

Police Scotland to equip 500 trained officers with tasers



Police Scotland is to increase its use of Taser by equipping around 500 specially trained officers in local policing divisions.

The move, which will be presented to the Scottish Police Authority Board on Tuesday (19 December), is designed to improve the safety of the public and police officers.

It comes after an increase in the number of incidents in which police officers have been confronted by people with bladed weapons and an increase in assaults on officers. Already in 2017, 969 officers have been assaulted, compared to 764 in 2016.

The service has been carrying out an extensive programme of engagement with the Scottish Police Authority, national and local politicians, and other key stakeholders to explain the plan to increase the deployment of Taser (correctly known as Conductive Energy Devices) before the specially trained officers (STOs) are in place.

Deputy Chief Constable Johnny Gwynne, Crime and Operational Support, said, "Our officers are facing increasing threats of violence from people with knives and other bladed weapons. We've also seen an increase in the number of officers attacked while carrying out their everyday duties.

"We will shortly begin the selection process for around 500 conventional uniformed officers to be trained to carry Taser.

"These officers will be deployed at the heart of local policing in all 13 divisions across Scotland, helping to keep

their colleagues and the public safe and bringing Police Scotland into line with forces throughout the UK.

“Ultimately, this move is about keeping the public safe, which is at the heart of what we do.”

The STOs will be deployed in urban and rural areas across the country, giving local policing commanders access to enhanced security and protection for their communities. The total number of STOs will equate to just under 3% of the force establishment.

Training of the STOs will start in May and some officers will be deployed as soon as their training is complete. All STOs are expected to be operational by August 2018. They will be equipped with the Home Office-approved Taser X2.

Taser allows officers to maintain a safer distance from a subject, decreases the risk of injury, prevents escalation and enables safer and quicker resolution to an incident. Every time a Taser is discharged a report is sent to the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner to independently assess the incident.

DCC Gwynne also announced that Police Scotland would be extending the role of Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) officers to allow them to be deployed to more non-firearms calls. The removal of the current restrictions will also be presented to the Scottish Police Authority on 19 December and will come into effect in early in the New Year.

ARVs currently deploy to firearms incidents, threat to life incidents or deal with anything they come across during the course of their patrols using their professional judgement.

DCC Gwynne said, “We have increased the number of ARV officers available in our communities but our current deployment model is inefficient. It does not allow these officers to be sent by the control room to anything other than firearms or threat to

life incidents.

“They already respond to things they come across and are sent to other incidents where there’s a threat to life but no firearms are involved. They are trained in advanced emergency first aid and we have many examples of incidents where these officers have assisted, such as at road crashes or medical emergencies where they have been able to get to the scene before an ambulance.

“ARV officers will now support colleagues and the public by responding to a wider range of incidents with an emphasis on public protection, vulnerability and speed of response. They will also support local and national campaigns, such as drink-driving and speed awareness activity.

“The deployment of these officers will at all times continue to be overseen by specially-trained police Inspectors across Scotland. This will ensure they will also remain available to be deployed to firearms and threat-to-life incidents.

“These Inspectors, who are based in our control rooms and are on duty 24 hours a day, will maintain the command and control of ARVs at all times. They will be responsible for assessing the appropriateness of all calls they attend using established decision making and risk assessment processes.

“This move is designed to maximise the safety of the Scottish public, but we are aware that in the past there have been some concerns about the role of armed police officers in our communities and that previously we have not engaged as well as we could have when making decisions about how they are deployed.

“We have learned from that experience and have carried out extensive engagement with the Scottish Police Authority, elected representatives and other key stakeholders to explain why we are doing this.”

The change comes as Police Scotland completes an uplift in the number of dedicated firearms resources, which was announced in June 2016.

The increase of 124 officers include 99 specifically dedicated to ARVs and was completed on Monday 27 November when the final three officers transferred into their new roles.