

## News

# Police 'taser black people for longer'

Fiona Hamilton Crime Editor

Chief constables criticised the police watchdog yesterday after a review of the use of Tasers concluded that officers had used them unsafely and disproportionately against black people.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) said that officers were missing chances to calm situations and were firing them for prolonged periods in nearly a third of cases.

In a rare response Lucy D'Orsi, the National Police Chiefs' Council leader for less lethal weapons, accused the IOPC of giving a vague report. Its review of 101 Taser cases from 2015 to last year had ignored the input of police and involved a tiny fraction of overall use of the weapon, she said.

The IOPC announced its review after concerns were raised about a series of Taser cases involving black men and mentally ill people.

PC Benjamin Monk was sentenced in June to eight years in prison for the manslaughter of Dalian Atkinson, the former professional footballer, who died after being kicked in the head and tasered for six times longer than usual.

The IOPC said that police risked "losing the trust and confidence of the communities they serve" if they did not address concerns about Tasers.

Its review found that black people were twice as likely as white people to suffer continuous discharges of Taser for more than five seconds. In almost a

third of cases reviewed by the IOPC, the Taser was used for prolonged periods, including eight in which the stun gun was fired continuously for more than 20 seconds.

The watchdog highlighted concerns about the use of Tasers on children. Other cases included an elderly person who was tasered when mistakenly suspected of being involved in a robbery.

Police used the devices 32,000 times in the year to March 2020, double the number two years earlier and a fivefold increase from a decade ago.

D'Orsi said she was "extremely disappointed" that the IOPC had not attended a Taser training course, adding: "The focus on such a small data set ignores good practice and learning elsewhere."

Michael Lockwood, director-general of the IOPC, said her comments were "extremely disappointing". He said that ethnic minority groups needed a clear answer about why there was disproportionality in use of the weapons and there was a risk of "undermining the legitimacy of policing".

The IOPC made 17 recommendations, including the creation of independent community panels to scrutinise use of Tasers. It also called for improved guidance, better training and more detailed publication of Taser data to improve transparency.

It also wants the Home Office to commission research into the risks of prolonged discharge.



## Livingstone's mango tree goes under the hammer

A section of the mango tree under which Stanley met Livingstone is to go up for auction (Will Humphries writes).

It was given to the head of the Salvation Army in

the 1930s and is being put up for sale by the family of the cabinet maker who rescued it from a skip.

Sidney Gardiner, 84, was given the memento in the mid-1970s as part-payment for refurbishing the Salvation Army

Part of a mango tree under which Livingstone and Stanley met in 1871 was turned into a memento

Heritage Centre in central London. His son Stuart was ten when he came home to find "the house floor-to-ceiling full of native, tribal swords, spears, shields, masks, kit bags of liberated Japanese swords".

Henry Morton Stanley tracked down Dr David Livingstone, the Scottish explorer and missionary, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika on November 10, 1871, supposedly greeting him under a mango tree with the words: "Dr Livingstone, I presume?"

The memento was kept in the Gardiners' lounge and they are selling it to raise money for Sidney's dementia care. It is expected to fetch up to £1,200 at Sworders Fine Interiors in Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex, on September 14-15.