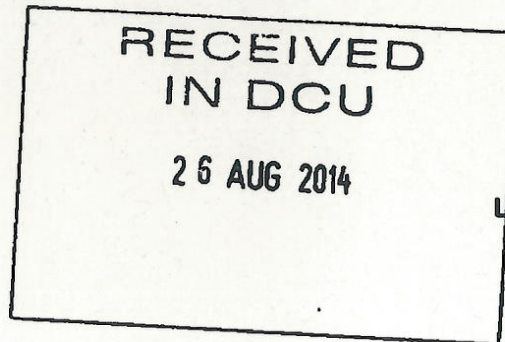


Our ref: SB/200814

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Home Secretary,
2 Marsham Street,
London SW1P 4DF



**SURREY
POLICE**



Lynne Owens QPM MA
Chief Constable

20th August 2014

Dear *Home Secretary,*

I write further to your letter of 15th July and apologise for the slightly tardy reply, created by my period of summer leave. In responding I have had sight of the responses from David Shaw, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Justine Curran, Chris Sims, Sir John Murphy and Chris Eyre. Of course in my response I effectively wear three hats; Chief Constable of Surrey, Head of the Uniformed Operations Business Area and, previously, Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police Service (for the period of the riots in 2011).

Chief Constable David Shaw has provided a detailed explanation in response to the questions you ask, having chaired the water cannon sub-group (established at the request of the MPS) on behalf of my National Business Area. The importance of this policy decision, in changing the current 'face' of policing in this country is not underestimated. As David articulates there are tactical instances whereby the use of water cannon may protect lives, prevent disorder and protect property. However, it is equally evident that the purchase and deployment does not have the full support of every chief constable. I believe there are a number of interlinking reasons for that:

1. Legitimacy:

Chris Sims clearly articulates a rationale that I believe is shared by some other chief constables and Police and Crime Commissioners. In light of the nature of our threats in Surrey it is highly unlikely that we would have to deploy water cannon here but my Police and Crime Commissioner would support its deployment in appropriate (serious) circumstances.

I am advised that MOPAC have undertaken a comprehensive engagement and consultation exercise in their assessment of the legitimacy of this tactic.

2. Geography

Chief Constables oversee forces of very varying demographics. There is a question of simple practicality in the location of such pieces of equipment (and their operators) which make the concept of deployment in spontaneous situations in some places almost unimaginable.

3. Cost versus Benefit

In the current climate some chief constables are concerned that this is an expensive addition to the armoury (in training time as well as purchase and deployment) when balanced against the occasions when such deployment could occur. With the proximity of Surrey to London and witnessing the increased mobilisation of level two resources I would be prepared to seek the PCCs support to fund the appropriate proportion of spend if the policy decision was to extend policing capability in this manner.

Your letter outlines a number of events and asks about the contribution water cannon could have made to their successful conclusion. The only example I was personally involved with from a leadership perspective were the riots of 2011. As the Metropolitan Police Service review ("*4 Days in August*") concludes in respect of water cannon.

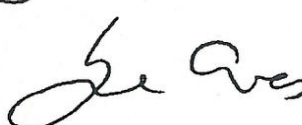
"had it been available for use, it would have been considered as a tactical option during this disorder. However it is unlikely to have been an appropriate and practical option owing to the speed and agility of the disorder"

The review then explored some previous occasions where such deployment may have been appropriate concluding that

"Water Cannon would be valuable in a few rare situations"

Of course the review was wide ranging highlighting many other areas for development too and to view the water cannon policy decision in isolation (away from developments in intelligence, social media and other resource availability as examples) is not sensible. One tactic will never be a panacea. Chris Eyre rightly draws your attention to the potential intelligence and investigatory benefits that water cannon may bring.

Fundamentally this policy decision, to authorise the deployment or not, is risk-based, balancing the tolerance for disorder (including all the subsequent consequences on rare occasions) with public support for the changing face of policing in this country, costs and practicality. Hopefully my colleagues and I have provided sufficient operational perspective on the totality of the issues but we remain ready to assist with any further queries.

yours sincerely,


Lynne Owens
Chief Constable