


# View from the chair

As the Home Office continues to evaluate trials of Taser among non-firearms officers, Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, says it is time to roll the device out to all frontline police

A portrait of Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a light blue and white striped shirt, and a purple tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a blurred office setting.

“Too many police officers have been murdered and too many families left without fathers, mothers or partners – police officers have to be given the right equipment to protect them and the public.”

The criminal use of firearms, and the consequential danger to unarmed police officers, has grown exponentially during my years in the service. Last month I was honoured to represent the national Federation at the unveiling of the Police Memorial Trust's plaque to Constable Ian Broadhurst, who was murdered in Leeds on Boxing Day 2003. This was a particularly callous and brutal crime by a dangerous professional criminal. Those who gathered to see Michael Winner unveil the plaque had mixed feelings, because shortly before the ceremony the High Court had substituted a minimum sentence of 37 years for the full life sentence imposed at the trial. Both David Crompton, the deputy chief of West Yorkshire Police and Tom McGhie, chairman of the West

shooting by police officers provokes angry protests from the relatives or associates of the person concerned, and frequent challenges to the police action at inquests.

This hostile reaction appears to be causing cold feet among chief officers when they contemplated the introduction of Tasers as standard police equipment. Last month I raised my concerns at the ACPO conflict management conference. I suggested that, after four years of shilly-shallying over the decision to bring Tasers into general issue, some senior police officials are not being honest about the extent of their support for this measure.

The Taser is perhaps the first practical and effective supplement to an armed response by police officers. In the UK we have trialed the use of Taser with firearms officers and more recently non-firearms officers within ten forces, the results we do have are positive and frequently just the sight of the stun device is enough to stop offenders in their tracks. The civil liberties lobby has had plenty to say about the alleged dangers of the Taser. It does deliver a nasty shock to anyone on the receiving end, but momentary discomfort is far removed from the possible fatal results of police shootings. I was, to say the least, disappointed by the comments made at the ACPO conference by Jim Barker-McCardle, the deputy chief executive of the National Police Improvement Agency, who said he was "not opposed" to the introduction of Taser, but concerned about an adverse reaction from the media. To illustrate his fears, he showed a video of an incident in New York where a man had fallen from a first floor window ledge after being Tasered, and sustained a fatal injury. The fact that this was an inappropriate use, because of the subject's position at the time, did not invalidate the case for Tasers.

Senior management seems to be more concerned about attracting adverse criticism from the usual suspects, rather than taking positive action in the interests of preserving the lives of police officers, innocent bystanders, and in the final analysis, suspects. Whenever the Federation has campaigned for better protection for our members on the streets, senior management and politicians have hesitated. This applies to protective clothing, pepper spray, prisoner restraints and more practical batons. When Alan Clarke was Home Secretary he vetoed the long baton, because he feared a repetition of the Rodney King incident in America. Thank goodness, his successor, Michael Howard, took a more robust attitude. Four years of internal debate, hugely expensive research and trialing, is justification for action. Too many police officers have been murdered and too many families left without fathers, mothers or partners – police officers have to be given the right equipment to protect them and the public.



Photography: Rui Vieira/PA Wire/PA Photos

#### Policeman demonstrating a Taser

Yorkshire Federation, voiced the outrage felt by the force that the Appeal Court could even contemplate the release into society of such a cold blooded killer. I also attended the ceremony for PC Jon Henry of Bedfordshire, where Prime Minister Gordon Brown unveiled a plaque in honour of the officer who was stabbed to death in a street incident in Luton on June 11 last year.

We used to take pride in the fact that we were virtually unarmed, but in response to the growing risks from illegal weapons we have developed a sophisticated and well-trained firearms response. It may surprise some of our members to learn that in the first 70 years of the last century only three people were killed by police firearms. Since then, the number of such fatalities has grown, but the ratio of deaths or woundings to the thousands of firearms incidents each year remain infinitesimal. Notwithstanding, almost every instance of a fatal