



Home Office

**RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION ON INCREASING
FIREARMS LICENSING FEES
ADMINISTERED BY THE POLICE**

MARCH 2015

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Background.....	4
Summary of responses.....	5
Responses to question one.....	6
Responses to question two.....	9
Conclusion and next steps.....	12
Consultation principles.....	15

Introduction

This document is the summary of responses to the consultation paper, *A proposal to increase firearms licensing fees administered by the police*, published by the Home Office on 27 November 2014.

It covers:

- the background to the consultation
- a summary of the responses to the consultation
- responses to question one
- responses to question two
- the next steps following this consultation.

Background

Firearm and shotgun certificates are held for a wide range of legitimate purposes. As at 31 March 2014, in England and Wales, there were 151,413 firearm certificates and 582,923 shotgun certificates on issue and 3,486 registered firearms dealers. As at 31 March 2014, there were 26,101 firearm certificates and 49,165 shotgun certificates on issue and 358 registered firearms dealers in Scotland.

Police forces in England, Wales and Scotland administer the licence requirements for firearms and shotguns. The fees payable by an applicant for this service have remained at the level set in 2001.

The Home Office has responsibility for the licensing and control of most firearms in Great Britain and owns the overarching fee structure. We worked with interested parties to develop a proposed new set of fees for firearms licences administered by the police that would be proportionate and appropriate for service users and enforcement bodies alike. The aim of the proposal is to enable police forces to achieve full cost recovery (based on an agreed estimate of timings and costs) for the issuing of firearm and shotgun certificates when an online system (eCommerce, currently under development) is operational, so that a more efficient and consistent service can be provided to certificate holders.

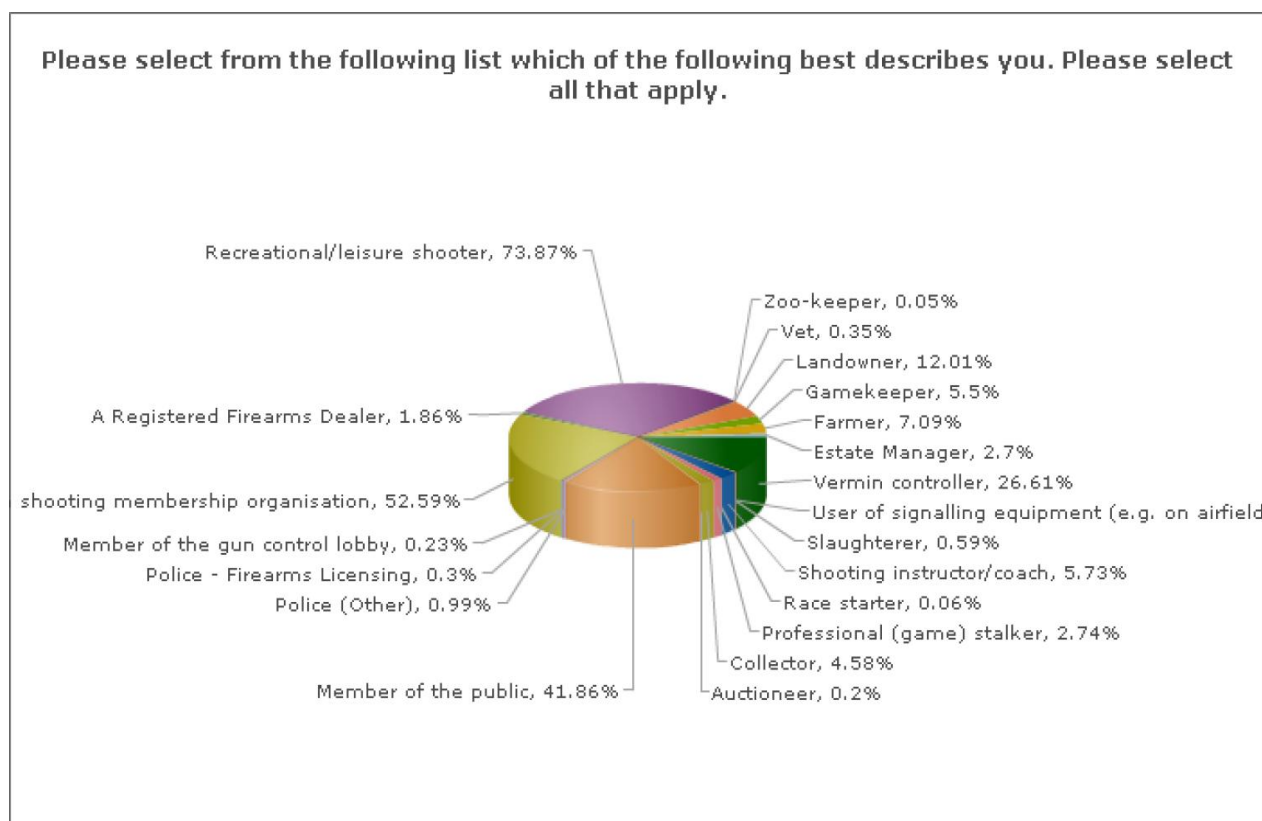
We undertook a public consultation exercise between 27 November and 29 December 2014 to ask whether respondents agreed with the proposed increase and to seek views on how future reviews should be taken forward.

Summary of responses

We received a total of 11,810 online responses. We also received 21 separate responses by email. The responses came from a wide variety of respondents including members of the public, members of the gun control lobby, police, police and crime commissioners, farmers, vermin controllers and members of shooting organisations.

From the responses received, 86% identified themselves as the holder of a firearm and 14% confirmed that they did not hold a firearm. We also asked whether respondents lived in a rural area and 71% confirmed that they did and 29% did not.

A breakdown of respondents is set out in the graph below.



Response to question one

1. Do you agree that the fees should be adjusted in line with the proposals as set out below?

	Current Fee	Proposed Fee
Firearm Grant	£50.00	£88.00
Firearm Renewal	£40.00	£62.00
Shotgun Grant	£50.00	£79.50
Shotgun Renewal	£40.00	£49.00
Coterminous Grant	£10.00 ¹	£90.00
Coterminous Renewal	£10.00 ²	£65.00
Registered Firearms Dealer – registration renewal	£150.00 £150.00	£200.00 £200.00
Replacement firearm certificate	£9.00	£4.00
Replacement shotgun certificate	£8.00	£4.00
Visitor’s permit - individual	£12.00	£20.00
Visitor’s permit – Group	£60.00	£100.00
Game Fairs	£12.00	£13.00
Variation (not like for like)	£26.00	£20.00

¹ The total cost of a coterminous grant is the £10 fee + the £50 grant fee which is £60

² The total cost of a coterminous renewal is the £10 fee + the £40 renewal fee which is £50

Almost all of the respondents, 94%, answered this question with a total of 73% either strongly agreeing or tending to agree that there should be an increase in the fees as set out in the table above. Many respondents acknowledged that there had not been an increase for a number of years and that this needed to change.

- 49% strongly agreed
- 24% tended to agree

“The proposed fee increases are ‘robust and appropriate.’”

“Applicants should bear the full cost of the licence application process.”

Nearly a quarter of respondents either strongly disagreed or tended to disagree that there should be an increase. A number of these felt that the cost of the licence was already too high and that the cost should be met by the public purse because of the public safety element of firearms licensing. Others expressed concern that any increase might discourage young people from taking up shooting or mean that existing shooters would not be able to afford to continue shooting.

- 6% tended to disagree
- 18% strongly disagreed

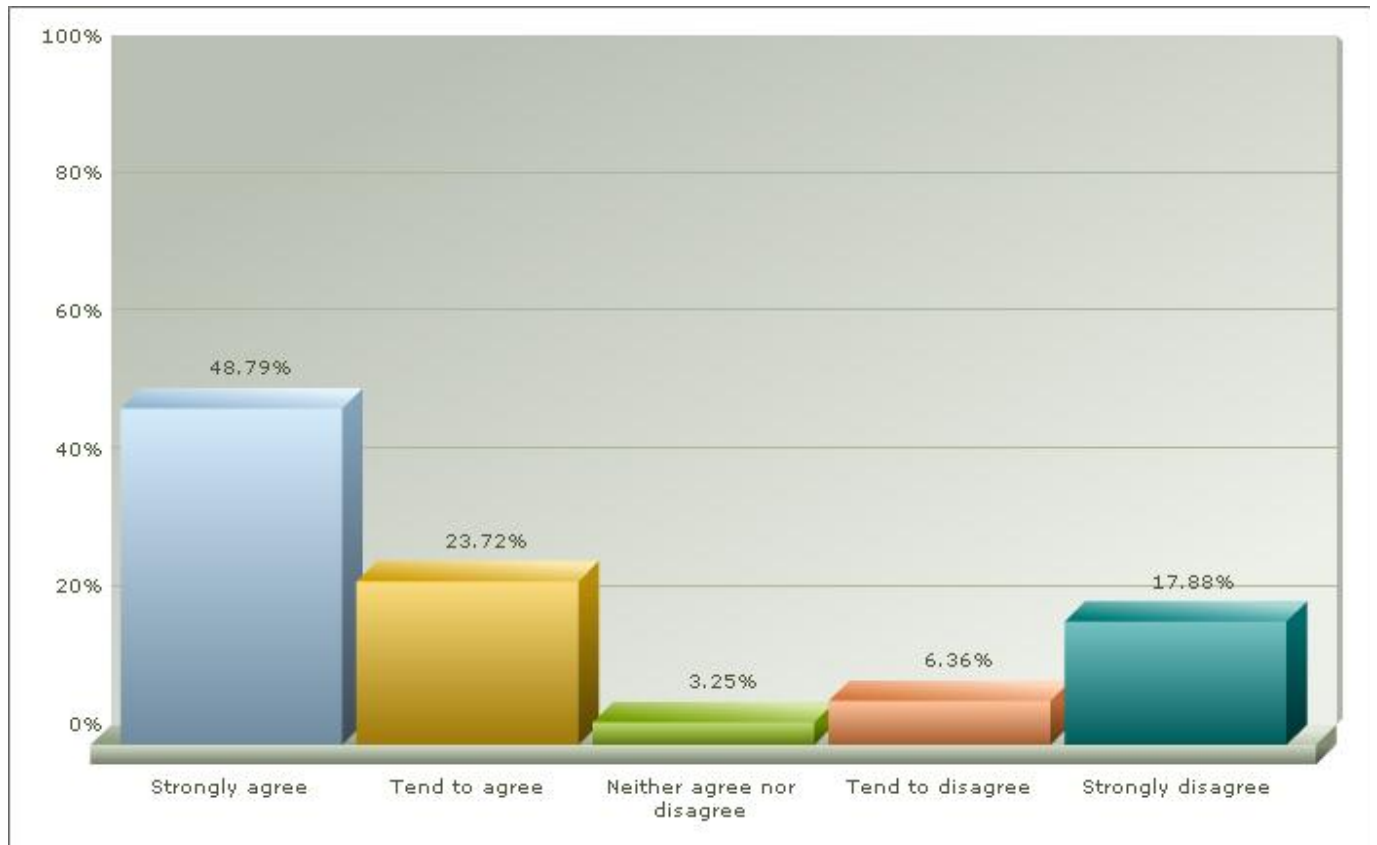
“The fees should not be increased. The cost should be met by the public purse. The Firearms Act and certificate requirements are there to protect the public.”

“The cost increases should be fair and reflect the process and the time taken to review applications.”

There were 3% of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal.

The following table shows the breakdown of responses.

Do you agree that the fees should be adjusted in line with the proposals as set out below?



Response to question two

2. The fees and costs for firearms licences administered by the police have to be reviewed annually. Do you have any comments on how the review process should be taken forward?

The consultation document made clear that there should be annual reviews of the fees for firearms licences administered by the police so that there is not a repeat of the current position where there had not been a change for 13 years.

Only 4,256 respondents answered this question which is approximately 36% of the total response.

There were four recurring themes in the responses and many respondents made two or three suggestions for how the review process should look going forward.

Over a third (36%) of these respondents felt that future increases should be made in line with inflation, either the retail price index (RPI) or the consumer price index (CPI). This was felt a fairer measure as it would be transparent and was a well-known method of increasing costs.

“Future increases in firearms licensing fees linked to inflation.”

A significant majority of respondents agreed that there should always be consultation on future changes to the fees. Many made clear that representatives of shooting organisations and the police should always be involved. There were different suggestions about how people should be consulted including through further use of the Home Office Fees Working Group³ and the more formal process of a public consultation.

“The review should continue to be a collaboration of parties in the Home Office working group.”

“An annual inflationary increase in line with the CPI and a 5 year review involving the shooting organisations”

³ The Home Office Fees Working Group is chaired by the Home Office and has representation from the police, shooting organisations and other government departments.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of these respondents felt that an annual review of fees would be too frequent and bureaucratic and suggested five years in line with the life-cycle of licences. A smaller number felt that a review after three years would be appropriate.

“Why do fees need to be reviewed annually, this is excessive administration. A review every 5 years would be sufficient and reduce costs further.”

“Fees should rise in line with inflation and should be looked at every 3-5 years.”

About 11% of these respondents felt very strongly that the efficiency and performance of the police needed to improve if there were to be future increases. There were many examples cited of long delays with the processing of renewals in firearms licensing departments.

“Police firearms departments should not only provide high standards of service, they should also publish comprehensive, timely and transparent reports on their actual performance”

“All contact I have had with the police has been fair, dealt with by personable people, but incredibly slow.”

There were also a number of respondents who acknowledged the good service already provided by their police firearms licensing department.

“I am happy with the service received, the licensing department followed Home Office guidance, making certificate conditions simple and not complex and being fast in response to questions and in fast application services.”

“I am lucky to live in one of the most efficient areas when it comes to firearm licensing and a typical variation will take five days often less. I don't mind paying for such good service.”

A smaller number of respondents also suggested other ways forward including: extending the life of an existing certificate, appointing an independent body or person to review costs and centralising the processing of firearms licences similar to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

“Processes should be independently reviewed to ensure they are relevant and efficient.”

“The period of validity of firearms and shotgun certificates should be increased to 10 years.”

“Would it not be better and cheaper to have a central firearms registry like the DVLA.”

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Government welcomes the response to the consultation and would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond on this important issue.

The majority of respondents agreed with the proposed increase to the fees for firearms licences administered by the police. The Government had already recognised that there was need for a review, particularly because of the length of time since the last revision, which meant that the police were only recouping 27% of the current cost of licences. We therefore agree that the fees should be increased at the earliest opportunity.

The Government is clear that alongside the increase processes must be put in place to ensure there is a regular review of the firearms licensing fees. The HM Treasury guidance *Managing Public Money* suggests that it is good practice to review the service provided annually to check that fees are at the appropriate level. It also recommends a more fundamental review at regular intervals.

We therefore welcome the different suggestions made by respondents as to how the review process might work in the future. We recognise the concerns raised by respondents that annual reviews might be too frequent and bureaucratic. However we believe that it is important that there is regular monitoring in place particularly because the increases are based on an estimate of the time savings that eCommerce will bring.

The majority of respondents suggested that future reviews should be in line with inflation. However the Government guidance on setting fees is clear that fees should be set to recover the full cost associated with providing the service to ensure that the government neither profits at the expense of consumers nor makes a loss for taxpayers to subsidise. Simply increasing fees by inflation is unlikely to achieve this as, although some costs may attract inflation, different rates will apply to different costs, and some costs may reduce, for example, due to increased efficiency or contractual changes.

Consultation with police and stakeholders was seen as an integral part of any future reviews. We will re-convene the Home Office Fees Working Group, which has representation from police, the shooting community and other Government departments, to oversee the review process to enable an annual change to be agreed if appropriate.

We will then consider conducting a more comprehensive review after five years. This will look at the processes and wider framework and a decision will be taken whether the proposals from this review should go out for public consultation.

Our work on improving the firearms licensing system continues. A number of respondents to the consultation made suggestions about how this might be done. We will be collating these and will give them further consideration alongside any recommendations that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will make after reviewing how the system works in practice later this year.

The new firearms fees are set out below and will come into force once an Order amending the Firearms legislation comes into effect. We are working towards April 2015 and further updates will be available on the Home Office's GOV.UK website.

Table of new fees

	New Fee Totals
Firearm Grant	£88.00
Firearm Renewal	£62.00
Shotgun Grant	£79.50
Shotgun Renewal	£49.00
Coterminous Grant	£90.00
Coterminous Renewal	£65.00
Registered Firearms Dealer – registration renewal	£200.00 £200.00
Replacement firearm certificate	£4.00
Replacement shotgun certificate	£4.00
Visitor's permit - individual	£20.00
Visitor's permit – Group	£100.00 ⁴
Game Fairs	£13.00
Variation (not like for like)	£20.00

⁴As the fee for an individual permit has increased we have also increased the fee for group applications of six or more permits

Consultation principles

The principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>

ISBN: 978-1-78246-784-7
Published by Home Office
© Crown Copyright 2015