

## Jersey Human Rights Group

On behalf of the Jersey Human Rights Group I thank the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel for asking our Group to consider making a formal submission in relation to the proposed importation of Taser Guns.

The following report has been compiled from Member's comments.

Having discussed the matter among ourselves we felt it would have been helpful for the States Police to meet our Group to discuss the matter and to justify its desire to add Taser Guns to its armoury. To this end an invitation was submitted to the Police Chief asking that he or a representative attend our next meeting which is scheduled for Monday 30<sup>th</sup> April. To assist members the following additional information was requested.

*If you are able to attend I believe it would be helpful if whoever could cover the following issues:*

*Given the excellent work being carried not only in crime prevention but also in gaining the public's confidence it would be helpful to know whether equipping the police with Tasers would have a detrimental impact. Given that Jersey is a low crime area how can the use of Tasers be justified? Could you provide details of the number of occasions in the past ten years when the Police have been called to deal with incidents in which armed police have been deployed? Also how often have police fired their weapons and what injury was occasioned.*

*Again during the past ten years please could you provide details of the number of occasions police have used hand cuffs, drawn their batons and/or used gas or any other objects?*

*I am sure that there may be other matters that you would wish to impart in support of Tasers and we would look forward to hearing of them and hopefully you will be able to attend on the 30th.*

Although our initial request was acknowledged it took a further two enquiries before it was rejected on the grounds that the Police Chief thought our request should have been addressed to the Home Affairs Minister rather than the Chief Officer direct. We were however advised that the Police Chief and the Home Affairs Minister would be appearing before your Scrutiny Panel on 27<sup>th</sup> April and it may be helpful if our members attended to hear what was said. The answers to the questions posed in our initial request were not supplied.

We understand that the request for Taser guns is based on the assumption that they are a "less lethal" weapon when dealing with serious violent incidents. However our Group has not been provided with any examples as to what is meant by serious violent incidents.

It is noted that in the latest edition (9) of Scrutiny Matters the Home Affairs Minister is quoted as follows; "***I want the States Police to be able to deploy***

***the lowest possible level of response to serious threats to public safety. At present there are situations in which firearms are being deployed where the lower level of Tasers would be much better.***” The Minister did not define what he meant by serious threats to public safety.

By coincidence only last week the States Police provided the public with an example of how it responds to an alleged “serious threat to public safety.” It has been reported that an argument broke out among a small group of men which resulted in one man stabbing another man in the face with a screwdriver. Regrettably people have been assaulting each other since the beginning of time and have used a variety of methods to do so. Also for a great many years a variety of forms of police officers have been trained and employed to prevent crime and detect those who break the law.

There will always be threats to public safety but police officers receive training in conflict management and under normal circumstances responding to allegations of assaults should not require a posse of armed police smashing down doors to question a suspect believed to have stabbed someone with a screwdriver. So why was it necessary for an armed police response?

What is worrying is that it was reported that the Police Chief was present and the Home Affairs Minister is on record as saying that the incident justified the need for Taser guns as it would not have required an armed response by the police. The Minister should be asking for evidence of the serious threat to public safety that justified armed officers breaking into a private residence in the first place?

He should also be asking why the armed response was carried out in the presence of the media and were they “tipped off” because it is apparent that the police actions were being witnessed almost at the outset? Also if they were “tipped off” what was the purpose, was it to justify the use of Taser guns?

Jersey can be justly proud of being a low crime area which requires low profile policing by officers who are presumably highly trained which includes conflict management training. We are also aware that some officers are even more highly trained in conflict management to deal with extra ordinary problems. Where was that evidence last week?

It is apparent that the Minister supports an armed response when allegations of assaults are received but is of the belief that it is better for police officers to be armed with Tasers guns because it reduces the potential for someone being shot dead with a bullet than shot dead via electrical voltage.

Such logic is not only nonsense but potentially harmful to any member of the public who might have the misfortune of being mistakenly suspected of carrying out an assault.

Policing is an art and police officers who over re-act to incidents do untold harm to their image and esteem and to public confidence. Policing is also a

risk business and from time to time police officers will be confronted with difficult people who challenge their authority. However it is how they overcome those difficulties that will earn the public's respect.

As mentioned above the Police Chief rejected the opportunity of discussing the Taser gun issue and given the police action last week it does little for public confidence or for arming police officers with Taser guns. Whilst it is arguable whether Taser guns are less lethal, one must question whether they should form part of the police weaponry in the first place. If there is a belief that Tasers are less harmful than a firearm than are they more likely to be used at the outset of a conflict than as a last resort?

Whilst it is not denied that Taser guns are used by some police forces it should also be noted that some countries do not permit their use and those who do have stringent controls on their use but are often abused.

It is noted that the Scrutiny Panel is reviewing the Human Rights implications of the use of Taser Guns. The Jersey Human Rights Group like Amnesty and other similar organisations have their own views as to possible violations but it would seem that any possible violation may occur following the misuse of the Taser gun rather than its possession.

The Jersey Human Rights Group (JHRG) is concerned about the introduction of Tasers into Jersey because:

- Tasers clearly weaken the concept that “the police are the public and the public are the police”.
- The JHRG has no knowledge of the frequency of events in which their use would have been justified, but perceive this to be very low. They would like to see a detailed review of, say, 6 incidents in Jersey in which Tasers could have been used with benefit.
- The JHRG regards peaceful conflict resolution as the first priority and is concerned that the police may, quite quickly, see Tasers as a quick and easy alternative.
- The cost of the Tasers and of the training in their use will be material and the JHRG would like to see the business case for that expenditure.
- The JHRG thinks that it is likely that more training in peaceful conflict resolution might well generate a higher return.

Yours sincerely,

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Member of the Jersey Human Rights Group.  
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