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Briefing: Urgent concerns over potential authorisation of Taser 10 & the negative impact on children's rights

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June 2025

Introduction

In this briefing we alert you to our concerns in relation to the UK Government's potential authorisation of the use of Taser 10 by police forces in England and Wales, which will also be used on children.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has explicitly called for the prohibition of harmful devices, including Tasers, against children. In its [2023 Concluding Observations](#), the Committee recommended that the UK State party and devolved administrations:

*“Take legislative measures to explicitly prohibit, without exception, the use of: (i) harmful devices including spit hoods, **tasers**, plastic bullets, attenuating energy projectiles and other electrical discharge weapons against children (parag 30 a).”*

This recommendation underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) before any decision is made regarding the authorisation of Taser 10 use by police forces in England and Wales. Organisations such as [Children's Rights Alliance England](#), the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), and other [human rights bodies](#), have raised significant concerns regarding the negative impact of Taser use on children.

We lay out some of these concerns in this briefing and highlight throughout, rights breaches under the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), that underpins all legislation and policy in Wales. Like previous concerns expressed in relation to strip search of children (see [briefing here](#)), Taser use against children is a further example of how, UK Government policy is contrary to Welsh Government's commitment to the UNCRC and Welsh specific legislation that gives due regard to children's rights.

What are Tasers?

The [College of Policing](#) describes the use of a Conducted Energy Device (CED or Taser) as a “less lethal weapon system” designed to temporarily incapacitate a subject through use of an electrical current which temporarily interferes with the body’s neuromuscular system and produces a sensation of intense pain. [Amnesty International](#) has argued that they should not be described as ‘less-lethal’ because they can still “cause serious injury or even death”.

Existing Data Patterns in Taser Use Against Children

UK Home Office statistics include information on the number of times Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs), referred to as Tasers, are used. According to UK Home Office, use of force statistics, police deployed Tasers on children 2,091 times in [2020-2021](#), including six instances involving children under the age of 11 years. In 122 of these cases, the Taser was discharged (See Appendix 1 Types of Taser Use).

Between [2022 and 2023](#), there were over 3,000 instances of Taser use involving 11- to 17-year-olds across England and Wales, with 88 discharges. Additionally, Tasers were drawn on six children under 11 years during the same period.

In year ending [March 2024](#), there was a slight decrease of Taser use on all children from the previous year with 2,900 uses. 2,895 of these uses were on 11-17 year olds and 5 were on children under 11 years. There were 66 discharges – all on 11-17 year olds.

If we look to the data of total Taser use on children across the 4 Welsh police forces in the year ending [2024](#).

- Gwent Police Force: Total Taser Use 35 instances, on 11–17-year-olds, 33 non-discharge and 2 were discharge.
- Dyfed Powys Police Force: Total Taser Use 9 instances on 11–17-year-olds, all non-discharge.
- North Wales Police Force: Total Taser Use 12 instances on 11–17-year-olds, 11 non-discharge and 1 discharge.
- South Wales Police Force: Total Taser Use 56 on 11 – 17-year-olds, all non-discharge.

Disproportionate and Discriminatory Use

Evidence indicates that disproportionality in Taser use is stark. In London, for example, [over 70% of Taser deployments against children involve those from Black or other racialised groups](#), indicating patterns of institutional and structural racism. In a review conducted by the [Independent Office of Police Conduct](#), over a quarter of children subject to a Taser discharge, were Black. Furthermore, over a quarter of the children,

were experiencing a mental health episode. In the year ending March 2024, [UK Home Office Statistics](#) report that of all Taser uses on boys, 26% were on Black boys and of all Taser uses on girls, 14% were on Black girls. Of all Taser uses on children 23% were on Black boys. Racial disproportionality in use of Taser was also raised as an issue of concern by the [UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) following its examination of the UK in 2024.

The data does not report on disability as a protected characteristic. However, [research](#) has also indicated that children with special educational (SEN)/additional learning needs (ALN) are more likely to be subjected to use of force, including Tasers. Researchers also note that disproportionality in Taser use, is exacerbated by socioeconomic factors and higher levels of police surveillance in deprived communities, with *'affected communities experiencing Taser as a dehumanising and potentially lethal weapon'*.

The disproportionate use of Tasers against children from Black, ethnic minority, and socio-economically disadvantaged communities, children with mental health concerns or ALN amounts to discriminatory practice, violating Article 2 of the UNCRC.

There should be detailed, up-to-date statistics published for the Welsh Police Forces annually, on Taser use, cross referenced by ethnicity, age, disability, (including ALN/SEN) socio-economic status, and whether a child has mental health concerns to monitor disproportionality and facilitate accountability to marginalised groups of children. The lack of disaggregated data made available in this context highlights the need for more Wales specific reporting to better understand and address the use of force on children across the Welsh police forces.

Medical and Psychological Impact of Tasers on Children

Physical Health Risks

Children are at elevated medical risk from Taser deployment. According to the [Scientific Advisory Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons](#) (SACMILL), Tasers can cause neuromuscular incapacitation, sudden collapse, and injuries from secondary trauma. Tasers can lead to [cardiac arrhythmias/cardiac](#) infections from barb penetration, and burns, especially when flammable materials are present. The [Omega Research Foundation](#) has communicated that *'repeated and extended shocking of persons has led to deaths and been heavily criticised by human rights and medical organisations'*.

Furthermore, unlike earlier Taser models, [Taser 10](#) barbs must embed in the skin. Children's thinner skin and reduced body wall-to-organ distance significantly heighten the risk of deep tissue or organ injury. Barbs from Taser 10 are heavier, travel at higher velocity, and have increased kinetic energy, thereby increasing the likelihood of severe internal harm, including to the eyes, brain, lungs, and liver. Given that children frequently wear lighter clothing, this danger is compounded.

Psychological and Developmental Harm

The psychological impact of Tasers is equally profound. Adolescents' brains are still developing, particularly in regions that regulate risk and emotional response. The medical risks associated with Tasers, particularly on still-developing bodies, are incompatible with the obligation to safeguard children's survival and development and right to the highest attainable standard of health, breaching Articles 6 and 24 of the UNCRC. Additionally, psychological impacts — such as anxiety, PTSD, and increased fear of authority — can also affect a child's mental health.

Taser use—or even the threat of it—has been found to cause significant distress, fear, and trauma in children, particularly those with mental health conditions or special educational needs. Some children report experiencing symptoms of PTSD following such encounters. In research undertaken by CRAE with children, one child said:

“I just saw the little dot there and... I just went all warm, scared. I thought I'm going to get hurt now, I'm going to get a shock in a minute. They just stunned him [his friend] and he was flopped on the floor.”

Even when a Taser is not discharged, the act of a police officer drawing the weapon can be deeply distressing for children. This is especially true for those who are among the most vulnerable in our society — including children with histories of abuse or exposure to violence, those who have been criminally exploited, and those with ALN/SEN or significant mental health challenges. Taser use, which includes threatening a child with a Taser, can constitute a form of state-inflicted violence, especially in cases where the child poses no serious threat. This is particularly concerning when used on children already traumatised by abuse, exploitation, or neglect. Taser use may retraumatise children, thus amounting to a violation of their right to protection from both physical and psychological violence (Article 19 UNCRC). This is also contrary to, policies and guidance in Wales, including the Youth Justice Blueprint that supports a rights based and trauma informed approach.

As reported by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the use of Tasers on children may also be considered cruel or degrading treatment (Article 37a of the UNCRC), particularly when used as a method of control rather than a last resort in a life-threatening situation.

Children's Rights Context in Wales

Despite these known harms and concerns, no published CRIA has accompanied Taser 10's authorisation process and it is our understanding from the answer to a UK Parliamentary Question that there are no plans to do so. This is a clear violation of the UK Government's obligations under Article 3 of the UNCRC which requires that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them.

Furthermore, although Policing in Wales is not devolved, given the authorisation of Taser 10 will impact children in Wales, we would expect this decision to be subject to Wales specific legislation that requires that all decisions (including development of policy, legislation, budgets) are given due regard to the UNCRC, under the [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#). With the added requirement under the Welsh Government's [Children's Scheme](#) to conduct a CRIA to evidence how due regard has been given.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly raised concerns about the use of Tasers on children, most recently as cited above in their [2023](#) Concluding Observations, but also in [2016](#) review of the UK. The Committee has called for a ban on the use of Tasers and other electrical discharge weapons on children, citing both physical and psychological risks, as indeed has the [UN Committee Against Torture](#).

Conclusion

Despite all these concerns there is no legal presumption against Taser use on children in the UK. The continued use of Tasers and the deployment of Taser 10 on children by police forces in England and Wales if authorised, will represent a serious breach of international human rights standards and Welsh children's rights legislation. The UK Government's failure to conduct a CRIA prior to authorisation is a grave oversight that disregards its obligations under the UNCRC.

Mounting evidence of the disproportionate use of Tasers on children—particularly those who are Black, socio-economically disadvantaged, have mental health concerns, ALN/SEN—exposes deep-rooted systemic discrimination and raises profound concerns about the physical, psychological, and developmental harm caused by such weapons. The use of Tasers on vulnerable children is not only traumatising but may also constitute state-inflicted violence and degrading treatment.

Immediate action is needed to halt the authorisation of Taser 10 and ensure all future decisions concerning the use of police enforcement technologies are grounded in children's rights, trauma-informed and evidence-based practice.

It is crucial that the introduction of new policing weapons, devices, equipment or technology are always subject to a robust CRIA process to assess and mitigate any potential risks to children and the enjoyment of their rights.

Recommendations

Welsh duty bearers should take the lead and call for:

- 1. Immediate Moratorium on Taser 10**
Suspend the authorisation of Taser 10 and ensure an independent Child Rights Impact Assessment is conducted and published.
- 2. Legal Prohibition on Taser Use Against Children**
Introduce a legal prohibition on Taser use on children under 18 years, or at a minimum establish a strong legal presumption against such use.
- 3. Mandatory Child Rights Impact Assessments**
Ensure CRIAs are required and embedded in all future policy and procurement decisions involving new police weapons, devices, equipment or technology.
- 4. Enhanced Police Training**
Update police training to explicitly cover the physiological and psychological risks Tasers pose to children, with a focus on trauma-informed de-escalation practices.
- 5. Independent Oversight and Accountability**
Expand the mandate of Wales based independent oversight bodies to investigate all Taser use involving children and report findings publicly, including disproportionate Taser use on particular groups of children. Independent oversight mechanisms, which include children's rights organisations and children and young people, should also be developed.
- 6. Improved Data Transparency**
Welsh Police Liaison Unit to urgently collate and publish disaggregated Taser usage across the 4 Welsh Police Forces, data by age, ethnicity, disability (including ALN/SEN), socio-economic status, mental health concerns, the reason for Taser use, if the child was found with a weapon, what type of weapon, was the child injured by the Taser being fired, what was the outcome etc – to facilitate accountability and monitor disproportionality. Deep dives should also be regularly conducted into use of Taser on children to ensure the full circumstances leading up to Taser use can be understood and scrutinised.

Appendix 1: Types of Taser Use.

The way a Taser is used by police officers is categorised into a range of escalating actions from drawing the device, through to it being discharged (i.e. fired, drive stunned or angled drive-stunned). Any one of these actions is categorised as a use.

Drawn: Drawing of Taser in circumstances where any person could reasonably perceive the action as a use of force.

Aimed: Deliberate aiming of the Taser at a targeted subject.

Red dot: The weapon is not fired. Instead, the Taser is deliberately aimed and then partially activated so that a laser red dot is placed onto the subject.

Arcing: Sparking of the Taser as a visible deterrent without aiming it or firing it.

Fired: The Taser is discharged 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 discharges the weapon with a live cartridge installed. One or both probes may attach to the subject. The officer then holds the Taser against the subject's body in a different area to the probe(s), in order to complete the electrical circuit and deliver an incapacitating effect.

Drive stun: As a last resort, the Taser is held against the subject's body without a live cartridge installed, 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.