



25 January 2016

**Police and Crime Commissioner response to HMIC report on:**

**'Targeting the Risk' – An inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of firearms licensing in police forces in England and Wales**

**Background**

This report, published in September 2015, examined the effectiveness and efficiency of firearms licensing arrangements in England and Wales. The way in which the police are required to undertake their firearms licensing responsibilities is set out in 34 separate pieces of legislation. These are supported by Home Office guidance and by the College of Policing's guidance which is set out in its Authorised Professional Practice.

**PCC**

I have noted Thames Valley Police's response to the national recommendations, presented by the Chief Constable to my public facing meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016. A copy of this response is given below.

***Thames Valley Police – January 2016***

***Recommendation 1 – Governance of firearms licensing to ensure compliance with Authorised Professional Practice.***

*Force procedure is in accordance with the Firearms Licensing Authorised Professional Practice, which enables the force to properly and effectively fulfil its duty to protect the public from harm. The Firearms Licensing Manager regularly attends a governance meeting with the Head of Intelligence and DCI Central Intelligence. Key areas of business such as performance, customer engagement and good practice are reviewed. Intelligence is continuously gathered and assessed to support revocations and refusals of certificates/applications. A structured decision making process has been developed using the National Decision Model.*

***Recommendation 2 - Effective monitoring and audit of firearms licensing procedures, as required by the Authorised Professional Practice.***

*Force procedure is in accordance with the Firearms Licensing APP. In addition to the above governance meeting the Firearms Licensing Manager and DCI Central Intelligence meet regularly with the ACC Crime to review key areas of business.*

Recommendation 3 - Establish an accredited regime of training for all officers and staff who are involved in the firearms licensing arrangements.

All staff attend the mandatory National Decision Model training and all decision making is underpinned by The Code of Ethics. Legislation and guidance are adhered to. All staff with delegated authority have the experience and capability to ensure that they can audit and account for their decision making. The firearms enquiry officers attend a national course suitable for their role.

Recommendation 4 - Review the demand placed on firearms licensing departments

There has been an increase in turnaround times for dealing with applications, however, in accordance with the Home Office Guidance, temporary permits are being issued to allow certificate holders to continue to use and possess their shot gun and firearms. The effectiveness and efficiency of the department is being overseen by the fortnightly governance meetings and actions have been put in place to meet firearms licensing priorities.

Recommendation 6 - Firearms licensing guidance requires the police to conduct home visits for all new grant applications, and will set out more clearly the risk assessment process for renewals.

Force procedure is in accordance with the Home Office Guidance to the Police and the Firearms Licensing APP, which enables the force to properly and effectively fulfil its duty to protect the public from harm. Thames Valley Police currently operates a non visit policy, which is in accordance with the Home Office Guidance to the Police (chapter 10.6), and which has recently been amended. The Force has robust working practices to deal with issues of public safety.

Recommendation 8 - Commission a review of 'total expired' licensing records.

Force procedure is in accordance with the Home Office Guidance to the Police. The onus for applying to renew a firearm and/or shot gun certificate rests with the holder. Reminders are issued to all certificate holders well in advance to allow the renewal process to be completed before the original certificate expires. If no reply is received and the certificate expires, enquiries are carried out to confirm whether or not the holder no longer has possession of the firearms or ammunition to which the certificate relates, or if the certificate has not yet expired, that arrangements have been made to dispose of the firearms and ammunition before expiry.

Recommendation 9 - Ensure that arrangements in the use of temporary permits are in accordance with Home Office guidance.

Force procedure is in accordance with the Home Office Guidance to the Police and all temporary permits are issued in accordance with this guidance.

Recommendation 10 - Ensure that effective arrangements are in place for the day to day management of police national computer error notifications on the National Firearms Licensing Management System.

Although the two systems are not fully compatible and duplicate records are created the department's Office and Systems Manager monitors and merges these duplicates. This is overseen by the ACC Crime in the PNC quarterly meetings.

Recommendation 11 - Review the current proposals for the sharing of medical information between medical professionals and the police for the purpose of firearms licensing, to ensure the establishment of a system which allows the police effectively to discharge their duty to assess the medical suitability of an applicant for a section 1 firearms or shot gun certificate.

The Home Office is responsible for this recommendation; however, current force procedure is in accordance with ACPO FELWG and Home Office Guidance to the Police.

*Recommendation 12 - Complete a retrospective review of the certificate holders' continued suitability to have access to or possession of firearms in the case of section 1 firearms and shot gun certificates.*

Force procedure is in accordance with the Home Office Guidance to the Police and the Firearms Licensing APP. When information or intelligence of note is received regarding certificate holders, it is assessed and prioritised in accordance with the NDM. This process may trigger a review and subsequent investigation.

*Recommendation 13 - Ensure that systems designed to identify, prior to police attendance, whether a reported incident involves or is at the address of a firearm certificate holder.*

Force procedure is in accordance with the Firearms Licensing APP. As part of the application process the firearms licensing department notifies command & control administration to place a flag on the address for operational officers. Addresses are also flagged where remote storage has been authorised. Details of police powers to seize firearms and certificates are detailed on the Knowzone (firearms licensing, property and domestic portals) and have been included in the domestic violence policy.

*Recommendation 16 - Review current arrangements for public engagement with regard to firearms licensing to ensure that they are practical, proportionate and well known.*

Force procedure is in accordance with the Firearms Licensing APP. Department staff attend an annual Registered Firearms Dealers meeting. The Senior Firearms Enquiry Officer attends rural crime meetings. The ACC Crime chairs a meeting every 12 to 18 months with representatives from national shooting organisations. These representatives act as critical friends and contribute to the Force's working practices.