# Sussex Police officers on trial for alleged excessive force against vulnerable 93-year-old amputee



In a troubling incident that has raised significant concerns regarding police conduct and the treatment of vulnerable individuals, two Sussex Police officers are currently on trial for allegedly using excessive force against Donald Burgess, a 93-year-old amputee. The senior citizen, who had one leg and was wheelchair-bound, was subjected to pepper spray, a Taser, and a baton within mere seconds of officers entering his room at Park Beck care home in St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex.

The trial at Southwark Crown Court revealed harrowing details about the incident, which occurred in June 2022. Body-worn camera footage presented to the jury demonstrated a disturbing lack of professionalism among the officers. They were seen laughing and making light of the situation immediately after spraying Burgess in the face with a full canister of synthetic pepper spray. In one instance, Pc Stephen Smith jokingly referred to the episode as a "stand-off," downplaying the severity of having deployed such force against an elderly man with clear vulnerabilities. According to the prosecution, the officers’ use of force was not only excessive but potentially fatal. Notably, Burgess reportedly expressed distress during the altercation, telling the officers, “I’m dying,” which underscores the alarming nature of the incident.

Subsequent to the confrontation, Burgess died three weeks later in hospital, leading to an investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. This probe aims to assess whether the use of force was both reasonable and proportionate, especially given Burgess's physical and mental condition, which included dementia. The broader implications of this incident have drawn attention to how law enforcement interacts with individuals who may be vulnerable or incapacitated.

This is not an isolated event. Reports have surfaced from elsewhere in the UK regarding contentious police conduct in care facilities. For instance, similar cases in South Australia, where officers faced scrutiny for their use of Tasers on individuals within care homes, highlight ongoing concerns surrounding law enforcement protocols when addressing situations involving vulnerable populations. In these cases, while no charges were laid against the South Australian officers, serious questions linger over how police engage during such sensitive interventions.

As the trial progresses, it has become increasingly evident that the context surrounding incidents like these is critical. The growing awareness of the need for greater sensitivity towards elderly and disabled individuals is echoed in public discourse. Advocates and community members alike are calling for a reassessment of policing strategies within care environments, demanding not only accountability for excessive force but also a rethinking of police training aimed at de-escalating situations without resorting to violence.

As society grapples with these pressing issues, the case of Donald Burgess serves as a stark reminder of the responsibilities of law enforcement, particularly in safeguarding the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens. The trial’s outcome could have far-reaching implications not only for the individuals directly involved but also for how police forces across the UK approach their duties in similar settings.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1 - [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2058331/police-use-pepper-spray-care-home)
2. Paragraph 2 - [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2058331/police-use-pepper-spray-care-home)
3. Paragraph 3 - [[2]](https://news.sky.com/story/police-pepper-sprayed-then-tasered-one-legged-93-year-old-man-who-later-died-prompting-investigation-12665534), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/donald-burgess-tasered-police-investigation-b2138368.html)
4. Paragraph 4 - [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/25/sussex-police-officers-deny-assaulting-man-93-taser-pepper-spray)
5. Paragraph 5 - [[5]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-21/no-charges-laid-against-police-officers-after-using-taser/103494422), [[6]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/sa-police-officers-investigated-for-using-taser/103073214), [[7]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-08/police-release-vision-after-officers-use-taser-at-care-home/103081556)
6. Paragraph 6 - [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/donald-burgess-tasered-police-investigation-b2138368.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2058331/police-use-pepper-spray-care-home> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.sky.com/story/police-pepper-sprayed-then-tasered-one-legged-93-year-old-man-who-later-died-prompting-investigation-12665534> - An investigation is underway after a 93-year-old disabled man, Donald Burgess, was Tasered and pepper-sprayed by police at a care home in East Sussex. Burgess, who had one leg and suffered from dementia, died three weeks later in hospital. The Independent Office for Police Conduct is examining whether the use of force was excessive. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/police-pepper-sprayed-then-tasered-one-legged-93-year-old-man-who-later-died-prompting-investigation-12665534?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/donald-burgess-tasered-police-investigation-b2138368.html> - The Independent Office for Police Conduct is investigating the use of force by two Sussex Police officers who Tasered and pepper-sprayed 93-year-old Donald Burgess at a care home in East Sussex. Burgess, who had one leg and dementia, died three weeks later in hospital. The investigation aims to determine if the force used was reasonable and proportionate. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/donald-burgess-tasered-police-investigation-b2138368.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/25/sussex-police-officers-deny-assaulting-man-93-taser-pepper-spray> - Two Sussex Police officers have pleaded not guilty to assault charges after allegedly using a Taser and pepper spray on 93-year-old Donald Burgess at a care home in East Sussex. Burgess, who had one leg and dementia, died three weeks later in hospital. The case is set to be heard at Southwark Crown Court. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/25/sussex-police-officers-deny-assaulting-man-93-taser-pepper-spray?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-21/no-charges-laid-against-police-officers-after-using-taser/103494422> - No criminal charges will be laid against two South Australian police officers who used a Taser during an arrest at an Adelaide care facility. The officers had attended the facility to assist paramedics, and the man, in his 60s, suffered minor injuries. The matter will now be reviewed by SAPOL's internal investigation section. ([abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-21/no-charges-laid-against-police-officers-after-using-taser/103494422?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/sa-police-officers-investigated-for-using-taser/103073214> - Two South Australian police officers have been removed from operational duty after allegedly using a Taser during the arrest of a man at a care facility. The officers were called to the facility to assist paramedics, and the man, in his 60s, suffered minor injuries. An internal and criminal investigation is underway. ([abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/sa-police-officers-investigated-for-using-taser/103073214?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-08/police-release-vision-after-officers-use-taser-at-care-home/103081556> - South Australian Police have released vision showing part of an incident where two officers used a Taser and pepper spray during an arrest at a care facility. The officers have been removed from operational duty while their conduct is investigated. The man, in his 60s, suffered minor injuries during the arrest. ([abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-08/police-release-vision-after-officers-use-taser-at-care-home/103081556?utm_source=openai))