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23 October 2020

Dear Ivy Burnett,

**Freedom of Information request reference: 59346**

Thank you for your e-mail of 3 July 2020, in which you request:

*Police use of Tasers on mentally ill, mentally disabled and emotionally distressed people in England and Wales in the years 2015 to 2020, including 'highest use', 'ethnicity' and 'gender'.*

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

I am able to disclose some of the information that you have requested. The attached spreadsheet shows TASER® use between the period 1 January 2015 and 31 March 2019 broken down by highest use, ethnicity and gender. It should be noted that data up until the 31 March 2017 comes from the Home Office TASER X26 database, this does not split out the data into the categories referenced above, the data is categorised by psychological and mental health disorder which is likely to be inclusive of some of the categories you have outlined. Data includes all times a TASER® was used, whether it was actually fired or not. These uses include drawn, aimed, red dotted, arced, used in drive stun mode, fired and used in angle drive stun mode. Definitions of these different types of use can be found in Annex A.

Please note the data from the Home Office TASER® X26 database was not quality assured on receipt from police forces and it contains many known reporting errors and inconsistencies. These issues should be recognised and if this data is quoted in the future, it should be caveated as follows:

- The data held on the Home Office TASER® X26 database comes from individual police records previously sent to the Home Office each time a TASER® X26 was used.

- The statistics are a different source to the statistics supplied in aggregate form by individual forces which go through validation and quality assurance checks within Home Office and with police forces before being published as Official Statistics on GOV.UK.
- Some of the fields, are police officer assessments.

For data relating to April 2017 onwards, the way in which police use of TASER® is reported has changed. From 1 April 2017, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) introduced the requirement for all police forces in the UK to record data on police use of force, including TASER®. A subset of this data is collected and published as part of the Home Office Annual Data Requirement which was last published in December 2019, covering incidents in England and Wales between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019. The data for the period between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2019 can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet. Should you wish to see the [police use of force, England and Wales](#) publication this is available on GOV.UK.

It should be noted, however, that subject demographics are only available for 13,000 for the 17,000 Taser® incidents in 2017/18, and 22,000 of the 23,000 incidents of TASER® in 2018/19. This is because not all forces could provide a more detailed breakdown of their TASER® use in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

It should also be noted that the recording of police use of TASER® was a national requirement prior to 2017/18. However, the transition from recording TASER® use through one system to another system (i.e. a wider use of force recording system) is known to have affected the quality and reliability of the 2017/18 and 2018/19 TASER® data and so figures from April 2017 are not directly comparable with figures for previous years.

Lastly, I can confirm that the Home Office holds the information you have requested covering the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. However, after careful consideration we have decided that the information is exempt from disclosure under section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act because it is due to be published at a later date.

Section 22 of the Act is a qualified exemption and requires consideration of the public interest test. Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest with the reasons for our conclusion, are set out in Annex B.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to [foirequests@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:foirequests@homeoffice.gov.uk), quoting reference FOI 59346. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request would be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you were to remain dissatisfied after an internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the FOIA.

Yours sincerely

**Police Powers Unit**

## Annex A

Type of Use	Definition
Drawn	Drawing of the TASER® in circumstances where any person could reasonably perceive the action to be a use of force.
Aimed	Deliberate aiming of the TASER® at a targeted subject.
Red dot	The device is not fired. Instead the TASER® is deliberately aimed and then partially activated so that a laser red dot is placed onto the subject.
Arced	Sparking of the TASER® without aiming or firing it.
Drive stun	The TASER® is held against the subject's body and the trigger is pulled with no probes being fired. Contact with the subject completes the electrical circuit which causes pain but does not deliver an incapacitating effect.
Fired	The TASER® is fired with a live cartridge installed. When the trigger is pulled, the probes are fired towards the subject with the intention of completing an electrical circuit and delivering an incapacitating effect.
Angled drive stun	The officer fires the device with a live cartridge installed. One or both probes may attach to the subject with the intention of completing an electrical circuit and delivering an incapacitating effect.

## **Annex B**

### **Public interest test in relation to section 22**

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in maintaining the exemption. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not necessarily the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. Transparency and the 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone.

### **Considerations in favour of disclosing the information**

There is a general public interest in the disclosure of information to ensure departmental transparency and accountability. There is also a general public interest in providing information to enable the public to understand decisions which may affect them. There is a specific public interest in enabling access to information about TASER® use.

We recognise that there may be a public interest in disclosing this information now and that this may weigh in favour of it being unreasonable to wait for the information to be published.

### **Considerations in favour of maintaining the exemption**

It is in the public interest to ensure that the publication of official information is a properly planned and managed process. The Home Office must ensure that the information intended for publication meets the standards and requirements set for departmental publications. It would not be in the public interest for the Home Office to release this information prior to meeting such standards.

Publication before the planned date, in response to individual FOI requests, would undermine the Home Office pre-planned publication procedures and its ability to use staff resources in a way that avoids undermining reasonable publication timetables.

### **Conclusion**

We conclude that the balance of the public interest lies in maintaining the exemption and withholding the information, because it is in the overall public interest that the Home Office is able to plan its publication of information in a managed and cost-effective way.