

**Association of Chief Police
Officers: Independent
Evaluation of the Operational
Trial of Taser**

Final Report, May 2004

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Summary of key conclusions

- In general, the Taser device was viewed by the firearms officers involved in the trial as a useful and effective piece of equipment. The officers to whom we spoke in all of the pilot forces were positive about its potential benefits.
- The main operational benefits of Taser reported were that it can help to de-escalate potentially violent situations, can reduce the risk of harm to officers and can, in some circumstances, be used with more precision than alternatives such as irritant spray and baton gun.
- Officers told us that the visual impact of arcing Taser or ‘red dotting’ a subject was frequently sufficient to make a person posing a threat cease to do so. It was thus seen as being highly effective in terms of de-escalating potentially violent situations – and therefore possibly reducing the need to introduce lethal force into incidents.
- Concerns were raised by a number of firearms officers about practical problems with Taser, notably operational reliability, design, storage and data recording. These issues were, however, raised primarily in the early months of the trial when officers were unfamiliar with the technology. By the end of the trial many of these problems appeared to have been overcome.
- It is difficult to make direct comparisons between Taser and other less lethal options because each weapon has certain benefits for specific situations. The judgement about which is best to deploy depends on the environment and nature of incident in question. That said, we concluded that Taser seems to be a beneficial addition to the range of conflict management options currently available to officers.
- The trial guidelines dictated that Tasers are only deployed alongside conventional firearms and in circumstances in which it is judged appropriate for firearms officers to carry firearms. Many of those involved in the trial – senior as well as operational officers – considered that this restriction meant that opportunities to use Taser to resolve violent or potentially violent incidents that did not meet the criteria for firearms deployment had been missed.
- There has been little press interest in Taser, especially outside the trial areas. Public awareness of Taser is limited. But the experience of the trial forces to date is that the public appears to be supportive of Taser, particularly where forces are open and informative about the deployment of the technology.

Section 1: Introduction

- 1 In February 2003 PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to undertake an independent evaluation of the operational trial of the Taser device. The trial concluded on 31 March 2004. This is our draft final evaluation report.
- 2 The trial was co-ordinated by the ACPO Police use of Firearms Secretariat on behalf of ACPO. We are very grateful to Martyn Perks, the staff officer of the ACPO Working Group on Police use of Firearms, and the liaison officers in each of the five forces for their assistance throughout.

Terms of reference

- 3 Our brief for this assignment was:
 - ‘To evaluate how successfully Taser devices have been used as a supplementary option to other deployment methods, namely firearms, dogs, baton rounds and irritant spray.’
- 4 The evaluation did not cover any medical assessment of the use of Tasers, nor did it include making judgements on the operational decisions to deploy Taser in respect of specific incidents. The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) is tasked with overseeing post-incident investigations where Taser is discharged.
- 5 This report builds on an interim report produced for the ACPO steering group in September 2003.
- 6 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
 - Section 2 sets out the background to the trial and its parameters;
 - Section 3 describes our evaluation methodology and evidence base;
 - Section 4 presents the key findings from our analysis of Taser deployment forms and our fieldwork visits to pilot forces;
 - Section 5 sets out our main conclusions from the research;
 - Annexes A-C contain supporting documentation.

Section 2: Background

- 7 In this section of the report we provide brief details about Taser. We describe the scope of the trial and set out the main elements of the policy set out by ACPO describing its operational parameters and key procedures. We then describe our evaluation methodology in terms of the approach we adopted for gathering research evidence and information.

The Taser device

- 8 The Taser is an item of conflict management technology that works by delivering an electrical current that interferes with the body's neuromuscular system, temporarily incapacitating a subject. The Taser is laser-sighted and uses cartridges attached to the end of the barrel. The cartridges project a pair of barbs, which attach to the skin or clothing and deliver an electrical charge. The maximum range is 21 feet. The effect of a Taser discharge is instant and only lasts as long as the charge is applied. Every time the Taser is fired, it stores the time and date when it was fired. The Taser trial police forces used the American-made M26 Advanced Taser. The power output from this version of Taser is 26 watts.

Taser trial policy and parameters

- 9 Five police forces took part in the trial:
- Lincolnshire Police;
 - Metropolitan Police;
 - Northamptonshire Police;
 - North Wales Police; and
 - Thames Valley Police.
- 10 In February 2003, ACPO issued a policy document to the forces taking part in the Taser trial that set out how the trial should be conducted¹.
- 11 The document notes that while Taser technology has been subject to 'rigorous assessment' by the Police Scientific Development Branch (PSDB), the Defence Scientific Advisory Council's Sub-Committee on the Medical Implications of Less Lethal Technologies (DOMILL) has a number of 'residual medical concerns' about the deployment of Taser, particularly in regard to special population groups.

¹ *Operational Trial of Taser – Policy* (ACPO, February 2003)

12 The lack of certainty about the medical implications of Taser at the outset of the trial was a factor in causing ACPO to decide that the use of Taser should be ‘deliberately constrained by policy for the purpose of the trial’. The policy document sets out these policy constraints as follows:

- Taser will only be deployed in circumstances where firearms officers are authorised to carry firearms;
- Taser will be readily available and will only be deployed alongside conventional firearms;
- the command structure will be in accordance with current advice contained within the ACPO Manual of Guidance on Police Use of Firearms with respect to conventional weaponry; and
- officers will be trained in line with the above principles.

Definitions

13 There are two important definitional issues addressed in the policy document:

Deployment – is defined as where Taser is deployed to a policing operation where the use of firearms has been authorised. Officers were required to complete an evaluation questionnaire for every such deployment throughout the course of the trial period.

Usage – is defined as any of the following three actions carried out in an operational setting:

1. drawing of a device in circumstances where any person perceives the action as a use of force or threat of a use of force, whether or not this is accompanied by a verbal warning, sparking of the device or placing of the laser sight red dot onto a subject;
2. firing of a device so that the barbs are discharged at a subject; and
3. application and discharge of a device in ‘touch stun mode’ to a subject.

14 All uses that fall within categories 2 and 3 above are referred to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) for further investigation.

- 15 In summary, there are three main categories of types of operational incident with which this evaluation is concerned:
- where Taser has been deployed to the incident;
 - where Taser has been drawn; and
 - where Taser has been drawn *and* fired or applied in stun mode.

Section 3: Evaluation methodology

- 16 In this section of the report we described how we approached the evaluation in terms of defining research questions and the evidence base.

Research questions

- 17 As our initial brief for the evaluation was a general one - 'To evaluate how successfully Taser devices have been used as a supplementary option to other deployment methods, namely firearms, dogs, baton rounds and irritant spray' – we sought during the initial, exploratory stages of the evaluation to determine a number of key research questions that would help us to focus our work. These questions were produced in discussion with senior officers in the trial forces during our first round of fieldwork and agreed with ACPO through the process of agreeing our interim report. The questions are set out below.

- To what extent has Taser successfully reduced the need to use lethal force (ie conventional firearms) at incidents where it is deployed?
- To what extent have firearms officers accepted that Taser is a useful supplementary option to existing conflict management technologies?
- To what extent have commanders accepted that Taser is a less lethal option that they are content to have deployed?
- Is there evidence of public confidence in the police's ability to deploy Taser appropriately and with restraint?

- 18 Our main findings, as reported in this document, are structured around these four key questions.

Evidence base

- 19 Our approach to data collection has been to gather evidence from two main sources:
- the completed Taser deployment forms, passed on to us by the ACPO trial co-ordinator based in the ACPO Police use of Firearms Secretariat; and
 - semi-structured interviews and meetings with relevant officers in the five trial forces.

- 20 We supplemented these two main data sources with information provided to the ACPO Police use of Firearms Secretariat by trial forces following Taser usage incidents. We have also taken note of press reports and PCA statements published following incidents where Taser has been actually fired or applied. In this report we present the results of our analysis of the data collected.
- 21 Copies of the deployment form and the interview questionnaire are attached as annexes to this report.
- 22 The visits included interviews with an Assistant or Deputy Chief Constable, a member of the Police Authority, the chief firearms officer and a focus group with a selection of firearms officers with direct experience of using Taser in an operational setting.
- 23 The purpose of our visits was to:
- find out about the experience of using Taser in practice, and obtain views about its operational benefits and problems;
 - compare Taser - as per the terms of our brief - with other forms of less lethal technology;
 - understand the local policies and procedures governing the deployment of Taser in the five forces, and listen to views about the impact of those policies and procedures on potential Taser deployment and use;
 - listen to views about the adequacy of training and guidance;
 - start to understand public attitudes about Taser; and
 - explore the pilot forces' overall experience of the trial year and reach a judgement about the success of the trial.
- 24 We consider that this provides a solid evidence basis for ACPO and the Home Office to consider the way forward for Taser.

Section 4: Key findings

- 25 In this section of the report, we present our analysis of the Taser deployment forms received between 28 February 2003 and 19 April 2004 and our research from our two rounds of fieldwork.
- 26 Our key findings section is structured as follows:
- A. Taser deployment and usage (basic factual information about the number and nature of Taser deployment and usage over the trial period);
 - B. Evidence to answer research questions (results of the trial in each of the four key research areas outlined in the previous section).

A. Taser deployment and usage

Returned deployment forms

27 Police officers were required to complete an evaluation questionnaire each time a Taser was deployed to an incident. We received 1,530 such forms. Our expectation is that forms may not have been completed for a number of Taser deployments, but it is not possible to say how many. Unless Taser was actually used, forms were frequently not fully completed.

Taser 'uses'

28 In summary:

- 71 forms were returned outlining Taser deployment;
- 13 forms were removed as they covered the same incident;
- the analysis of Taser deployment therefore covers 58 cases.

29 The table below shows the number of forms returned by each force, the number of usages and the number of usages as a percentage of total deployments.

Police force	Number of forms returned	Number of usages	% usages
Metropolitan Police	867	30	3.3%
Northamptonshire Police	96	6	6.3%
North Wales Police	118	8	6.8%
Thames Valley Police	256	1	0.4%
Lincolnshire Police	193	13	6.7%
Total	1530	58	3.8%

Subject details

30 The table below summarises the key characteristics of a ‘Taser subject’. Subjects were typically male and average height and build.

Gender	Breakdown
Male	94%
Female	6%
Height	
Under 5 foot	0%
5 – 6 feet	70.83%
Over 6 feet	29.17%
Build	
Slight	20.93%
Medium	58.14%
Large	20.93%

Note: Base of 50

31 The section of the form on officer defined ethnicity of taser subjects was completed in respect of 46 usages. The results were:

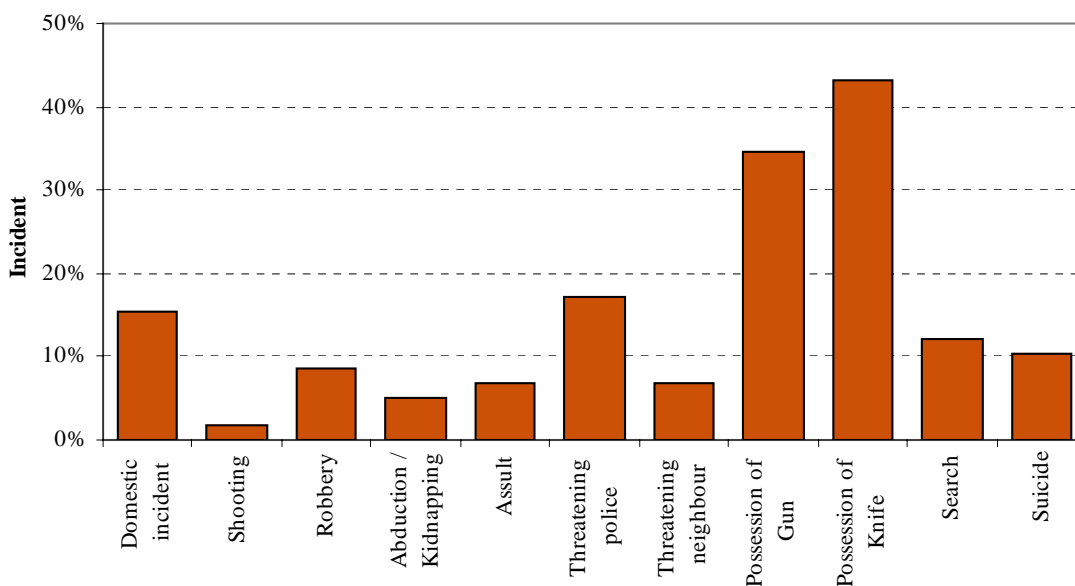
- IC1, White – 40 (87% of forms where this information was completed)
- IC2, Dark European – 1 (2.2%)
- IC3, African Caribbean - 5 (10.9%)

B. Addressing the research questions

To what extent has Taser successfully reduced the need to use lethal force (ie conventional firearms) at incidents where it is deployed?

- 32 Taser was typically deployed to incidents characterised by violent or threatening behaviour, in many cases involving a knife or a firearm. The graph below shows the breakdown of incident details recorded on the deployment forms.

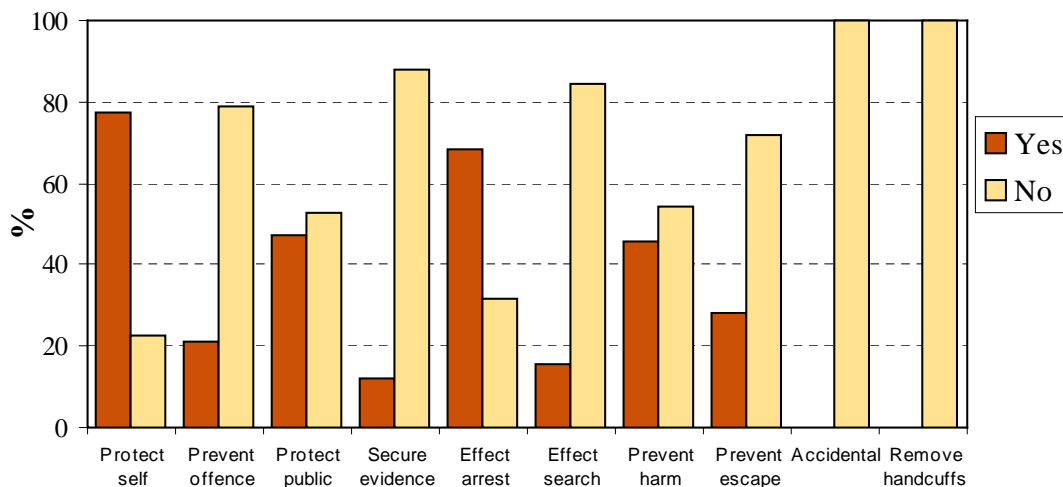
Percentage breakdown of incident



Note: An incident can have multiple characteristics such as possession of gun and threatening police.

- 33 Further evidence of the serious nature of these incidents is provided by the reasons for using Taser recorded by firearms officers. The graph overleaf shows that self or public protection were key factors in decision-making. To this data, we can add the fact that decision to use Taser was spontaneous, rather than planned, in 48 of the incidents. In 19 incidents (33% of the total), officers commented that Taser was used on subjects who were under the influence of alcohol. In 13 incidents (22.5% of the total) Taser was used on subjects noted to be under the influence of drugs.

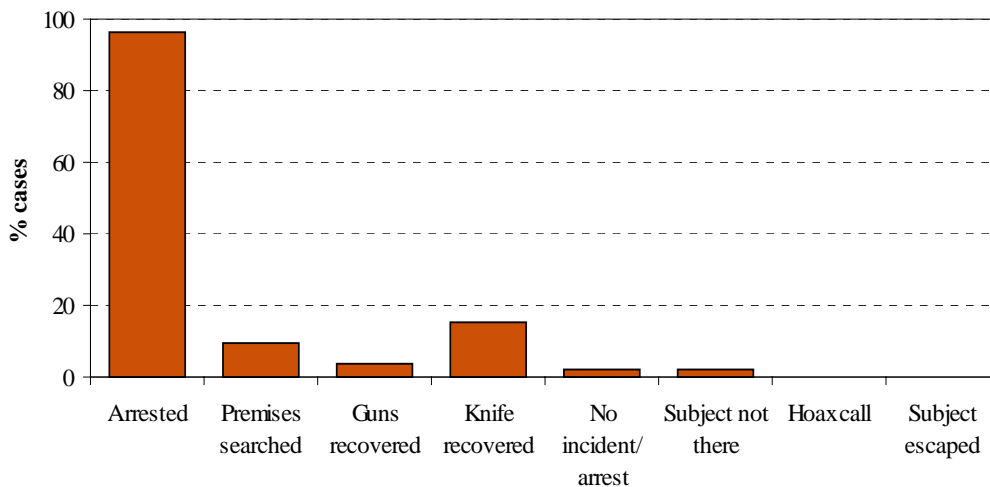
Action to warrant taser use



Outcome of incidents

34 Despite the violent nature of incidents where Taser was called into use, the suspect was successfully arrested in 95% of cases. Officers also reported that a weapon was recovered on 16 occasions (27.6% of cases) and premises searched on six occasions (10.35% of cases) following Taser use.

Outcome of incident

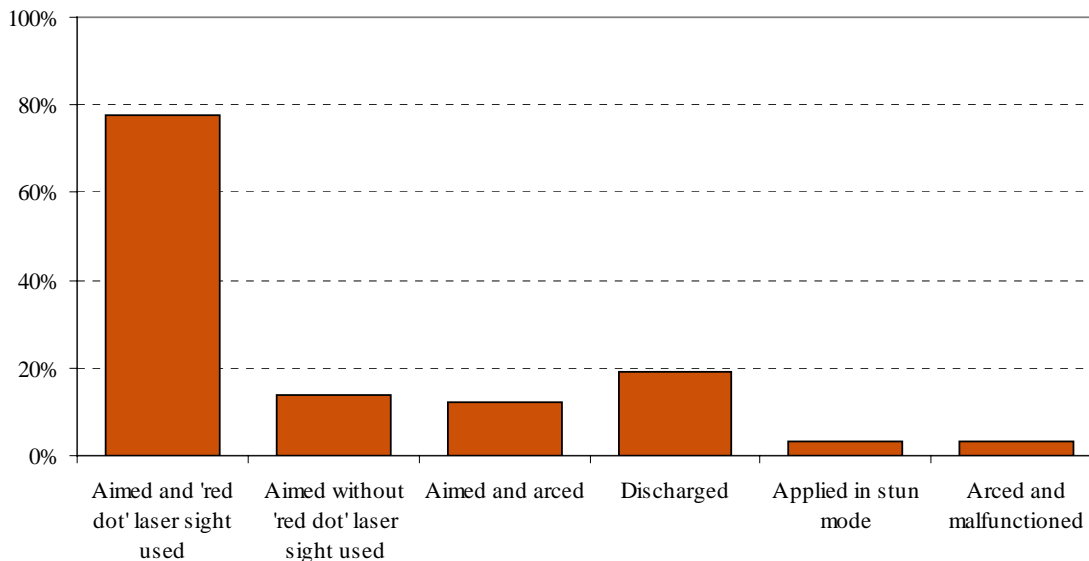


Details of Taser usage

35 In summary, Taser was drawn at 58 incidents². Of these incidents (according to the information provided on the forms) Taser was:

- aimed and the ‘red dot’ laser sight used 45 times (77.6% of cases);
- aimed without the red dot being used eight times (13.8% of cases);
- aimed and arced seven times (12.1% of cases);
- discharged 14 times³ (19% of cases);
- applied in ‘drive stun’ mode twice (3.4% of cases);
- arced but malfunctioned twice (3.4% of cases).

Details of taser usage



Note: base of 58 incidents. Total adds up to more than 58 incidents because multiple actions could be taken at each incident (eg Taser could be aimed and then fired).

36 This high success rate in terms of incident resolution was achieved in the majority of cases without Taser actually being fired. In 26 cases (44.8% of all cases), officers needed to do no more than aim Taser and use the laser sight for the subjects to become compliant. In seven

² For the purposes of this analysis we have counted multiple Taser uses at a single incident as a single usage

³ Once at a dog

cases (12.1% of cases) aiming Taser ensured compliance. In one case compliance was achieved after Taser was arced.

- 37 Compliance was not achieved early and Taser was actually fired at 13 incidents (involving people) and was used in stun mode twice. The table in **Annex C** sets out the key features of the incidents when Taser was actually fired or applied in stun mode.
- 38 Our fieldwork interviews with firearms officers supports the conclusion that Taser appears to have been effective in reducing the need to use lethal force at incidents where it has been deployed. It certainly appears to have had a strong ‘de-escalation’ effect. In many incidents, the threat of Taser (rather than its actual use) had been enough to make the individual subject become compliant.
- 39 Officers told us that the visual impact of arcing Taser or ‘red dotting’ a subject was frequently sufficient to make a person posing a threat cease to do so. It was thus seen as being highly effective in terms of de-escalating potentially violent situations – and therefore possibly reducing the need to introduce lethal force into incidents. The feedback on this issue supported the analysis of the completed deployment forms set out above regarding the impact of the red dot.
- 40 The following quotations from firearms officers provide a flavour of the views that we found on the ground in the trial forces:

“It is less harmful than other non-lethal options such as baton and CS Gas”

“A very effective form of personal safety”

“Taser often resolves issues by being seen and is therefore personal safety equipment and not exclusively a firearm”

“It is a good tool to use against violent offenders and has good results when deployed”

“Taser protects life and prevents harm...” “...excellent equipment”

“Taser de-fuses situations more easily and quickly than calling a firearms deployment, it should be used before the need for firearms arises.”

“It reduces injuries to both officers and the public”

“It was a lot quicker in resolving many situations.”

“Taser de-fuses situations more easily and quickly than calling a firearms deployment”

- 41 The only cautionary comment that we received from an officer on this issue was that when in bright daylight a subject posing a threat had not realised that he had been red dotted and continued to be non-compliant.
- 42 ***Our overall conclusion, however, is that the evidence suggests that Taser has been effective in preventing incidents from escalating to the point where lethal force is required. In many incidents, the threat of Taser – rather than its actual use - has made the individual become compliant.***

To what extent have firearms officers accepted that Taser is a useful supplementary option to existing conflict management technologies?

- 43 Taser was seen by many officers as having the potential to reduce the risk to officers called to deal with incidents concerning violent offenders. This is partly because Taser can be fired from a distance, reducing the need for officers to engage with subjects at close range – e.g. using batons and shields. But also because Taser is seen as being a pre-emptive strategic option which can help resolve an incident before the risk of harm to officers becomes heightened. While immobilised, subjects can be restrained and handcuffed quickly minimising risk of injury to officers.
- 44 Officers explained that in most firearms incidents, the situation is such that the individual being tackled is usually submissive when confronted by SO19 officers (in the Metropolitan Police) armed with conventional firearms. In these incidents, the individual is not typically violent and resolution of the situation is through negotiation and a strong, visual armed presence. Taser is suited very well to incidents where the individual is violent and is difficult to approach and restrain. Taser is suited to handling violent individuals in non-firearms situations. In these instances SO19 officers could be deployed with Taser very effectively to assist officers in situations they cannot contain.
- 45 We asked officers to compare the operational effectiveness of Taser with that of other less lethal technologies currently available to them. Officers were keen to stress that it is difficult to make such a comparison because different technologies have certain benefits for certain situations depending on specific the environment and nature of subject(s) involved. One of the senior officers whom we interviewed said that she thought it was important to find the ‘niche’ for Taser in the range of responses available.
- 46 Officers did, in general, suggest that Taser, whilst adding complexity to the response strategy, offered them a more flexible method of response, which was to be welcomed.

Taser compared with baton gun

- 47 The general view was that Taser is a more flexible response tool than the baton gun, despite the longer range of the latter, with officers in the Metropolitan Police expressing a clear preference for Taser over baton gun. Taser was reported to represent a viable less lethal option in stand-off situations and was considered to be a better option than the baton gun in terms of ease of use and effectiveness in making an individual compliant. It was also said to be more effective than a baton gun in terms of presenting the weapon, arcing it and red dotting an individual. Taser was seen by many as easier to use, providing a more flexible response (i.e. the aiming and red dot stage) easier to handle and more capable of being used indoors than the baton gun, which they suggested was largely restricted to outdoors operations due to the dangers of ricochet.

- 48 Baton Rounds rely solely on pain thresholds and do not always fully incapacitate someone like the Taser (when used effectively). The Baton Gun involves a greater degree of contact with the individual compared with the Taser. The Baton Gun is also liable to ricochet if used in confined areas.
- 49 It was suggested that Taser could be used to complement the baton gun by acting as a follow up means of immobilising the subject at relatively close range. Officers reported that on some occasions in the past the baton gun has been used with little regard for follow up tactics. When considering the use of Taser it is important that a strategy is devised that incorporates an action plan for the next steps once Taser has been deployed. This could involve the use of a shield team or dogs to move in to neutralise the threat.
- 50 It should be noted that in making comparisons between Taser and Baton Gun (and indeed making any such comparative judgement) we are restricted to reporting the views expressed to us by frontline officers and their commanders. The views expressed to us are not universally held. We have received comments from Dr Graham Cooper at DSTL that challenge the inference that Taser compares favourably with Baton Rounds in certain situations⁴. More detailed evaluation data on the Baton Gun would be required to reach a definitive view on this issue.

Taser compared with other less lethal options

- 51 The Taser compares favourably with other less-lethal methods. Northamptonshire Police do not yet use the baton gun, but do use a pepper spray, which was seen to be useful but not as effective as Taser - spray being non-discriminatory and difficult to target upon an individual. Officers in this force considered the apparently minimal injuries inflicted by Taser to be an important advantage over other less lethal options open to them. It was suggested that irritant spray, dogs and batons were more likely to cause injuries to subjects and bystanders than Taser.
- 52 Officers in all forces considered the ability of Taser to isolate an individual in a way that other less lethal options cannot as a key benefit. Taser was said to provide a good alternative to baton guns and incapacitant sprays in confined areas of action such as inside buildings or vehicles where innocent bystanders might be struck by a rebounding baton or affected by dispersing spray.
- 53 Taser was reported to be of operational benefit because of the ability to transcend the pain threshold. The basic technology underpinning Taser – the use of an electric shock – means that it does not (unlike some other conflict resolution options available to the police) rely purely on the psychological impact of pain to secure compliance on the part of the recipient. Taser incapacitates the subject regardless of whether the subject is fully aware of what is happening to them. Officers in those forces dealing with problems with drug users

⁴ Comments on draft PwC report from Dr Graham Cooper received by ACPO on 13 April 2004

considered this to be a particularly attractive benefit of Taser. Another benefit suggested by officers in one of the pilot forces was that once the current had been established it could be reapplied without re-firing, helping the police, if necessary, to keep a subject subdued until they could be restrained.

- 54 Taser also provides forensic evidence that other weapons do not. Its data port and downloadable functions can provide valuable forensic evidence for each incident.

Practical limitations and problems

- 55 A limitation of Taser compared with other less lethal options is that it requires the individual to be in full view. Taser is not reliable in instances where the individual is only partially in view. For example, if the individual is behind a low-wall and only in view above the waist then Taser is less effective than other less-lethal options. It was also suggested that in certain situations dogs could have more of a deterrent effect than Taser or a real firearm. Some officers stated that certain groups of individuals were more fearful of dogs than firearms.

- 56 We expected to find a level of concern about practical difficulties of carrying and deploying Taser alongside (i.e. at the same time as) other weapons. While a number of senior officers raised this issue, it was not reflected by the firearms officers themselves. They were clear that carrying Taser does not, given appropriate training, limit their ability to deploy conventional firearms or other less lethal technology where necessary.

- 57 Although the overall view throughout the pilot forces was that Taser was potentially an effective addition to firearms weaponry, there were concerns raised relating to some practical problems with Taser. These can be summarised in terms of:

- reliability;
- design attributes;
- storage and associated equipment; and
- serial numbers and date recording.

- 58 Each of these issues is addressed in turn below.

Reliability

- 59 Most of the officers to whom we spoke had only limited experience of the practical use of Taser at the time that we made our visits. In the initial round of visits, reliability appeared to be a problem area. By the time we conducted the second round of visits, reliability was not raised as a major issue. This suggests that the effect of the 'learning curve' was in operation

throughout the trial period - as officers became more familiar with the technology, so their ability to use it consistently and effectively increased.

- 60 We have also had reports of battery packs failing during training. Officers commented that they are not well built, that they easily crack and fracture. It was noted that the clips that hold the cartridges break easily. Officers commented that batteries often get jammed, that it is difficult to get them out, and that they need to be changed frequently. It was hoped that the new design Taser would address some of these problems.

Design attributes

- 61 Officers generally liked the design of Taser in terms of its weight and portability, although there were some criticisms of its design. Some senior firearms officers thought that the size of the gun makes it difficult to use in covert operations – although it is questionable whether it was designed with this type of use in mind, and indeed the visible impact of Taser was seen as a positive attribute by many.
- 62 Some officers reported that the overall maintenance and battery changing arrangements and downloading issues are very impractical. Officers suggested that the need to recharge the battery once a week was burdensome. There was a suggestion in one force that the battery charging should be carried out centrally and it should not be the responsibility of officers who are working long shifts.
- 63 Officers thought that improvements could be made in the manufacturing of the Taser. It was reported that currently it is made from low quality materials and can crack easily. Officers reported that the new Taser model overcomes most of these problems.
- 64 The key risk to Taser’s operational benefit is the possibility that the barbs miss the intended target. The effectiveness of Taser is related to the distance of the intended target from the officer using Taser. At greater distances there is an increased risk that the officer will miss the intended target or that the probes will not penetrate the individuals clothing.
- 65 The thickness of the wire was a concern for some officers who were worried that the wire could snap. Other officers would welcome more research into Taser capability of piercing different materials. In one instance Taser was not deployed as the subject decided to hide under a thick duvet.
- 66 There were various views about the size of the gun, most considering that it was fine and relatively easy to carry; others complaining that it was too big and uncomfortable. We understand that smaller Taser models are available and could be adopted if Taser were to be rolled out more widely.
- 67 The gun was reported to be a little fragile and can sometimes break easily. It had reportedly broken more times in the UK than in USA.

Storage and associated equipment

- 68 Storage was reported to be a problem in a number of forces. Some officers reported that in the absence of a better alternative it is kept in the boot of an Armed Response Vehicle (ARV), which is viewed as far from ideal.
- 69 Currently the Tasers are reported to be awkward to carry and require eight AA batteries. There are also reports that the cartridges used can be broken easily. There was enthusiasm for the idea of Tasers being replaced with the X26 model which is 60% smaller than the M26 and has a lithium iron battery. Officers thought that the new model could overcome most if not all of the operational problems associated with the M26 but there were clear resource implications.
- 70 Officers would prefer to carry the Taser on their person rather than carry it in their cars, as they feel they should have quick and easy access to it.

Serial numbers and date recording

- 71 There were some problems with the Taser data recording system throughout the trial (the system for recording key information following a Taser discharge). Following an incident in Northamptonshire, the serial number downloaded from a number of Taser recording devices did not match the serial number on the Tasers. This was not, however, viewed as a major problem as the devices had individual manufacturer's numbers that were traceable to the serial numbers for each piece of equipment.

Training and guidance

- 72 Officers were generally content with the Taser training package they had received. Within the Metropolitan Police, SO19 officers had already received a high level of training in the use of firearms and were therefore able to adapt quickly to the use of Taser. The majority of firearms officers we spoke to felt that the training programmes were sufficient for officers with their experience of handling firearms. Officers from the Metropolitan, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire Police did stress, however, that they would have concerns about the adequacy of the current Taser training programme if Taser were ever to be rolled out to non firearms officers. Many of the firearms officers and trainers considered that Taser should only ever be used by specially trained firearms officers who are highly skilled at making judgements under stress.
- 73 The main suggestion among firearms officers and trainers for future improvements to the training programmes related to realistic training ground scenarios. Training for firearms officers in Thames Valley incorporated simulation exercises that were well received. Here video training has provided officers with the ability to train in situations that help them to assess certain situations and make decisions about what actions to take and when to use the conventional and non lethal options they have available to them. We are not aware of this type of training being provided in other forces. Clearer communication about Taser training

was called for by some officers. There was a suggestion that there could be a central, national, Taser training team.

- 74 ***Our overall conclusion in this area is that Taser appears to have been widely accepted by all the trial police forces as a helpful additional piece of equipment. A number of practical problems were reported at the start of the trial, but these had generally been overcome by the end of the year. Officers who were sceptical at the start of the trial tended to change their views and support the technology after they had had experience of using it.***

To what extent have commanders accepted that Taser is a less lethal option that they are content to have deployed?

- 75 We noted in section 2 that the current ACPO policy is that Taser should only be deployed in situations where individuals are ‘armed or otherwise so dangerous that the use of a firearm, by an officer, may be necessary’. The effect of this restriction is that Tasers are only deployed alongside conventional firearms and in circumstances in which it is judged appropriate for firearms officers to carry firearms.
- 76 At the outset of the pilot the Metropolitan Police decided to deploy Taser only in the ARV supervisors’ cars. This could be described as following a policy that is more restrictive than that envisaged by ACPO. On 21 July 2003 the Metropolitan Police force decided to deploy Taser on all of its Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs) in line with the other forces.
- 77 In contrast, Lincolnshire decided to deploy Taser on the person of all their firearm officers, which could be said to be a rather more relaxed interpretation of the trial policy and guidance. The Taser was located inside officers’ jackets until the moment that authorisation to deploy was granted by the relevant commander or they self authorised. In practice this has meant that Lincolnshire officers were more likely to ‘self arm’ with Taser than officers in the other forces – and indeed did so on a number of occasions. This policy was changed part way through the trial to bring Lincolnshire into line with the other trial forces (ie Tasers in Lincolnshire are now located in ARVs and not carried by officers).

Views on Taser authorisation and deployment

- 78 A number of officers, both senior and frontline, considered the trial policy – ie aligning Taser authorisation with conventional firearms authorisation – to be too restrictive. The main concern was that opportunities to use Taser to resolve violent or potentially violent incidents that do not meet the criteria for firearms deployment are being missed. Domestic violence incidents were cited by some officers as being examples of situations that could be ideal for Taser deployment, but where firearms authorisation (and hence Taser authorisation) was seldom granted.

- 79 The general consensus - particularly among firearms officers - was that the Taser authorisation process should be de-coupled from the authorisation process for conventional firearms, thereby allowing it to be deployed at incidents where it could be used most effectively. Officers reported that under existing guidelines the deployment of Taser has been very limited and some officers expressed concern that the weapon had not been rigorously tested in terms of its operational reliability and its appropriate use.
- 80 Taser was reported by officers to be a very effective piece of equipment for police work and some argued that it should not be restricted to firearms staff. Taser could be introduced at a lower level of authorisation, possibly on a par with or slightly below spray. If the level of authorisation required for Taser deployment were lowered then it could be used in a much wider variety of scenarios.
- 81 In Lincolnshire there was some frustration that the original arrangement of officers carrying Taser on their person had been abandoned, as they considered that this had worked well.
- 82 Although the trial policy and guidance documentation explicitly states that there is not a hierarchy of force in conflict management situations, but rather a range of options from which to select the most proportionate and appropriate response, a number of officers who we interviewed did discuss their views about Taser's position on such a hierarchy or continuum. There was a widespread view that Taser is actually likely to be a less harmful conflict response tool than baton guns, incapacitant spray and dogs and could, therefore, be authorised for a wider range of incidents than those meriting an ARV response.
- 83 It was recognised, however, that this was not a straightforward issue. To ask firearms officers to attend a wider range of incidents so that Taser can be deployed effectively would be to introduce conventional firearms into a larger number of incidents. On the other hand, to allow non-firearms officers to deploy Taser would have significant training implications.
- 84 ***The trial rules have meant that Taser deployment is restricted. Some firearms officers considered that, even within the limitations of the guidance, commanders could have authorised more Taser deployments if they had wanted to. If true, this suggests that this criterion has been only partially met. More discussion with commanders might be required before any general extension of Taser.***

Is there evidence of public confidence in the police's ability to deploy Taser appropriately and with restraint?

- 85 The trial did not include a requirement for forces to assess or inform public opinion in respect of Taser, although some of the forces did take steps to do so. We found that forces had not yet undertaken any formal evaluation of the impact of these strategies and therefore our ability to answer this research question with a high degree of certainty is limited. In this section of the report, we summarise the results of our interviews with Police Authority members, community liaison officers in order to provide some analysis in this area, but the results should be seen as illustrative and preliminary only.
- 86 PricewaterhouseCoopers has been commissioned to undertake a short analysis of public attitudes to Taser deployment and the results of this work will be available shortly.
- 87 During the trial, the Metropolitan Police established informal consultation arrangements with police and community consultation groups, local borough commanders, local authorities and the Police Complaints Authority. This informal consultation focused on explaining what Taser was, the guidelines around its use, who in the force could use it and the expected after effects on suspects. We were told that this response to this exercise had been positive and had promoted a greater public understanding of why Taser is being used - namely as a less lethal option to a firearms response and to improve officer safety.
- 88 Police Authority members in London reported that there had been 'a solid appreciation of the need for police protection' among the wider general public in the Capital. We understand that those consulted did not express concern that Taser represents an escalation of force. Rather, given its ability to resolve situations more readily, Taser was seen as a useful means of de-escalating violence in policing situations.
- 89 One London Police Authority member stated that the 'success' of Taser in the trial could be gauged by the lack of adverse local and national media coverage. Taser usages were reported in the national media on a number of occasions throughout the trial year, but such reporting did not tend to be critical of the new technology, with the exception of the coverage afforded to a critical statement from Amnesty International in October 2003.

- 90 In North Wales there was a full demonstration of Taser at the start of the trial and this received extensive coverage in the local press. All those involved in the event were reportedly in favour of the addition of a further non-lethal alternative to conventional firearms. Views have been sought from a variety of different groups within the North Wales community, including the Women's Institute, elderly residents, magistrates and other members of the general public.
- 91 We were told that feedback received by North Wales has been positive and no complaints have been received. Discussions with local councillors and community groups has similarly been positive. Indeed, we were advised that these groups favoured a roll out Taser across the country. It was felt that Taser could assist in improving the public's image of the police in the way they handle violent situations. The public may view the use of pain to get an individual to comply as unnecessary in some cases, and Taser addresses this concern.
- 92 In Northamptonshire, Taser was launched using the national press, local media and the Northamptonshire police website. This strategy seems to have been success in terms of informing the public about Taser and the representatives of the Force and Authority that we interviewed suggested that the strategy had contributed to a 'good response' to the trial from the local community.
- 93 More work is required – and is in train - in order to assess public attitudes to Taser. But the experience of the trial forces to date is that the public appear to be supportive of Taser, particularly where forces are open and informative about the technology. The trial experience suggests a full public demonstration of Taser has major benefits in terms of educating and informing the public. This might be factored into any extension of Taser to other forces in future.
- 94 ***Further research into public attitudes to Taser has been commissioned. But the trial experience in this area to date indicates that the public has not reacted negatively to Taser, particularly where forces have made efforts to consult with and inform the public at the start of the trial. This approach should be considered as part of any wider roll out of Taser.***

Overall views about the trial process

- 95 The majority of those that we interviewed during the fieldwork considered the trial to have been a success.
- 96 Officers would have welcomed some feedback on their use of Taser during the trial year, and would have liked further opportunities to feed their views on Taser into the evaluation process. Some officers felt that the trial had been slow, but understood that the deployment of Taser had to be carried out in a controlled manor over a period of time.
- 97 The pilot forces stated that there had been good team working during the trial process and that the pilot forces had worked well with each other as a team. Each representative has been very receptive to other views and ideas and this has ensured that a good relationship has been established between the liaison officers. There were many positive responses to the trial process and praise for the liaison officers who had put considerable time and effort into the process.
- 98 The evaluation form was said by some to be too lengthy and as a result it was thought that some officers had not completed this form completely or accurately enough. The revised form (issued in December 2003) was said to be much more efficient and user friendly. It was suggested that an online form could make the process easier, all officers have access to a computer and this would save a lot of effort and time. This should be borne in mind if the trial is repeated or extended.

Section 5: Conclusions

99 We would like to highlight the following key themes and messages that have emerged from the Taser trial evaluation:

- the number of deployment forms returned to us was lower than we expected at the outset of the trial. Our initial assumption was that around 300 forms would be completed each month; we received an average of around 100 forms. Similarly, the number of Taser usages (58) was lower than might perhaps have initially been expected;
- the low level of Taser deployment and usage is a consequence of the policy parameters set by ACPO for the Taser trial – indeed ACPO wished the trial to be ‘deliberately constrained’ by such restrictions. Ensuring that Taser can only be deployed to an incident where conventional firearms are deemed to be appropriate has meant that the number and nature of incidents to which Taser is deployed is limited. A number of police officers involved in the trial regretted this limitation and suggested that Taser could potentially be deployed for a wider range of incidents to good effect;
- where Taser has been deployed it has invariably helped secure a positive outcome to an incident, minimising the potential need for officers to deploy other, possibly more lethal, technologies. On the occasions when Taser was used in respect of a human subject, they were arrested without any serious injury to the subject or the arresting officers;
- in many cases, officers have needed to do no more than aim, or aim and use the ‘red dot’ laser sight, or aim and arc Taser to ensure compliance on the part of the suspect. Taser appears to have a high visual deterrent value which can enable officers to de-escalate possibly violent situations relatively quickly and easily;
- in the early stages of the trial, there were a number of occasions when the use of Taser was not straightforward and multiple Tasers had to be fired on several occasions to bring the subject under control. Such incidents happened less frequently in the later stages of the trial, suggesting that a ‘learning curve’ effect was in place, with officers getting better at using Taser with more operational and training scenario practice;
- officers – both senior and operational – generally regarded Taser as a useful supplementary option to their current range of technology for dealing with conflict situations. It was seen as comparing favourably with baton guns and incapacitant spray, although it was recognised that both could be more appropriate than Taser in given situations. Key Taser benefits were described as: the high deterrent value; reduced risk of harm to officers who might otherwise need to engage with suspects at

close quarters; the minimal impact on bystanders in confined spaces; and the fact that Taser does not depend on the subject reacting solely to pain for compliance;

- there were a number of minor operational problems with Taser, although officers considered these to be outweighed by the benefits. Officers consider that there is room for improvement in terms of the reliability of the technology; the size of the device; the robustness of the battery packs; and the accuracy of serial numbers and date recording.

100 Our overall conclusion is that the trial has, within its own terms of reference, been a success. Where used, the Taser device has, on the whole, helped officers to arrest of suspects without the need for resort to lethal force. We have seen no evidence of adverse public reaction to Taser in trial areas or elsewhere, although further research is required to validate this proposition. Firearms officers and senior officers have, in general, welcomed Taser as a useful supplementary piece of incident management technology.

101 Decisions about whether Taser should be extended to other forces or for use in respect of less serious incidents are for ACPO and the Home Office. The view that was most commonly expressed by officers and Police Authority members in the trial forces was that Taser use should be extended to a limited range of other (non-firearms) incidents. This statement is accompanied by some caveats:

- Taser deployment should continue to be the responsibility of specially trained officers. Extending usage beyond the firearms officers would need to be monitored carefully;
- the range of incidents for which Taser could be deployed would need to be carefully defined;
- efforts should be made to inform and educate local communities about Taser in advance of a roll out;
- Taser should continue to be monitored and officers should receive regular feedback on good practice.

Annex A – Evaluation questionnaire

TASER DEPLOYMENT REPORT



Force reference number:

THIS DEPLOYMENT FORM MUST BE COMPLETED ON EACH OCCASION THAT THE TASER IS DEPLOYED.

1. INCIDENT DETAILS

a. Time of Incident:

b. Date of Incident:

c. Incident Number:

d. Location (address) of incident:

Postcode (first 3 characters, or full if known):

e. Brief details of incident:

f. Spontaneous Pre-planned

g. Visibility: Poor Average Good

h. Resources in attendance:

i. Number of AFOs:

ii. Dogs: GPD Firearms Other

iii. Baton Gunner: No Yes

iv. Number of Tasers in attendance:

i. Was a Taser used?: No (complete sections 2 and 3 only)
Yes (complete sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

j. Number of Tasers used:

If more than one Taser was used, then please complete an additional form for each Taser

2. OUTCOME OF INCIDENT

Briefly describe the result of the operation:
.....
.....
.....

3. FORM COMPLETED BY

a. Name: Rank:

b. Role in incident:

c. Signed:

d. Date:

e. Force:

If the Taser was not used, only this page needs to be completed.
When completed please return this form to:

TASER DEPLOYMENT REPORT

4. SUBJECT DETAILS (this page onwards is only to be completed if a Taser was used)

Taser used on:

a. Last Name:

b. First Name:

c. Other Names:

d. Age (DOB):

e. Address: Postcode

f. Male Female

g. Officer defined ethnicity (6+1) Self defined ethnicity (16+1)

h. Height: Under 5 feet 5 – 6 feet Over 6 feet

i. Build: Slight Medium Large

j. Was the subject under the influence of:

Alcohol: Yes No Was this known prior to use: Yes No

Drugs: Yes No Was this known prior to use: Yes No

k. Any known relevant medical condition:

l. Weapon: Firearm Knife Pointed weapon Blunt weapon
 Syringe Missile Other

For further subjects please complete additional forms

5. TASER DETAILS

Taser One:

a. Serial Number:

b. Taser application:

i) Drawn: Yes No

ii) Aimed: Yes No

iii) Arced: Yes No

iv) Discharged (fired): Yes No (if yes complete 5.1)

v) Stun Mode: Yes No (if yes complete 5.2)

Subject action to warrant above action:

Protect self Prevent offence Protect public Secure evidence

Effect arrest Effect search Prevent harm Prevent escape

Accidental Remove handcuffs

Other

TASER DEPLOYMENT REPORT

5.1. If Taser was discharged (fired) complete the following section:

a. Cartridge 1 number:

b. Probe Contact:
 Top : No Yes Clothing penetration Skin penetration
 Bottom: No Yes Clothing penetration Skin penetration

c. Distance between subject & firer (m):

d. Subject Orientation
 Standing Kneeling Sitting Prone Moving
 If Moving, details:

e. Incapacitation achieved: Yes No
 Reason if unsuccessful:

Cartridge reapplied: Yes No If yes, how many times:

If the Taser was discharged for a 2nd time, please complete the following section:

f. Cartridge 2 number:

g. Probe Contact:
 Top: No Yes Clothing penetration Skin penetration
 Bottom: No Yes Clothing penetration Skin penetration

h. Distance between subject & firer (m):

i. Subject Orientation
 Standing Kneeling Sitting Prone Moving
 If Moving, details:

j. Incapacitation achieved: Yes No
 Reason if unsuccessful:

Cartridge reapplied: Yes No If yes, how many times:

5.2. If stun mode was used, please complete the following section:

a. Subject Orientation:
 Standing Kneeling Sitting Prone Moving
 If Moving, details:

b. Incapacitation achieved: Yes No
 Reason if unsuccessful:

If the Taser was used for a 2nd time in Stun Mode, please complete the following section:

c. Subject Orientation:
 Standing Kneeling Sitting Prone Moving
 If Moving, details:

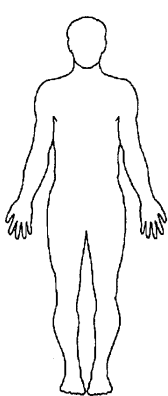
d. Incapacitation achieved: Yes No
 Reason if unsuccessful:

TASER DEPLOYMENT REPORT

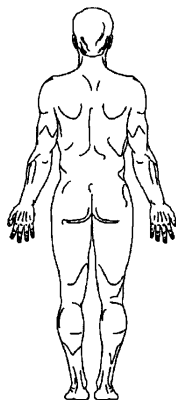
6. PROBE PLACEMENT

a. Application Points:

Using the below diagram, indicate the point of each probe attachment or stun mode application. (For multiple discharges please identify each by number)



Front

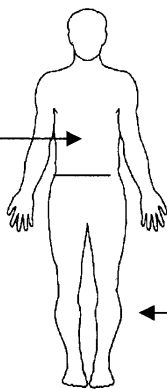


Back

b. Clothing:

Describe clothing whether Taser fired or stun mode used:

Upper half



Lower half

TASER DEPLOYMENT REPORT

7. AFTER CARE

Subject requested probe removal: Yes No

a. Probe removed by:

Officer (Clothing attachment) Ambulance personnel Subject
 Force Medical Examiner Hospital staff

b. Duration between probe discharge and removal:

Under 30 mins 30 – 60 mins 1 – 2 hours Over 2 hours

c. Did probe positioning delay transportation of the subject to police station?

No Yes (if yes give length of delay below)

Under 30 mins 30 – 60 mins 1 – 2 hours Over 2 hours

d. Injuries Sustained:

Primary (as a result of the Taser):

Secondary:

If Secondary injury, cause:

e. Detained in Hospital: Yes No

If detained, reason:

When a Force Medical Examiner has examined a subject, if possible, a copy of their report should be attached to this document

f. Force Medical Examiners Report attached: Yes No

8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please comment further if not addressed above (i.e. issues from debrief):

.....

.....

9. OFFICER DETAILS

a. Taser Officer:

Name: Rank:

Role in incident:

b. Silver Commander:

Name: Rank:

Role in incident:

c. Investigating Officer:

Name: Rank:

Role in incident:

When completed please return this form to:

Annex B – Fieldwork interview checklists

Round 1 Visits:

Meeting with the senior (ACPO level) officer

Why did you agree to take part in the pilot of Taser?

What benefits do you think Taser can bring to your force and local community?

What do you think the success criteria should be for our evaluation exercise?

[Prompts: reduction in use of force, acceptance by officers, public acceptance]

What role do you think Taser has in relation to other deployment methods (baton rounds, dogs, guns, pepper spray etc)?

What training is available for officers in the use of Taser?

Would you consider extending the availability of Taser to non-firearms officers? Why/why not? What would be the implications of doing so?

There have been very few incidents of Taser actually being fired. Why do you think this is?

Meeting with the commander responsible for authorising Taser use

Can you describe the policies and procedures that you have in place for authorising the use of Taser?

What factors do you consider in making an authorisation decision?

How have these policies and procedures been implemented in practice? What has worked well; have there been any problems?

What are the potential benefits of Taser? How do you think officers view the technology?

What are the main operational problems?

There have been very few incidents of Taser actually being fired. Why do you think this is?

Meeting with evaluation project liaison officer

How do you feel the evaluation project is going so far? What could we do to improve it?

Are there any key issues from your point of view that you think we should be considering?

Are there other ways that you would like to communicate with us? [other than liaison group meetings]

How do you think we should run the next round of visits later in the year? Should we talk to the same or different people?

Focus group with firearms officers

Can you tell us about your own experience of using Taser? Has it been broadly positive or negative?

In what circumstances would you use Taser instead of another deployment tool (guns, dogs, pepper spray, baton rounds)?

What are the practical problems with Taser use?

[prompt: technical, battery failures, other faults, authorisation procedures and policies]

What are the good things about Taser? What benefits do you think it has?

Overall, does it help you do your job better?

What training have you had in Taser use? Was this sufficient/appropriate?

How would you improve the Taser?

[prompt: correcting faults, design, policies and procedures]

How are you finding the evaluation forms? Is it clear and straightforward?

Round 2 Visits:

Interviews to cover two main themes:

Public attitudes to Taser

Experience of the trial year

Public attitudes

Meetings with:

officer responsible for community liaison
a police authority representative

Questions

What have you done as a police force/authority to gauge public attitudes to the Taser trial (eg open days, local media etc)?

What was the impact of any such activities?

How do you consider the public has reacted to the Taser trial?

How do you think the public would react to extension of Taser to 'non-firearms' incidents such as domestic violence, street disorder etc?

Has the trial been discussed with the force/authority's partners – eg through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership? If so, what views were expressed?

What more do you think the force/authority could do to gauge and respond to local people on the issue of Taser?

Experience of the trial year

Meetings with:

A senior officer – authorised to speak about the trial on behalf of the force
Group of firearms officers
Trial liaison officer

Questions

What were your success criteria for this trial?

[Prompt: in the interim report we suggested reduction in lethal force; acceptance by firearms officers; acceptance by authorising commanders; evidence of public confidence]

How well do you think the trial measures up against these criteria?

What went well? What went badly?

Based on a whole year's experience, how do think Taser compared with other deployment methods (baton rounds, dogs, guns, pepper spray etc)?

What do you think should happen next? Should Taser:

be rolled out to all forces?

be deployed on a wider range of incidents (ie those that do not warrant firearms deployment)?

Are there any operational, procedural or technical problems that should be addressed before, or as part of, an extension of Taser?

How was the trial process itself? Could it be improved?

Annex C – Record of Taser uses

<i>Date of incident and force</i>	<i>Key features of incident</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<i>4 August 2003, Metropolitan Police</i>	<i>Subject in possession of handgun. Taser used alongside baton gun. Taser fired once.</i>	<i>One barb struck subject, one barb struck nearby wet grass creating a current. Subject affected, enabling officers with dog to make arrest.</i>
<i>12 August 2003, Northamptonshire Police</i>	<i>Armed robbery subject, thought to be armed. Three tasers fired in turn.</i>	<i>First and second tasers failed to attach properly. Third taser attached successfully and subject temporarily incapacitated, then arrested.</i>
<i>13 August 2003, North Wales Police</i>	<i>Police attempting to arrest man suspected of wounding. Non-compliant, threw object at officers. Thought to be in possession of weapon. Three tasers fired at subject simultaneously when subject approached officers.</i>	<i>Tasers temporarily incapacitated suspect. Subject arrested.</i>
<i>21 August 2003, Northamptonshire Police</i>	<i>Police attempting to arrest man suspected of wounding. Irritant spray ineffective. Non-compliant subject in possession of knife. Two tasers fired in turn.</i>	<i>First taser ineffective. Second taser effective. Subject arrested.</i>
<i>23 August 2003, Lincolnshire Police</i>	<i>Officers attempting to make arrest in football crowd. Violent resistance. Self-authorized use of taser applied in stun mode.</i>	<i>Taser used in stun mode. Subject became compliant and was arrested.</i>
<i>9 September 2003, Lincolnshire Police</i>	<i>Woman reported assault on her by her husband, on attending officers were faced with violent offender.</i>	<i>Taser fired and man arrested.</i>
<i>28th November 2003, Lincolnshire Police</i>	<i>Male armed with knives threatened to kill his girlfriend. Officers were threatened by suspect.</i>	<i>Taser was fired three times in total. The suspect was arrested</i>
<i>1st December 2003, Metropolitan Police</i>	<i>Women at risk of self-harm, holding a knife to her chest. Taser used to facilitate evacuation and control of subject.</i>	<i>Taser fired and women arrested</i>

<p>17th December 2003, Northamptonshire Police</p>	<p>Subject in believed to be in possession of 9mm handgun and/or shotgun. Believed to carry knife on and had a history of violence and was a known drug addict.</p>	<p>Suspect was non compliant when faced other methods (firearms support dog). A taser was fired and was effective, but the suspect needed another activation of the taser to make him compliant. Suspect was arrested.</p>
<p>21st December 2003, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>Suspect in street carrying a hand gun.</p>	<p>Taser fired and suspect arrested, Suspect agreed that the firing of taser was appropriate.</p>
<p>23rd December 2003, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>An officer in a police car was attacked by a male carrying a stick smashing its windows.</p>	<p>Suspect was fired upon by with taser, followed by a second discharge rather than a new cartridge being discharged. Suspect was arrested.</p>
<p>16th February 2004, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>Officers arrived at the premises of a suspect to execute a warrant. Subject was located within premises and refused to comply with requests to leave the premises and became violent in the process.</p>	<p>Suspect refused to leave the premises. Attempts were made to use the taser in stun moded. The suspect was forcibly detained and arrested.</p>
<p>21st March 2004, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>Female seen by police with handgun and 2 swords</p>	<p>Taser fired at suspect who was arrested. 2 swords and one handgun recovered.</p>
<p>27th March 2004, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>Suspects concerned in armed robbery. Armed intervention took place with taser deployed to assist in detainment</p>	<p>Suspect's vehicle stopped and three people were arrested. 2 loaded firearms were found and a quantity of gold bullion recovered.</p>
<p>29th March 2004, Metropolitan Police</p>	<p>Officers went to ant address to arrest three suspects for murder involving firearms and knives.</p>	<p>Officers were confronted by nine males who were all abusive and aggressive towards police. Police line was rushed and taser used to protect offices and subdue subjects. Three suspects were arrested on suspicion of murder.</p>

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