether any officer is carrying a Taser?

- Do you issue a verbal warning to colleagues when using CS spray, especially if you are with a colleague who is carrying a Taser?

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- There were no misconduct or criminal outcomes for any of the police officers or police staff involved in the handling of this incident.



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### 2. Tasered man suffers cardiac arrest

Two police constables were patrolling a town centre in the early hours of Saturday morning. They were in an unmarked police car and were carrying standard personal protective equipment and Tasers.

They approached a hotel where a number of people were gathered outside. A security officer flagged them down while they were in their car and told them that it had "kicked off". The officers got out of the car and approached the group.

As the officers got closer they saw a fight in progress between one man who was bleeding and a number of other men. The injured man ran into the hotel pursued by two of the men.

Both officers drew their Tasers but did not radio in to the control room or activate their emergency control buttons. One of the officers pushed past one man who was trying to block his way and went in to the hotel foyer. Once inside he saw two men beating the injured man as he lay in a foetal position on the floor. The officer shouted to the men to stop and that he was a Taser officer. The two men then pushed the officer to the ground.

While that was happening the other police constable was outside and had his path to the hotel blocked deliberately by a man who was refusing to move. He targeted the man with the red laser sight on his Taser. As a result, the man started to comply and he moved aside from the door. The officer could now see inside and saw his colleague being pushed from behind.

After the first police constable had been pushed to the ground, the two men ran out of the hotel. As they ran off, the police constable who was on the floor inside the foyer discharged his Taser at one of them but

only one of the barbs struck the man so it did not have any effect.

As the two men ran out of the hotel, they barged into the police constable who was outside. The police constable kept his footing and successfully fired his Taser onto one of the men causing him to fall to the floor.

The police constable told the man to stay on the floor but he got to his feet and started to run away. The police constable then cycled the Taser for a second time and kept his finger on the trigger causing it to cycle for 11 seconds. Although, he was not conscious of how long he was keeping his finger pressed down.

The man fell to the floor and the police constable, together with two hotel staff, pulled the man's arms behind his back and handcuffed him. The police constable then radioed for assistance to take the man back to the police station.

Meanwhile, the other police constable had pursued the other man and had been able to effect an arrest.

A crowd began to form near the officer and the man who had been Tasered. Some of the people knew the man and were being very verbally aggressive towards the police constable.

A couple of minutes later other police officers arrived to provide assistance. The police constable who had Tasered the man asked them to check on the man as he had been unresponsive for a couple of minutes.

The two officers were unable to locate a pulse on the man. As a result, the man was unhandcuffed and rolled onto his back. The police constable who had fired the Taser then performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the man and then used an automated external defibrillator (AED) from one of the first aid kits in one of the police cars.

The AED delivered two or three shocks to the man at which point he started to breathe again but did not regain consciousness. Shortly afterwards an ambulance crew arrived and took the man to hospital.

The hospital later diagnosed that the man had suffered a cardiac arrest and was under the influence of illegal drugs. The consultant responsible for the man's care determined that the man had no underlying heart conditions and that the cardiac arrest was most likely due to the use of the Taser. The consultant also reported that this would have been compounded by his increased adrenalin levels at the time of Tasing and the use of cocaine.

The man later made a full recovery.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- What training does your police force give to officers who use Taser to help them deal with any medical emergencies that may arise as a result of someone being Tasered?
- What steps has your police force taken to ensure that Taser officers are able to access first aid kits or automated external defibrillators if needed?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- Under what circumstances would you consider activating your emergency control button and calling for assistance?
- Are you aware of the potential dangers of Taser use on people who are under the influence of legal and illegal drugs?

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- The investigation found that the officer's use of Taser was proportionate and justified in the circumstances.
- The officer who allowed his Taser to cycle for 11 seconds received additional training on this issue.

 [Click here for a link to the full learning report](#)

### 3. Partially sighted man Tasered in a case of mistaken identity

Early on a Friday evening, police received three separate reports of a man walking around a town centre carrying and waving a sword.

A variety of units were despatched to search for the man, this included units with standard personal protective equipment, units with Tasers and units armed with Tasers and conventional firearms.

Over the course of the next 15 minutes, six separate descriptions were broadcast to all officers engaged in the search. During this period, the Force Incident Manager (FIM) authorised the use of Taser and conventional firearms. The FIM also communicated that due to conflicting reports that the man appeared drunk, that officers were to treat him as potentially vulnerable and enter into early negotiations and modify behaviour as though the man were drunk.

A police constable armed with Taser in a single-crewed police van was involved in the search. He drove past the end of a street and saw a man heading in the opposite direction. He reversed the van and saw a flash of light at the man's side. Believing this to be the sword he got out of the van.

The police constable made his way to the man and radioed in that he had seen him. The constable then shouted for the man to stop and that he was a police

officer and that he had a Taser. The man did not acknowledge him. The constable shouted to the man again telling him to stop. Again the man did not acknowledge him and kept walking.

The police constable fired his Taser into the man's back causing him to fall to the ground face down. The police constable caught up with the man, pulled his arms behind his back and handcuffed him. He then picked up the object he had seen the man carrying and realised that it was in fact a white stick, which the man had been using as he was partially sighted.

Other officers arrived shortly afterwards and after several minutes of lying handcuffed, face down on the ground, the man asked to be un-handcuffed. The police constable did so, having realised that it was a case of mistaken identity.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- **As a FIM what techniques do you use to ensure that, in dynamic situations, that all police officers are aware of the latest intelligence and how do you communicate multiple, potentially varying, descriptions of a suspect?**

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- **When you are single-crewed in a police vehicle how do you ensure you have taken in all of the relevant information and/or any descriptions of suspects that have been relayed over the radio?**
- **Where Tasers have been authorised, do you ensure that you do not use them as a default option and, where safe to do so, ensure that the correct person/suspect has been identified and that negotiation has been given every reasonable chance of success before Taser is used?**
- **Do you consider any other reason for a lack of response from a suspect or lack of compliance with instructions? For example, a learning disability or visual, hearing or speech impairment or not understanding English?**

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- **The police constable was issued with a performance improvement notice and told to apologise to the man.**



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## 4. Taser used in custody

A man was arrested for providing a positive road-side breath test. He was then taken to the local custody suite by the arresting officer, a police constable, who was trained to use and was carrying a Taser.

At the custody desk the man was agitated and difficult in his manner and explained that he had

substance dependency issues, had attempted to self-harm previously and had undiagnosed mental health problems.

The man was asked to remove his shoes so they could be searched. The man took off his shoes and kicked them in the direction of the police constable.

The police constable took hold of the man and the custody sergeant informed him that he was about to be searched. At this point the man pulled away and began to remove his clothes and throw them in the direction of the custody sergeant and the police constable.

The police constable and sergeant then took hold of the man and attempted to physically move him to a cell. The man resisted being moved.

After a brief struggle the police constable moved a few paces away, pulled out his Taser and pointed it at the man. He told the man to face the wall but the man did not comply. The man was now calmer but was asking why he should face the wall. The police constable informed him that it was because he was being violent and aggressive. The man strongly denied being violent.

This exchange lasted for a few seconds during which the man said that if the police constable said "please" he would comply and face the wall. The police constable did not respond to this.

The police constable then shot the man with his Taser causing the man to fall to the floor in a squat position. The police constable then told the man to lie down but the man did not do so. The man was disorientated but conscious and had maintained his squatting position. The police constable then cycled the Taser for a second time. The man then complied and lay down whilst continuing to protest that he was not being violent. At this point a nearby door in the custody suite opened and a number of officers came out and handcuffed the man and escorted him to a cell.

The man had the Taser barbs removed by the police constable just before going in to the cell and was seen very shortly afterwards by a forensic medical examiner.

The man later complained that the use of the Taser was disproportionate and unjustified.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- **Does your Taser policy specifically deal with the use of Taser in custody suites as opposed to just 'confined spaces'?**
- **Do your police officers know that the College of Policing guidance specifically states that Taser use**

**will be subject to more scrutiny when it is used on people with mental health difficulties and also when it is used on people in confined spaces such as custody suites?**

**Key questions for police officers/staff:**

- **What other options would you have considered before using a Taser in this situation?**
- **Are you aware of the guidelines and issues around Taser use on people with mental health difficulties?**
- **As a custody sergeant or detention officer what further checks, considerations or instructions would you give following a detained person's admission of mental health difficulties?**
- **Are you clear that every time you use force in a situation, you must be able to justify that use of force?**

**Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:**

- **The officer received management advice. He was also required to go through the CCTV footage together with a conflict management trainer. The trainer also advised the officer on the National Decision Model, assessment of threat, use of tactical communication and use of tactical options.**

**Find out more online**

Learning reports available online include the recommendations made in each case, full details of action taken by each of the forces involved, and details of any criminal or misconduct outcomes.



[Click here for a link to the full learning report](#)

## 5. Taser used on a man for refusing to put on a safety suit

Police officers arrested a man for motoring offences and took him into custody.

The man told the custody sergeant that he was on medication for a mental health condition and asked to see a doctor for another undisclosed mental health condition.

While at the desk the man produced a bladed article and was further arrested.

As the man's police national computer (PNC) record showed a number of self-harm markers the custody sergeant asked him to put on a safety suit. Once in his cell, the man refused and threatened to fight any officers who tried to remove his clothes.

The police officer who arrested the man, who was a Taser trained officer, asked for authorisation to use Taser. The Force Incident Manager (FIM) granted

authorisation based on a brief description of the man's behaviour but asked no follow-up questions.

The police constable who arrested the man went to the man's cell with four other police officers who were in the area on patrol and had been called to attend the custody suite and assist. The police constable asked the man through the cell hatch to remove his clothes but the man did not respond. The police constable entered the cell and told the man to stand against the wall, which the man did. The man breathed in and tensed up. The police constable shouted "Taser, Taser" and then successfully fired his Taser.

The man fell to the bench and the four other police officers entered the man's cell. They removed his clothes and the Taser barbs and then left the cell.

After they had left the cell, some of the police officers involved were captured on CCTV having a conversation about the use of Taser and stated that the man had "glowed in the dark" and had "blue flames" coming out of his eyes.

An hour later the custody sergeant again requested authorisation to use Taser from the FIM in case he needed to in order to allow a force medical examiner (FME) to examine the man. The man was agitated and angry and the custody sergeant thought he posed a risk to the FME. The FIM refused authorisation. The custody sergeant recorded on the custody record that he was not letting the FME examine the man due to safety concerns. The man was seen by an FME eight hours later when he was calmer.

The FIM did not make a record of either of his decisions on Taser authorisations, although, the telephone calls were recorded. He also did not ensure that the post-incident procedures were followed.

The man complained to his solicitor while he was in custody about the use of Taser and his solicitor relayed the complaint to custody staff and asked that all CCTV be preserved. Custody staff told the on-duty inspector, who then went off duty shortly afterwards and did not tell the incoming inspector of the complaint. As a result, no action was taken for over two months until the man's solicitor wrote to the police force. Consequently, the complaint was not referred to the IPCC as it should have been, the CCTV was nearly lost and the six-month time limit for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to consider statutory offences such as common assault was nearly breached.

**Key questions for policy makers/managers:**

- **How does your police force ensure that any complaints made by people whilst in custody are properly recorded and acted on?**
- **How do you ensure handovers between duty**

inspectors are carried out effectively and that no outstanding actions are lost?

- How does your police force ensure that the rationale given for authorising use of Taser is properly recorded and subject to effective scrutiny?
- How do you ensure that post-incident procedures, particularly following the use of Taser, are properly followed?
- Does your police force provide officers with a list of issues to consider before authorising Taser use?
- As a police officer responsible for authorising Taser use, are you clear on what your role is in relation to post-incident procedures?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- How do you ensure that you record as detailed as possible rationale for your use of Taser? How do you ensure you do it as soon as is practicable after the event?
- Are you clear what your responsibilities are around post-incident procedures?
- When you receive complaints are you clear where they should be recorded and to whom they should be referred?

#### Actions taken by police force

- The policy and learning around the use of Taser in custody suites was reviewed.
- The police force's Taser Use Policy was reviewed to ensure roles and responsibilities were appropriate.
- A review of the complaints process relating to complaints made by those in custody was carried out.

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- The inspector who authorised the use of Taser was put on a performance plan.
- The inappropriate comments captured on CCTV were referred to the police force's professional standards unit.



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## 6. Taser used on a man in a police cell

A man was arrested for racially aggravated assault. During the booking-in procedure at the custody suite he was difficult, drunk, verbally aggressive and using racist language. He tore up the custody record before the risk assessment could be completed.

As the risk assessment had not been done, the man was treated as high risk. He was taken to a cell and asked to strip so that he could dress in a safety (paper) suit. In the cell the man removed all of his clothes but refused to remove his boxer shorts, saying that officers would have to fight him to get them. As he was arguing with the officers a religious hat which the man had been secreting in his boxer shorts, fell out.

The police officers who had escorted him to the cell returned to the custody sergeant to discuss how to proceed. The custody sergeant had not been in post very long and had limited training since completing his initial custody training many years before. He also had very limited experience of Tasers.

After discussion, the decision was taken to seek authorisation for Taser use from the Force Incident Manager (FIM). The custody sergeant recorded on the custody record that authorisation was sought to gain 'compliance' from the man. This was in contravention of the police force's guidance that stated Taser should not be used to gain compliance. The sergeant did not record any other rationale or further detail his decision-making.

A police constable, rather than the custody sergeant, contacted the communications room who despatched a Taser trained officer and contacted the FIM. The FIM then authorised the use of Taser based on the information on the incident log as there was sufficient information on the log to do so. However, the FIM did not speak to any of the officers present in the custody suite.

After the Taser trained officer had arrived at the custody suite, he and several other officers went to the man's cell. The Taser officer and two police constables entered the cell with the Taser officer in the lead. They made the reasonable decision not to use shields as was taught by the police force for Taser use in cells because the cell was too small.

The Taser officer identified himself as a Taser officer and asked the man to remove his boxer shorts. The man said he would and stood up off the bench where he was lying. Once standing, however, the man refused and clenched his fists.

The Taser officer fired the Taser successfully causing the man to fall to the ground. The other police officers were then able to remove his boxer shorts. The Taser officer then removed the barbs to prevent the man self-harming or using them as a weapon.

The man was later seen by a force medical examiner. Shortly after this, he was examined at hospital and given the all-clear.

Following the incident, the Taser officer recorded a detailed rationale for his use of the Taser in the custody record, a Taser deployment form and his duty statement. In addition, all of the correct post-incident procedures were followed by the Taser officer and custody staff. The FIM, however, was unaware that these had been completed correctly as he was unaware that, as per police force policy, it was his responsibility to ensure the procedure had been followed correctly.

**Key questions for policy makers/managers:**

- How do you ensure that staff returning to custody roles, after service in other areas of the police force, are up to date with the latest guidance and skills?
- As a police officer responsible for authorising the use of Taser, what steps do you take to gather evidence before authorising its use? What are the key factors you consider? Do you take into account the location that the Taser is to be used e.g. in custody?
- What guidance or training has your police force given to custody officers or staff equipped with Taser to prepare them for the specific challenges and risks attached to using Taser in a custody environment?
- Does the training you provide to officers on the use of Taser in confined spaces include the use of shields in conjunction with Taser, and if so, does the training take into account the action that should be taken in very confined spaces such as police cells?
- What steps has your police force taken to ensure that police officers properly record their rationale for using Taser and that this rationale is subject to effective scrutiny?

**Key questions for police officers/staff:**

- When in custody, if you are required to use force, where do you record your rationale and decision-making? How do you ensure you do this as soon as practicable?
- How do you demonstrate and record that you have considered all of the possible alternatives before using force?

**Actions taken by police force**

- The policy and learning around the use of Taser in custody suites was reviewed.
- The police force's Taser use policy was reviewed to ensure roles and responsibilities are appropriate.
- Training around the use of shield tactics was updated.

**Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:**

- The custody sergeant received advice on how to accurately record his rationale on the use of force.
- The investigation found that the use of Taser was justified and as a result there was no case to answer for misconduct.



[Click here for a link to the full learning report](#)

## 7. Use of Taser as part of a planned operation

A man was arrested as part of a pre-planned drugs operation. Due to the severity of the offences under investigation and the man's previous history, firearms units armed with conventional firearms, Tasers and a dog unit were deployed to make the arrest.

The police officers that had been issued with Tasers had received them from one of the firearms team leaders who had signed all of them out and then handed them to the police officers.

The man was arrested after he had got out of a car outside a residential property. He did not initially comply with instructions to get down on the ground. He was then forcibly taken face down to the ground by a number of police officers. He was instructed to place his arms behind his back, however, he kept one arm tucked under him near his waistband.

One police constable thought that the man might be reaching for a weapon and so used his Taser in drive-stun mode to the side of the man's body. Police officers were then able to securely handcuff the man behind his back.

During the course of the incident, a police dog handler had sent his dog to grab hold of the man but another police officer got in the line of sight and was hit by the dog.

After the man had been handcuffed, the police constable who had used the Taser told the officer that had been hit by the dog that he used Taser on the man. No other officers were aware that the man had been Tasered.

The man was taken back to the local custody suite. None of the custody staff were informed that the man had been Tasered. As a result, none of the medical post-Taser procedures were followed.

The police officer who had used the Taser was an officer safety trainer and had completed the Taser instructor course, however, he required help from another police officer to submit a Taser deployment form. There were a number of basic inaccuracies on the form.

The police officer who used the Taser and the officer who deployed the police dog did not record in their pocket notebooks that they had taken part in the operation and therefore did not record anything about the incident. Furthermore, the statements provided by several of the police officers involved in the operation contained very little information.

The man later complained that he had been stamped on and Tasered unnecessarily.

**Key questions for policy makers/managers:**

- What processes do you have in place for ensuring that there is a clear audit trail for weapons allocated to police officers so it can be clearly demonstrated to whom they were allocated and when?
- After a suspect has been Tasered, who is responsible for informing custody staff? The

police officer who deployed the Taser? Who is responsible if the police officer who deployed the Taser is absent?

- What steps do you take to ensure that post-Taser deployment forms are properly completed, and within the 24 hours specified by College of Policing guidance?
- How do you ensure that all Taser-deployment forms are submitted to the Home Office and ACPO Conductive Energy Device Section as required by Authorised Professional Practice?
- Is it police force policy that police officers record their attendance at every incident in their pocket notebook?
- Is it police force policy for police officers to record every use of force in their pocket notebook, no matter how minor?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- Are you aware of the correct level of information required for post-Taser deployment forms as set out in training?
- Where do you record your rationale for deploying a Taser?
- If you have used your Taser, how do you ensure that custody staff are aware that, in line with College of Policing guidance, the suspect is required to be seen by a forensic medical examiner?
- Do you routinely record your attendance at every incident in your pocket notebook?
- Do you routinely record your use of force in your pocket notebook, no matter how seemingly minor?

#### Action taken by this police force:

- Following this incident a new firearms issues and return form was implemented. This form requires each officer to sign for a specific and designated weapon.
- The firearms unit has also introduced a new deployment form that ties in to the issues and return form and must be counter-signed by a senior officer.

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- All police officers involved were reminded of the importance of recording and justifying any use of force, particularly in incidents where firearms have been issued.
- The police officer who deployed the dog received management advice around the need for accurate record keeping in incidents where police dogs have been deployed.
- The police officer who used his Taser left the police force before he could attend a misconduct meeting.



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## 8. Accidental Taser discharge to the head

In a busy town centre in the early hours of Saturday morning, a man approached two police officers who were crouched down and in the process of handcuffing and arresting a suspect.

The man began to argue with the two police officers and swear at them, asking them what they thought they were doing.

At this point, a police sergeant who was nearby attempted to push the man away. However, the man was aggressive and would not comply. Consequently the sergeant, several other officers, and two night marshals, who were working nearby, attempted to physically restrain the man.

Due to the man's large size and his level of resistance, they were unable to take him to the ground. As a consequence, one of the police officers sprayed PAVA spray in the man's face but this did not have any effect.

Eventually the man was taken to the floor but continued to resist. One of the police officers then shouted for people to get back as he was going to use his Taser. The Taser did not fire properly and so the police officer used it in drive-stun mode on the man's back.

The police officers were then able to get the man handcuffed behind his back and on to his feet. The police officer with the Taser then loaded a new cartridge in the Taser. This police officer then took part in the escort of the prisoner by entangling the man's arm with his left arm.

The police officers escorted the man, who was still resisting, to a nearby police van. The police officer who had used his Taser on the man still had his Taser drawn.

When they reached the back of the police van, one of the police officers let go of the man and went to open the back door of the van. At this point the police officer who still had his Taser out tried to reinforce his grip on the man using the same arm he was using to hold the Taser.

Shortly after he had reinforced his grip, the police officer accidentally discharged the Taser. One of the barbs struck the man on the side of his head, just above the temple. The Taser fully deployed and the man fell to the ground.

The man was conscious and still able to communicate and was placed in the back of the van after the barbs had been removed. He was then taken to the local custody suite.

At the custody suite, the man became aggressive and agitated again and was placed in a cell. He was later examined by a medical examiner who noted a number of injuries, including a penetration mark above his temple.

The police officer later submitted a use of Taser form, which was found to include insufficient information.

After the man was released from custody, he visited his GP on two occasions and complained of various medical complications he had suffered after being Tasered.

Following the conclusion of a court case against the man for his actions on the evening of the incident, he submitted a complaint to the police force alleging a number of matters, most notably that the use of force and specifically both deployments of the Taser were excessive.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- Is your training and police force policy clear that Taser officers become a different tactical option to escorting officers as soon as they draw their Tasers?
- What steps does your police force take to ensure that use of Taser forms are properly completed?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- Do you always re-holster your Taser as soon as the incident no longer requires it to be used?
- If a Taser barb had struck a suspect in a sensitive area, such as their head, what steps would you take to ensure they received the appropriate medical care as soon as possible?
- Are you aware of College of Policing guidance that states barbs should only be removed from sensitive areas by medical professionals?

#### Action taken by this police force:

- All Taser trained officers are now required to submit use of Taser forms to their direct line supervisor prior to the forms being sent to the chief firearms officer.
- All operational supervisors, including inspectors who supervise Taser officers have received additional training on the guidance for the correct deployment of Taser, including tactical options and an input on the submission of use of Taser forms.

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- The police constable who discharged the Taser received management advice and is no longer authorised to carry or use Taser.



[Click here for a link to the full learning report](#)

## 9. Taser used mistakenly on Good Samaritan

At around 10pm, two rival gangs of girls in their late teens became involved in an altercation outside a supermarket.

During the course of this altercation a young man who was with one of the groups punched one of the girls in the head causing her to fall to and remain on the floor.

A man was passing by with his friend. He went over to try and defuse the situation. He placed the girl in the recovery position, asked a passer-by to call the police and then escorted the man who had hit the girl inside the supermarket where the doors were locked.

Shortly afterwards a police car arrived with two firearms officers inside, one of whom was armed with a Taser. The police officers had been told that several calls had been received about the incident and one of the callers had mentioned knives and bottles being used in the altercation.

The Taser armed officer identified the man who had been helping the girl as a potential protagonist due to his large size and how vocal he was being. Consequently, the police officer went up to the man and tried to take hold of his arm.

The man did not immediately recognise the officer as a police officer and snatched his arm away. The police officer then pushed the man to move him away but the man did not move. The police officer then moved to pull his Taser out.

This caused the man to put his hand on the police officer's forearm in order to prevent him drawing his Taser. The police officer then pushed the man again causing him to stumble over a bike rack. The police officer then told the man to lie on the floor but the man tried to get up.

The police officer then fired his Taser at the man causing him to fall face down on to the floor. At this stage other police officers and a dog unit had arrived. A non-firearms police officer then helped the first police officer by assisting in placing the man in handcuffs.

The police officer got one of the man's hands into the handcuffs. The man did not immediately comply with the instructions to place his other hand behind his back. The firearms officer then cycled the Taser for a second time.

The police officers were then able to get the man's other hand into the handcuffs. He was then helped to his feet and placed in the back of a police van.

He was taken to the local custody suite and was released without charge the following afternoon. He later complained that he was grabbed from behind by a police officer, pushed to the ground and Tasered twice unnecessarily.

CCTV footage was taken from the supermarket but it was not checked until many months later and was found to be footage of a different time period to that of the incident. By then, the supermarket had deleted the original footage.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- **Does your police force have specific rules of engagement for firearms officers on their own in crowd situations i.e. situations where the integrity of their firearms might be put at risk?**
- **In high profile incidents such as Taser discharges what steps does your police force take to ensure that all relevant CCTV is seized and checked?**

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- **How do you ensure in fast moving, stressful situations that you follow the national decision model before using force?**

#### Outcomes for the officers/staff involved:

- **The case was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service which took no further action.**
- **The firearms officer who used their Taser left the police force before the investigation was completed.**



[Click here for a link to the full learning report](#)

## 10. Changes to approval process for Taser officers

After reviewing Taser complaints and looking at its practices, one police force decided to change its process for approving and vetting officers interested in becoming Taser officers.

Previously police officers wanting to become Taser officers submitted their application to the Taser unit. The police officer's inspector was then responsible for checking the police officer's complaints history and submitting their written approval if they agreed that the police officer was suitable. Guidance did not specify whether specific types of complaint or levels of severity would make an applicant unsuitable. Decisions were made purely at the inspector's discretion.

Following approval from their inspector, police officers were required to undertake a fitness and eye-sight test and to read a set of documents and information for the

first day of the Taser course. Applicants could potentially fail any of either the fitness tests, eye-sight test or the first day of the Taser course.

After reviewing this process, the police force decided to make it more consistent with the process for applying to become a firearms officer. A slimmed down version of the firearms form was created and the initial stages of the two processes became broadly the same.

These revised applications have to be signed-off by an applicant's inspector after they have checked the police officer's complaints history. The application and complaints history are then reviewed by the inspector's line manager and finally by the superintendent for that area.

While the police force did not introduce any specific criteria around the types and severity of complaints that would make a police officer unsuitable to be a Taser officer, these additional layers of decision-making ensured continuity of decisions and also built further checks into the process.

The police force also introduced measures to ensure all Taser officers were reviewed annually by their line manager. Line managers looked at the police officer's complaint history for the previous year before confirming their suitability to continue in the role.

In addition, the police force has raised the fitness level for Taser officers to the level of fitness required for public order officers. This change was made because research demonstrated that people who are healthier and more active make better decisions under pressure. Additional research also found that when people were physically fatigued their perceptions and fine motor skills, such as those used for the operation of a Taser, deteriorated rapidly.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- **What is your approval process for police officers wanting to become Taser officers?**
- **Has your approval process been reviewed since the introduction of Specially Trained Units?**
- **Do you have higher fitness requirements for Taser officers than those required for entry level to the police service? (the issues around use of force and fitness levels are currently being debated nationally)**
- **Have you undertaken any benchmarking with other police forces around the vetting process for Taser officers?**
- **Are Taser officers' complaints histories annually reviewed?**

## Additional themes

In reviewing cases for possible inclusion in this bulletin we have identified a number of recurring issues that we felt it was also important to circulate.

### Evidence from in-house Taser experts

In several local Taser investigations, professional standards departments used evidence from the police force's in-house Taser expert or lead. In our view this practice could create potential accusations of bias, justified or not, as frequently the police officers in question could be personally known and /or have been trained by the Taser expert or lead.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- Does your police force consider using Taser leads or experts from other police forces in serious cases? (these could be identified with the assistance of the College of Policing).

### Applying the national decision model instead of a continuum of force

In complaint investigations Taser officers, at interview, have offered a range of explanations for why they chose to use Taser as opposed to other forms of force. These included:

- Not using CS Spray because the incident was indoors and the spray would also have affected the police officers who were present.
- Not using CS Spray because the incident was outside and therefore the spray would have dispersed and affected the police officers who were present.
- Not using a baton strike, police dog, or open-hand techniques as these would have caused more injury than Taser.
- Getting close enough to use a different technique would place the police officer in danger of being hit/hurt.

However, many police officers rationalised their use of Taser by saying that it was the lowest form of force that was available to them. The national decision model argues against some forms of force being seen as potentially less likely to injure than others, but argues that all force options are to be seen as part of a range of options

for use depending on the specific situation and the level of threat.

#### Key questions for policy makers/managers:

- Does your police force advise officers investigating Taser allegations to explore decisions to use Taser based on the national decision model?
- Does your police force advise investigating officers to consider the possibility that in certain situations Taser might be more dangerous than other forms of force?

#### Key questions for police officers/staff:

- Are you aware of the factors that might increase the risk to a person if Taser is used on them? For example, a pre-existing heart condition, being under the influence of drugs, or the person having a medical condition such as epilepsy or the person being stood on potentially dangerous ground, for example stairs or a high balcony?
- Are you aware that College of Policing guidance states that anyone subject to Taser use who is later found to have a pacemaker or similar implanted device should be transferred to hospital for immediate assessment?

#### Related reading

The Learning the Lessons webpages on the IPCC website ([www.ipcc.gov.uk/learning-the-lessons](http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/learning-the-lessons)) contains links to a variety of research and other publications relating to Taser, as well as previously published bulletins, and copies of the more detailed learning reports which accompany each case.

**Find out  
more online**

Learning reports available online include the recommendations made in each case, full details of action taken by each of the forces involved, and details of any criminal or misconduct outcomes.