

Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

Inspection Title:

An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England and Wales

Published on:

28 August 2026

Publication Types:

Firearms

Police Forces:

All police forces

Link to Report:

[An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England and Wales - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

23/10/2026

Key Findings

On 12 August 2021, Jake Davison shot and killed five people in Plymouth with a lawfully held pump-action shotgun. He wounded two others before using the shotgun to take his own life.

In April 2023, during the inquests into these five tragic deaths, the senior coroner criticised the failure of the government and the police service to act on recommendations from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services previous inspection of firearms licensing in 2015 and other reports.

This report examines how police forces keep the public safe while making sure that their possession of firearms is lawful. The Inspectorate consider the effectiveness and efficiency of:

- national guidance and legislation;
- local policies and processes;
- national, regional and local governance arrangements;
- training for firearms licensing personnel; and
- funding and resourcing.

HMICFRS inspected:

- The three-force collaborated licensing unit for Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary;
- Cheshire Constabulary;
- Gloucestershire Constabulary;
- Gwent Police;
- Kent Police; and
- Northamptonshire Police.

They carried out:

- a review of 598 documents, including policies, processes and force management statements;
- a review of other relevant HMICFRS reports, including the 2015 thematic inspection of firearms licensing and reports from other organisations;
- a review of 377 firearms licensing case files, including at least 46 from each force inspected;
- a total of 59 interviews with police personnel, including leads for firearms licensing;
- a further 53 interviews with government officials, national police leads, members of the shooting community, victims of crimes involving licensed firearms, academics and external organisations;
- a total of 40 focus groups in police forces, including with supervisors, Firearms and Explosive Licensing Units (FELUs) personnel, investigation teams, neighbourhood and response teams, and control rooms;
- data analysis of the National Firearms Licensing Management System;
- a public survey to ask for the views of people with recent direct experience of firearms licensing applications in England and Wales that attracted 11,135 responses;
- a survey of registered firearms dealers that attracted 100 responses; and
- reality testing in each force inspected by speaking to individual police officers and staff.

During their fieldwork, HMICFRS found that the firearms licensing system is not fit for purpose and should be replaced by a national firearms licensing authority for England and Wales. There is continued failure to develop clear guidance which has contributed to inconsistent firearms licensing processes. This has resulted in inconsistent decision-making, risk management and overall service across England and Wales. This approach is further compounded by the prevalence of variable supervision and limited oversight of decision-making. Differences in local priorities and risk appetite further contribute to overall inconsistency, both within individual FELUs and across forces nationally. There is significant variation in how FELUs apply national guidance and in the length of time they take to process applications. This affects both public safety and service to applicants and certificate holders.

HMICFRS state that there needs to be a complete overhaul of firearms licensing legislation. The 2026 House of Commons Library research briefing on firearms licensing highlighted that: "The law governing firearms regulation in the UK is very complex." Many practitioners working in firearms licensing and representatives of the shooting community told the Inspectorate the same, describing it as "clunky" and easy to misinterpret. This has led to inconsistencies in firearms licensing across England and Wales. For example, handguns are generally banned, but there are narrow exceptions where police can allow their use in limited situations, such as for humanely killing animals. HMICFRS found that firearms and explosive licensing units (FELUs) interpreted the legislation differently. As a result, one unit revoked some handgun certificates when holders moved into its area, even though other units had granted them. All these units appeared to be acting within the law.

New legislation should remove the conditional rebuttable presumption of grant. The Firearms Act 1968 sets a conditional rebuttable presumption in favour of grant for firearm and shotgun certificates. This means chief officers of police should grant certificates unless one or more of the statutory grounds for refusal apply. In his Prevention of Future Deaths Reports following the Keyham inquests, the senior coroner for Plymouth, Torbay and South Devon stated that "the public would be better protected if the legislation provided that a certificate shall not be granted unless the applicant has satisfied the relevant chief officer of police that they are safe to hold a gun of any type". A revised presumption would place clearer responsibility on applicants to satisfy the chief officer that they are suitable to hold a firearm or shotgun certificate. It would allow FELUs to refuse applications that contain omissions or misleading statements without needing to prove deliberate dishonesty to justify refusal.

The Inspectorate commented that there isn't a clear and enforceable offence for using or carrying a firearm while intoxicated. Section 12 of the Licensing Act 1872 makes it an offence to be "drunk when in possession of any loaded firearms", with a maximum penalty of a £200 fine or one month imprisonment. In the nine years to June 2025, proceedings were brought against two people for this primary offence. One received a fine of £10. The offence doesn't cover drug intoxication, set alcohol limits or prescribe testing powers.

Certificate applicants should be required to demonstrate competence in firearm handling. There is no legal requirement for applicants in England, Wales or Scotland to have training, or undergo an assessment of competence, on how to handle or use firearms safely, or on firearms law. This is unusual among comparable jurisdictions.

The Inspectorate suggest that there should be a statutory responsibility to inform FELUs about the death of certificate holders. There is no statutory requirement to tell police forces about the death of a certificate holder and there is no arrangement in place for the national General Register Office, or local superintendent registrars, to share notifications of deaths with the police. This creates a clear risk.

HMICFRS state that the Home Office and policing have failed to develop clear firearms licensing rules and guidance. On too many occasions, the police are not following the Home Office guidance or the Authorised Professional Practice that are in place. And the guidance and practice in many respects are inadequate, allowing room for interpretation and the creation of inconsistency in the way firearms licensing is undertaken within and between police forces. This creates an environment in which members of the public are let down and their safety compromised.

The Inspectorate found that FELUs are inconsistent in the suitability checks they carry out. While statutory guidance stipulates that “background checks ... apply to renewals as they do to grants”, it is less prescriptive in relation to renewals. Aside from medical checks described in the medical suitability assessments section of this report, the guidance provides no clear direction, stating instead that “it is a matter for chief officers to consider whether any additional checks are necessary ... but, in doing so, the primary consideration must be public safety”. It directs readers to a section on additional checks and a list of factors they “may wish to take into account”. Statutory guidance doesn’t specify how far back firearms licensing personnel should look when checking applicants’ suitability at renewal. As a result, HMICFRS found different practices across the FELUs inspected.

Arrangements for processing visitors’ permits pose potential risks to public safety. Section 17 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 allows visitors to Great Britain to possess firearms, shotguns or ammunition without holding a certificate, provided the police grant them a visitors’ permit. A sponsor, either a company based in Great Britain or a resident, must apply on the visitor’s behalf. The sponsor doesn’t have to be a certificate holder. As with certificates, forces mustn’t grant a permit if doing so could endanger public safety. They must also be satisfied that the visitor has a good reason for each firearm.

Firearms importation processes pose significant risk to public safety. HMICFRS found weaknesses in the arrangements for sharing and recording information relating to firearms imported and exported by registered firearms dealers. These weaknesses limit FELU’s ability to maintain effective oversight, which creates a significant risk to public safety. Law and guidance aren’t suitably robust or clear whether applicants with a criminal history are prohibited from having a certificate. FELUs make inconsistent decisions when applicants fail to disclose relevant information, Section 28A(7) of the Firearms Act 1968 makes it a criminal offence to “knowingly or recklessly to make any statement which is false in any material particular for the purpose of procuring (whether for himself or another) the grant

or renewal of a certificate under this Act". However, the legislative framework creates a conditional rebuttable presumption in favour of grant, placing the burden on police to justify refusal rather than on applicants to demonstrate suitability. This has practical consequences for decision-making where applicants leave out relevant information. In the five years to September 2025, 38 people from eight force areas were subject to legal proceedings for knowingly or recklessly making a false statement to obtain a firearm or shotgun certificate. Of these, 24 were convicted, with an average fine of £222.

Delegated authority levels remain inconsistent across forces. Section 55 of the Firearms Act 1968 sets out that chief officers can delegate their authority to make firearms licensing decisions to selected personnel. In one FELU, only the firearms licensing manager and their deputy held delegated authority for most decisions, including grants, renewals, refusals, revocations and returning guns after a previous revocation or seizure. In two FELUs, firearms enquiry officers had delegated authority to grant applications. In all FELUs inspected, more senior personnel made higher-risk decisions, but the level of seniority varied between forces. Forces need accurate schemes of delegation. The firearms licensing APP states that "the chief constable should define, agree and communicate in writing the parameters of delegated authorities [and] what decisions can be made and by whom". All the FELUs inspected had a scheme of delegation. In more than half of these, the scheme didn't match what FELUs were doing in practice.

HMICFRS state that supervision of firearms licensing practice needs to improve. During HMICFRS' case file review, the Inspectorate found a lack of effective supervision and oversight in 51% of the cases examined. Consequently, most FELUs lacked effective oversight capable of identifying errors in this high-risk licensing regime.

The Inspectorate also found that there is insufficient oversight of decision-making. Five of the six FELUs inspected lacked effective monitoring. In 25 out of 229 cases, across four of the six FELUs, HMICFRS found decision-makers hadn't sufficiently recorded the reasons for their decision. The application or renewal was granted in each of the 25 cases.

It was found in the report that Firearms licensing appeals should be heard by a specialist national tribunal. Section 44 of the Firearms Act 1968 sets out that the Crown Court in England and Wales, and the Sheriff Courts in Scotland, are the appeals bodies for firearms licensing decisions. Several forces and legal services departments told the Inspectorate that the appeals process works well. They described it as robust and said that courts understood it well, generally giving proper consideration to the statutory guidance. In some regions, forces reported constructive relationships with local courts and consistent decision-making. However, many firearms licensing practitioners and members of stakeholder groups highlighted problems. The most common concern was timeliness, reflecting wider pressures on the criminal courts. Courts can take months to list appeals and then adjourn hearings when criminal trials take priority. In some appeals, the delays are so long that appellants' circumstances have substantially changed by the time the court hears the appeal. HMICFRS heard of an appeal taking six years to reach court. Throughout the inspection, many interviewees suggested that an independent specialist tribunal would be better placed to hear appeals.

The National Firearms Licensing Management System isn't fit for purpose. The National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS) is the central register of firearms applicants, certificate holders and licensed firearms. For nearly 20 years all forces in England and Wales have used the NFLMS, and it remains the only national system of record for firearms licensing. The NFLMS is at the end of its operational life, and a new system is due to replace it in 2027. The system's limitations are undermining the efficiency and effectiveness of firearms licensing. Firearms licensing practitioners told us that the system is prone to crashing and system updates can take many hours to complete. This prevents firearms and explosive licensing units from carrying out core work. Search functionality is limited and the system relies heavily on free text entries. These factors make it difficult to locate records and to make sure personnel record information consistently. There is no user manual or national training, so firearms licensing practitioners tend to learn from colleagues. The NFLMS transfers information to the Police National Computer (PNC). When forces enter data in the wrong format or leave required fields incomplete, the PNC doesn't update automatically. Instead, the NFLMS generates an error notification for the force. Forces should correct the NFLMS record without delay.

HMICFRS found that FELUs' use of automation and advanced digital tools was limited. No force inspected was using artificial intelligence to streamline its firearms licensing processes. However, during inspection HMICFRS heard that one FELU was trialling "robotic process automation" to transfer data from the Single Online Home portal into the NFLMS, reducing manual data entry.

Firearms licensing governance arrangements need to improve. Since 2022, the Home Office has chaired a twice-yearly firearms licensing enforcement board to discuss strategic issues. Attendees include the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for firearms licensing, Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Department of Health and Social Care and the College of Policing. These meetings should provide strategic direction for firearms licensing. However, HMICFRS found that the firearms and explosives licensing working group serves as the main national meeting. Regional governance arrangements also lack clarity and consistency. Many regions have no formal governance arrangements. HMICFRS recommend establishing a national to regional meeting structure. Each region should appoint a senior officer lead who would hold regular regional meetings with FELU managers. The regional leads would bring strategic issues to a national meeting chaired by the NPCC lead for firearms licensing. This structure could encourage consistent decision-making, co-ordinated performance improvement, sharing of best practice and peer support. Similar governance structures already exist in many areas of policing.

HMICFRS also found that there is insufficient national data on the cost of firearms licensing. Forces capture financial data differently. Some only record direct salary costs. Others record partial overheads. Many don't include IT, training, fleet, estates or wider support costs. As a result, the cost of running firearms licensing is unknown at force or national level. An increase in fees has improved funding and police resourcing but this needs to be maintained.

It is suggested within the report that force-level governance lacks consistency and assurance. Firearms licensing isn't typically seen as a frontline policing priority. It has to compete for resources with priorities such as serious violence, safeguarding, serious and organised crime and neighbourhood policing. However, this shouldn't reduce the importance of robust governance of firearms licensing. Effective oversight is essential to public safety and to maintaining the confidence of certificate holders. The Inspectorate found that at force level, governance arrangements vary significantly. All forces inspected had some form of oversight of firearms licensing. This was often included within broader management meetings and not treated as a distinct area requiring specialist governance and assurance.

The Inspectorate found that the way police engage with certificate holders and others connected with firearms licensing needs to improve. During HMICFRS' inspection, focus groups and interviews were held with certificate holders, groups that represent the shooting community, the Gun Control Network, medical professionals and the wider public. The Inspectorate found forces worked with them to varying degrees. Some stakeholder group members highlighted that some FELUs were easy to contact through published phone numbers. Two FELUs held drop-in sessions to help certificate holders. However, some responses to HMICFRS' firearms certificate holders survey were less positive.

Overall, 70 percent of HMICFRS' survey respondents reported they were satisfied with the police during the licensing process. Registered firearms dealers reported similar satisfaction levels about police performance. However, the Inspectorate also heard about many frustrations respondents had with the firearms licensing process and the level of resourcing in some FELUs. Forces need to work with certificate holders more, and make sure their stakeholder groups are effective, to address this and improve public confidence. Survey analysis showed that an important issue for respondents was that the process took too long. Overall, 53 percent of respondents reported that they were satisfied with how long the process took. However, satisfaction with timeliness falls sharply from 70 percent when applications are completed within six months to 9 percent when they exceed six months. Satisfaction with the quality of the police response drops from 82 percent to 37 percent, and ease of contact satisfaction reduces from 65 percent to 38 percent. Delays beyond six months remain common and affected more than a quarter of respondents to HMICFRS' survey.

HMICFRS commented on how firearms and explosives licensing unit role profiles aren't fit for purpose and should be reviewed. They state that firearms and explosives licensing units (FELUs) are structured differently across forces, and the responsibilities attached to equivalent roles vary significantly. However, the units generally include FEOs, decision-makers and managers, and administrative and case work personnel. The Inspectorate found that some FELUs had personnel who worked in an investigative capacity. Other senior managers, who didn't sit directly within the FELU, were responsible for making decisions regarding firearms licensing. They had delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the chief constable.

The Inspectorate stated that any personnel required to take possession of firearms need to be able to do so safely. Forces sometimes require their FELU personnel to seize or take firearms from certificate holders. In most of the FELUs inspected, the force trained personnel on how to safely take possession of firearms and transport them. However, HMICFRS are concerned that in one FELU, personnel responsible for seizing firearms hadn't received any training on how to do this safely which poses a clear risk to personnel and to public safety.

Recommendations

There were 23 new recommendations made within the report, seven of which are directed at Chief Constables nationally:

Recommendation 12:

By 31 March 2027, the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the visitors' permit regime to reduce the inherent risks to public safety. As part of this review, they should consider whether visitors' permits should be restricted to applicants from countries with firearms licensing and safety practices similar to those in Great Britain. In the interim, chief constables should make sure that firearms and explosives licensing units assess visitors' permit applications in line with the Guide on firearms licensing law.

Recommendation 13:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should:

- satisfy themselves that their scheme of delegation for firearms licensing is fit for purpose and in line with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice; and
- check that decision-making is in accordance with that scheme.

Recommendation 14:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure that they have audit and dip sampling processes in place to review firearms licensing decisions in line with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

Recommendation 18:

By 1 December 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing should specify the financial information that forces need to have a clear understanding of the cost of firearms licensing. Chief constables should then record and report this information, including data on actual costs, to the National Police Chiefs' Council lead annually.

Recommendation 20:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should establish or maintain:

- a force-level firearms licensing governance structure that is compliant with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice; and
- a qualitative and quantitative performance framework that covers both risk and how quickly firearms and explosives licensing units process applications.

Recommendation 21:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure they have a documented engagement plan in line with firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

Recommendation 23:

With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that any firearms and explosives licensing unit practitioners who are responsible for handling and transporting firearms are qualified to handle them safely.

Areas for Improvement

There were no areas for improvement.

Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement:

I welcome this thematic inspection report on Firearms Licensing. It is a strong and timely report which, in my view, provides much-needed clarity and direction for the firearms licensing system. The recommendations are constructive and helpful, particularly given the significant risks inherent in firearms licensing and the substantial levels of demand we manage locally.

I am particularly supportive of Recommendation 1, which calls for the Home Office to establish a single firearms licensing authority for England and Wales. Given the risks and responsibilities involved, I believe there is a compelling case for greater national consistency, standardisation and oversight. The report provides a strong foundation from which this important proposal can now be considered and developed.

The report makes 23 recommendations, seven of which are directed to Chief Constables nationally. Each of these recommendations has been reviewed, and appropriate actions have been identified where required. Delivery and progress will be overseen through our established Firearms Licensing Strategic Oversight Group and will remain subject to ongoing scrutiny by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Public safety remains at the heart of our approach to firearms licensing. I am committed to ensuring that we take appropriate learning from the inspection and use the recommendations to support continued improvement in our firearms licensing arrangements. However, with no additional funding, this will be achieved by reducing resource in other areas of the Constabulary.

Our initial response to each of the seven recommendations directed to Chief Constables is set out below.

Recommendation 12:

By 31 March 2027, the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the visitors' permit regime to reduce the inherent risks to public safety. As part of this review, they should consider whether visitors' permits should be restricted to applicants from countries with firearms licensing and safety practices similar to those in Great Britain. In the interim, chief constables should make sure that firearms and explosives licensing units assess visitors' permit applications in line with the Guide on firearms licensing law.

The Constabulary has reviewed the use of its visitors' permit process to ensure compliance with the Home Office Guide on Firearms Licensing Law and national Authorised Professional Practice (APP). This work has been incorporated into the Firearms Licensing improvement programme and will include a review of application assessment processes, decision-making, and quality assurance arrangements. The review ensured all visitor permit applications are appropriately risk assessed and supported by auditable decision-making.

Historically Norfolk and Suffolk Firearms Licensing Unit (FLU) has managed visitor permits well and in line with statutory guidelines under S17. Of the Firearms (Amendment) Act

1988. Robust checks are completed on the applicant to ensure they are a fit and proper person and have good reason for their application and the possession of firearms and ammunition during their visit and that any specified firearms, shotguns or ammunition are permissible and able to be held under a visitors permit.

Sponsors of the applicant are also checked as is the legitimacy of the named event the visitor is attending and are required to provide dates and locations where the shooting will occur and confirm the firearms to be possessed or imported.

Recommendation 13:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should:

- **satisfy themselves that their scheme of delegation for firearms licensing is fit for purpose and in line with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice; and**
- **check that decision-making is in accordance with that scheme.**

Norfolk and Suffolk FLU have reviewed the Firearms Licensing Scheme of Delegation as part of a wider Firearms Licence Improvement programme to ensure it is fit for purpose and consistent with national Authorised Professional Practice. Existing role profiles and decision-making responsibilities have been mapped and reviewed as part of the improvement programme with a broader review of decision-making authorities and delegation opportunities undertaken in line with recommendations detailed in the Eastern Region Innovation Network (ERIN) report published in November 2025.

Existing delegation arrangements are documented within force procedures and operating practices. High risk decisions relating to grants or returns are made by the Head of Command at Superintendent level, in accordance with statutory guidance and approved authorised practice. Revocations are managed and authorised by the Firearms Licensing Manager (Head of Unit) and the FLU Inspector, whilst lower risk revocation and refusal powers are delegated to Senior Firearms Enquiry and Licensing Officers appropriately for specific cases. Norfolk and Suffolk can demonstrate the strength of decision making and scrutiny in place in line with the approved authorised practice.

Recommendation 14:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure that they have audit and dip sampling processes in place to review firearms licensing decisions in line with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

The Constabulary recognises the importance of robust auditing and dip sampling in supporting effective firearms licensing decision-making. Existing dip-sampling arrangements are already in place for a proportion of routine renewals and are supplemented by supervisory oversight. All returns and revocations undergo multiple levels of scrutiny through Senior Firearms Enquiry Officer, Firearms Licensing Manager, and Head of Command assessments with refusals and revocations reviewed by Legal Services where appeals are lodged.

Regional Firearms Licensing Manager peer-review scrutiny sessions have been agreed to provide independent review of decision-making in which Norfolk and Suffolk will actively participate. Further governance arrangements are already in place through the Firearms Licensing Strategic Oversight Group and Chief Officer Scrutiny Meetings and in addition to this work is being undertaken to explore and develop opportunities for broader scrutiny through the Independent Advisory Group whilst maintaining confidentiality and data protection requirements.

Recommendation 18:

By 1 December 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing should specify the financial information that forces need to have a clear understanding of the cost of firearms licensing. Chief constables should then record and report this information, including data on actual costs, to the National Police Chiefs' Council lead annually.

Norfolk Constabulary supports the development of a national understanding of firearms licensing costs. Cost submissions have already been provided by the constabulary as part of the national review of Firearms Licensing Fees and annual income generated by licensing fees have been calculated and remain under review through the Firearms Licensing Strategic Oversight Group and Chief Officer Scrutiny Meetings. It remains the case, that despite recent increases in fees, the costs of administering the firearms licensing regime in Norfolk remains heavily subsidised through funding intended for general policing. It follows that any additional investment or resourcing required to meet the recommendations in this report, will need to be found by cutting services elsewhere. This is one reason why we strongly support the recommendation to develop a national firearms licensing service and for the outdated NFLMS to be replaced. These two measures would increase efficiency, reducing costs for the taxpayer and licence holders.

Direct costs are well understood locally, and work is now being undertaken as part of the wider Firearms Licensing Improvement Programme to expand current methodology to capture indirect costs, including estates, fleet, ICT, Legal Services, training and accommodation costs.

The Constabulary intends to align its approach with any guidance issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and will be well positioned to provide annual reporting when required.

Recommendation 20:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should establish or maintain:

- **a force-level firearms licensing governance structure that is compliant with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice; and**
- **a qualitative and quantitative performance framework that covers both risk and how quickly firearms and explosives licensing units process applications.**

The Constabulary has established a dedicated Firearms Licensing Transformation Programme overseen by a Firearms Licensing Strategic Oversight Group that meets fortnightly to provide strategic direction, challenge and governance. It is recognised that current performance reporting remains labour intensive and heavily dependent on manual extraction due to the reliance on National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS) and the existing planner/kanban structures used for case management.

Enhanced performance reporting is currently being developed using technology solutions which will deliver improved application tracking, management information and analytical capability. The new platform will support planning prioritisation and service improvement.

Qualitative assurance is already provided through supervisory review, legal scrutiny, and dip-sampling activity both within the FLU and through the Firearms Licensing Strategic Oversight Group and Chief Officer Scrutiny Meetings.

Together, these existing and proposed arrangements will ensure compliance with Authorised Professional Practice and provide clear oversight of operational performance.

Recommendation 21:

By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure they have a documented engagement plan in line with firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

Norfolk Constabulary recognises the importance of meaningful engagement with certificate holders, representative bodies, registered firearms dealers and other stakeholders and has established an Independent Advisory Group and formal communications process including regular meetings and structured updates to all parties.

Communications through automated messaging has been improved providing clear information and directing certificate holders to useful links on the relevant force internet pages. A physical brochure is under development to pass to registered Firearms Dealer, Gun Clubs and representative bodies to distribute to those within the community who may still not have access to digital material.

A process of advocacy has been implemented representative bodies allowing them a direct route to senior decision makers within Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies through which they are able to raise cases where it is felt a review of circumstances and progress may be required. This provides a level of senior management oversight and governance not previously available and an opportunity to identify further learning and process improvements whilst working with partners within the shooting community.

Internal engagement through briefing products, awareness training and routine communications managed through both operational and strategic leadership is now also in place with newly created 'you said we did' updates given to all FLU staff.

Recommendation 23:

With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that any firearms and explosives licensing unit practitioners who are responsible for handling and transporting firearms are qualified to handle them safely.

Norfolk Constabulary is committed to ensuring that all firearms licensing personnel involved in the handling or transportation of firearms are suitably trained and accredited. Norfolk and Suffolk already operate an established system of competence assurance with all relevant FLU personnel already receiving formal firearms handling training and mandatory annual refresher training with auditable completion records maintained.

Additional guidance and training is provided to frontline staff regarding seizure powers, booking procedures and safe handling requirements with guidance documents and links available across both force intranet sites.

A programme of additional face to face training for both new recruits and existing front-line staff is being developed with the assistance of our learning and development team to deliver the College of Policing Approved training package developed by the FLU. Further learning, refresher documents and aide memoires are also available to all staff. Scoping work is underway to establish a formal annual wellbeing/welfare assurance process for all personnel who handle or transport firearms as part of their role.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

Firearms licensing is a very important issue for residents in Norfolk. It is clear that the existing arrangements are not working as they ought to, so I welcome and support the measures suggested to try to improve the service we give. This office will continue to monitor the performance of the licensing team and hope that real progress will be made quickly.

For Office Use Only:

- Response submitted to the HMICFRS Monitoring Portal.
- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response published on the OPCCN website.