



Home Office

Controls on the use of crossbows on public safety grounds - call for evidence

February 2024

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Summary

This call for evidence aims to seek information and evidence about whether further controls on crossbows should be introduced on public safety grounds. The information gathered from this call for evidence will help inform evidence based policy advice and future decisions by the Home Secretary and Ministers.

This call for evidence closes at **11:55pm on 9 April 2024**

1. Background on crossbows

1.1 Crossbows are subject to statutory controls by virtue of the Crossbows Act 1987 ([Crossbows Act 1987 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)), which makes it an offence to sell or hire a crossbow, with a draw weight of 1.4 kilograms or greater, to persons under the age of 18 in England, Wales and Scotland. Similar legislation is in place in Northern Ireland. The Act also prohibits persons aged under 18 from selling or hiring a crossbow. In addition persons under the age of 18 are prohibited from possessing a crossbow which is capable of discharging a missile or parts of a crossbow which together (and without any other parts) can be assembled to form a crossbow capable of discharging a missile, unless supervised by someone aged 21 or over. The Act also allows the police to search individuals that they have reason to believe are in unlawful possession of a crossbow.

1.2 The maximum penalty for the sale or hire of a crossbow is six months' imprisonment or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or both on summary conviction. The maximum penalty for the purchase, hire or possession of crossbows by under 18s is a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

1.3 It is also unlawful to hunt with a crossbow by virtue of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 ([Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)), and the Deer Act 1991 ([Deer Act 1991 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)) prohibits the use of arrows in the taking, killing or injuring of any deer.

1.4 As there is no requirement for the registration of purchasing a crossbow it is not possible to estimate how many crossbows might be in circulation in England, Wales and Scotland. In answer to a Parliamentary Question in 1991 ([Crossbows \(Hansard, 26 November 1991\) \(parliament.uk\)](#)), the estimate provided then was that there was between 250,000 and 300,000 in circulation. We would welcome, as part of this call for evidence, any additional information or evidence about the extent of current crossbow ownership across Great Britain. Any data or information to support this can be added in the free text box at Q24 of this call for evidence.

1.5 Incidents involving crossbows are, fortunately, rare and the vast majority of those using crossbows do so safely and responsibly. There were fewer than 10 homicides

by crossbow from 2011 to 2021 and no killings by crossbow (or catapult¹) in 2021/2022, which was the first year data were collected on the Home Office Homicide Index². There has since been a tragic killing by crossbow in December 2022 involving a crossbow in Westcliff, Essex³. It is shocking and traumatic when incidents do occur involving crossbows, and the Government is clear that such misuse is a very serious matter and where an offence is committed, this should attract the severest penalties possible.

What this call for evidence covers

2. Further controls on the use of crossbows

2.1 At the end of 2021 the, then, Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, asked that consideration should be given to introducing greater restrictions on crossbows and she commissioned a review. This followed the incident at Windsor Castle on 25 December 2021 when a man gained entry to the grounds armed with a crossbow. Jaswant Singh Chail subsequently admitted treason, threats to kill and possession of an offensive weapon and was jailed for 9 years⁴. This review has progressed and in light of this, the Home Office is now seeking views, through this call for evidence, on whether there should be any additional controls relating to crossbows to help minimise the risk to public safety from individuals who would misuse crossbows and use them to commit criminal offences.

2.2 The current statutory controls on crossbows are based on age restrictions, and with additional controls preventing crossbows being used in hunting animals. Such controls on the use of crossbows are in comparison to the controls on the use of firearms, which are subject to a system of licensing, and that are based on checks on the suitability of someone holding a firearm. There are also very serious offences and penalties for having an unlicensed firearm. There is no licensing (or registration) scheme in place for anyone wishing to purchase and own a crossbow. We would therefore be particularly interested in receiving evidence as to whether there should be some form of licensing scheme that would provide controls on the use, ownership and supply of crossbows.

2.3 We are not proposing what such a licensing scheme might look like but we have set out below what three potential different approaches might be. If some form of licensing scheme did come into force, then, depending on the parameters of the scheme, it would be unlawful to own, supply or purchase a crossbow without the relevant authority. This would also apply to crossbows already owned by an individual. In any consideration, we would need to ensure that any new controls

¹ The number of crossbow and catapult homicides are very low so these are combined on the Homicide Index form and then separated out following investigation into the data.

² The Home Office Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. The term "homicide" covers the offences of murder, manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and infanticide. Infanticide is defined as the killing of a baby under 1 year old by their mother while the balance of her mind was disturbed as a result of giving birth. Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded as a crime, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the vast majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always the case.

³ [Westcliff: Man admits killing Dave Peck | Essex Police](#)

⁴ [A man has been jailed for offences including treason after he was arrested at Windsor Castle | Metropolitan Police](#)

were proportionate to the risk involved and balanced with ensuring that crossbow enthusiasts were still able to pursue their sport.

2.4 We would be interested in receiving views on the three potential options set out below or any evidence in respect of a different possible kind of scheme or that there are already sufficient controls currently around the sale and possession of crossbows (there is an opportunity in the online response form for comments). The three possible options are:

- a) **Licensing of sellers and suppliers.** This would make it a requirement for sellers, suppliers and importers to have a licence from the police in order to sell crossbows and bolts. Obtaining a licence would be subject to police approval. Sellers would be required to keep a record of buyers, including name, date of birth, address and purpose of the purchase and this information should be shared with the police on request. Breach of the licence conditions by the seller/ supplier would include a financial penalty and/or withdrawal of the licence.
- b) **Licensing of sellers and buyers without police checks.** This approach would be similar to the 'Registration of sellers and buyers' option (option c) but would also make it a requirement for those who wish to purchase and possess crossbows to register and obtain a licence. Granting of the licence by the police could be automatic on paying a fee but the police would have the authority to refuse in certain circumstances.
- c) **Registration of sellers and buyers following police checks.** This approach would be similar to option b) above, but the police would undertake suitability checks on sellers and buyers before they registered and granted the licence.

2.5 The Government does not have a view on the options above, and the purpose of this call for evidence, is to get views and evidence about whether such changes (and if indeed any) are needed on crossbows.

2.6 There are advantages and disadvantages with all of the options set out above. The expectation is that, with any new licensing or registration scheme, the licence fees for the scheme would cover the costs of setting up the scheme. However, there will be start-up costs in relation to new IT systems to allow applications to be made online, as well as staff to manage the applications and renewals of licences or registrations. Option a), the 'Licensing of sellers and suppliers' option is likely to be the least expensive and option c) the 'Registration of sellers and buyers following police checks' is likely to be the most expensive.

2.7 In addition, with option a), members of the general public who owned a crossbow would not be able to sell these on to another individual without registering and paying to become a licensed seller. Options b) and c) would allow this but there would need to be controls to ensure that sales were only to another registered individual. On all options, overseas sellers would also need to sell their crossbows through a licensed importer in Great Britain which would be very difficult to enforce.

Legislation on crossbows in Northern Ireland is devolved so it would be a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive to consider, subject to any scheme being approved by the Government, as to whether to take forward similar measures with Northern Ireland Assembly approval.

We would welcome responses on the questions below (which are set out at the end of this call for evidence paper and the online response form).

Q1. Should there be further legislative controls around the sale and ownership of crossbows?

Q2. Do you have any evidence to support your response?

Q3. If yes, do you consider one of approaches outlined in 2.4 of this call for evidence paper, and listed below, to be a preferred option? You can expand on your answer in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

- a) Registration of sellers and suppliers.
- b) Registration of sellers and buyers without police checks - similar to fishing licences.
- c) Registration of sellers and buyers following police checks. This is similar to the firearm licensing regime.
- d) None of these (there is an opportunity at the end of this survey to add comments and propose an alternative).

Q4. If you answered “no” to Q1, could you expand on why that is in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

3. Sale and possession of broadhead arrows

3.1 In addition to considering whether there is a case for additional controls on crossbows on public safety grounds, we are also looking at whether additional measures might be required on the sale and possession of broadhead arrows. Although it is unlawful to hunt with a bow or crossbow it is lawful to sell or possess broadhead arrows or bolts. Broadheads are, primarily, used for hunting and have no purpose in target shooting. As such, we would welcome views and any supporting evidence on whether or not broadhead arrows should be prohibited in Great Britain.

3.2 There would be exemptions to any prohibition, in line with other prohibited offensive weapons, for items of historical importance or for use in bona-fide historical

re-enacting, sporting activities, for use in film and theatre, possessed on behalf of a museum or gallery, or lent or hired by a museum or gallery for cultural, artistic or educational purposes. Antique broadhead arrows would also be exempt (over 100 years old).

We would welcome responses on the questions below (which are set out at the end of this call for evidence paper and the online response form).

Q5. Should the sale and possession of broadhead arrows be prohibited (with the exemptions listed at paragraph 3.2 in this call for evidence)?

- a) Yes, with these exemptions;
- b) Yes, with different exemptions or no exemptions;
- c) No.

Q6. If yes, could you expand on your answer in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Q7. If you answered “no” to Q5, could you expand on why you think there should be no prohibition of broadhead arrows in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Q8. Do you purchase, or have you ever purchased, broadhead arrows?

Q9. If you answered “yes” to Q8 was the purchase of broadhead arrows for any of the following:

- a) Personal/recreational shooting;
- b) Sport;
- c) Re-enactment;
- d) Other (please specify in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence).

Q10. If a prohibition was brought in and you believed you had a defence against this by means of the exemptions set out in paragraph 3.2 of this call for evidence, which exemption below would apply to you?

- a) Item of historical importance;
- b) For use in bona-fide historical re-enacting;
- c) Sporting activities;
- d) For use in film and theatre;
- e) Possessed on behalf of a museum or gallery, or lent or hired by a museum or gallery for cultural, artistic or educational purposes;
- f) Antique (over 100 years old).

4. Who should respond to this call for evidence?

Responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in, or views on, the subject of crossbows. You do not have to own one or use one recreationally. When you submit your response, you will be asked about the capacity in which you are responding. This is because some of the questions will not be relevant to everyone. We would be particularly interested in hearing from manufacturers, retailers, those who use crossbows for a sporting or leisure purpose, including re-enactors, and from members of the public.

How to respond to this call for evidence

You can respond to this call for evidence by completing the [online response form](https://gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/controls-on-crossbows) <https://gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/controls-on-crossbows>. The call for evidence closes at **23:55 on 9 April 2024**.

Please provide your answers and any evidence or comments in response to as many of the questions as you see fit - you are not required to answer all of them.

If there are areas you would like to offer further comment on there is an opportunity to do so at the end of the questionnaire (Q22) and to attach any supporting documentation.

Please contact crossbows@homeoffice.gov.uk if you experience any technical issues with the online survey.

We would welcome responses to the following questions which are discussed earlier in this call for evidence paper.

Call for evidence – questions

Licensing of crossbows

Q1. Should there be further legislative controls around the sale and ownership of crossbows?

Yes

No

Q2. Do you have any evidence to support your response?

Yes (please provide at Q22)

No

Q3. If yes, do you consider one of approaches outlined in 2.4 of this call for evidence paper, and listed below, to be a preferred option? You can expand on your answer in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

- a) Registration of sellers and suppliers.
- b) Registration of sellers and buyers without police checks - similar to fishing licences.
- c) Registration of sellers and buyers following police checks. This is similar to the firearm licensing regime.
- d) None of these (there is an opportunity at the end of this survey to add comments and propose an alternative).

Q4. If you answered “no” to Q1, could you expand on why that is in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Prohibiting the sale of broadhead arrows

Q5. Should the sale and possession of broadhead arrows be prohibited (with the exemptions listed at paragraph 3.2 in this call for evidence)?

- a) Yes, with these exemptions;
- b) Yes, with different exemptions or no exemptions;
- c) No.

Q6. If yes, could you expand on your answer in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Q7. If you answered “no” to Q5, could you expand on why you think there should be no prohibition of broadhead arrows in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Q8. Do you purchase, or have you ever purchased, broadhead arrows?

Yes

No

Q9. If you answered “yes” to Q8 was the purchase of broadhead arrows for any of the following:

- a) Personal/recreational shooting;
- b) Sport;
- c) Re-enactment;
- d) Other (please specify in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence).

Q10. If a prohibition was brought in and you believed you had a defence against this by means of the exemptions set out in paragraph 3.2 of this call for evidence, which exemption below would apply to you?

- a) Item of historical importance;
- b) For use in bone-fide historical re-enacting;
- c) Sporting activities;
- d) For use in film and theatre;
- e) Possessed on behalf of a museum or gallery, or lent or hired by a museum or gallery for cultural, artistic or educational purposes;
- f) Antique (over 100 years old).

Crossbow ownership

Q11. Do you own a crossbow?

Yes

No

Q12. If yes to question 11 above, how long ago did you purchase your crossbow (if you own more than one then please answer this question in relation to the last crossbow you obtained and provide additional details at Q22 for any others)?

- a) In the last 12 months;
- b) In the last 5 years;
- c) Longer than 5 years ago;
- d) I own one but did not purchase it.

Q13. If yes to question 11 above, where did you purchase your crossbow (if you own more than one then please answer this question in relation to the last crossbow you obtained and provide additional details at Q22 for any others)?

- a) From a high street shop;
- b) Online;
- c) It was gifted to me;
- d) None of the above (please elaborate in the free text box at Q22).

Q14. If a licensing or permit scheme was brought into force, would you consider applying for a permit or licence to continue to own a crossbow?

Yes

No

Q15. If a licensing or permit scheme was brought into force, would you consider applying for a permit or licence to be able to purchase a crossbow?

Yes

No

Q16: Do you use a crossbow for one of the following:

- a) Personal/recreational shooting;
- b) Sporting competition;
- c) Re-enactment;
- d) Other (please specify in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence).

Manufacturers/Importers/Retailers

Q17. Do you manufacture, import or sell crossbows and ancillary equipment?

- a) Manufacture;
- b) Import;
- c) Retail.

Q18. If you manufacture crossbows, could you provide more detail in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence paper about the number and type of units made, and sold, in the last 5 years.

Q19. If you import crossbows, could you provide more detail in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence paper about the number and type of units imported, where from, the numbers sold and the price range in the last 5 years. It would be helpful if this could also include the numbers and prices for ancillary equipment (including bolts).

Q20. If you sell crossbows, could you provide more detail on the number of units and types you have sold or exported and the price range in the last 5 years in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence. It would be helpful if this could also include the numbers and prices for ancillary equipment including bolts.

Q21. If you are a manufacturer, importer or retailer of crossbows would you continue to do so if a permit or licensing scheme was brought into force?

Yes

No

Please expand on your answer, if you wish, in the free text box at the end of this call for evidence.

Q22. If you have any comments on the subject matter of this consultation, please enter below. This is the free text box for additional answers/information and you can also provide supporting material to this call for evidence.

About You

Please use this section to tell us about who you are.

Full name

Job title or capacity in which you are responding to this call for evidence exercise (for example, retailer, manufacturer, member of the public)

Date

Company name/organisation (if applicable)

Address

Postcode

If you are a representative of a group (i.e. sports club, re-enactment group or society), please tell us the name of the group and give a summary of the people or organisations that you represent.

Contact details and how to respond

Please send your response by 9 April 2024 by either –

- Completing the online form at: <https://gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/controls-on-crossbows>
- Email to: crossbows@homeoffice.gov.uk

Complaints or comments

If you have any complaints or comments about the call for evidence process you should contact the Home Office at the above e-mail address.

Alternative formats

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from crossbows@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Representative groups

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent when they respond (i.e. sports club, re-enactment society or group).

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this call for evidence, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Home Office.

The Home Office will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and, in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.