

Our ref: HRP/KST

28 October 1992

HOME OFFICE WORKING GROUP ON PHYSICAL PROTECTION OF POLICE  
ASP BATON

Following recent telephone conversations, the last of which was on Friday, 23 October, I am now forwarding the background information into the ASP Baton in order that it may be considered at the next meeting of the Working Group on 20 November.

Our interest in the ASP Baton arose from an individual initiative by one of my sergeants, Bob Bryant, who went on holiday in Florida at the beginning of this year, and had contact with officers in the Metro-Dade Police Department. Sergeant Bryant has a long history of interest in self-defence and it was this that led him to make the contact in Florida. From this he quickly recognised that the ASP Baton had characteristics that might make it an acceptable replacement for the standard police truncheon, which is to a very large extent no longer seen as a credible weapon of defence for police officers in the front-line and who daily face violence on an increasing scale.

Through the local Police Federation Sergeant Bryant made representations to my Chief Constable, Mr Shattock, and in recent months, with his backing and that of the Corporate Team, the Police Federation have sought to explore the possible introduction of the ASP Baton in Avon and Somerset. My involvement has been more recent but I now represent the Chief Constable in considering the various agendas that surround the introduction of a new weapon of defence in this country baring in mind differences in culture, tradition and public/police relationships. Another critical factor is the potential for litigation in the event that use of a new weapon might lead to serious injury.

Since I became involved in this matter I discovered that the representatives of the Police Federation had commissioned a modest laboratory trial of the ASP Baton in comparison with the PR24 (which was described as "large club") and our traditional 15" wooden truncheon using the facilities of the University of Bristol.

/continued

D Cansdale

Attached at Appendix A is a brief analysis showing the comparison between the ASP Baton and our truncheon, and on the second page a graph in which the PR24 (large club) also features. That research was based on the standard ASP Baton and concluded that in the 'worst case scenario' both weapons were potentially lethal, that the differences between the two were not great, and that a field trial would be the better way of evaluating the new weapon. What did come through clearly was the very much greater potential for damage attributable to the PR24 (large club).

Since that research was conducted I became aware that Dr Parsons, the inventor and manufacturer of the ASP Baton, had been invited by my Police Federation to visit the force area and to demonstrate the ASP Baton.

Prior to this taking place I commissioned further clinical trials using the services of our Home Office pathologist, Dr Steven Leadbeatter, who is based in the University of Wales, Cardiff. Attached at Appendix B is his covering letter and a report prepared by members of the Medical Systems Research Unit at that University. Their research was restricted to the standard ASP Baton and our traditional wooden truncheon. Their results were in line with those from the University of Bristol but more detailed and again raise question marks regarding the relative impact damage of each weapon but make the point that "a forensic pathological opinion must be subservient to objective experimental data." The clear message is, at the end of the day it must be a matter of professional judgement balancing the escalating level of violence to which police officers are now subjected and the introduction of a more effective weapon of defence, albeit that in the worst case scenario it could inflict more serious damage when the same amount of pressure is applied. I should emphasise here that the comparison made was using the standard ASP Baton and not the new 'Airweight' version. I also recognised that the two Universities' analyses appeared to some extent to contradict the claims of the manufacturer.

On 14 October together with my Force Medical Officer I attended a presentation by Dr Parsons in which he displayed and explained a wide range of batons produced by his own company. It immediately became clear that the comparisons between the ASP Baton made in America were with their 26" wooden baton - hence the different outcomes when compared with our smaller 15" truncheon. I also had the opportunity to see the new airweight version of the ASP Baton which I estimate is approximately half the weight of the standard ASP Baton. It has the benefits of the standard ASP Baton including strength and durability, but I would anticipate it would, under test conditions, compare more favourably with the British police truncheon. This therefore makes it all the more attractive, with none of the practical and cultural disadvantages of the PR24.

/continued

D Cansdale

We have held back from approving a field trial albeit that Dr Parsons is prepared to supply my force with sufficient ASP Batons for this to be carried out, pending further clinical research. You kindly drew my attention to the work of Dr Jill Tan at PSDB in relation to the survey of long truncheons published in 1989. I have since the presentation of 14 October spoken to Dr Tan about the possibility of undertaking further research into the ASP Baton and in particular the airweight version. Unfortunately the time at my disposal when we spoke by telephone did not allow us to progress the idea very far, but I did sense that she felt the current political climate would inhibit her from undertaking such work commissioned solely from my force. This was not my intention. I of course recognise that this should be presented to your Working Group and that the Working Group is the appropriate agency to commission PSDB to undertake this further research study. Indeed I very much hope that this can now be done and without further delay. I would certainly like to see the results of such research within say three months time. I do not believe we can allow months to turn into years on what is seen to be such an important 'front line' issue. I am also aware that representatives of the Police Federation from various police forces and from Surbiton have also had the benefit of Dr Parsons' presentation and there is great interest now in the ASP Baton even from those who formerly were strongly advocating the PR24 with all its problems of training, retraining, and practical difficulties despite training (high incidence of head injuries caused by PR24 sliding up protective upper arm when applied in on-the-street situations). You may be interested to know the outcome of a field trial on the ASP Baton in the Tampa Police Department, copy of which is attached at Appendix C.

The interest in the ASP Baton within my force, and significantly now in other forces, is pressing for an early field trial. My force already has a number of instructors who have been accredited by the manufacturer to train others in the use of the ASP Baton. We have been given a range of ASP equipment to enable further research to be undertaken. As already indicated, we also have the offer of sufficient items of equipment to enable a meaningful field trial to be undertaken and I believe a significant discount could be negotiated on the unit cost quoted by the manufacturer for a large order. We recognise however, that it is desirable to complete the laboratory research before engaging in a field trial and this is the purpose of my correspondence. We should now be testing the standard ASP Baton and the airweight ASP Baton against the standard wooden truncheon and I very much hope that the Working Group will commission that work with PSDB on 20 November. I will arrange for Sergeant Bryant to bring to that meeting items of equipment so that you are at least able to see them and if you would wish it he could also demonstrate the way in which they are used. Could you kindly advise details of time and venue so that I can make the appropriate arrangements.

/continued

D Cansdale

Thereafter, and with your endorsement, I am prepared to personally attend Sandridge to explain what we would be looking for and to assist in bringing their research to an early conclusion.

For background I am also forwarding a number of relevant papers - one by Sergeant Bryant entitled 'Protective Equipment for Staff' (Appendix D), the Sales Prospectus from Armament Systems and Procedures Inc (Appendix E) and an article entitled 'Coming Along Quietly' from the Police Review on 16 October 1992 (Appendix F).

H R Pike  
Assistant Chief Constable  
Personnel and Training

Mr D M Cansdale  
Assistant Chief Constable  
Hertfordshire Constabulary  
Stanborough Road  
WELWYN GARDEN CITY  
Hertfordshire  
AL8 6XF