



# ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

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**Security  
classification:  
NOT  
PROTECTIVELY  
MARKED**

PUBLIC ORDER AND PUBLIC SAFETY

**Disclosable under  
FOIA 2000:  
YES**

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**Force/organisation:  
NPPOPS**

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To: The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

**Telephone:  
01482 578205**

## Operational context for the deployment of the water cannon

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing in my capacity as the National Policing Lead for Public Order and Public Safety for England and Wales in response to your letter sent to CC David Shaw received on 15 July 2014.

The specific points of information that you have requested will be provided by David, as chair of the Water Cannon Project Board. However, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide a summary of my views with regard to the potential deployment and use of water cannon in the public order environment.

The management of conflict and responding to violence relating to public order policing is inevitably complex with a high threat to the public, police officers and property and the risk of escalation. The key police objectives in these complex events must always be to prevent death and serious injury whilst also seeking to protect property and maintain the Queen's peace.

To achieve these objectives it is crucial that public order commanders have a broad range of public order tactical options that they can consider deploying which are commensurate with the prevailing threat and specific circumstances of the disorder being encountered. In this regard it is beneficial to determine what added value the water cannon would provide as an additional tactical option for public order commanders in the operational context of serious disorder or riot.

In your letter you identify five historical events of disorder that have occurred within the UK in recent years. Upon assessment, the deployment and/or use of water cannon could have been considered as a viable tactical option for public order commanders in three of these events. The water cannon could have been utilised to disperse violent protesters to create a sterile area between protesters and the police thereby negating or reducing the need for

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baton strikes, support the protection of vulnerable buildings and support police cordons. The intended outcomes and benefits could reduce the number and severity of injuries to the public and police officers, reduce damage to property, increase security to vulnerable buildings and enhance the control of a geographical area.

It is important to note that in the other two events water cannon would not have been deployed as conventional methods of public order policing succeeded and therefore the proposed criteria for its deployment would not have been met.

In corroboration, the HMIC report 'The rules of engagement: A review of the August 2011 disorders' considered that the use of water cannon may be used in the following circumstances:

- Barricades are built and missiles are being used;
- Petrol bombs are being thrown;
- Violent attacks on the public in the presence of the police;
- Arson attacks on buildings;
- Threats to fire and ambulance personnel.

The circumstances highlighted by HMIC have been used in events of serious disorder within the UK, some of which you refer to in your letter. In all of these circumstances the tactical consideration of the water cannon could have provided enhanced protection to the public, police and property that otherwise would not be available to public order commanders. Also, as the delivery of water can be graduated (diffused or directed) at varying pressures the water cannon can be considered in a wide range of tactical situations where existing conventional tactical options have failed or are likely to fail.

Furthermore, the water cannon is a less lethal use of force option and its use is intended to avoid causing serious and permanent injury. There are operational situations where the risk of serious and permanent injury to both the protesters offering violence and the police officers attempting to quell the violence is high. Currently, in these situations public order commanders would consider conventional tactics which could include the deployment of horses, dogs, vehicles and PSU officers with batons and shields. All of these tactics inevitably require the officers to be in very close proximity to the violent protesters, thus placing both parties at potentially greater risk. The water cannon could offer an effective and less injurious tactical option for public order commanders which would reduce the need to use a higher degree of force.

It is acknowledged with absolute assurance that there would need to be a robust process for the authorisation to deploy water cannon as a tactical option. Therefore, the level of authorisation for the deployment of water cannon within the police service has been deliberately stipulated at the rank of at least Assistant Chief Constable or Assistant Commissioner within the Metropolitan Police Service.

The tactical option of the water cannon would only be authorised following a robust threat and risk assessment by highly experienced public order commanders. The main consideration for the authorisation of the water cannon would revolve around tests of necessity, proportionality and justification in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and ensuring that the minimum level of force is used to achieve the lawful objective. This would determine that the water cannon would only be authorised where it is deemed a proportionate response to serious public disorder or riot where there is a potential for loss of life, serious injury or widespread destruction being encountered.

Overall, I do consider that there are clear tactical benefits that the water cannon can provide on those unfortunate occasions when we are faced with serious disorder or riot.

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The water cannon would compliment the existing range of tactical options and equipment available for consideration by public order commanders in order to offer greater protection to the public.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish require any further information with regard to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Curran'.

**Justine Curran, QPM  
Chief Constable.**

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