



Introduction

This revised guidance aims to provide the police with guidance on firearms legislation. It should be noted that this is not a definitive statement of the law but is intended to provide a cohesive explanation of the often complex area of firearms licensing.

The guidance is being revised in batches, and chapters on specific topics will be published online once they are available. The first revised chapters provide guidance on restrictions on the possession, handling, and distribution of firearms and ammunition, and on the issue of museum firearms licences. Until new chapters have been published on other subject areas, reference should continue to be made to the 2002 version of the guidance, together with any subsequent advice issued by the Home Office. Future changes to firearms legislation or policy will be reflected through updating of the relevant chapter online, to ensure that the document remains up to date and readily accessible.

This guidance is intended to assist consistency of practice between police forces, and to encourage an informed understanding among firearms users and the wider public of the considerations involved in the application of the Firearms Acts. In operating the licensing system that underpins these laws, chief officers of police should also aim to provide cost-effective systems that ensure the speedy and efficient processing of applications, mindful of good practice and best value in their service provision. However, the wider interests of public safety remain paramount.

Firearms legislation, and the subject of firearms generally, is complex and highly specialised. It is not practicable to provide comprehensive training for every police officer on the administration of the Firearms Acts. It is therefore essential that this guidance is available to police officers and civilians directly involved in the licensing process. Where difficulties arise, advice should be sought from the firearms department at the appropriate police force.

The Secretary of State and the Scottish Ministers attach great importance to the consistent administration of the Firearms Acts, as does the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). All forces should seek to comply with the advice and guidance and follow the procedures set out in this document. However, chief officers of police are the ultimate authority responsible for the administration of the legislation in their force area, and it may be necessary to depart from the guidance when each case is assessed on its merits and the circumstances justify such a course of action. In such circumstances, chief officers for the force concerned will need to be able to justify their decision.

Police records of certificate holders and their firearms should be relevant, accurate, and up-to-date whether held electronically on a computer or in another format. The Firearms Rules 1998 prescribe the form of firearm and shot gun applications, certificates, permits and other forms. If non-statutory forms are used, they should be clearly marked to indicate their status.

This guidance deals in details with England, Wales, and Scotland. Legislation on firearms is reserved to the Westminster Parliament, with the exception of the power to regulate air weapons which is devolved to the Scottish Government. Firearms law is different in Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands. Chief officers of police will also need to be mindful of the Human Rights Act 1998. The contacts listed in appendix 1 of the 2002 guidance should be consulted for further information on specific topics as necessary.

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