

RESEARCH REPORT: EVALUATION OF THE STRATHCLYDE EXTENDED DEPLOYMENT OF TASER PILOT

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2009 the Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police approved the establishment of a pilot project to extend the use of Taser to specially trained officers attending operational incidents involving violence or threats of violence. The aim of the Extended Deployment of Taser (EDT) Pilot was to assess the effectiveness of deploying Specially Trained Officers (STOs), who are *not* authorised firearms officers, on the front-line with Taser X26 devices as an additional tactical option in operational policing situations requiring the use of force. The Pilot ran from 20 April to 20 October 2010 and thirty response officers from two sub-divisions were selected for specialist training as STOs for the purpose of carrying Taser during their regular periods of duty.

METHODOLOGY

A range of sources of information was collected in relation to the Pilot and evaluation was based on a number of quantitative and qualitative methods including:

- documentary analysis
- analysis of Force statistics
- a series of semi-structured interviews with STOs, their partners and others involved with the Pilot
- a Force-wide survey, including additional questions for the selected sub-divisions.

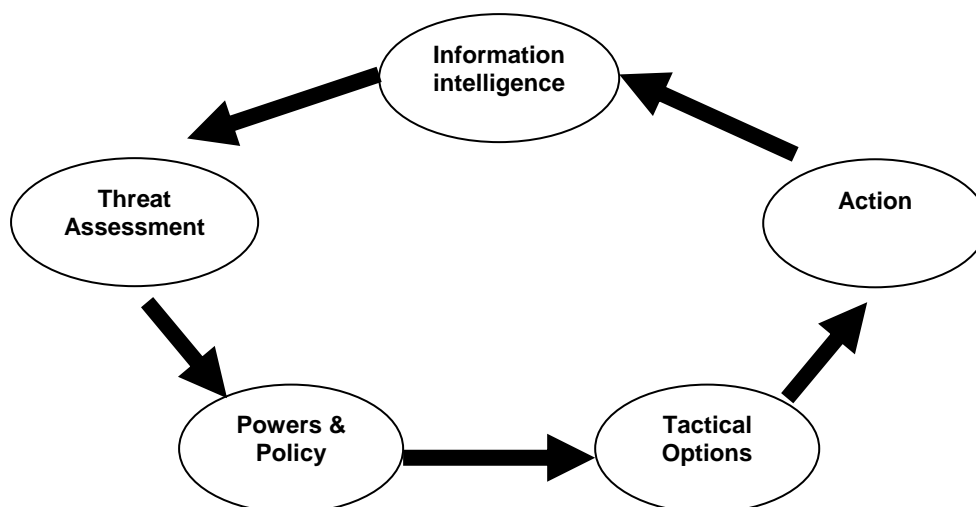
BACKGROUND

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) produced for the Pilot were fully in line with national guidelines, drawing appropriately on the Policy and Operational Guidance contained within the ACPO Operational Deployment of Taser for Specially Trained Units documents, to which ACPOS adheres. As the national guidance makes clear, Taser is not a replacement for existing means of managing conflict situations, but is an option to be considered alongside all other available tactics. Its use within the EDT Pilot was firmly set within the context of, and informed by, the Conflict Management Model (Figure 1). This sets out the process by which a measured and appropriate response can be made to any situation involving conflict, and provides a decision-making framework within which conflict can be dealt with in a logical and progressive manner.

In all major respects the Strathclyde SOP was situated within the Conflict Management Model and was compliant with nationally approved practice for the extended deployment of Taser by STOs.

Arrangements for the carriage of Taser involved the design of a custom-made vest with holster for STOs to wear. While similar care and attention was paid to the storage of Taser within locked cabinets in the two sub-divisions, there were no written instructions issued with regard to the storage arrangements.

Figure 1. Conflict Management Model



SELECTION AND TRAINING

The two sub-divisions, AB (Glasgow Central and West) and QD (Rutherglen and Cambuslang), in which the Pilot was located were chosen primarily on the basis of the high level of officer absence as a result of police assaults. However, there were other key differences between the two areas which influenced the impact of the Pilot in these sub-Divisions. AB covers a city centre area where most incidents are linked to the night-time economy, while QD covers an area on the periphery of the city where high levels of violence within residential areas pertain.

Criteria for the selection of STOs was devolved to the two sub-divisions. The criteria eventually settled upon were very similar in both areas, such as appraisal rating and exemplary complaints/discipline record, and were entirely appropriate to the choice of officers for this role.

The training programme for STOs and the standards required for satisfactory completion met or exceeded the national guidelines laid down by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). All STOs rated the standard of training very highly and found that the course prepared them very well for the Pilot. The training programme was identified as an example of best practice by the Force and the continuing informal support by trainers to STOs throughout the Pilot can be commended as an example of good practice.

DEPLOYMENT OF TASER

During the six months of the Pilot period the number of Taser deployments was only 11. Deployment of Taser by a Specially Trained Officer (STO) is defined as occurring in any and all of three stages – drawing of the Taser by removing it from its holster; red-dotting of the device by placing the laser sight red dot onto a subject; and firing of the device so that the barbs are discharged at a subject. No significant pattern in terms of the date, time of day, type of location or category of incident in which Taser was deployed was identified.

Use of Taser varied significantly between the two Pilot sub-divisions. There was a very small number of deployments in AB sub-division – 1 draw and 1 draw/red-dot – compared to the higher number of deployments in QD – 2 draw, 6 draw/red-dot and 1 discharge. This may relate to the varying characteristics of these sub-divisions, the types of disorder commonly encountered by police officers there, and the appropriateness of use of Taser in relation to these.

In all Taser incidents there was a good level of compliance with the principles laid down in the Standard Operating Procedures, the processes involved in the Conflict Management Model, and in line with the training undertaken. Issues of public safety, the safety of other officers and often the safety of the subjects themselves were the most significant factors in STOs' decision-making. Officers did make judgements that were reasonable and were based on a balanced assessment of the risks involved and were able to demonstrate that Taser was deployed in a manner which was measured, justified and proportionate.

IMPACT OF THE PILOT

In attempting to assess the impact of the EDT Pilot a number of quantitative measures were reviewed. These included statistics on police assaults, officer absences, information from the annual Force survey, complaints against the police, and types and levels of potentially violent disorder.

The impact of the Pilot was also assessed qualitatively through semi-structured interviews with all STOs (n=30) and with a sample of partners (n=10).

From this data, the extent to which the EDT Pilot met the objectives which were set at its outset was evaluated.

Objective	Outcome
To enhance resilience and confidence among frontline officers in resolving violent or potentially violent incidents	Achieved (Source: Officer Interviews)
To increase levels of confidence and reassurance among members of the community in relation to the ability of the police to deal with violent situations	Partly Achieved Variation between Pilot areas (Sources: Force Survey; Officer Interviews)
To assess the effectiveness of the STO training programme	Very Effective (Source: Officer Interviews)
To reduce levels of assaults on police officers and on absence rates due to assaults	Partly Achieved Some evidence of impact in one Pilot area; no established link between assaults and absences (Source: Force Statistics)
To measure levels of public support for the carrying of the Taser device by police officers	Positive (Source: Force Annual Survey)
To reduce levels of complaints by members of the public against the police	Unknown Link between complaints and Pilot not established (Source: Force Statistics)

CONCLUSION

This evaluation sought to determine compliance of Specially Trained Officers with the Standard Operating Procedures for the deployment of Taser and reviewed in detail both the small number of incidents in which Taser was deployed within the Pilot (see 1 below), and a number of identified incidents in which STOs decided *not* to deploy Taser (see 2 below). It concluded that Specially Trained Officers complied with the Procedures and adhered to the requirement to use Taser in ways which were measured, justifiable and proportionate.

Case Study 1

Interviews with STOs followed the pattern of the Conflict Management Model. In this case, a lone officer had to confront three gang members and decided to deploy Taser.

Intelligence

Officers on night shift came across a disturbance in which a group of male and female adults, who had just alighted from a bus, were seen running from five or six young males who appeared to be chasing them. The officers gave pursuit. One of the males was brandishing a knife above his head. He saw the officers come out of the police vehicle, began to back off from the fight, and ran into the adjacent high flats, followed by two other males. In light of the danger to the public and themselves, the officers pursued the knife perpetrator into the narrow, common close. However, the STO and his partner became separated.

I got into a dark, narrow close, which became an open close, then turned right up another flight of stairs. Now there were three people, as the knife-man met up with another part of his gang. My question was 'Where's the knife?' My neighbour didn't have a great knowledge of the area and we had become separated. I could hear help coming and my initial reaction was to wait for backup, but I heard someone say, 'He's on his own.' One male, very drunk, said something like, 'He's on his own. We'll take him.' I said, 'Stand still, don't move, raise your hands.' Someone said, 'Charge him.'

Threat Assessment

There were three young males and one had a weapon. The STO was alone in a very restricted stairway and was standing in the light. The three others were in the dark and the knife could not be seen. It was a very dangerous situation in which there was a clear threat to the officer and a definite intention on the part of the subjects to cause considerable harm.

Powers and Policy

The aim was to detain subject in order to search for any weapon and to arrest for alleged breach of the peace.

Tactical Options

Verbal communications were used, but the officer was cornered and the response was threatening. The officer put his hand on his baton, but realised that it could only be used on one person. With CS spray there was a danger of cross-contamination and not all three may have been affected. The STO had to decide whether to back off or engage further, but the three of them advanced. The officer had no idea where backup was and they were 10 feet away and advancing.

Tactical Decision

The decision was made to use the Taser when the threat level became so high. The STO switched on the Taser and issued a warning. Two of the males thought it was a gun and ran away. The male with the knife continued to advance and was red-dotted. He looked at his chest, fell to the floor and was handcuffed.

Outcome

The situation was immediately diffused and further violence was stopped. The person was arrested without violence or injury to himself, the officers or the public.

Officer Perspective

Having experienced direct violence from gangs previously, the STO strongly believed Taser was the safest option. Building on experience from the training course, it was understood that Taser on display could cause someone to desist.

I got used to the various threat assessments that made me more aware. Taser is a good device, obviously in the right hands. It's not a toy.

Case Study 2

STOs were also asked about situations in which Taser was *not* deployed. In this case officers were called to deal with a drunken male at a party in a block of flats.

Intelligence

The initial call was for a female under the influence of drugs within a party in an eight storey block of flats. The anonymous caller was concerned for the female's safety. While speaking to the female in the party, another guest became verbally abusive to the officers. This male was 6'8" in height and well built. He then unexpectedly ran out onto the balcony, which was about three feet wide, about 12 feet long, and had a concrete balustrade four feet in height and threatened to jump.

Threat Assessment

The male was very tall, well built and heavily under the influence of alcohol. His girlfriend revealed that he had a history of mental health problems and was off his medication. There was a large number of people in the room.

Powers and Policy

To protect life by preventing the male from jumping and preventing harm to officers and others.

Tactical Options

Verbal communications were initiated, but were having no effect. Due to close confinement empty-techniques and use of baton were ruled out. Use of CS spray could have excited him into going over the balcony, plus the possibility of cross-contamination.

I then began to think of Taser. Due to the position he was standing in, if I had fired and he had become incapacitated, he would have fallen forward onto the balcony where he could have been safely restrained. However, also there was the prospect that it may not have been effective and he could still have jumped or, worse still, as a reaction, gone over the edge himself.

Tactical Decision

Continued with verbal commands and eventually he came away from the edge and sat on the balcony floor.

Outcome

Once down on the floor he was overpowered physically and arrested. He was charged with breach of the peace.

Officer Perspective

The STO believed this was the right thing to do.

At first the use of Taser was the last thing on my mind. After consideration the risk of injury to ourselves or to him was greater with the Taser option due to the circumstances.