

## Survey Report

January 2020

# The use of Taser in North Yorkshire

In September 2019 the North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner surveyed the public as to their appetite for Taser to be rolled out to more Police Officers in North Yorkshire.

The decision to arm officers with Taser is down to local Chief Constables, based on their assessment of risk and need in their area. In this country, police officers are not routinely armed, and our model of policing is community-based. Therefore, the relationship between the police and the public is very important, which is why the Commissioner felt it necessary to conduct this survey.

Taser is a weapon that fires two small darts connected by thin wires to the firing unit that deliver an electric current designed to disrupt voluntary control of muscles, incapacitating the subject. Taser is classified as 'less-lethal' as the possibility of serious injury or death still exists, though in rare circumstances.

A total of 4079 people responded to the survey. Considerable effort was put into advertising the survey amongst different communities and sufficient responses were received from groups with protected characteristics for us to be confident of their perspective.

This survey found overall support for a further roll-out of Taser in North Yorkshire to aid officer safety and to allow the police to do a better job. There is a high degree of trust in North Yorkshire Police to use them responsibly. However, the survey did find some variance regarding whether the roll-out should be mandatory, and when it would be justified to use Taser, as outlined below.

## Findings

Two thirds of the public of North Yorkshire feel that rolling Taser out would make them feel safer in their community. Only 6 per cent felt it would make them feel less safe. Importantly, of those who currently feel less safe in their community, 86 per cent said that knowing police officers were armed with Taser would make them feel safer. Four in five think that the roll out of Taser will be good value for money.

How safe would you feel if every police officer in your community was armed with Taser?	
I would feel safer	66%
It would make no difference to how I feel	28%
I would feel slightly less safe	3%
I would feel much less safe	

There is clear trust in North Yorkshire Police to use Taser responsibly, with 93 per cent stating their support. 94 per cent stated that they would be more likely or it would make no difference to them approaching a police officer for help. One in four of those who feel less safe in their community being more likely to approach an officer as a result.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement, "I trust the police to use Tasers responsibly"?		
1	Strongly agree	69%
2	Agree	24%
3	Disagree	4%
4	Strongly disagree	3%

Respondents were less clearly cut when it came to the extent of the roll out. While there was support for neighbourhood police officers to carry them, there was some hesitancy, with, for example, two in five councillors and a quarter of the public feeling that neighbourhood officers shouldn't carry them.

This was reflected in whether it should be mandatory, with most councillors and over a third of the public feeling it should be down to individual officer choice or only available within teams as back up or within specialist teams. Moreover, there was a 50/50 split amongst those police officers responding. Given that the nature of policing in the UK is by consent, and that most police officers will have joined with this in mind and at a time when Taser was not widely available, the Commissioner feels that a more robust and direct survey of *all* North Yorkshire police officers should be undertaken by the Chief Constable to fully understand their view on this before any mandatory roll-out be considered.

When someone is behaving violently or is suspected of carrying a weapon there is overall support for the use of Taser being always justified. There is not the same level of support when someone is resisting arrest, when most say it is only sometimes justified. Similarly when someone is fleeing the scene of a crime, while most public would say it is always justified, councillors and police officers who responded feel it is only sometimes or rarely justified and overall there is a greater spread of answers compared to the first two examples above. When someone is threatening harm to themselves, the public and councillors think that the use of Taser should only be as a last resort, while most police officers feel that it is always justified. There is clearly a difference between what the police and public think is appropriate and would therefore consider to be legitimate use of Taser which the Chief Constable will need to consider carefully.

This is also apparent in terms of ethnicity and age. Ten per cent fewer BAME respondents consider the use of Taser always justified across all examples than white British nationals. People under 45 were also generally more cautious. For example, while overall the public feel it is always justified when someone is fleeing the scene, those under 45 do not. They are also far more against its use when someone is resisting arrest or threatening harm to themselves. This will also need to be carefully considered when considering what use will be legitimate.

Other than where stated, there are no significant differences in these findings for protected characteristics groups whose answers follow the trends stated above.