

Bob Hill Blog  
17th February 2012

The issue of the States Police having access to Taser Guns is back in the public domain. Below are two questions which were lodged by Deputy Gerard Baudains with answers given at the States Sitting on 11th September 2007. I am personally pleased that the St Clement's electorate has seen fit to re-elect Gerard and one wonders why they did not support him in 2008.

As readers will see, the wily Gerard softened the Minister up with a written question and then with the aid of other Members got him against ropes before the Bailiff rang the bell. The Written and Oral answers give an insight to the Police armoury and new Minister Le Marquand should take note of the foot stamping response to Ben Shenton's statement and question (This is Jersey. Do we really need TASER guns? Is it just another toy?)

I don't think any one was convinced with the answer given by the former Deputy of St John and Assistant Minister Andrew Lewis when he attempted to justify the need for Taser Guns and Members were never told why there were export problems or how much the Taser Gun and officer training would cost.

Having a police background I do understand the danger that some times is just around the corner, however Jersey is a low crime area and I was particularly saddened that in attempting to justify the Taser Gun the Minister stated that it "*gives better officer safety as they can be discharged at up to a distance of 21 feet. The CS spray has an operational effectiveness of approximately 12 feet and with the ASP baton the officer needs to be within arms reach. The Launcher baton gun has a documented operational effectiveness of 20 metres (over 60 feet in old money) however in instances where it has been discharged and the subject has been wearing heavy clothing or under the influence of drink or drugs or indeed both it has provided no more than a distraction.*"

One may ask if the gun is only a distraction why is it needed? Every step away from a suspect is a step away from the traditional policing and a step away from consensus policing. I can recall officer safety being the justification for handcuffs being issued to officers which would only be used as a last resort, unfortunately handcuffs are often the first resort and another step away from the public and another own goal. I understand that even Honorary Police Officers are carrying handcuffs.

As a member of the Jersey Human Rights Group I am naturally interested re possible Convention violations. I don't disagree with Amnesty International's Comments however it should be noted that Jersey unlike other jurisdictions does not have a Police Authority. Only at the last Sitting our Home Affairs Minister was unable to answer a question relating to the alleged police raid at the home of the Honorary German Consul, on the grounds that it was an operational matter. If that is the case who will be accountable should something untoward occur by the misuse of a Taser Gun?

There are still many questions that need to be asked and I hope it will not be left to the usual suspects to ask them. If States consent is required for the States Police to import and use Taser Guns, Members should take the opportunity of ensuring that there are strict written guidelines in place and there is a direct line of accountability.