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(submitted via email)

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find below the National Black Police Association's submission to the Water Cannon Consultation.

1. Do you think water cannon would be a useful addition to the tools available to the Metropolitan Police in managing rare cases of serious public disorder?

The NBPA is opposed to the introduction of water cannon to policing in England, Wales and Scotland. We believe its introduction would be a retrograde step for UK policing.

It is clear from the consultation documents that some things did not work as well as they could have done during the riots in 2011. Interest in providing water cannon to the police in London emanated from criticism of a perceived lack of robust response to the riots in London and elsewhere. This is not just an issue for London. If water cannon is made available to the Metropolitan Police it will effectively be a tactical option for all police forces in England and Wales and potentially for Police Scotland as well. The impact of this decision will have national consequences. History shows us that once such equipment is introduced it will not be removed so this decision is practically irreversible.

It is our view that the focus of post riot efforts should continue to be on obtaining improved community intelligence, developing better police/public relations with all communities and working hard to ensure that police actions and policies improve trust and confidence in the police rather than undermining it. If the police service agrees to obtain water cannon the message this sends to the public, particularly to those who are most affected by conflict with the police on a daily basis is that if all else fails the solution is to fire a potentially lethal jet of water at them. This sends a message of hostility rather than one of engagement and trust. People from minority communities, particularly those who are already disproportionately subject to stop and search and other executive police powers will feel even more 'over policed and under-protected' by the introduction of water cannon as we are far more likely to be subject to its use.

Crime is falling and has been for years. London and the rest of the UK is a safe and relatively trouble free place to live, visit and work in. Whilst the use of water cannon might provide the media with some interesting footage with which to fill column inches and 24 hour television news it would be a retrograde step for the UK in general and for policing in particular. We can manage the small amounts of public disorder that we experience using the model of policing that has worked for decades – neighbourhood policing, supported by the community and backed up with specialist officers that are not routinely armed for the occasions when a specific response is required. Water cannon has no place in that model.

Our responses to questions 2 and 3 are with the caveat that we are opposed to the introduction of water cannon as outlined above.

2. What rules do you think should be in place to oversee the use of water cannon in London?

We note that authorised professional practice (APP) is already in place for the use of water cannon in Northern Ireland. We support the APP as published but would recommend the following amendments are made:-

- The APP states that use of force legislation ‘may apply’. This is inaccurate. Use of force legislation must apply to what is a potentially lethal use of force and the APP should reflect this.
- The APP states that Silver commanders will ‘liaise with ... personnel operating [water cannon].’ This approach sits outside of normal command protocols for specialist teams/officers. Such communication should be made from Silver to the bronze commander with responsibility for the specialist team, as is the case with horses, dogs, firearms and other specialist tactical options that can be deployed in public order situations. Normal command protocols should be in place for water cannon.

3. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the use of water cannon in London?

The NBPA is concerned that “The Mayor has accepted the principle but is committed to engaging with Londoners about the use of water cannon in the capital”. As outlined in our response to Question 1 this is an issue of national significance that doesn’t just affect London. We are concerned that this proposal has been accepted in principle before this consultation has taken place. We would recommend a wider public consultation as well as a debate in Parliament that recognises this as an issue that affects the whole of England, Wales and Scotland. The NBPA is willing to support any future debate or consultation on this important issue.

Yours faithfully,



Nick Glynn, LLB (Hons)
Vice President
National Black Police Association