# The tragic policing of vulnerability: how Donald Burgess’ death exposes Britain’s harsh new law enforcement era



The moral landscape of modern Britain raises profound questions not just about law enforcement but also about the troubling state of our legal framework under the new Labour government. Recent discussions have unveiled a chilling catalogue of what is now deemed permissible—burglary, shoplifting, fare evasion, public drug use, and even driving off from petrol stations without paying. The widespread perception signals that the police are preoccupied with more "serious" matters, reflecting a law enforcement approach that many are coming to see as alarmingly ineffective.

A particularly grotesque illustration of this trend was revealed in the tragic case of 93-year-old Donald Burgess, whose death followed a brutal confrontation with Sussex Police officers in a care home. Responding to reports of Burgess, who suffered from dementia and used a wheelchair, ostensibly wielding a butter knife, the officers treated him not as a vulnerable individual in distress, but as an imminent threat requiring military-grade tactics. This incident has sparked outrage, particularly as a jury deemed the officers' actions lawful, highlighting a disturbing disregard for the rights of the vulnerable under the current administration's policing policies.

Bodycam footage depicts Burgess in a disoriented state, grappling with a urinary tract infection that muddled his mental faculties. Instead of being treated with the compassion expected by a civilized society, he was assaulted with pepper spray, Tasered, and struck with a baton. This escalation of force invites urgent questions about the appropriateness of police tactics, particularly towards those who are not only elderly but also cognitively impaired.

This calamitous incident has ignited investigations by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), challenging the rationale behind police protocols for handling the vulnerable. It speaks to a broader societal trend where tough-on-crime policies appear increasingly directed at those least able to defend themselves. This shift away from rehabilitation towards punitive measures is alarming and demonstrates how our law enforcement is evolving into an authoritarian approach rather than a community-focused one.

The unsettling reality is that police officers, who should represent service and protection, are frequently perceived as agents of punishment, reinforcing a culture of fear that disproportionately affects society’s most vulnerable—like the elderly or those struggling with mental health issues. The robustness of our legal system, which once aimed to reflect societal norms, now seems to facilitate this harsh reality. For instance, while theft of any kind carries penalties, the inconsistent enforcement of such laws raises questions about their actual impact, creating a growing cynicism among the populace.

In light of the harrowing situation involving Donald Burgess, we must confront the question: what level of aggression and fear are we willing to accept in the name of law enforcement? This could irrevocably shape British policing and redefine our understanding of crime and punishment. Justice and humanity must prevail; we must demand a policing strategy rooted in compassion, rather than aggression. The sorrowful fate of individuals like Burgess should serve as a cautionary tale—a vivid reminder that the very essence of our legal system is human dignity, which is tragically under threat in today's Britain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-14767817/PETER-HITCHENS-Donald-Burgess-police-shoplifters-thugs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-62426889> - This BBC News article reports on the incident involving Donald Burgess, a 93-year-old man with dementia, who was Tasered and pepper-sprayed by two Sussex Police officers in a care home. The officers were responding to reports that Burgess was threatening staff with a knife. Following the incident, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) initiated an investigation into the use of force, and the officers faced gross misconduct notices and a criminal investigation for manslaughter. Burgess died three weeks later in hospital. The article provides details of the incident and the subsequent investigations.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/04/sussex-police-officers-investigated-over-death-of-man-93-after-being-tasered> - The Guardian article discusses the investigation into two Sussex Police officers who used a Taser on 93-year-old Donald Burgess, leading to his death three weeks later. The officers were called to a care home in St Leonards-on-Sea after reports that Burgess was threatening staff with a knife. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is investigating whether the force used was reasonable, necessary, and proportionate. The article highlights the concerns raised over the use of force against vulnerable individuals and the ongoing investigation.
4. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/theft-act-offences> - This page from the Crown Prosecution Service outlines the legal framework for theft offences in the UK, including shoplifting. It details the penalties for theft, which can be up to seven years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. The page also discusses the concept of low-value shoplifting, where the value of stolen goods does not exceed £200, and how such offences are triable either-way, meaning they can be heard in either the Magistrates' Court or the Crown Court. The information is crucial for understanding the legal consequences of shoplifting in the UK.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-66023467> - This BBC News article reports on the referral of evidence regarding the death of 93-year-old Donald Burgess to prosecutors. Burgess, who had dementia and used a wheelchair, was Tasered by police in a care home in St Leonards-on-Sea. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) investigated the incident, and a file of evidence was passed to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to determine whether any officers should be charged. The article provides updates on the investigation and the legal proceedings following the incident.
6. <https://news.sky.com/story/police-pepper-sprayed-then-tasered-one-legged-93-year-old-man-who-later-died-prompting-investigation-12665534> - Sky News reports on the incident where two police officers used a Taser, baton, and incapacitant spray on 93-year-old Donald Burgess, who had one leg and dementia, in a care home. The officers were responding to reports that Burgess was threatening staff with a knife. Following the incident, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) initiated an investigation into the use of force, and the officers faced gross misconduct notices and a criminal investigation for manslaughter. Burgess died three weeks later in hospital. The article provides details of the incident and the subsequent investigations.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2022/08/05/inquiry-after-death-of-disabled-dementia-patient-93-tasered-by-police/> - The Irish Times article discusses the investigation into the death of 93-year-old Donald Burgess, who had dementia and was Tasered and pepper-sprayed by police in a care home. The officers were called to the care home after reports that Burgess was threatening staff with a knife. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is investigating the use of force, and the officers face gross misconduct notices and a criminal investigation for manslaughter. Burgess died three weeks later in hospital. The article provides insights into the incident and the ongoing investigation.