



**Evaluation of Extended Use and Deployment of
Conductive Energy Devices (Tasers) to non-Firearms
Officers within Police Scotland**
Final Report

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Executive Summary

The aim of this study was to evaluate the introduction of Police Scotland's extended use of Conductive Energy Devices (Tasers). It was focused around the following key objectives:

1. To explore and examine the pre- and post-change perceptions of police officers, key members of stakeholder groups and community representatives regarding the Specially Trained Officer (STO)/Taser rollout, *with a specific focus on:*
 - a. the extent to which perceived resilience, confidence and personal safety among officers is enhanced as a result of the deployment of STOs with Tasers.
 - b. the perceived impact of the rollout of STOs/Tasers on public reassurance and safety, and the perceived benefits and risks.
2. To identify any remaining challenges with the Taser rollout and make recommendations for the future.

A mixed methods approach was adopted. The research team firstly developed an online questionnaire, and invitations were sent to all STOs in Scotland (n=480) to complete the questionnaire immediately prior to, and during their participation in, the STO training programme or (in some cases) during the very early stages of their new deployments. The questionnaire survey was designed to capture the STOs' perceptions about the rollout of Tasers, the perceived projected advantages and drawbacks of this, the extent to which they anticipated any perceived impact on police resilience and confidence in dealing with potentially violent incidents and any potential benefits and risks in terms of public safety and public opinion. The team also sought STOs' willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, and subsequently conducted these (either in person or by telephone) with a representative sample of 13 officers from different Divisions across Scotland. Secondly, the research team established access to a representative sample of staff from the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) in order to establish wider views and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (either in person or via the telephone) with six individuals from these stakeholder groups. Thirdly, an attempt was made to access local Community Councillors from a spread of Local Authority areas. However, given that this initial fieldwork was being conducted during the summer of 2018 (ie. during summer recess), it proved extremely difficult to gain access to a meaningfully sized sample of Community Councillors. Given the very limited insights that the team gained from the few individuals who were sampled, a decision was ultimately made not to pursue this further and to focus instead on gaining wider access to the views and perspectives of the general public. Hence, fourthly, in order to garner the views of the general public, the research team also identified and accessed local community groups across a range of urban and rural areas in Scotland, who each participated in focus groups. In total, 69 members of local communities participated, including those from youth and adult groups, members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community, those with physical and mental health issues and the elderly. Interviews and focus groups at this stage sought to explore early perceptions about the emerging rollout of Tasers in terms of anticipated impact on public confidence and reassurance, the potential benefits and risks for officers and in terms of community safety and resilience.

Baseline survey data was then analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the focus group and interview data was also

conducted, with the use of NVivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

Between 4-5 months after the initial survey and interview data had been gathered, a second questionnaire survey was sent out to all STOs across Scotland. The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to identify any changes in officers' perceptions about the rollout of Tasers, following their initial 16-20 week period of deployment with the devices. The survey was designed to capture officers' follow-up views on the advantages and drawbacks of Tasers, the extent to which they could now identify any specific perceived impact on police resilience and confidence in dealing with potentially violent incidents and any potential benefits and risks in terms of community safety. However, it was also designed to explore the extent to which officers believed that the presence of the Taser had thus far acted as a deterrent, how they had experienced public reaction to the device and to capture examples of specific operational situations where they believed the Taser had helped to de-escalate participate incidents. The follow-up survey included opportunities for both closed and open-ended responses from officers, with the latter providing a rich source of follow-up qualitative data. In addition, the research also re-established contact with each of the local community groups who had participated in earlier focus groups by email. Each of the group members were asked to indicate whether their views had changed since the research team had last met them and were given the option to participate in follow-up focus group discussions about these changing perceptions. In reality, none of these participants opted to re-engage in discussions, with all indicating that their earlier views had remained unchanged.

Follow-up survey data was again analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of changing perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the follow-up open-ended qualitative survey data was also conducted, with the use of Nvivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results. Support from Police Scotland's analysts was also drawn upon to provide statistical data on the use of Tasers by STOs during deployments across Scotland to date.

The main findings can be summarised as follows:

Pre-deployment, the vast majority of STOs believed that the rollout of Tasers would enhance the resilience, confidence and personal safety of officers. Officers generally believed that the decision to extend the use of Tasers in the national force had emerged against the backdrop of an increase in violent incidents, unpredictable behaviour among certain members of the public as a result of drug misuse, mental ill-health and vulnerability and the increased terrorism threat. Participating officers believed that Tasers would greatly assist them in being able to defuse potentially volatile incidents where threat to life had become an issue, from a distance. This would result in reduced risk of harm to officers, and the Taser was generally viewed as an additional tool that would complement officers' existing communication and negotiation skills. Officers predicted that the presence of the Taser during deployments could hold the potential to subdue potentially dangerous suspects, to bring violent incidents to a quicker and safer conclusion and to avoid the hands-on contact that the use of other officer tools entailed. Some responding officers initially identified some hesitancy and reluctance among senior officers to deploy STOs due to anticipated complaint processes and repercussions, but this was a view that appeared to subside as STOs became more embedded into operations. The vast majority predicted that Taser deployments would have a positive impact on community safety and public reassurance and were quietly confident about the political, public and media support for the new devices. Anticipated benefits vastly outweighed anticipated risks, with the threat of minor injuries to the suspect the only identified drawback.

Police stakeholders recognised the prevalence of officer injuries in Scotland, the increased challenges associated with drug-induced violence and the limited impact of existing weaponry. Against this backdrop, they believed that Tasers could enhance officer safety, while also recognising the need for their use to be guided by the national decision-making model. While they recognised the minor risk of potentially incapacitating members of the public with existing health issues, they also were strongly of the mind that the majority of the public were welcoming of the Taser rollout and a mostly welcoming response would also emerge among politicians and the media.

Members of local communities had mixed and contested views about the current levels of crime and public safety within communities, but many recognised that police officers could often feel potentially threatened and could have their lives put at risk. Many felt that officers needed Tasers because of the growing issue of mental ill-health within communities and the associated unpredictable risk of violence. Community members recognised that the devices could act as a deterrent but also expressed some concern about the possibility of the presence of Tasers potentially escalating combative behaviour among those suspects who may already be armed. Several community groups expressed the view that Tasers should not become standard operational weaponry for all officers (particularly those assigned to community policing duties), as this could create increased fear. Some were also clearly influenced by images they had seen on social media where Taser misuse was reported from different parts of the world, and while they recognised the device's deterrent effect some also raised concerns about officers potentially using Tasers to victimise and harass young people. These issues underline the importance of ensuring that the general public are made aware of the specialist training in place for STOs and the significant controls in place to ensure effective, proportionate and accountable use of Tasers across Scotland.

Following their initial 4-5 months of deployment, the perceptions of responding officers appeared to confirm their initial positive views about the Taser rollout. The vast majority of STOs confirmed their belief that Taser deployment had had a positive impact on community safety and on the confidence, resilience and safety of serving officers. There was a slight downward shift in positive perceptions regarding the impact of Tasers on public confidence and reassurance – perhaps largely due to the general public indifference to the presence of Tasers that the majority of the STOs had observed. While most believed the Taser was beginning to act as a deterrent during potentially volatile incidents and enhance officers' feelings of confidence and safety, less than a quarter of the sample had actually used the Taser thus far. Of those who had used it, it was evident that the majority had found that simply announcing their presence as an STO equipped with a Taser had helped them to de-escalate a particular situation and mostly believed that such incidents would not have been resolved as quickly without the Taser's presence. Although some had removed, aimed or red-dotted the Taser, only a very small minority of incidents had involved the arcing or firing of the device to date. The majority felt that violent incidents would not have been de-escalated as quickly or efficiently without the Taser, but (like the general public) on the whole officers believed that Tasers should only be available to certain officers – namely those who had the relevant temperament, skills and desire to become trained as STOs. Finally, there were clearly some remaining issues in terms of availability of the devices and the travel time needed to pick up equipment that Police Scotland will require to address in the future.

The main challenges associated with the Taser rollout and the relevant recommendations for the future can be summed up as follows:

1. The continuing unresolved and unanswered issues associated with the minor risk of incapacitating members of the public with existing health issues (including those relating to heart and/or blood pressure issues or issues of mental ill-health):

Recommendation: Police Scotland, in collaboration with the Police Investigations and Review Commission (PIRC), should create and maintain a database of investigated incidents where the Taser has been fired, and the instances of where health-related conditions became apparent post-incident. The Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) should potentially consider commissioning future qualitative research to explore the short- and longer-term impact of Taser exposure on individuals involved in these incidents.

2. The continuing existence of misguided perceptions among the general public about Taser deployment, who are clearly uninformed about the specialist training in place for STOs and the significant contemporary controls and processes for ensuring proportionality of use and officer accountability.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should consider launching a social media awareness-raising and public reassurance campaign that seeks to make members of the general public aware of the robust training in place for STOs, the significant controls in place via the PIRC-referral process in order to ensure effective, proportionate and accountable use of Tasers across Scotland and the relatively low instances of Taser discharge to date.

3. The combined views of existing STOs and the general public that Taser use should not become fully mainstreamed, and that the issuing of Tasers should continue to be dependent on successfully completing a formally-assessed training exercise and be restricted to those officers who have the necessary skills and temperament to deploy with the devices.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should continue to develop further training programmes for STOs and a robust assessment exercise should continue to form part of these; Police Scotland should consider the volume of officers to be trained, and ensure that they maintain a focus on proportionality that prevents the public from being over-exposed to operational officers who are equipped with Tasers.

4. The remaining issues in terms of availability of the Taser devices and the travel time required for some officers to pick up equipment prior to deployment and deposit it post-deployment.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should continue to lobby the Scottish Government for additional funding in order to increase the number of available Tasers, and ensure that the devices become more easily accessible to STOs in order to ensure efficiency on the ground.

Introduction, Background and Research Methods

Contextual Background

In the Implementation Plan (2017-20) attached to its ten-year strategy, *Policing 2026*, Police Scotland highlighted the intention to begin to deploy Conductive Energy Devices (Tasers) as a means of additional protection to officers (Police Scotland, 2017b). It was felt that the rollout of Tasers may potentially reduce the risk of injury and enhance the safety of officers, the public and perpetrators against the backdrop of the increased risk of knife attacks on unarmed police officers and members of the public (Police Scotland, 2017a). Accordingly, in the summer of 2018 just under 500 Specially Trained Officers (STOs) were trained in the use of, and became equipped with, Tasers. Training commenced in May 2018, with a completion date of August 2018 and STOs began to become deployed operationally from early June 2018.

Aims and Research Methods

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the views of the general public, the research team also identified and accessed local community groups across a range of urban and rural areas in Scotland, who each participated in focus groups. In total, 69 members of local communities participated, including those from youth and adult groups, members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community, those with physical and mental health issues and the elderly. Interviews and focus groups at this stage sought to explore early perceptions about the emerging rollout of Tasers in terms of anticipated impact on public confidence and reassurance, the potential benefits and risks for officers and in terms of community safety and resilience.

Baseline survey data was then analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the focus group and interview data was also conducted, with the use of NVivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

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In the sections that follow, pre- and post- survey results and qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups with each of the participating groups will be reported, with salient quotations used to support discussion. To preserve the anonymity of participants, a coding system has been used to identify individual participating officers (T1-13/TT1-15), stakeholders (S1-6) and community member focus groups (P1-12).

Pre- and Emerging Deployment Survey Results

Perceptions of Officers

Officer Survey Results

Immediately prior to, and during the very early stages of the rolling out of the extended use of Tasers in Scottish communities, all officers who had been selected as STOs were invited to participate in an online questionnaire survey, supported by QuestionPro. In total, 178 STOs participated in the initial survey (an overall response rate of 37% from the initial sample of 480). The majority of the respondents (n=84%) were male and the most common age-range (n=84%) was between 21-30. Almost all (n=95%) were Constables, and a large proportion (n=72%) had been in service for either less than five years or between 5-10 years. The officers served in a wide range of geographical Divisions within the force, and while 38% had not yet undertaken the STO training during the time of their initial survey participation, 62% had either recently completed it or were currently undertaking the training programme during the time that the survey was launched.

Officers were asked to indicate whether they believed that the increased deployment of Tasers would increase the resilience and confidence of officers. As Table I illustrates, the vast majority of officers who responded either strongly agreed (41%) or agreed (43%) that this would be the case, while only six officers in the sample disagreed.

Table I: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland will increase the resilience and confidence of officers’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	40.45%
2.	Agree	43.26%
3.	Neutral	12.92%
4.	Disagree	3.37%
5.	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	Total	100%

In terms of anticipated public reaction, as Table II illustrates over two thirds of respondents believed that the increased deployment of STOs would enhance public confidence and reassurance, while just under a quarter remained neutral.

Table II: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland will enhance public confidence and reassurance’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	20.22%
2.	Agree	52.25%
3.	Neutral	24.16%
4.	Disagree	3.37%
5.	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	Total	100%

As Table III illustrates, when asked if the increased deployment of Tasers would enhance community safety, over 80% of respondents agreed, with just under 2% disagreeing with this sentiment.

Table III: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland will enhance community safety’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	46.33%
2.	Agree	41.24%
3.	Neutral	10.73%
4.	Disagree	1.69%
5.	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	Total	100%

Finally, officers were asked to reflect upon the extent to which they believed that the increased deployment of Tasers would potentially improve their own and other officers’ safety at work. Table IV illustrates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) believed that this would be the case. Thus, it was evident that officers believed that the presence of this additional tool would provide added protection to themselves and their colleagues during deployments.

Table IV: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland will improve officers' own personal safety at work’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	69.49%
2.	Agree	27.12%
3.	Neutral	2.82%
4.	Disagree	0.00%
5.	Strongly disagree	0.56%
	Total	100%

Accordingly, the pre-survey results seemed to suggest that officers believed that the rolling out of Tasers would have a positive impact on both community safety and the confidence, resilience and safety of serving officers. In particular, the predominantly young male sample of officers clearly believed that they would feel safer going to work, and that local people would feel reassured by the Taser’s presence.

Officer Interview Findings

Those officers who indicated a willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews were contacted by the research team throughout the summer of 2018. Individual interviews were subsequently conducted, either in person or by telephone, depending on personal preference and availability. In total, 13 STOs participated in follow-up interviews. Of these, eight were male and five female, with one officer from ‘A’ Division, three from ‘C’ Division, two from ‘E’ Division, one from ‘G’ Division, two from ‘K’ Division, two from ‘L’ Division, one from ‘N’ Division, and one from Q Division. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for ease of data analysis and data was anonymized. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes, as outlined below.

Key Drivers, Anticipated Benefits and Risks

All officers believed that the emerging rollout of Tasers was required because of a perceived increase in violent incidents. They believed that a tendency towards knife carrying had re-emerged in some Scottish communities, disrespect towards, and physical assaults of, officers had increased and there had also been a recent spate of firearms incidents in certain parts of the country. Officers also believed that violent reactions from members of the public was more unpredictable than before because of a perception regarding the escalation of drug misuse:

I'd say knife crime, or dealing with knives, is becoming more of a daily thing. And, you're dealing with people that the kinda respect for the police is gone ... they're more likely to assault you with little consequence. I'd say violence against the police is on the rise. - *Female Constable T1*

I think what's maybe changed is the violence that kind of erupts here now is more unexpected. People seem to go from zero, to wanting to kill us, without any intermediate stages, whereas before you had an idea who was going to kick off and who wasn't. Now, it's more difficult to predict with people taking drugs and whatnot ... there's a lot of paranoia ... I would say there's more unpredictability about the dealings we have with people, just never know what they're gonna do. - *Male Sergeant T10*

Several officers also believed that the use of Tasers would provide a valuable additional tool to assist with the counter-terrorism agenda. This was based on the officers' perceptions that their rollout had emerged as a direct consequence of police cuts¹, and that Tasers would provide a valuable tool for dealing with violent incidents against a backdrop of limited access to police 'back-up' on the ground, and also because of the cutbacks in other public services which had led to a stretching of police resources:

In days gone by you'd be a lot more confident with dealing with violent people because you knew you'd have back-up around the corner. Certainly, now the numbers on the ground ... have maybe dropped by 60-70 per cent from numbers 10 or 15 years ago² ... certainly it comes into part of the decision-making when you're dealing with groups that you don't have the back-up round the corner that you used to have. - *Male Constable T2*

... cutbacks have obviously been made in various places, people don't get the level a' support that they, that they either need or want. And because of that, I mean the police are the only agency that can't say 'no'. - *Male Constable T6*

Officers generally believed that Tasers should be used primarily to diffuse violent incidents, particularly where there was a threat of harm to an individual him/herself, other citizens or to officers:

... for example, you're in a house somewhere and somebody's gonna self-harm and they've got a knife, they're not gonna hurt anyone else but they're gonna potentially, you know, kill themselves with it. You have the capability of using it on them to disarm them, to prevent them from hurting themselves. You've also got the other end of the spectrum where you've got someone running about the street with a knife potentially harming others, so that's two completely different ends of the spectrum, somebody, you know, not at risk, not a risk to anyone else, and somebody who is. So, I think it's ... if you're not getting compliance from someone, and they are a risk either to themselves or someone else, then that's ideal for it. - *Female Constable T13*

Although officers clearly had a range of other tools at their disposal (including batons, handcuffs and PAVA spray), they believed that carrying a Taser would give them more confidence and that its presence during a deployment would allow them to bring volatile incidents to a conclusion much more quickly. All of the participants cited the way in which the Taser would allow officers to handle a violent situation from a distance, without the need to get close to a suspect and putting themselves at risk of being assaulted:

The benefits for me of using the Taser is the distance factor and the ability to control something at distance, obviously being a violent, a violent incident. Meaning that we don't have to get as close as we used to have to get to try and influence someone's behaviour. - *Male Constable T7*

We've also got the option that you can show the Taser and you can show the flashes of electricity in the Taser to almost warn someone that you are [giving] this serious warning of, 'if you come any closer I will Taser you but look at this electricity. Is that something you want to happen? Is that something you want to have through your body?' So it's, I think wi' the baton, you're almost thinkin', 'well, you need to come, I'll need to hit wi' this baton ... whereas with a Taser you can hit them from obviously about five metres at the most. - *Male Constable T5*

¹ The reduction in the level of police resources is based on a perception on the part of some officers, and therefore may not be a true representation of the current levels of policing in our communities.

I think there are massive benefits in terms of it's a distance weapon so you're not putting yourself at risk by going closer to subjects that are armed. – *Female Constable T1*

Inherent within the anticipated benefits of Taser use was a fundamental belief by all of the interviewed officers that the most important tool at their disposal would continue to be their ability to communicate. Talking their way out of situations, negotiating and appealing for co-operation was seen as the primary means of de-escalating potentially violent situations, and the presence of the Taser was simply seen as an additional tool that would complement and enhance this process. While most officers could not identify any perceived risks in the presence and potential use of Tasers during deployments, a minority cited the potential after-effects whereby (where it was actually discharged) it could lead to head injuries if the impact of the electricity led to citizens falling to the ground. One male officer also highlighted the added risks associated with dealing with people with existing mental health issues and the way in which the Taser's presence could add to issues of personal vulnerability.

Anticipated Public, Political and Media Reactions

The majority of officers anticipated that citizens would be welcoming of the rollout of Tasers. Although some STOs acknowledged that some members of the public might feel apprehensive when they noticed them to begin with, they also believed that in time most would feel more protected in the knowledge that officers now had additional tools to deal with violent incidents and to protect the general public and themselves:

I think there is a lot of people [who] don't understand about Taser. You know, they maybe look at it [as] more of a gun, you know? 'Cause all they're gonna see is that shape of a gun, although it is bright yellow. I think the fact that most people have never seen Taser before, don't know how it works etc. ... it could be quite scary to an extent for them. But hopefully over time, it's like everything else, you know, it's, not that long ago we weren't wearing body armour and batons and things. – *Male Constable T8*

I don't think it'll have a great impact on their general day-to-day business. I'm sure the majority of the members of the public will be more than happy to see officers armed with a Taser, (1) for their own safety and (2) for the officer's safety. – *Male Constable T4*

Although it was very early days in the rollout, several STOs who had already begun to deploy described the way in which some members of the public had begun to notice the presence of Tasers as part of their armoury. For instance, they described the way in which some young people had become curious about their presence and asked questions about them, while some adults had actively commented that they thought their presence represented a positive step in protecting communities:

When I've been out in public wearing it young people under 13, 14 have been very curious about it. – *Male Constable T2*

Everybody kind of says the same thing, 'oh, you know, you definitely need it'. You know, when you see things in the newspapers and on the TV about, you know, what people are potentially carrying, they think it's a very good thing that police are carrying Taser. But I've had no, it's not as if somebody'll mention it every time I get out the car or go into someone's house. You know, it's few and far between, but most of the comments are all positive. – *Male Constable T11*

However, one officer observed that he had only had one person notice the Taser thus far during the early weeks of his deployment, and firmly believed that most people were not even conscious of its presence:

Obviously it's been quite well publicised that there are 500 officers trained, but I think it's something that they don't, it's not that obvious that they look at you and see you walking down the street or see you getting out the car and think, 'oh God, he's got a Taser!' – *Male Constable T5*

In terms of wider reactions, officers had been surprised about the lack of political and media attention to the rollout thus far. One officer believed that MSPs may be keen to lend their support to the revised deployments because of their eagerness to see a reduction in violence in Scotland. These officers' views had implications in terms of the perceived role of political and media attention, since they clearly believed that Police Scotland is not always subjected to balanced scrutiny:

... we don't always get the best response from politicians or the media. I feel like I'm sure they'd find some sort of fault in times when it does get used and it might be a bit of a blame culture. – *Female Constable T3*

I would imagine if there was some kind of incident of controversy where somebody gets hurt, falls over and hits their head or badly hurt or, you know, heaven forbid, passes away, then yes that would generate some questions and some controversy. But you would expect that, you know. – *Male Sergeant T10*

Training, Internal Fear, Apprehension and Scrutiny

All officers believed that the training they had completed in order to become qualified as STOs had been robust, thorough and helpful. They described the way in which the training sessions had provided them with a thorough understanding of how to use the device, a focus on how to deal effectively with issues of vulnerability and a range of scenario-based learning where they had the opportunity to discharge the Taser. Although generally very satisfied with the training, several officers believed that four days' preparation was not sufficient, but welcomed the annual refresher training that they would be entitled to in the future. In spite of feeling well qualified and being hugely committed to their anticipated deployments with Tasers, a very small minority of participating officers felt that their role as STOs was not fully supported by Divisional Commanders and Inspectors because of the police complaint referral processes involved and fear of repercussions if something should go wrong. Consequently the perception of the officers was that the deployment of Tasers was not welcomed by all senior officers:

I know for a fact that not all Divisional Commanders want [Tasers]. I know for a fact that a lot of Inspectors are being very wary of people deploying with it ... (1) it's a lot of paperwork and (2) it's a lot of scrutiny, a lot of transparency ... it's another use of force form, it's an automatic referral to PIRC, you know it probably leaves sort of an officer wide-open for a fire prosecution as well if it's not deployed right – or the perception it's not deployed right. It's a lot easier to hit someone across the head with your baton ... or deploy CS gas ... than actually Taser someone. – *Male Constable T2*

In summary, building on the positive views that were identified via the questionnaire survey, follow-up interview data indicated that participating officers saw the Taser as an additional and complementary tool that would enhance their existing ability to de-escalate and diffuse volatile and potentially violent situations through communication and negotiation. It was evident that officers believed that the presence of the Taser during deployments could hold the potential to subdue potentially dangerous suspects, to bring violent incidents to a quicker and safer conclusion and to avoid the hands-on contact that the use of other officer tools entailed. There was a felt sense of support from the general public to its introduction to date, but a quiet uneasiness that political and media backlash could emerge once Tasers began being used. Although officers clearly felt well equipped and prepared by the training they had completed, among a small minority of those who had begun to be deploy it was evident that some initial reluctance, anxiety and fear had emerged among superior officers to include Taser officers in given deployments due to the anticipated complaint process and possible repercussions if anything went wrong.

By the end of September 2018 official statistics provided by Police Scotland suggested that, during the first three months of operation, Tasers had been used a total of 80 times across Scotland. With regard to their use, there had been a discharge rate of 10 per cent (with the Taser having been fired eight times). During other incidents, the Taser had been drawn on 34

occasions, aimed on six occasions, ‘red dotted’ on 32 occasions and arced on two occasions. In line with officer views garnered during the survey and interviews, feedback from Police Scotland data suggested that Tasers were often deployed during potentially violent incidents, with just under half of all uses having occurred during incidents where offensive weapons were present. The reported deployment incidents and low discharge rates at this point therefore appeared to support officers’ anticipated views that Tasers would most often be used to diffuse potentially violent incidents, with a particular focus on complementing officers’ wider communication and negotiation skills.

Perceptions of Stakeholder invested in Policing

Members of stakeholder groups invested in policing were contacted to seek their willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. Specifically, email and telephone contact was made with the SPA, HMICS and the SPF to seek voluntary participation in semi-structured interviews. In total, six participants were accessed, with two participants from each of the three organisations participating in face-to-face interviews. Of these, five were male and one female. A summary of key insights emerging from stakeholders is presented in the following sections under three sub-themes.

Key Drivers, Anticipated Benefits and Risks

Members of stakeholders groups on the whole thought that one of the key drivers for change with respect to the rollout of Tasers was to increase officer safety; and indeed this was also referred to as one of the key benefits associated with the rollout. Evidence of the prevalence of officer injuries was cited, as well as the potential for under-reporting, and the related issue of employer duty of care for officers’ health and safety:

We’re looking at in excess of 7000 assaults on police officers which we think could be doubled if people [aren’t reporting] ... we did a personal protection equipment survey, one of the questions was ‘do you always record the fact that you’ve been assaulted?’ – and there’s 50% of the people don’t ... bear in mind we only have 8000 operational police officers who are out there on the front line day to day, so that means every person in the street’s gonna be assaulted at least once. – *Male Stakeholders S5/S6*

It’s a duty of the employer to protect its employees. So, this is a piece of kit that we know works ... there’s been a culture, a health and safety culture, which hasn’t been positive ... and we’re changing that slowly but surely ... [for the protection of] the officers ... if you reduce the number of assaults on officers then they feel safer in the workplace. – *Male Stakeholder S6*

It was claimed that when officers deployed they were frequently entering into an arena beset with ‘unpredictability’ (*Male Stakeholder S1*). A number of incidents they were called to increasingly involved dealing with mental health issues, or knife crime; previous incidents were cited emphasising the dangers officers often faced. For example, one stakeholder’s reflection of an incident below illustrated officers’ vulnerability in dealing with some incidents but also indicated how officers perceived Tasers to be a beneficial addition to their equipment:

There was an officer got stabbed in Edinburgh. And there was lots of cries from the Federation that if ... if officers had been deployed with Tasers that wouldn’t have happened - *Male Stakeholder S3*

It was also thought that the rollout of Tasers would provide more flexibility to officers responding to particular incidents, with one participant claiming that there was perhaps a shift in people’s behaviour. Specifically, officers expressed concern about some people being more willing to challenge authority, whether it be teachers or the police:

I think the benefits for Tasers are very much in the form of it might make things safer, it might de-escalate things quicker - defuse situations much quicker - *Female Stakeholder S4*

It was argued by one stakeholder that there had been a reported increase in drug-induced violence where suspects would not feel the pain of traditional compliance devices such as batons and that the opportunity to constrain from a distance would be an added advantage:

We're seeing more drug-induced violence, you know where people are not feeling the pain ... a baton is a pain compliance device, whereas a Taser works in a different way entirely – it's a restraint device, and what we know of the restraint devices, handcuffs and leg straps, work ... and you can do it from a distance. – *Male Stakeholder S5*

It was also pointed out that when the police were called to an incident that may involve a threat to officers or the general public, that deploying an STO – when appropriate - would provide a less lethal option:

... There are situations where somebody could be disarmed with, with a Taser, when the alternative might be a firearms response which could potentially result in a fatality - *Male Stakeholder S2*

However, deploying Tasers more widely was not without risks, especially in relation to having to incapacitate someone who may have underlying health problems. This, it was felt, may impact on how the public view not only the introduction of policing tools more widely, but public confidence in policing, with two stakeholders stating:

I'm not sure how we would evaluate the risks about the loss of public confidence - *Male Stakeholder S1*

It's a really difficult, I mean public confidence in policing and the Scottish model of policing by consent is so integral, I think, to our police force and how we want them to operate. So ... I suppose ... before taking a decision like that I would be, one of the things that I personally would be interested in seeing is, is testing public opinion. What do the public think about routinely arming or routinely giving Tasers to, to every officer? – *Male Stakeholder S2*

Some stakeholders highlighted the limitations with using the Taser and emphasised that it was not a panacea, citing on specific example of where it failed to protect an officer from knife crime:

If it's winter, if someone's got a big duffle coat on, it's not gonna work ... and there's a danger here that it becomes, 'oh it's alright ... someone's got a Taser' ... well, that's as long as you get the barbs in ... we've actually got a video ... where the guy pulls out a knife and he is Tasered but the Tasers didn't connect. And the guy had to change his cartridge running backwards, and he was stabbed. – *Male Stakeholder S5*

Anticipated public, political and media reactions

Stakeholders invested in policing had generally mixed views as to how the public, politicians and the media would view the Taser rollout. One stakeholder thought - with respect to the Taser rollout - that this change was met with a 'kind of welcoming response' (*Male Stakeholder S2*) from both politicians and the media to a certain extent. He asserted that this was due to them being informed about the rationale around the change, how it was going to be proportionate, amid guarantees around training and extra safeguards being put in place. However, he cautioned:

I think to me there's a bit of a difference between that and saying that all officers should have Tasers. I'm not, I'm not sure. I don't know, to be honest, how the public would view that. I'm sure some people would probably think 'give the police whatever they want'. But then there's other people who would certainly take a different view - *Male Stakeholder S2*

Two stakeholders referred to it in terms of policing being a 'political football' insofar as the media and politicians may respond to it in line with their own agendas. However, it was

acknowledged that there were strong arguments on both sides, and that there would need to be real engagement with communities since it was thought that the public may not welcome it:

I think ... that would be seen as a sort of step change in recognising our society becoming more dangerous - *Male Stakeholder S1*

However, it was also hoped that good news stories would be reported about its effectiveness, about trained officers being able to deal with situations quickly. This, it was hoped, would reinforce public confidence in policing:

It's easy to sort of do the opposite and make people fear it, and I think that's something to worry about. So I think those good news stories about dealing with things quickly and making situations better need to be told as well. - *Female Stakeholder S4*

One interviewee indicated that there had been a level of proactivity in terms of relevant stakeholders engaging with MSPs and discouraging them from using changes to Police Scotland's deployment models as an opportunity for political point-scoring, while another indicated his perception that the general public were generally unconcerned about whether officers were armed with Tasers or not:

We've done a lot of work with people, saying 'could you please stop politicising this' ... going out speaking to MSPs and saying, 'what you're doing, this is not appropriate' ... actively speaking to them and saying ... 'your approach on this is not helpful ... you're trying to make political points here and it's not, it's just not on because it's interfering with safe use. - *Male Stakeholder S5*

When [the public] call the police they want the police to resolve the situation so it can go back to the status quo ... they don't care how that's resolved as long as they're no longer interrupted or no longer in a state of fear and alarm because of the behaviour of somebody. - *Male Stakeholder S6*

Deployment and Officer Safety

Members of stakeholder groups were asked when and against whom, and under what conditions they thought Tasers should be used. Four stakeholders iterated that it should only be used as a last resort. Specifically, they believed that this would be when some threat or harm was being presented to the officers, or even a serious threat to life to either the public, the individual or the officer involved – but that its use should always be guided by the national decision-making model. This was summed up by two stakeholders:

When absolutely necessary [laughs], so yeah. So when absolutely necessary and again, and I suppose weighing up all of the, the risks. And I know often officers, officers will be making a decision in a split second in a very difficult circumstance obviously. But I suppose off the top of my head when the officer feels he is in danger and or other people are in danger. So, to prevent danger to somebody else. Potentially to, to prevent danger to the person themselves - *Male Stakeholder S2*

I think it has to be life-threatening to the officers or life threatening to members of the public ... for me, it just comes back to the national decision-making model: what is your objective ... and how can you do it more safely? - *Male Stakeholders S5/S6*

However, one stakeholder thought this decision should be up to the officer involved, that there were so many factors to take into consideration, and they were assured that the officer would have enough training to decide what course of action to take - whether that would be to use the 'spray' or to handcuff someone - but ultimately the decision would be theirs to make, with reference to the national decision model:

It's all about the National Decision Model, and officers going and making their own decisions ... It's about explaining each of these situations as appropriate and this is why I chose to use this option so, its providing a range of scenarios and it is really up to that particular officer to explain why they did it - *Female Stakeholder S4*

Two stakeholders also thought that being Tasered was a better alternative than being struck with a baton – which would also put the officer at risk:

...So that, that sort of risk assessment needs to be, needs to go on. As I say officers will try and de-escalate by talking, talking a situation through. Or even by the, by presenting a Taser may just de-escalate it. If the individual's gonnae harm themselves or, or harm others then as I say it's a safer one. So, you know, if they're gonnae be struck by a baton, where do you strike them? You need to get in very close because the baton's not very large. So the threat of risk to an officer ... is it not better for both parties to be brought to an end - individual incapacitated for a short period of time? - *Male Stakeholder S1*

Stakeholders also thought being armed with a Taser may provide some extra confidence to some officers; however, it was stressed by one stakeholder that you cannot be overconfident as there will be some situations where you cannot deploy it, and there would also be occasions when you have to question when it is appropriate, for example, does a shove merit being Tasered?:

So, I guess it can give you confidence you've got another tool, but it will still be up to you to make those decisions about - well is it actually appropriate in this scenario? - *Female Stakeholder S4*

All stakeholders, however, thought that Tasers would enhance officer's safety; especially in those situations where a knife may be involved, in which case officers were less likely to receive an injury. One thought it could also enhance the safety of other officers around them:

I also think it would make officers around them feel less vulnerable as well - *Male Stakeholder S3*

However, it was also pointed out that research would probably need to be carried out in the future to find out if carrying a Taser impacted on how officers responded to incidents:

...Like I said the, the slight unknown for me, unless there's research to say this would be whether as a result of having that, the officer might actually, you know, engage differently wi' the situation. And whether it would make him more likely to, actually to, you know, to pull that out and use it, as opposed to just talking somebody down. But I don't know, I don't know - *Male Stakeholder S2*

Perceptions of Community Representatives

A total of eleven focus groups were held with various community groups - rural and urban - across Scotland. The sample included representation of age, gender, ethnicity, social and personal challenges including physical and mental ill-health. Focus groups were held with young people, adult community groups and with those from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. In total, 69 individuals took part in these focus groups - 37 males and 32 females. Their ages ranged from 16/17 year olds to those over the age of seventy. There was also a mix of ethnicity. As would be expected from such diverse participants there were some tensions in their perceptions but they did raise and discuss a number of interesting points. It was also interesting to note that, while the research questions were specifically worded to encourage discussion around the deployment of Tasers, at times community responses focused on getting across the types of issues that were most concerning in relation to their local neighbourhoods and where they believed additional resources might be useful for the policing of specific incidents. Therefore, the community perceptions discussed immediately below were implicitly linked to participants' views about the potential impact that deploying Tasers may have on them. It is also important to recognise that community participants contextualised their perceptions and beliefs in relation to their experiences of living in and the policing of their communities. They did not differentiate, or compartmentalise, changes in policing practice but rather understood it in relation to their lived experiences. Most of the differences in perceptions in relation to policing at the community level were evident by age, place and ethnicity. The following sections give an indication of the main issues emerging

from the analysis of this qualitative data.

Crime in the Community

This section of findings draws attention to the backdrop of community experiences that had informed and influenced participants' opinions about policing in their communities. A number of key points were raised in relation to crime and the changing nature of it locally in the participants' communities and in the wider context of Scotland and the UK. Generally, the consensus was that crime was rising overall. There were also differing perceptions about crime and violence between rural and urban areas. In general the perception was that there was relatively little crime and violence in rural areas compared to that of urban spaces and in particular Scotland's bigger cities. For example, in rural areas there were repeated comments about the lack of crime:

There's not that many incidents of violent crime ...more smaller, less serious crimes. You don't have very many assaults or muggings or stuff like that. - *Community Focus Group P11*

Yeah there is not much violen[ce] - *Community Focus Group P6*

Conversely, in those areas that lie on the periphery of large urban areas there was a different perception articulated:

Yous obviously 'hing about ... [and] ... there's reports of people coming down from [named city] and causing fights.

There's a lot a' violence happening in the area. I feel really unsafe walking about in [named town]

... it's a' schemes, a' different schemes ... It's a' schemes I think that cause it.

... but it was a lot worse when we were younger like wi' the territorialism than what is now. - *Community Focus Group P12*

There were thus serious concerns articulated over crime and violence in the large urban cities and in particular in the central belt. Additionally there was a perception that there were mental health issues that were becoming policing issues and that were perceived as a potential threat to the suspect, police and the public. In particular, the concern was with those who had become extremely agitated and potentially dangerous to themselves, the police and the public as they were not thinking rationally. However, overall both in rural and urban areas issues related to crime and violence were perceived as less prevalent than they had been in the past.

Nonetheless there was concern about the potential for crime rates to increase. For example, the BME participants expressed concern about a range of crime threats; there was a split by gender in the degree of significance they attached to this, and the quote below reflects the views of the men:

I'm concerned about it because of the incident and the crime rates going high, especially in this area particularly. We had a few months back two murders happened, one in the high street, in the town and one on Argyll Street, and there's a couple of incidents of rapes, and casual fighting is a normal thing, it's just very common. So, property damaging, like people's property gets really damaged, cars, windows get broken, that sort of thing. Drug use, drug stuff is going on. So, in general, it is a concern, yes. - *Community Focus Group P7*

The women who participated in the BME focus group reported initially that they felt safe in their community; but there were particular incidents where they felt a victim/victims of racism:

Somebody try poking my door. I live in 13 floor. Me and two kids. My husband died after six year long I'm scared and call the policeI'm feeling so scared because I feel somebody inside the building doing that ... some people in my building ... stay downstairs in the garden, you drink alcohol, marijuana, something about that, and why? ... The people sit down all the time downstairs, and no live in my building. This is a problem. Somebody live in building and somebody friend, you come and sit down and drink and, you know, cocaine or, I'm see that. And the bottle alcohol, all the time down in

the street. Yes, this is a problem, you know, no good the kids sees this. - *Community Focus Group P8*

Another example given was that of an occasion where one of the women had intervened to help - as she saw it - protect a child from a perceived danger:

I see ladies with child is maybe one and half, you are walking so faster and you need cross the street and come and catch him because I want help, and you come and shout me because maybe I am Muslim and you see scarf, you shout me and tell me some word no good, and all the people you see and me go crying and I'm just, I want to help you. Tell me 'don't touch my kids, don't touch my children'. I tell myself maybe no understand me, because no speak English good, and ask my friend come interpreter for the lady, tell her why you doing that, just the lady scared for the baby cross the street. And shout about my friend, and tell some word is no good. - *Community Focus Group P8*

These experiences were very specific to the BME communities. Their concerns about alcohol, drugs and rising crime rates generally were, for the most part, shared by almost all of the participants in the focus groups. Age in particular seemed to be significant for dividing opinion over some of the issues raised at the local level. Only a few reported that they felt crime had been reduced significantly. This occurred in one of the housing schemes in the east end of Scotland's largest city, which hitherto had experienced extremely high levels of territorial gang-related violence. In particular, older adults living in this area were of the opinion that after years of investment by multiple agencies in their community alongside early and effective interventions and urban regeneration, the improvement was encouraging, but it should not be read as the problem having disappeared. Their perceptions were:

I think it's quietened down a good bit because you don't hear so much fighting on the pitches and different things like that.

Police are not coming up and down and a' that. I don't know about that but I think, you know, it has quietened down, this area anyway.

We dae some committee work in the housing as well. The thing is we've took [name of community] up the road and there was a stabbing last weekend and the boy nearly died. And there is crime going on, no at oor doors, it's up there. Hooses getting broke intae, we've never heard a' that before, hooses getting broke intae. We never ever heard, but there's nae polis so the young yins know that's just a kid on shop up there. That's a' that is. They've no cells, no nothing. - *Community Focus Group P3*

Unfortunately, the younger people living in this area still talked about gang-related crime and about how it had not disappeared:

It's calmed doon, but it's no', I don't think it's away. - *Community Focus Group P2*

Furthermore, some young people in this same community suggested that they 'scheme hop aw the time' (*Community Focus Group P2*) to avoid trouble. Word of potential gang-related violence got around the community and so they were able to, on occasions, negotiate ways to avoid it. They did, however, feel that this type of crime still impacted on the older generations 'cause o' aw the young yins walking about' (*Community Focus Group P2*) and the police whom they believed 'actually will feel threatened' (*Community Focus Group P2*) because 'they just get hurt aw the time'. Young people reported that knives, block backs and choppers were the most common weapons carried by gang members/disaffected groups of young people. Unusually for a community that has hitherto most commonly been linked to knife crime, guns were also mentioned as an issue: 'A boy fae our school got took out of school wi' a gun' (*Community Focus Group P2*). On this occasion it turned out to be a 'gas gun, no' an actual gun,' (*Community Focus Group P2*). Nonetheless it was concerning given that there are apparently an increasing number of gun-related incidents being reported across Scotland and in particular in the central belt.

These contested views about crime and feelings of being safe/unsafe in the community were raised in all of the focus groups. The older participants with first-hand knowledge of just how bad the gang-related violence had been in the past often reported feeling more confident and

safe in their community now. This aligned with being known in the community and by the residents there, which they felt gave them a degree of confidence and security, as they were not perceived as either a threat or a target. Although they were not without their challengers, even amongst the adults:

My perception is there's large groups of youths that hang around, and my understanding is that they will only fight with each other. You know, so long as you don't make eye contact with them, they just let you go about your business, you know. - *Community Focus Group P4*

Conversely, in other smaller urban areas there were mixed feelings about safety in their community:

Like if I'm passing a bunch a' neds I'll avoid them just in case something happens. So no, I wouldn't say I feel safe walking down the streets or anything like that but I wouldn't say I feel unsafe either. It's all just a worry that something might happen. - *Community Focus Group P12*

The younger participants, some of whom had limited knowledge/experience of the levels of gang-related violence expressed concern about the potential for it to re-emerge as they felt that there were often a number of groups of young people on the streets. One of the concerns they expressed in relation to this was that the police couldn't really do anything about young people gathering on the streets any more as most of them were under age and therefore couldn't be charged. One observation in relation to the changing nature of crime in the participants' communities was the risk of dog walking:

... because there's so much money on them ... 'cause they can use them for fighting. It's, it's horrible. They don't care who it is or who it hurts. So it's mair, it's more things like that. And it's ma' kids I would worry for more than me. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Given the range of crimes and range of weapons reputedly used in these communities, respondents were asked about their perceptions of police and policing as is discussed in the following sub-section.

Policing in the Community, Deployments and Officer Safety

Some participating young people felt that there was a lack of respect shown towards them from the police. Some of the young people reported feeling targeted/victimised by the police just for being young and out on the streets. One group when asked what the main problem/s were in their area replied 'the polis' (*Community Focus Group P2*), whilst others questioned the level of policing they were subjected to. There were also a number of comments about the levels of force used by the police and a perception of some 'polis' being 'good cops' and others 'bad cops':

I think the police are a big target towards anybody because some a' them have got a bad name for ourselves because a' what they've done. But then you cannae put it on a' the police officers cause it's no a' them. They're just dain their job but some a' them can be quite over the top we' that they dae. But they don't, they don't always take it intae a sensible matter a' what they're dain. They, some of them do go over the top but. - *Community Focus Group P12*

Good cops were viewed as those who were perceived as understanding their community and not constantly picking on the same individuals - stopping and searching them and removing drugs and/or alcohol from them. Interestingly, though, this notion of young people and alcohol being the main problem was contested by a number of young people who pointed out that the over 25/30 year old age group were also responsible for alcohol-related incidents:

Like your thirty year olds coming now and they all start causing fights 'cause they're, 'cause alcohol's involved and it's just not fun at all. - *Community Focus Group P12*

Therefore, perceptions of policing in the community varied by age with the younger

participants perceiving good cops as the kind of cops who would leave them alone, but at the same time this kind of policing activity was perceived by some of the older members of the community as an example of the police feeling ‘under threat’ from:

... these gangs of youths because they can be quite large, there can be about 20/30. Well, not 30, at least 20 of these youths kicking about. There’s a certain area in front of the old shops which aren’t, there’s only one shop out of four units, sort of semi-derelict, and the kids hang about in the wee green in front of these shops. So, it’s a known area where they congregate. The police don’t come down. I think the idea is just leave them to it sort of thing, you know. Provided that they obey certain rules and probably don’t fight, you know I mean, my theory is that certain areas kids are allowed to congregate so long as they aren’t creating too much mayhem. You know, rather than try and police the whole area, they let them do their thing in certain areas. - *Community Focus Group P4*

Another emerging issue was that of mental ill-health:

I don’t know if it’s all right tae say this but when it becomes mental health I think they need, there’s a bigger chance they need their Tasers then because these people are so unpredictable. ... mental health is on the rise as bad as it is and the polis are having tae deal wi’ that. And if doctors and that done their job right the polis wouldnae be having tae go oot and deal wi’ these people a’ the time. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Stop and search was raised, particularly by young people, as a contentious issue with some reporting that they were stopped and searched on a fairly regular basis:

Basically every week ... even when you’re no’ at a public place and you’re away up in fields, still dae it. ... they don’t take my booze aff me or that, I don’t know why. - *Community Focus Group P2*

Some other young people questioned the procedure under which they were being stopped and searched and suggested that the police may not be doing it correctly. The example below reflects the concerns of some young people that similar situations might arise with the introduction of Tasers:

I dinnae ‘hink they follow the proper stop and search procedure now ... ‘right, I’m stopping you under section whatever, under the criminal justice act...’ ... [because] ... ‘We’ve had a report a’, we’ve had a report a’ somebody daein’ that right’. And then you look nothin’ like that but they’ll pull you in. I’ve, I’ve had that a few times as well, you know. Just like had drugs in ma mates and I’ve been pulled aff the polis and everything as well. Just and it’s nonsense. You’re like, ‘you’re, it’s profiling’. - *Community Focus Group P10*

Despite these negative images/perceptions expressed by participants, almost all agreed that the police had a difficult job to do; they recognised that officers could feel vulnerable and at risk of having their safety undermined. The majority of respondents agreed that the police should have a range of tools at their disposal for use in the community when they were needed. Furthermore, there was a strong recognition that police resources were stretched and that they, the community, did rely on the police to maintain community safety.

Rollout of Tasers

Consequently, there was a recognition that the police should be able to protect themselves and significantly that the police should have a variety of tools at their disposal to keep all individuals - perpetrators, victims, community members and the police – safe:

I think there should be something, you know, to use if the situation goes out of control - *Community Focus Group P8*

I’m okay wi’ Tasers but it depends on the officer, the situation. Like the situation needs to call for it and the officer needs to know ... it wouldnae bother me if the police walked about wi’ a Taser... - *Community Focus Group P3*

However, there was a differing opinion amongst those in more rural communities. While

overall there was a consensus of opinion that having STOs might be useful in urban areas and potentially on very few occasions in a rural setting, the majority questioned whether they were really needed due to the low crime rates they experienced. Overall, there was a belief that having STOs carry Tasers would offer more protection to the police and help to increase public confidence in officers to protect and effectively deal with issues in their community. While there was significant support for the police to be armed with Tasers, there was also considerable (albeit, potentially misguided) concern expressed by some participants over how they might be deployed:

... police officers ... will feel powerful with a Taser. And the way the police already act tae the youths ..., I can just imagine them with a Taser... There'd be ... somebody get, there'd be a couple a' people getting Tased every night. - *Community Focus Group P12*

Like maybe some police officers may just use them too quick ... like hostage wi' a knife and they were Tasered ... if there was a risk tae somebody's life. I think if it was in that situation but you see on social media obviously in other countries ... somebody's been arrested but they've been Tasered for no reason. ... that scares me 'cause I've got a son who's growing up and will one day be a teenager ... you see it, like there's force being used that's sometimes unnecessary ... sometimes there's force ... that's no' needed. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Additionally, the perception of respondents was that public knowledge that the police were armed with Tasers could lead to a powerful deterrent effect:

I think knowledge is power ... if a lot of people know about it then it would maybe stop a lot a' people getting Tased and ... probably stop a lot a' people committing crimes if they think they're gonnae be Tased as well I think ... But also I think, see where ... that is like an armed response, I would, me personally I would rather the person was Tasered than shot because then the person will be accountable for their actions. - *Community Focus Group P5*

However, some were concerned about the potential to escalate events if Tasers and guns were more widely used:

But someone's obviously, if a criminal's armed and they've still got that weapon in their hand, like say it was a gun and they see the, the officer pulling out a Taser, that's gonnae cause them tae react. Like that could just trigger something ... Aye, that could then cause the police tae be shot. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Simultaneously, others expressed a different view on whether or not officers should have Tasers:

I don't fancy seeing community polis walking about wi' Taser guns ... I would never want that. I would never, I wouldnae feel safe for the people oot in the streets. I'm no' a criminal but I wouldnae feel safe for the criminals tae be honest or the youths mair than anything. They are criminals but the youths are, I just wouldnae feel safe wi' them if it was community police. - *Community Focus Group P5*

In general there was a concern that the police would resort to using the Tasers rather than drawing on traditional policing approaches and therefore further victimise and harass young people whilst increasing the risk of more young people getting involved in, or finding themselves on the cusp of, criminal activity. The participants were quite specific about the conditions under which they felt they should be used in the community:

If used correctly yes. If the criminal or the perpetrator is being violent. If they have got somebody as a hostage. If they've got somebody as, like if they're a threat. I don't agree if it's, they're just drunk and disorderly and they're being a pain in the butt. And they just kinda Taser them ... or, I don't know if it's alright tae say this, but when it becomes mental health I think they need, there's a bigger chance they need their Tasers then because these people are so unpredictable. I think, well I dae, I just think keep them safe when they're going tae deal wi' people like that 'cause that's on the rise as well. - *Community Focus Group P5*

The issues raised above suggest that, if members of the public were aware of exactly how Tasers are deployed by the police and the significant controls and training in place to ensure that when they are deployed they are used effectively and appropriately, it might dispel many of their fears. In particular, the need for the public to be reassured that the STOs were just that, 'specially trained', was apparent; that the deployment of Tasers was not as an additional tool that could be used indiscriminately but used specifically for occasions where the suspect, community or police were at risk.

However, despite the concerns raised, the participants were not in favour of the public having full information on how these devices would be deployed:

I don't think the public should know all the information about the Tasers 'cause they could walk about telling folk and they would know what tae expect. So I don't think they should know. - *Community Focus Group P3*

Participants felt that the police should have control of this information and that to inform the public of the deployment processes would in the long run undermine their effective use; there was a feeling that those involved in criminality would push and/or circumvent the deployment of the Tasers, leaving the police either open to accusations of inappropriate use or to being even more vulnerable in the community:

All wee idiots ... I think they would try and annoy them a bit tae get them tae try using them ... like, teenage boys trying tae act smart and then the police actually lashing out. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Furthermore, policing with Tasers obviously caused some consternation for some respondents. While it was felt it would increase community safety, and perhaps the police taking cognisance of all the caveats above, on a personal level for some it would be likely to increase their fears:

But then I don't want community polis tae have Tasers 'cause I don't think it would be, it wouldnae make, I wouldnae feel safe tae see [all] the polis wi' Tasers. I would feel safe but I wouldnae feel safe for the people that are causing trouble, I just wouldnae. ... So if you see the police oot wi' a Taser you know it's, it's serious, aye it's serious. Obviously when you kinda see the police oot it kinda is serious or else they wouldnae be there but I think like you're saying, no' every place, just the specialist. I don't think it should be, like obviously if it's a trial and it's so many at a time, I don't think it should be them phased oot tae every officer. I think it should still be like your armed response. It's only a certain amount. And it's only if they're only deployed if they're really needed, unless they're the nearest ones there. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Additionally, some questioned the investment in Tasers as opposed to increasing a police presence on their streets.

They are very much understaffed so therefore there isn't a lot a' presence. Like you see vans and stuff like that but you'll not see police officers walking about the way they used tae ... There should be more money going up tae having more officers and having that support in their team rather than havin' an extra device that they may, ideally the rules are they're only gonnae use once in their lifetime, twice in your lifetime ... 'cause it's meant to deter crime ... *Community Focus Group P12*

Post-Deployment Perceptions

Approximately 4-5 months following the rolling out of the extended use of Tasers in Scottish communities, all officers who had been selected as STOs (n=480) were invited to participate in a post-deployment online questionnaire survey, supported by QuestionPro. In addition, the research team also re-established contact with each of the local community groups who had participated in earlier focus groups by email. Each of the group members were asked to indicate whether their views had changed since the research team had last met them and were given the option to participate in follow-up focus group discussions about these changing perceptions. As outlined in the Introduction to this report, in reality none of the latter opted to re-engage in discussions, with all indicating that their earlier views had remained unchanged. Accordingly, this final section will focus only on the follow-up survey data emerging from responding STOs.

Perceptions of Officers

In total, 174 STOs completed the follow-up survey (an overall response rate of 36%). The majority of the respondents (82%) were again male and the most common age-ranges were between 21-30 (43%) and 31-40 (38%), representing an increase in participation by those officers in the slightly older age-bracket compared with the initial survey. As before, almost all (95%) were Constables, and a large proportion (75%) had been in service for either less than five years or between 5-10 years. The officers again served in a wide range of geographical Divisions within the force, and the majority of participating officers had been deploying as STOs for either 1-3 months (36%) or 4-6 months (56%).

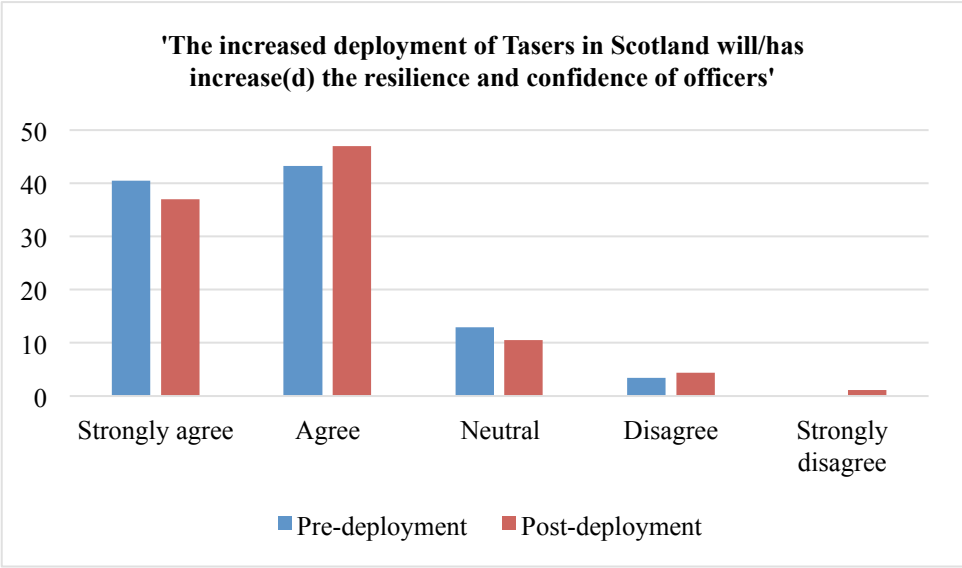
Survey Results: Quantitative Data

Officers were asked to indicate whether they believed that the increased deployment of Tasers had increased the resilience and confidence of officers. As Table V illustrates, the vast majority of respondents either strongly agreed (37%) or agreed (47%) that this had been the case, while just over 5% disagreed. As Figure I illustrates, this represented a very minor negative shift in responses from before, with a 3% drop in officers who strongly agreed, a 4% increase among those who agreed and with four more officers than before disagreeing with the statement. However, these very slight shifts in responses could not be in any way regarded as significant and a large majority of respondents clearly believed that the increased deployment of Tasers had, as anticipated, had a positive impact on the resilience and confidence of officers.

Table V: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland has increased the resilience and confidence of officers’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	37.02%
2.	Agree	46.96%
3.	Neutral	10.50%
4.	Disagree	4.42%
5.	Strongly disagree	1.10%
	Total	100%

Figure I: Pre/post perceptions about the increased deployment of Tasers’ impact on resilience and confidence of officers

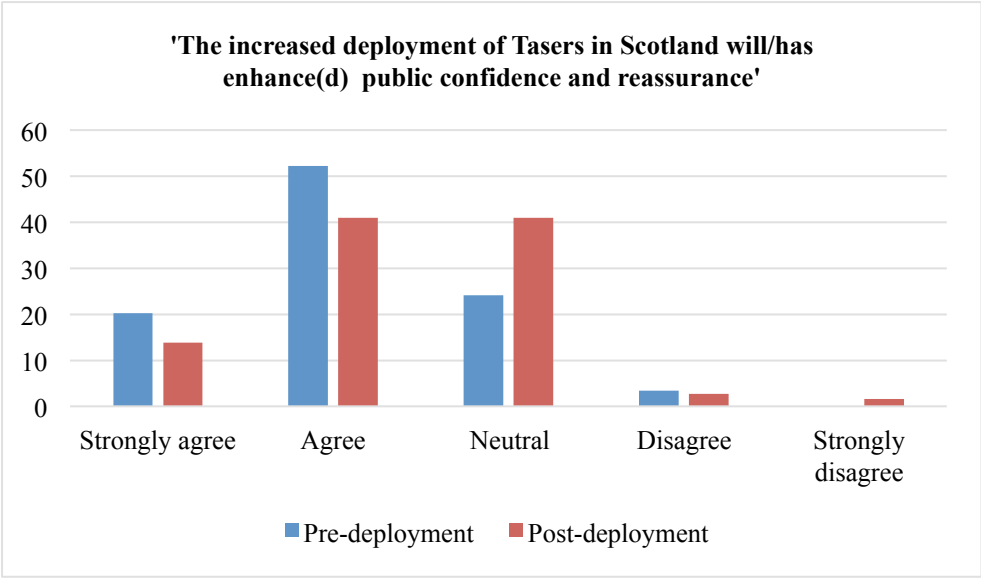


In terms of public reaction, as Table VI illustrates over half of the respondents believed that the increased deployment of Tasers had enhanced public confidence and reassurance, while 41% remained neutral. As Figure II illustrates, this represented a fairly significant change in views from the pre-deployment stage, with a 17% drop in the number of respondents who associated Tasers with enhanced public confidence and a 17% increase in the number of neutral responses. It appeared that some officers were more uncertain about the links between Taser deployment and public confidence/reassurance than had been the case among respondents during the pre-deployment stage.

Table VI: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland has enhanced public confidence and reassurance’- Post-Deployment

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	13.81%
2.	Agree	40.88%
3.	Neutral	40.88%
4.	Disagree	2.76%
5.	Strongly disagree	1.66%
	Total	100%

Figure II: Pre/post perceptions about the increased deployment of Tasers’ impact on public confidence and reassurance

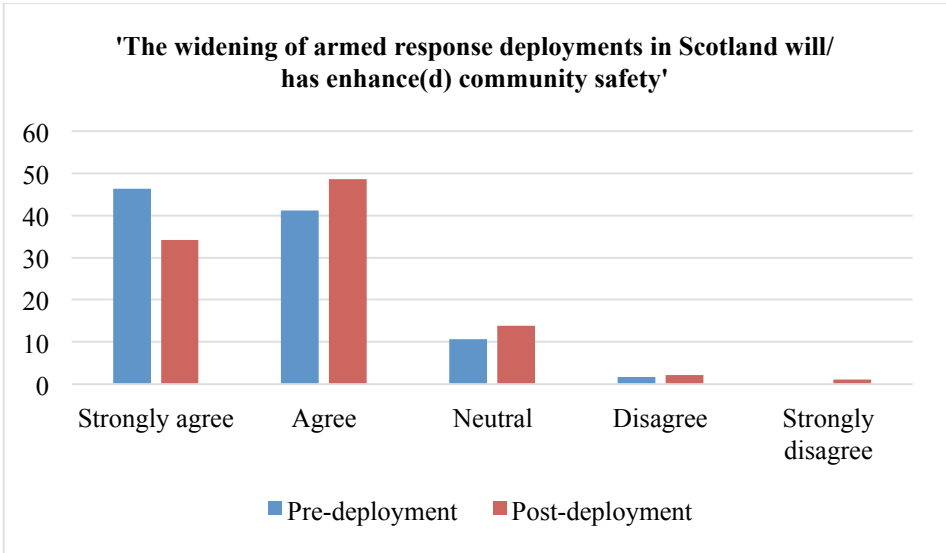


As Table VII illustrates, when asked about their views on whether the increased deployment of Tasers had enhanced community safety, as before over 80% of respondents agreed, with just 3% disagreeing with this sentiment. As Figure III illustrates, there was a 12% drop in the number of ‘strongly agrees’ with respondents either now simply agreeing with the statement, remaining neutral or - in a very small minority of cases – disagreeing with the statement. Although some respondents were evidently slightly less certain in their views on this issue than before, it was also evident that no significant changes in perceptions were recorded in this category compared with the pre-deployment stage.

Table VII: ‘The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland has enhanced community safety’ – Post-Deployment

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	34.25%
2.	Agree	48.62%
3.	Neutral	13.81%
4.	Disagree	2.21%
5.	Strongly disagree	1.10%
	Total	100%

Figure III: Pre/post perceptions about the increased deployment of Tasers' impact on community safety

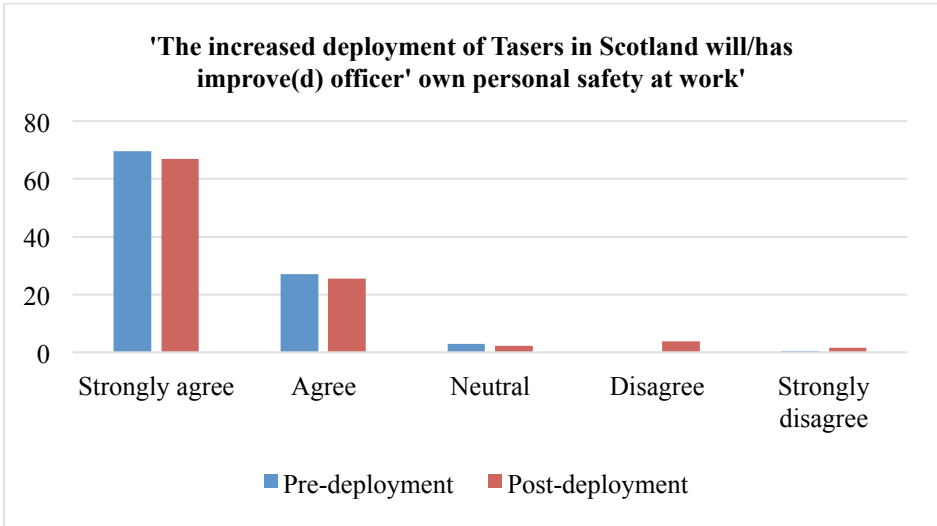


Finally, officers were asked to reflect upon the extent to which the increased deployment of Tasers had improved their own and other officers' safety at work. Table VIII illustrates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) believed that this was the case. As Figure IV illustrates, this represented only a 4% drop from the officer perceptions during the pre-deployment stage. Thus, it was evident that officers' experience of carrying Tasers had affirmed their anticipated perceptions that the presence of Tasers would provide added protection to themselves and their colleagues during deployments.

Table VIII: 'The increased deployment of Tasers in Scotland has improved officers' own personal safety at work' - Post-Deployment

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	66.85%
2.	Agree	25.41%
3.	Neutral	2.21%
4.	Disagree	3.87%
5.	Strongly disagree	1.66%
	Total	100%

Figure IV: Pre/post perceptions about the increased deployment of Tasers' impact on officers' own personal safety at work



In the post-deployment survey officers were also asked if they believed that the presence of the Taser during deployments had acted as a deterrent. As Table IX illustrates, 80% of STOs responded positively, with only 2% disagreeing and 18% unsure.

Table IX: ‘Do you think that the presence of the Taser during deployments has acted as a deterrent?’

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Yes	80.11%
2.	No	1.66%
3.	Not sure	18.23%
	Total	100%

Survey results indicated that only 24% of the sample had had reason to deploy/use the Taser since completing their training. Responding officers were asked to think of one or more (and up to four) incidents where they believed the presence of the Taser had helped to de-escalate a situation, and to indicate from a dropdown menu at which stage in the deployment process they believed that the presence of Tasers had helped to de-escalate the particular situation. As Tables X-XV indicate, the participating STOs had most frequently found that simply announcing their presence as an STO equipped with a Taser had helped them to de-escalate particular situations (with the majority indicating that this had supported de-escalation in response to one incident and on a total of 54 occasions). The Taser had been removed on 42 occasions (most frequently in response to one incident); aimed on 22 occasions (most common in response to one incident); red-dotted on 20 occasions (most frequently in response to one incident); arced on two occasions and fired on six occasions (and during only one incident on both counts).

Table X: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Announcing presence as an STO

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	23
2.	Two occasions	15
3.	Three occasions	8
4.	Four occasions	3
5.	Five occasions	1
6.	More than five occasions	4
	Total	54

Table XI: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Removing Taser from holster

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	29
2.	Two occasions	9
3.	Three occasions	2
4.	Four occasions	2
5.	Five occasions	0
6.	More than five occasions	0
	Total	42

Table XII: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Aiming the Taser at the suspect

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	16
2.	Two occasions	4
3.	Three occasions	2
4.	Four occasions	0
5.	Five occasions	0
6.	More than five occasions	0
	Total	22

Table XIII: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Placing the red dots on the suspect's body

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	15
2.	Two occasions	5
3.	Three occasions	0
4.	Four occasions	0
5.	Five occasions	0
6.	More than five occasions	0
	Total	20

Table XIV: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Arcing the Taser

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	2
2.	Two occasions	0
3.	Three occasions	0
4.	Four occasions	0
5.	Five occasions	0
6.	More than five occasions	0
	Total	2

Table XV: Stages and amount of times Tasers helped to de-escalate a particular situation: Firing the Taser

	Answer	Count
1.	One occasion	6
2.	Two occasions	0
3.	Three occasions	0
4.	Four occasions	0
5.	Five occasions	0
6.	More than five occasions	0
	Total	6

Accordingly, the participating officers seemed to indicate that the vast majority of incidents where the Taser had been used as a means of de-escalating particularly volatile situations had been resolved through simply announcing their presence or removing the Taser from their holster; arcing or firing the Taser had been the least frequent means of response to date.

Survey Results: Qualitative Data

Additional, open-ended comments provided by officers indicated that they had experienced mixed public reactions to the increased presence of Tasers in local communities. For instance, some indicated that the majority of local citizens appeared not to have noticed or commented on this:

I have had very little interest in the Taser I carry. A few members of the public have asked, 'Is that a Taser?' and that is the extent of the interest I have had from the public. – *Male Constable TT1*

Not many members of the public have noticed that I now carry a Taser which is good as it is not intimidating. - *Female Constable TT1*

If I am being totally honest, no members of the public have commented on me carrying a Taser thus far and I carry it on a daily basis. - *Male Constable TT2*

The observed public indifference to the presence of Tasers by the above officers may help to explain the slight drop in officer views regarding the links with public confidence and reassurance, as illustrated in Table 2.6 and Figure 2.2 (above). Others indicated that the public had become inquisitive about the presence of the Taser; this was usually expressed in a positive way, even although on occasions it could also be mistaken for a gun:

Any person who has noticed this seems to have a good reaction and seems genuinely interested in the device. - *Female Constable TT2*

A lot of members of the public have asked if it is a Taser when they see it on the belt. Some members of the public ask why every officer doesn't carry one which then gets explained. - *Male Constable TT3*

Many have assumed they are a gun; those that ask about them are surprised we have them but appear supportive of their use. - *Male Constable TT4*

Still others commented that young children, particularly boys, appeared to be the most intrigued about Taser presence, and likened this to the way in which many of them tended to be 'enthralled by police uniform and equipment in general' (*Male Constable TT5*). There were additional comments that suggested that would-be offenders had noticed the Tasers, particularly those who had a history of violence towards officers, and that its presence had begun to act as a deterrent in these cases whereby the sight of the Taser had helped de-escalate potentially volatile situations:

Well-known local criminals who may previously have been violent to officers. - *Female Constable TT3*

It has also been noticed by persons who would have otherwise attempted to cause disorder, and have then backed down or moved away of their own accord. - *Male Constable TT6*

On most volatile situations, the sight and presence of my Taser has led to a quick de-escalation without it leaving my belt. - *Male Constable TT7*

Some STOs went even further in their comments, indicating that the presence of the Taser had brought a renewed sense of authority in vulnerable situations out on the streets against the backdrop of an increasingly reduced sense of powerlessness in the job. With the changing demands on policing and the intense public scrutiny of the merging of the legacy forces in the creation of Police Scotland some officers reported a sense of increased tension which had impacted on their sense of authority to do their job, as summed up in the quote below:

Let's face it, traditionally we police by consent but we don't have that connection with the public and those we serve anymore. We lost our authority when we moved from a Police Force to a Police Service. Instead of enforcing the rule of law and ensuring safety and public order we now have to do as we are told by the public as if we don't they complain that we were uncivil, we are disciplined and thus the

circle continues. Taser has given the police authority in situations where we have lost our authority, ie. violent incidents - it's sad but true. - *Male Sergeant TT7*

In the final section of the survey, officers were asked to indicate whether or not they believed that the incidents they had been involved in that led to the Taser being deployed would have been de-escalated without the presence of the Taser. In response to this, the majority of participating STOs felt that potentially violent incidents, in particular, would not have been resolved as quickly and safely without the Taser's presence and that the device made them feel more in control and reduced the risk of serious harm to themselves, their colleagues and the public:

In all of the instances I have used (withdrew) my Taser the accused/suspect has complied 100%. It's not impossible to suggest these incidents may have ended similarly with use of other PPE however using the Taser definitely made me feel I had more control of the situation and increasing my personal safety. The Taser has been a very positive tool for me. - *Male Constable TT1*

The presence of the Taser became a focal point itself, and with the suspect in question being very attentive towards the Taser, this reduced the potential of him becoming aggressive towards myself and my colleagues, and reduced our risk of serious harm. The suspect followed instructions, and placed his knife on the ground, allowing himself to be arrested. This would not have been brought to as quick an outcome without the Taser being present. - *Male Constable TT8*

Both occasions in which I have 'used' a Taser have involved persons armed with weapons. On the first occasion I was sent to a routine domestic incident and was not deployed in my role as an STO. I went in order to back up my colleagues who had arrived just before me. On my arrival I could see my colleagues shouting at the suspect who was armed with a pitchfork and was pacing up and down. He was refusing to listen to them however immediately dropped the weapon on seeing me draw my Taser. There was no requirement for me even to aim it. It was clear to me from this incident due to conventional officers being there before me that the Taser was the key element that caused the situation to de-escalate. The second occasion involved a male on drugs armed with a hammer attempting to force entry into his neighbour's property. I deployed the Taser against this male who refused to engage at all with police and brandished his hammer at us. I do not believe there was any other way of ending this confrontation. - *Male Constable TT9*

... most of these incidents were of a violent nature with a person intending to cause harm to others or ourselves, I believe Taser had a positive impact on the subject and prevented further offending. - *Male Constable TT10*

Some STOs indicated that other types of tactical equipment could also have helped to de-escalate these situations, but that it would have taken longer to bring the incidents to a conclusion without the Taser, as well as presenting more risks to officers. Conversely, a minority of STOs felt that it was impossible to assess whether or not the incidents they had been involved in would have been resolved as quickly and easily without the presence of the Taser, and one officer indicated that its presence had not had the desired effect of de-escalating aggression among some suspects:

In my experience I have had aggressive persons who continue to be aggressive regardless of the presence of the Taser. I have thankfully been able to deal with these occasions through other means, however I am glad it is there and would rather have the Taser than not. - *Male Constable TT11*

Final open-ended comments on the survey underlined officers' positive perceptions about the Taser. Having been deployed for several months with the device, most officers believed that they had grown comfortable with the Taser, that their confidence and feelings of safety had increased as a result and that they now believed that the Taser was an essential piece of kit that allowed them to feel better prepared to deal with violent incidents they attended. One male officer indicated that the STO training had made him a better officer in terms of 'communicating, keeping distance and justifying ... use of force'. Several now believed that all officers should be equipped with Tasers, since they believed it was a little unfair that they were able to protect themselves better than their wider colleagues, but most others felt that

only some officers would have the appropriate temperament and that a formal process for STO selection should continue to be open only to those officers who had a desire to become trained. One negative element in the new deployments was the geographical distance that some officers had to travel to collect Tasers; this could lead to less time on the streets or even a lack of opportunity to deploy. Added to this was the perceived difficulty with the sharing of holsters and cartridge holders, and the perceived discomfort associated with being equipped with the holster while driving:

I generally don't deploy with Taser as there is no hub at my station and staffing doesn't permit me to travel 20 miles there and back to my nearest station with hub to collect a Taser. - *Male Constable TT12*

The one-hour round trip I have to make at the start and end of my shift to collect it/deposit it means I am out of the area I police for 2 hours of every 9 hour shift, meaning not only is there no Taser coverage, there is one less officer on the street to answer calls. - *Male Constable TT13*

Only issue with being an STO is equipment, we are having to share items like holsters and cartridge holders which should be personal issue to officers, this has an impact on time as officers belts need to be dismantled and rebuilt on a regular basis. - *Male Constable TT14*

The Taser is carried in a holster attached to a utility belt. It is awkward and uncomfortable especially whilst driving. - *Male Constable TT15*

In sum, having been deployed for several months, it appeared that the participating STOs generally had had previous anticipated perceptions about the rolling out of Tasers confirmed. As previously anticipated, the majority felt that the presence of Tasers had had a positive impact on both community safety and the confidence, resilience and safety of serving officers, with a slight downward shift in positive perceptions regarding their impact on public confidence and reassurance (perhaps explained in part by the general lack of interest and awareness in the devices by the general public that officers had experienced). While most respondents believed the Taser was beginning to act as a deterrent during potentially volatile incidents and enhance officers' feelings of confidence and safety, less than a quarter of the sample had actually used the Taser thus far. Of those who had used it, it was evident that the majority had found that the mere presence of the Taser acted as a deterrent, where simply announcing their presence as an STO had helped them to de-escalate particular situations. Although some had removed, aimed or red-dotted the Taser, only a very small minority of incidents had involved the arcing or firing of the device to date. The majority felt that violent incidents would not have been de-escalated as quickly or efficiently without the Taser, but there were clearly some remaining issues in terms of availability of the devices and the travel time needed to pick up equipment that Police Scotland will require to address in the future.

By June 2019 official statistics provided by Police Scotland suggested that Tasers had been deployed to 525 incidents between 1st June 2018 and 5th June 2019 and that they had been used³ on a total of 312 occasions across Scotland. With regard to their use, there had been a discharge rate of 10.6% (with the Taser having been fired 33 times). During other incidents, the Taser had been drawn on 135 occasions, aimed on 17 occasions, 'red dotted' on 118 occasions and arced on eight occasions. In line with officer views garnered during the survey and interviews, feedback from Police Scotland data suggested that Tasers were often deployed during potentially violent incidents: 57% where weapons were involved, 22% to violent incidents where weapons were not present and 21% to incidents of self-harming. Police Scotland's data also identified the *types* of weapons that had been used or presented during the 190 times that STOs had used Tasers where weapons had been presented. These included: knife, dog, adjustable spanner, axe, bottle, piece of glass, brick, claw hammer, crossbow, dumbbell, imitation firearm, knuckle duster, ammonia, glass, machete razorblade,

³ Police Scotland's definition of 'used' refers to drawing, aiming, red dotting, arcing, firing or contact stunning the device.

lighter, needle, metal baton, stanley knife, glass, metal pole, metal pot, pitchfork, samurai sword, scissors, slab, stick, stones, table leg, wooden board, wooden pole and wooden baton. Their findings also reported that, in the majority of cases, Tasers were used in incidents that involved mainly white Scottish/British males and that only 7 subjects had been identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group. They also reported that, from the 297 incidents attended where a Taser was used but not discharged, 232 of those incidents were successfully concluded without any escalation in the use of force. On 160 of these occasions, weapons were presented to officers and they claimed a 69% compliance rate. On 61 of the 66 occasions where officers were presented with a weapon by self-harmers Tasers were used but only discharged on 14 occasions. The statistics identified that 42% of all Taser discharges had involved persons self-harming or threatening to self-harm. On each of these occasions Police Scotland claimed 'use' of Tasers had prevented further or more serious harm to the subject. The reported deployment incidents and low discharge rates at this point therefore appeared to support officers' views that Tasers were most often used to diffuse potentially violent incidents. Furthermore, in February 2019 PIRC⁴ published 3 reports on its investigation of the use of Tasers in Jedburgh, Aberdeen and Carluke. In all three cases it was reported that the use of Tasers had been 'necessary, proportionate and justified'.

⁴ PIRC Investigation Findings: Taser Discharge, Jedburgh, 18 June 2018. Available at: <https://pirc.scot/media/4810/public-facing-report-op-sunadale-final.pdf> (accessed on 10th July, 2019); PIRC Investigation Findings: Taser Discharge, Aberdeen, June 2018. Available at: <https://pirc.scot/media/4809/public-facing-report-op-spey-final.pdf> (accessed on 10th July, 2019); PIRC Investigation Findings: Taser Discharge, Carluke, South Lanarkshire, 1 July 2018. Available at: <https://pirc.scot/media/4808/public-facing-report-op-clyde-final.pdf> (accessed on the 10th July, 2019)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overarching aim of this study was to evaluate the introduction of Police Scotland's extended use of Conductive Energy Devices (Tasers) across the first six months of Specially Trained Officers' deployment. Drawing on the evidence that has been presented, it is now possible to directly address each of the key objectives in turn, as follows:

To explore and examine the pre- and post-change perceptions of police officers, key members of stakeholder groups and community representatives regarding the STO/Taser rollout, with a specific focus on:

- a. the extent to which perceived resilience, confidence and personal safety among officers is enhanced as a result of the deployment of STOs with Tasers.**
- b. the perceived impact of the rollout of STOs/Tasers on public reassurance and safety, and the perceived benefits and risks.**

Pre-deployment, the vast majority of STOs believed that the rollout of Tasers would enhance the resilience, confidence and personal safety of officers. Officers generally believed that the decision to extend the use of Tasers in the national force had emerged against the backdrop of an increase in violent incidents, unpredictable behaviour among certain members of the public as a result of drug misuse, mental ill-health and vulnerability and the increased terrorism threat. Participating officers believed that Tasers would greatly assist them in being able to defuse potentially volatile incidents where threat to life had become an issue, from a distance. This would result in reduced risk of harm to officers, and the Taser was generally viewed as an additional tool that would complement officers' existing communication and negotiation skills. Officers predicted that the presence of the Taser during deployments could hold the potential to subdue potentially dangerous suspects, to bring violent incidents to a quicker and safer conclusion and to avoid the hands-on contact that the use of other officer tools entailed. Some responding officers initially identified some hesitancy and reluctance among senior officers to deploy STOs due to anticipated complaint processes and repercussions, but this was a view that appeared to subside as STOs became more embedded into operations. The vast majority predicted that Taser deployments would have a positive impact on community safety and public reassurance and were quietly confident about the political, public and media support for the new devices. Anticipated benefits vastly outweighed anticipated risks, with the threat of minor injuries to the suspect the only identified drawback.

Police stakeholders recognised the prevalence of officer injuries in Scotland, the increased challenges associated with drug-induced violence and the limited impact of existing weaponry. Against this backdrop, they believed that Tasers could enhance officer safety, while also recognising the need for their use to be guided by the national decision-making model. While they recognised the minor risk of potentially incapacitating members of the public with existing health issues, they also were strongly of the mind that the majority of the public were welcoming of the Taser rollout and a mostly welcoming response would also emerge among politicians and the media.

Members of local communities had mixed and contested views about the current levels of crime and public safety within communities, but many recognised that police officers could often feel potentially threatened and could have their lives put at risk. Many felt that officers needed Tasers because of the growing issue of mental ill-health within communities and the associated unpredictable risk of violence. Community members recognised that the devices could act as a deterrent but also expressed some concern about the possibility of the presence of Tasers potentially escalating combative behaviour among those suspects who may already

be armed. Several community groups expressed the view that Tasers should not become standard operational weaponry for all officers (particularly those assigned to community policing duties), as this could create increased fear. Some were also clearly influenced by images they had seen on social media where Taser misuse was reported from different parts of the world, and while they recognised the device's deterrent effect some also raised concerns about officers potentially using Tasers to victimise and harass young people. These issues underline the importance of ensuring that the general public are made aware of the specialist training in place for STOs and the significant controls in place to ensure effective, proportionate and accountable use of Tasers across Scotland.

Following their initial 4-5 months of deployment, the perceptions of responding officers appeared to confirm their initial positive views about the Taser rollout. The vast majority of STOs confirmed their belief that Taser deployment had had a positive impact on community safety and on the confidence, resilience and safety of serving officers. There was a slight downward shift in positive perceptions regarding the impact of Tasers on public confidence and reassurance – perhaps largely due to the general public indifference to the presence of Tasers that the majority of the STOs had observed. While most believed the Taser was beginning to act as a deterrent during potentially volatile incidents and enhance officers' feelings of confidence and safety, less than a quarter of the sample had actually used the Taser thus far. Of those who had used it, it was evident that the majority had found that simply announcing their presence as an STO equipped with a Taser had helped them to de-escalate a particular situation and mostly believed that such incidents would not have been resolved as quickly without the Taser's presence. Although some had removed, aimed or red-dotted the Taser, only a very small minority of incidents had involved the arcing or firing of the device to date. The majority felt that violent incidents would not have been de-escalated as quickly or efficiently without the Taser, but (like the general public) on the whole officers believed that Tasers should only be available to certain officers – namely those who had the relevant temperament, skills and desire to become trained as STOs. Finally, there were clearly some remaining issues in terms of availability of the devices and the travel time needed to pick up equipment that Police Scotland will require to address in the future.

To identify any remaining challenges with the Taser rollout and make recommendations for the future.

The main challenges associated with the Taser rollout and the relevant recommendations for the future can be summed up as follows:

1. The continuing unresolved and unanswered issues associated with the minor risk of incapacitating members of the public with existing health issues (including those relating to heart and/or blood pressure issues or issues of mental ill-health):

Recommendation: Police Scotland, in collaboration with the Police Investigations and Review Commission (PIRC), should create and maintain a database of investigated incidents where the Taser has been fired, and the instances of where health-related conditions became apparent post-incident. The Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) should potentially consider commissioning future qualitative research to explore the short- and longer-term impact of Taser exposure on individuals involved in these incidents.

2. The continuing existence of misguided perceptions among the general public about Taser deployment, who are clearly uninformed about the specialist training in place for STOs and the significant contemporary controls and processes for ensuring proportionality of use and officer accountability.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should consider launching a social media awareness-raising and public reassurance campaign that seeks to make members of the general public aware of the robust training in place for STOs, the significant controls in place via the PIRC-referral process in order to ensure effective, proportionate and accountable use of Tasers across Scotland and the relatively low instances of Taser discharge to date. Elected council members should be consulted on, and involved in, the rolling out of this PR strategy.

3. The combined views of existing STOs and the general public that Taser use should not become fully mainstreamed, and that the issuing of Tasers should continue to be dependent on successfully completing a formally-assessed training exercise and be restricted to those officers who have the necessary skills and temperament to deploy with the devices.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should continue to develop further training programmes for STOs and a robust assessment exercise should continue to form part of these; Police Scotland should consider the volume of officers to be trained, and ensure that they maintain a focus on proportionality that prevents the public from being over-exposed to operational officers who are equipped with Tasers.

4. The remaining issues in terms of availability of the Taser devices and the travel time required for some officers to pick up equipment prior to deployment and deposit it post-deployment.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should continue to lobby the Scottish Government for additional funding in order to increase the number of available Tasers, and ensure that the devices become more easily accessible to STOs in order to ensure efficiency on the ground.

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