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Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 24 November 2008

[...]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Tasers

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jacqui Smith): Each day police officers put themselves in danger to protect the public, so I am committed to providing the police with the tools they tell me they need to fight crime and keep the public and themselves safe. I am also proud that we have one of the few police services around the world that do not regularly carry firearms and I want to keep it that way.

Therefore I am today giving my agreement to allow chief officers of all forces in England and Wales, from 1 December 2008, to extend Taser use to specially trained units in accordance with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) policy and guidance. The guidance sets out that Taser can only be used where officers would be facing violence or threats of violence of such severity that they would need to use force to protect the public, themselves and/or the subject(s).

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I am also making funding available to forces to support the purchase of up to 10,000 Tasers. This will allow chief officers to take a decision on Taser deployment according to operational need, without being encumbered by financial restrictions.

Tasers are making a real difference on our streets, not only keeping the public safe but also protecting our police officers. Taser has been available to all authorised firearms officers since September 2004 as a less lethal alternative for use in situations where a firearms authority has been granted in accordance with criteria laid down in the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) “Manual of Guidance on Police Use of Firearms”.

Since 20 July 2007 authorised firearms officers in England and Wales have also been able to use Taser in a wider set of circumstances. These officers are now able to deploy Taser in operations or incidents where the use of firearms is not authorised, but where they are facing violence or threats of violence of such severity that they would need to use force to protect the public, themselves or the subject.

In July 2007 I also gave my approval for a 12-month trial of the deployment of Taser by specially trained units, who are not firearms officers, in circumstances where officers were facing violence or threats of violence of such severity that they would need to use force to protect the public, themselves or the subject. The trial commenced on 1 September 2007 in 10 forces: Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Gwent, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police Service, Northamptonshire, Northumbria, North Wales and West Yorkshire.

Independent medical advice was sought from the Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC) Sub-Committee on the Medical Implications of Less Lethal Weapons (DOMILL) on the use of Taser in these extended circumstances. DOMILL has now provided a fifth statement on the medical implications of the use of Taser.

The DOMILL statement assesses the risk of death or serious injury from use of the M26 and X26 Tasers within ACPO guidance and policy as very low.

Having considered the latest DOMILL statement and reports on the trial from ACPO and the Home Office Scientific Development Branch which provide final figures on Taser use in the trial, I have given my agreement for further roll-out.

All Taser deployments will also continue to be monitored for assessment by DOMILL. We will continue to publish Taser usage figures on a regular basis.

I have placed a copy of the latest DOMILL statement, and the Home Office Scientific Development Branch trial evaluation in the Library of the House.