



Russell Watson, chairman of Northumbria Police Federation

Call for Taser to be extended

Taser has to be one of the best pieces of personal protection equipment a police officer can carry. It can incapacitate a violent offender without the need for physical confrontation and contact and, in my opinion; it should be available to our members now.

If Taser prevents just one officer from being seriously injured, then surely this is reason enough to make it more readily available to our membership? This is especially relevant in the current climate of policing when more and more officers are being seriously injured on duty and may no longer get full support from the Police Pensions Scheme.

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It is essential that officers have the correct tools to avoid putting themselves in confrontational positions with violent offenders, thereby leaving themselves open to personal injury. Although we already have access to batons and CS gas, the importance of introducing Taser to extend the reactionary gap most officers would prefer cannot be over emphasised.

I reflect on my own experiences as an operational officer, in that, as I became older, my natural desire to arrest and put my personal safety to one side decreased. I think this was borne out of a realisation of my own mortality. With this in mind, I firmly believe that, if Taser was introduced and was more readily available to rank and file officers, this fear would diminish considerably. Older officers would certainly be more confident having ready access to a Taser to control violent suspects.

The majority of British police officers have shown themselves to act responsibly in using personal protection equipment to resolve potential serious

incidents. We must be the most accountable police service in the world. Deployment of Taser has proved to be very effective. Firearms officers have had access to it for 18 months, throughout which time they have continually demonstrated responsible use, which should go some way towards allaying the concerns expressed by Amnesty International and Liberty.

In a recent poll conducted by my local radio station, Radio Newcastle, 75 percent of respondents were supportive of the extended availability of Taser to the British police service. Our members want it, the public appear sympathetic, and ACPO, whilst dragging its heels somewhat, are becoming increasingly supportive of its extended availability. It is therefore time for the Home Office to make the right decision and give our membership access to the best piece of personal protection equipment currently available.

Availability of Taser needs to be extended now, not in another 12 months’ time when someone from the Home Office has the courage to make the decision. Any tool that can help reduce injuries to our members has to come sooner rather than later.