

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

28th April 2015

Black Londoners four times more likely to be targeted by police Tasers

Freedom of Information Requests submitted by StopWatch uncover grave concerns about the disproportionate rate at which black people are subject to the police use of tasers. Across London as a whole black people had a taser deployed against them at more than four times the rate of whites in 2014-15. Black people were subject to the use of tasers at a higher rate than whites in all but one London borough. In Lambeth, where police made greatest use of tasers, the figure was more than 6 times the rate. In Brent and Barnet it was more than 7 and 8 times respectively.

These figures are particularly concerning, given recent data published by StopWatch which revealed that the Metropolitan Police Service deployed tasers 185 times on children during the period January 2014 to November 2015, and 16 of those times on children 14 years old or younger.

StopWatch requested information about the use of tasers from all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales. Almost one-third failed to provide the data; some failed to provide data about ethnicity; and others provided data using inconsistent ethnic classifications. This makes it impossible for us to identify what the situation is across the country as a whole.

The Home Office has published information about the use of tasers but it does not cover the ethnicity of those who are subject their use.

Given the evidence that tasers are disproportionately used on black people in London, StopWatch urges the Government to ensure that police use of tasers is monitored more closely. The Home Secretary should ensure that the use of tasers is systematically monitored across England and Wales as part of her responsibilities under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Alice Roberti from StopWatch said:

“Given the physical effects of these so-called ‘less-lethal weapons’, it is surprising that the use of tasers is not being monitored more closely. The evidence that black people are subject to the use of tasers at a disproportionately high rate is particularly disturbing and risks heaping further harms on communities that are already subject to heightened rates of stop and search. Given that tasers are more invasive and harmful, it is essential that their use is subject to rigorous monitoring and oversight”.

Tasers have been linked to at least ten deaths in England and Wales over the past decade. Last month an officer was jailed for assault after tasing a member of the public he claimed swore at him. Police forces in England and Wales have been

arguing for more officers to be armed with tasers, with Devon and Cornwall Police planning to double the number.

For further information please contact Adam Elliott-Cooper at adamelliott-cooper@stop-watch.org or 0207 324 3533.

Notes to Editors:

1. StopWatch is a coalition of legal experts, civil society groups, academics and young people that works to reduce disproportionality and promote best practice in stop and search powers. For more information on StopWatch, please visit www.stop-watch.org.uk.
2. StopWatch full briefing on Taser can be found here: <http://www.stop-watch.org/news-comment/story/the-use-of-tasers-in-london>
3. The data used to calculate the Home Office figures quoted above can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-use-of-taser-statistics-england-and-wales-1-january-to-31-december-2015-data-tables>
4. The case of a police officer being jailed for using his taser can be found here: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/pc-who-twice-tasered-man-7660046>
5. Announcement of Devon and Cornwall Police plan to double taser officers can be found here <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-36018075>
6. Section 95 Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/480250/bulletin.pdf