



Home Office

## **FIREARMS LICENSING:**

### Statutory Guidance for Chief Officers of Police

August 2025

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The inspection of police firearms licensing by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in 2014-2015 highlighted the need for more consistency in the application of firearms licensing law by police forces and recommended that existing Home Office guidance be put on a statutory footing. This was supported by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland in its March 2018 inspection of firearms licensing. The Government subsequently introduced a power for the Secretary of State to issue statutory guidance to chief officers of police through an amendment to the Firearms Act 1968 ('the 1968 Act') made by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.
- 1.2. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 inserted section 55A into the 1968 Act, allowing the Secretary of State to issue guidance to chief officers of police as to the exercise of their functions under, or in connection with, the 1968 Act. **Chief officers of police in England, Wales and Scotland must have regard to such guidance. This means that the Statutory Guidance must be taken into account, and if there is a decision to depart from it, there must be clear reasons to justify that departure on a case-by-case basis.** This is important in order to achieve the consistency in police licensing practice which underpins the introduction of the Statutory Guidance for Chief Officers of Police on firearms licensing. This version of the Statutory Guidance, which comes into effect on 5 August 2025 replaces all previous versions.

## Purpose

- 1.3. The guidance covers the processes and criteria for assessing suitability to possess firearms<sup>1</sup> and to be a Registered Firearms Dealer ("RFD"). It is intended to assist chief officers in carrying out appropriate, proportionate and consistent checks and assessments in order to come to an informed decision.
- 1.4. Under section 44(3A) of the 1968 Act, the court (or sheriff in Scotland) hearing an appeal against a police firearms licensing decision must have regard to any guidance issued under section 55A that is relevant to the appeal.
- 1.5. The guidance is to be applied to all applications received, and licensing decisions made, on or after its publication, including reviews of suitability of existing certificate holders and RFDs.
- 1.6. This guidance sits alongside the non-statutory Home Office guide on firearms licensing law and the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on firearms licensing. Whilst there is no legal duty to follow the Home Office guide or the College of Policing APP, these are provided to assist chief officers in interpreting the law and setting operational practices respectively.
- 1.7. To assist the police in complying with the Statutory Guidance, there is a mandatory national training course on firearms licensing that is provided by the College of Policing for police forces in England and Wales, and which complements and

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<sup>1</sup> The term "firearms" is generally used in this document to refer to all lethal barrelled weapons, including shotguns, unless a distinction is required, for example, to distinguish issues to do with firearms certificates as against shotgun certificates.

references this guidance as well as the College's Authorised Professional Practice (APP).

- 1.8. This guidance does not apply to the licensing of air weapons in Scotland.
- 1.9. Police checks and assessments for licences administered by the Home Office or the Scottish Government are subject to direct oversight by those bodies on a case-by-case basis and do not come under this guidance. However, knowledge of the principles and processes that apply to firearm and shotgun certificates and the certification of RFDs will inform the consideration of licences administered by the Home Office or the Scottish Government and should provide the framework for the police in carrying out the appropriate checks and assessments.

## 2. Suitability checks

- 2.1 This chapter sets out the checks that chief officers should complete to assess whether a person can be permitted to possess firearms without danger to public safety or to the peace. The checks apply to the grant or renewal of a shotgun or firearm certificate, or for certification as an RFD.
- 2.2 The guidance sets out the standards which must be applied to ensure a thorough and consistent approach to assessing the risk to public safety.

### Background checks

- 2.3 Background checks are to be completed for every applicant who applies for either grant or renewal of a certificate or certification, unless checks were carried out within the last six months as part of continuous monitoring of existing certificate holders and where no concerns have come to light previously.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.4 All applicants should be checked against the widest relevant databases to gather conviction, intelligence and counter terrorism data. If such checks reveal any concerns as to suitability, the police will need to consider what further investigative action should be taken.
- 2.5 Where the applicant is a UK national and is known to have been resident outside the UK for a significant period (more than six consecutive months) a background check (criminal records check or equivalent) in the relevant country or countries should be completed. If not provided in English, an official translation should be obtained at the expense of the applicant.
- 2.6 Where the applicant is a foreign national, a background check (criminal records check or equivalent) should also be completed in the applicant's home country. The applicant should be required to provide a background check (such as a police certificate or equivalent) from their country of nationality and any other country where they have lived. This will be at the applicant's expense, including an official translation into English.
- 2.7 Where no background check is available, whether for a foreign national or a UK national with a significant period of residence abroad, the application should normally be refused, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may include, for example, long-term residence in the UK and/or in the British armed forces (for example, fifteen years or more) combined with the absence of any of the factors set out in paragraphs 3.9 to 3.12 of this guidance.
- 2.8 For foreign nationals and UK nationals with periods of residency abroad, the available background check may not be a criminal records check. For example, it may be a police certificate. In these cases, chief officers must determine the weight to be given to the document.
- 2.9 Where the applicant has been resident in another force area for a significant period (more than six consecutive months) a check against local intelligence records for that

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<sup>2</sup> The term "certificate holder" is generally used in this document to include RFDs.

force should be completed, although the final decision on the application must be taken by the chief officer in the force area in which the applicant currently resides.

- 2.10 Any previous applications in the last 10 years, including those made in another force area, must be checked for any relevant information or recorded concerns.
- 2.11 If an applicant's period of residency abroad or in another force area has been subject to a previous check, it does not need to be conducted again. It is essential that this check is recorded on the relevant licensing system.
- 2.12 Any other background checks deemed necessary (such as those set out at paragraphs 2.55 - 2.64 below) must also be completed.
- 2.13 If any new information comes to light as a result of background checks, for example if the applicant's circumstances have changed materially since the original grant or last renewal, or if they are otherwise considered higher risk, for example due to relevant information about behaviour or a medical condition, it is likely that more extensive enquiries will be necessary than if none of the above apply.
- 2.14 All records found relating to the applicant should be recorded on the application file. This will include instances where the applicant is a victim, witness or associate rather than a suspect. Assessing the relevance and weight of any records found is covered in Chapter 3 of this guidance.

### Home visits and inspections

- 2.15 A home visit must always be carried out before granting a certificate to a first-time applicant and, afterwards, further visits may be carried at the discretion of the police.
- 2.16 The home visit must include an interview<sup>3</sup> to discuss all issues relevant to suitability as set out in this guidance and must include inspection of security arrangements. The police should always interview the applicant's partner and other members of the household during the home visit unless there is a strong reason for not doing so. Where there are considered to be such strong reasons, the position should be agreed with the relevant manager, and properly recorded. Such interviews are crucial in providing the police with a more comprehensive picture of both the applicant and other household members' circumstances, including in relation to domestic circumstances or possible mental wellbeing issues, in order to assist in undertaking a comprehensive with their suitability assessment of suitability. The interview with the applicant's partner and other members of the household must be undertaken separately from the interview with the applicant, and without the applicant being present, and any disclosure which leads to a decision to refuse (or revoke) a certificate should be carefully communicated so as to minimise to the greatest extent possible the risk to the partner or other household member. If there is the possibility or evidence of domestic abuse (see paragraphs 2.57 to 2.64 below), or other wellbeing concerns, wider enquiries and investigations must take place.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Interview' in this context does not mean an interview as defined by Section 11 of Code C of the Police and Criminal Evidence Codes of Practice. It should be taken to mean a discussion with the applicant, household member or other person.

- 2.17 As indicated above, the home visit must include an inspection of the arrangements for the secure storage of firearms and shotguns when not in use. It is a condition of the issue of a firearm or shotgun certificate that they must be stored securely in order to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the guns by any unauthorised persons. The certificate should not be granted where there is any concern or doubt about the adequacy of the security arrangements or the applicant's ability or willingness to keep their firearms or shotguns secure at all times. Guidelines on security are set out in the Firearms Security Handbook<sup>4</sup>.
- 2.18 Home visits and inspections should be considered at the renewal of a certificate. If, following an application for renewal, it is determined that an inspection of security arrangements and other aspects of the home visit are not required (see paragraphs 2.69 and 2.71 below) an interview, if required, can be completed by an online video call or over the telephone although a home visit is preferable. The police may ask the applicant to supplement such a remote interview with further evidence, such as photos or videos, submitted by the applicant electronically.
- 2.19 RFD applicants must also be subject to an interview and inspection of their place or places of business and any place where firearms are to be kept. An inspection must take place at both grant and renewal, regardless of the level of risk assessment. Guidance on RFD inspections is covered in the Annex to this guidance.
- 2.20 Home visits in connection with grant and renewal applications should always be made by prior appointment and take place at a mutually convenient time.

## Referees

- 2.21 Applicants for both firearm and shotgun certificates are required to provide the names of two referees. Referees may be of any background, but must meet the following criteria:
- (i) resident in Great Britain;
  - (ii) have known the applicant personally for at least two years. The general expectation is that the referees will have known the applicant for the most recent two years and that they have had a reasonable degree of contact with the applicant during that period;
  - (iii) be of good character<sup>5</sup>;
  - (iv) is not a member of the applicant's family<sup>6</sup>; and
  - (v) is not a serving police officer; a police employee; a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC); a member of staff of a PCC; a member of, or a member of staff of, the Scottish Police Authority; or a Registered Firearms Dealer.
- 2.22 Information from referees is an important part of information gathering in order to undertake a full assessment of suitability. The police should exercise professional

<sup>4</sup> Current version available at [Firearms Security Handbook 2020](#)

<sup>5</sup> The police must carry out some background checks on the referee in order to determine his/her character.

<sup>6</sup> 'Family' is taken to mean the following: wife, husband, mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandparent and in-laws or step relations as above. Cousins are not regarded as immediate family, but co-habiting or civil partners or partners in a same-sex marriage should be considered as 'family' for these purposes and should not be accepted.

curiosity and judgement when considering the applicant's choice of referees; including police checks to confirm the suitability of those put forward. If the police consider that a referee is unsatisfactory, the applicant should be invited to put forward an alternative person (or persons). If an applicant has changed referees between an application for the grant of a certificate and a renewal application five years later, or between subsequent renewals, the reason behind this change should be explored to ensure that there is a good or satisfactory reason for the change and that there is nothing of concern behind the change.

- 2.23 Before granting a certificate to a first-time applicant, both of the applicant's referees must be contacted. Referees must be contacted by telephone, by an online video call or by a home visit, depending on the risk assessment. The police should ask the referees about any matter that they consider to be relevant to the applicant's suitability to possess firearms.
- 2.24 Referees must also be provided in support of an application for renewal. At that point, chief officers should determine whether it is necessary to contact referees, but the assumption should always be that referees will be contacted unless there are specific good reasons why this is not necessary. As noted above, particular attention should be paid in cases where the referees have changed since the original application. While there are many good reasons why a different referee or referees are provided at renewal (e.g. because of a move of location, change of circumstance, the death of an original referee etc) the police should be prepared to look into the reasons why the referees have changed, and to look more critically at the renewal application if the change of referee(s) is possibly linked to broader issues that might be a concern, and which might affect suitability to hold a firearm.
- 2.25 When contacting referees, the police must enquire about any matter relating to the applicant's suitability to possess firearms. There is no definitive set of questions to be asked, as the firearms enquiry officer must ask whatever they consider to be appropriate to the application and suitability to possess firearms. Referees must be asked if they know of any reason that might be relevant to the decision on whether the individual should be granted a certificate or their ability to possess and use a gun safely. The emphasis of the check with the referee will be in terms of the applicant's character and background, and what the applicant is like as an individual. Referees must also be asked if they understand their responsibilities as a referee, are aware of the guidance for referees which sets out those responsibilities, and confirm that they know who to contact should they have any concerns regarding the applicant's suitability in the future.<sup>7</sup> Referees should be aware that, if granted, applicants will have access to firearms over the next five years and, if necessary, during that time they should always contact the police if they have any concerns about the licence holder.

### Information about medical suitability

- 2.26 It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain information about their medical suitability from their General Practitioner (GP) or another suitably qualified doctor

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<sup>7</sup> Further information can be found in the Guide for Referees which forms part of the application form for the grant or renewal of a firearm and/or shotgun certificate (Form 201).



registered with the General Medical Council (GMC)<sup>8</sup>. The medical proforma included as part of the firearm application must be used for this purpose. The completed medical proforma must be forwarded to the police firearms licensing department dealing with their application. When the medical information is being provided to the police by a doctor from a private company, the doctor must first receive the applicant's medical information direct from the GP practice and not via the applicant.

- 2.27 Chief officers must consider information provided by a suitably qualified GMC-registered doctor for every person who applies for either the grant or renewal of a firearm or shotgun certificate, or to be registered as a firearms dealer, to assess any issues regarding medical suitability. However, this may not be required for an RFD who is already a firearm certificate holder because any relevant medical information will have already been considered as part of the firearms licensing application. If an applicant does not have a GP in the UK, they will not be able to fulfil the criteria to be issued with a firearm or shotgun certificate<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.28 In July 2019, the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs Council and the British Medical Association agreed a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of police and doctors regarding the medical assessment of firearms applicants and the ongoing monitoring of those in possession of a firearms certificate<sup>10</sup>. In Scotland similar arrangements are set out in a joint letter from the Chief Medical Officer and Police Scotland, dated 25 January 2022<sup>11</sup>. These agreements are clear that the responsibility for deciding whether or not to grant or renew a firearm or shotgun certificate is entirely a matter for the Chief Officer of Police. In carrying out this function it is appropriate for the police to consider wider evidence relating to suitability, including medical evidence. Information provided by the applicant's GP or another suitably qualified doctor will help to inform the police decision, but it does not alter the principle and fact that the decision whether or not to grant is made solely by the police.

### *Information sharing between the GP and the police*

- 2.29 The application form requires the applicant to declare any relevant medical conditions. The police may approach the applicant's GP to obtain relevant medical information, both during the application process and at any time during the validity of the certificate, once granted, if there are concerns about the applicant's continued fitness to possess firearms safely.
- 2.30 Doctors owe a duty of confidentiality to their patients, but they also have a wider duty to protect and promote the health of patients and the public<sup>12</sup>. Where a firearms applicant or certificate holder may pose a risk to themselves and/or others, including

<sup>8</sup> The term 'suitably qualified GMC-registered doctor' is used in this document to refer to a doctor with a full, specialist or GP (rather than provisional) GMC registration and a licence to practise (including where this doctor is providing this service for a private company).

<sup>9</sup> Military personnel who are posted abroad and have an MoD GP may still be regarded as resident in the UK for licensing purposes.

<sup>10</sup> [MOU between BMA, HO and Police re medical applicants \(England & Wales\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Chief Medical Officer - final version - SGHD-CMO\(2022\) 5 - Guidance for Information Sharing Requirement between Police and General Practitioners \(GPs\) and Registered.](#)

<sup>12</sup> GMC. Confidentiality: good practice in handling patient information (2017). Para 60 [GMC Guidance for Doctors - confidentiality and good practice in handling patient information](#)

in circumstances where the GP may be aware of instances of domestic abuse, the GP should, depending on the individual circumstances, share relevant information with the police on the following grounds:

- with the individual's consent;
- on public interest grounds; or
- in some circumstances, if it is legally required.

Detailed information on the potential grounds for disclosing information by GPs can be found in the GMC's guidance on confidentiality at [www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org). The GMC is the regulator for doctors.

### *Medical information required by the police*

2.31 When a person applies for a firearm or shotgun certificate or to be registered as a firearms dealer, the applicant will ask their GP, or a suitably qualified GMC-registered doctor, to provide information to the police which will confirm whether or not the applicant is or has been diagnosed or treated for any relevant medical condition which could affect their ability to possess a firearm safely. A medical proforma to be used for this purpose is part of the firearms application form and should be detached by the applicant and passed by them to the doctor for completion. This process is also to be used for the renewal of certificates.

2.32 The doctor should provide information based on a check of the applicant's full medical history. If there is a gap in the history supplied by the doctor, for example if the record from birth is not provided, the police should make a judgement as to whether the history provided is sufficient to make a decision as to suitability. If there are gaps in the medical record of a foreign national while they were resident abroad, the police will expect the applicant to have made all reasonable efforts to provide their medical history before they consider the application, taking into account the merits of the case as a whole.

### *Role of doctors in firearms licensing*

2.33 Doctors provide medical information to assist the police in their firearms licensing function and to protect public safety. They should not be asked to give general access to an applicant's medical record as this may result in doctors being in breach of the Data Protection Act 2018. Nor should they be asked to either endorse or oppose firearm or shotgun applications. Responsibility for the decision about whether a person is suitable to be granted a certificate lies with the police, not the doctor.

2.34 The medical proforma invites the doctor either to send the medical information direct to the relevant police firearms licensing department by secured NHS email or by post, or to return the completed medical proforma to the applicant to enable him or her to send it to the police along with their application form. An application for a certificate received by the police must not be granted without such medical information. If medical information is not provided, the police should inform the applicant that the application cannot be progressed in the absence of the required information from the doctor and will be refused. The police may contact the applicant, or the doctor

directly, to request missing medical information before making such a refusal, at the chief officer's discretion.

### *Relevant medical conditions*

2.35 Medical conditions that could be relevant include:

- (i) Acute Stress Reaction or an acute reaction to the stress caused by a trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder;
- (ii) suicidal thoughts or self-harm or harm to others;
- (iii) depression or anxiety;
- (iv) dementia;
- (v) mania, bipolar disorder or a psychotic illness;
- (vi) a personality disorder;
- (vii) a neurological condition: for example, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's or Huntington's diseases, or epilepsy;
- (viii) alcohol or drug abuse; and
- (ix) any other mental or physical condition, or combination of conditions, which may affect the safe possession of firearms or shotguns.

2.36 The list above is not intended to be exhaustive. Doctors should consider any mental, physical or neuro-developmental condition which may affect the individual's safe possession of a firearm or shotgun, whether now or in the future. See also paragraphs 3.40 to 3.42 of this guidance relating to the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 and/or the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003.

### *Payment of a fee*

2.37 Whether or not the doctor requests that a fee be paid by the applicant before responding to the request to supply information to the police and, if so, the level of that fee, are matters between the applicant and the doctor. It is not an issue that the police should become involved in.

### *Requesting medical information from a GMC-registered doctor other than the applicant's own GP*

2.38 The supply of relevant medical information from a doctor who has access to the applicant's medical record is necessary to determine the level of risk to public safety arising from the grant of a certificate. The certificate must not be granted or renewed if this information is not provided.

2.39 An applicant may, if they wish, approach a suitably qualified GMC-registered doctor, other than their GP, to supply the relevant medical information to the police firearms licensing department.

- 2.40 Where the doctor indicates that there are relevant medical issues and the police require further medical information in order to consider the application, the police may, at the chief officer's discretion, contact the doctor directly to discuss the application or seek further clarification. If necessary, the police should ask the applicant to contact the doctor to obtain further information, such as a medical report, about these issues. Any fee required by the doctor at this stage is a matter between the doctor and the applicant. If, having received further information, the police still have concerns about any of the medical information given or wish to obtain a more detailed report, they may request this from the doctor, the applicant's GP or, if appropriate, from a relevant specialist. The police should meet the costs associated with the provision of this additional report.
- 2.41 If the applicant has declared a relevant medical condition on the application form the police may ask the applicant to obtain and pay for, if required, a medical report to assist with their consideration of medical suitability. If a further medical report is subsequently required by the police to assist with consideration of the application, the police will pay for this.

### *The role of Local Medical Committees*

- 2.42 Good working relationships between the police and local GPs will help to ensure effective information sharing arrangements. This may include communication about the importance of information supplied by GP practices to independent doctors who have been asked to provide essential medical information for an application.
- 2.43 Engagement with the Local Medical Committee can help to secure a consistent set of arrangements in place across a local area. For example, if all parties are in agreement to developments or innovations that help to speed up application processes without compromising public safety, this is likely to be acceptable, provided that any variations from the processes described in this guidance are delivered on a voluntary basis, and that the procedures described here are adhered to if any concerns are expressed by the applicant.

### *Firearms reminder on the patient's medical record*

- 2.44 The medical proforma asks the applicant's GP to place a 'firearm application made' marker on the patient record so that the GP is able to notify the police if a new relevant medical condition arises after the proforma has been sent, but before the police have made a decision on the application.
- 2.45 When a firearm or shotgun certificate is granted or renewed or a person is registered as a firearms dealer, the police must contact the applicant's GP to ask them to place a firearms marker on the applicant's medical record to indicate that they have been issued with a firearm certificate, so that a 'firearms held' marker can replace the 'application made' marker. The police must also advise the GP in all cases when an application is refused, revoked, cancelled or expires, so that the firearm marker can be removed. The request from the police to the GP can be sent by email.
- 2.46 The purpose of having a marker on the medical record is to provide a reminder to the GP that they may need to notify the police if a person begins to suffer from a relevant

medical condition, or a relevant condition worsens significantly, specifically when this may affect the person's ability to possess a firearm safely.

- 2.47 The 'firearms held' marker remains on the patient record for five years. It is vital therefore that the police advise the GP of a certificate renewal as well as on first grant. This is added to the patient's record by the GP on a best endeavours basis, to reduce the risk that such relevant developments or changes are not reported to the police, which could endanger the certificate holder, members of his or her family, or the wider public.
- 2.48 Where the proforma has been provided by an independent doctor instead of the applicant's GP, the police must ensure that the request to place the firearms marker following grant is sent to the applicant's GP, and not to the independent doctor. This is because only the GP will have access to the GP IT patient record to place the firearm marker.
- 2.49 There is no requirement for GPs to monitor or assess a patient who currently holds a firearm certificate, but they should consider notifying the police if they become aware that relevant aspects of a certificate holder's circumstances have changed that mean they may no longer be safe to hold a firearms certificate. Doctors owe a duty of confidentiality to their patients, but they also have a wider duty to protect and promote the health of patients and the public<sup>13</sup>. This is set out in the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Home Office, police and the British Medical Association in July 2019. Full consideration must be given to the security of the patient record once the marker has been applied.
- 2.50 Detailed information on the grounds for disclosing information can be found in the GMC's guidance on confidentiality at [www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org). It is open to a GP to approach the police at any time in order to pass on information of possible concern about an individual, whether a patient or not, who possesses firearms or is applying to do so.

### *Revocation, cancellation, expiry (without renewal) or refusal*

- 2.51 The police must inform the GP within one month if a certificate is revoked or cancelled, if it expires and is not renewed, or if the application is refused. The GP can then remove the firearm marker from the patient's record.

### **Social media checks**

- 2.52 Chief officers should consider whether to conduct an open-source check of the applicant's social media presence and activity. The purpose of this is to establish whether the applicant is openly and repeatedly expressing views, or sympathising with views, which may suggest that their access to firearms would be inappropriate or unsafe. Police forces must respect the individual's right to freedom of speech, but if there is any indication of a possible propensity to violence, illegality or emotional volatility, these should be considered by the police when considering whether the applicant is fit to hold a firearms certificate.

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<sup>13</sup> GMC. Confidentiality: good practice in handling patient information (2017). Para 60: [GMC Guidance for Doctors - confidentiality and good practice in handling patient information](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/for-doctors/confidentiality-and-good-practice-in-handling-patient-information)

- 2.53 This check is intended to identify those who set out such views on open-source social media, and it may not capture those who are posting on social media more covertly, whether anonymously or under a pseudonym or on closed sites. Where there is a suspicion, through force intelligence or other sources for example, of such conduct online, chief officers should consider whether it is appropriate to conduct a more thorough investigation of the applicant's online activity.
- 2.54 If a more in-depth investigation into an applicant's social media activity is required which looks behind privacy settings, this could amount to activity regulated by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 or similar legislation and will need to meet the requirements set out there for authorisation.

### Additional checks

- 2.55 Chief officers should carry out additional, non-routine, checks if, following the initial enquiries above, they believe them to be necessary to assess suitability fully. This might be, for example, where there have been allegations of violent behaviour or domestic abuse, including non-physical forms of abuse such as controlling and coercive behaviour by the applicant, or where there has been a failure to disclose a relevant medical condition. Factors that merit the carrying out of additional checks will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. Police forces are responsible for determining when additional checks should be undertaken.
- 2.56 More generally, these checks may include, but are not limited to:
- (i) checks with other agencies, such as health professionals other than the GP, social services, probation services or multi-agency groups;
  - (ii) checks with other licensing or regulatory bodies or Government enforcement agencies;
  - (iii) a drug or alcohol test;
  - (iv) credit or other financial checks;
  - (v) information obtained from open source social media;
  - (vi) interviews with individuals other than the applicant or their referees, for example, partners, ex-partners or representatives of shooting clubs attended by the applicant;
  - (vii) background checks on partners or other individuals living at, or with unsupervised access to, the applicant's address; and
  - (viii) checks where there is an indication of domestic abuse, as set out in paragraphs 2.57 to 2.64 below.

### Additional checks by the police relating to domestic abuse

- 2.57 Evidence of domestic abuse is one of the most serious factors that should be taken into consideration in assessing an application. A statutory definition of domestic abuse, as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ("the 2021 Act"), incorporates a



range of abuses beyond physical violence and sets out that behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following: (a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse; (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct<sup>14</sup>.

2.58 The police should perform their risk assessments based on the statutory definitions set out in sections 1 to 3 of the 2021 Act<sup>15</sup>. Statutory guidance to support understanding and implementation of the Act was published in July 2022<sup>16</sup>. Officers should have regard to both the 2021 Act and the guidance when exercising their functions. The definition of domestic abuse is in two parts. The first part deals with the relationship between the abuser and the abused. The second part defines what constitutes abusive behaviour. Both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and they must be “personally connected” (as defined in section 2 of the 2021 Act). This ensures that different types of relationships are captured, including ex-partners and family members. The definition captures a range of different abusive behaviours, including physical, emotional and economic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. The statutory guidance, which supports the 2021 Act, provides further details on the different types of abuse and abusive behaviours that sit within those categories<sup>17</sup>.

2.59 The police will need to be satisfied that anybody who has perpetrated domestic abuse is not issued with, or retains, a firearms certificate, and officers must follow-up on any intelligence or reasonable suspicion that this could be the case. The firearms licensing manager will need to make an assessment of the risk, taking into account the nature of any previous history, when this occurred and the potential for a lawfully held firearm to be used in a domestic abuse situation. Where there is any information indicating that this may be a possibility or a risk, the police must:

- (i) conduct an interview with the applicant’s current partner and/or other family or household members of the applicant or their partner ensuring the safety of the possible victim is paramount at all times and appropriate risk planning has been undertaken. Given that domestic abuse may be hidden, interviews with the applicant’s partner and other family members should routinely take place in all cases as set out in paragraph 2.16 above, as part of the required

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<sup>14</sup> The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. The Police Scotland definition of domestic abuse is as follows: Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, co-habiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere, including online.

<sup>15</sup> Domestic abuse is a devolved matter in Scotland and dealt with under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. [Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland - Police Scotland](#) and [Domestic Abuse - Safer.scot](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

home visit, to help satisfy the police that there are no concerns around abusive behaviour;

- (ii) ensure that a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment is completed to inform of any immediate risk, threats or any safeguarding that may be necessary; and
- (iii) talk with any previous partners, or anyone else who may have useful information, where known and proportionate. These conversations must not be in the presence of the applicant. Police should be mindful, however, of the potential for malicious allegations to be made in such cases.

2.60 Care must be taken to consider every case on its merits. The interviews referred to above need to be conducted with sensitivity, and officers should take into account that a victim of domestic abuse may be unable to speak openly with the police for fear of further violence or reprisals. Information provided during interview must be treated as confidential.

2.61 Firearms licensing team members must have received adequate training so that they are aware of the indicators of domestic abuse, how to support victims, make referrals for support to the appropriate persons or teams to ensure appropriate safeguarding has taken place. In England and Wales, they must be aware of the College of Policing's guidance in handling domestic abuse cases: <https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse> while in Scotland they need to be aware of the guidance set out in Police Scotland's Domestic Abuse Standard Operating Procedure and Toolkit: [Marac toolkit for police - SafeLives](#).

2.62 Firearms Licensing Teams should be aware that there may be a need to take active steps to protect an applicant's partner, family member or ex-partner from reprisals. This is particularly important in the event that the person is interviewed in connection with the application and provides information which leads to a refusal or revocation.

2.63 An applicant's partner or family member is not required to give approval for the issue of the firearms certificate, and this should be made clear to them. However, a request from a partner or family member that the applicant should not hold a certificate should be taken into account. The responsibility lies with the police to make the decision based on all the evidence available.

2.64 In domestic abuse cases, checks should include checks with multi-agency partners such as a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), a multi-agency tracking and co-ordination (MATAC), a multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA), safeguarding hubs, and proactive police system checks for civil protective orders such as Non-Molestation Orders, Stalking Protection Orders, Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders and Restraining Orders. There is an opportunity to work closely and take advice from domestic abuse practitioners if appropriate. Further checks with other acquaintances may be made if considered necessary.

## Registered Firearms Dealers: servants



- 2.65 Applicants for registration as a firearms dealer are required (by Form 116) to provide details of all servants who, by virtue of section 8(1) of the Firearms Act 1968, are or will be authorised to possess, purchase or acquire firearms and ammunition in the ordinary course of the applicant's business. RFDs are also required to provide details of servants if notifying the police of an additional place of business (Form 116A).
- 2.66 The police should complete background checks and any other checks deemed necessary for each servant. Medical checks are not required for RFD servants in all cases, although the police may request medical information if specific concerns arise regarding a particular person. Such requests must respect the medical confidentiality of the RFD servant and the information must not be disclosed further (including to the RFD).
- 2.67 If the police have reason to believe that the employment of a particular person poses a threat to public safety, they should take steps, in compliance with data protection legislation, to inform the RFD, in general terms, that there is a concern and the reason for their concern.
- 2.68 It is for the RFD to make the final decision on suitability of servants. However, exercising due diligence over employees should be taken into account when assessing the RFD's suitability. Failing to act on a police recommendation about a servant without good reason will tend to show that the RFD is unsuitable. In England and Wales, in line with the Common Law Disclosure Scheme, the police should disclose, in writing to the RFD, information regarding an individual in order to enable the employer to consider risk mitigation measures in respect of employment or work done in a voluntary capacity by them<sup>18</sup>. In Scotland, this is covered by the Information Sharing – Standard Operating Procedure<sup>19</sup>.

### Checks at renewal

- 2.69 Background checks and medical checks apply to renewals as they do to grants. Medical information from a suitably qualified GMC-registered doctor should be provided on application for renewal. Beyond this, it is a matter for chief officers to consider whether any additional checks are necessary (see paragraphs 2.55 and 2.56) but, in doing so, the primary consideration must be public safety.
- 2.70 Chief officers should consider applications for renewal on a case-by-case basis. In considering whether there is a need for additional checks, the chief officer may wish to take into account the following factors:
- (i) certificate held for at least two cycles (10 years);
  - (ii) not coming to police attention adversely;
  - (iii) no concerns regarding firearms matters such as discrepancies in serial numbers;

<sup>18</sup> Further guidance is available on the Common Law Police Disclosure web page on Gov.uk at the following link: [Common Law Police Disclosure](#)

<sup>19</sup> Further guidance is available at: [Information sharing \(Scotland\)](#)

- (iv) no calls of an adverse nature to address, including in relation to suspected domestic abuse;
- (v) no intelligence suggesting criminality or other adverse concerns on behalf of the certificate holder or associates;
- (vi) recent contact with GP and no concerns raised and no failure to disclose a relevant medical condition; and
- (vii) no concerns raised by referees, partners, ex-partners, family members or anyone else, always being mindful of the potential for malicious allegations.

2.71 In light of the above considerations, the chief officer may make a judgement as to whether interviews with any of those listed in paragraph 2.70(vii) are required and, if so, whether these should be conducted in-person or by an online video call or over the telephone.

### **Disclosure and Data Protection**

2.72 Chief officers should ensure that information about applicants, servants, or other individuals subject to checks is processed in accordance with the provisions of data protection legislation and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

## 3. Assessing suitability

### A: General principles

- 3.1 The tests for the grant, renewal or revocation of a firearm or shotgun certificate under the 1968 Act are set out at the end of this Chapter. The primary consideration should always be whether the applicant can be permitted to possess a lethal-barrelled weapon without posing any danger to public safety or to the peace.
- 3.2 All the suitability criteria set out in this Chapter apply equally to firearm and shotgun certificates, to RFDs and to decisions over grant, renewal and revocation. There are some additional requirements for RFDs relating to business need, premises and practices, which are covered in the Annex.
- 3.3 Each case should be subject to a risk assessment, considering all the available information in line with the factors for consideration set out in this Chapter. The chief officer must additionally be satisfied that the applicant has good reason for possessing firearms. General guidelines on good reason are included in the non-statutory Home Office guide on firearms licensing law<sup>20</sup>.
- 3.4 Where an applicant or certificate holder moves to a different police force area during the period of police assessment, the police force where the person currently resides is responsible for the decision to issue or refuse the certificate. There must be good liaison and communication between all forces who have been involved in the assessment and the sharing of relevant information in relation to the person's suitability.
- 3.5 In limited circumstances, the law requires automatic refusal or grant (see paragraphs 3.49 and 3.50). There are also some factors, set out in paragraphs 3.28 to 3.30, that are sufficiently serious that their presence will usually result in refusal unless strong positive evidence is available to mitigate the risk.

### *Danger to public safety or the peace*

- 3.6 A danger to public safety or the peace exists if the applicant's ownership of the firearm could result in harm to self or others or disturb good order in public. This harm or disturbance could result from the applicant's own conduct or from the conduct of others. Firearms can also be used to threaten or intimidate within a wider pattern of controlling behaviour, including in relation to domestic abuse, and this risk should be considered when assessing suitability.
- 3.7 The applicant need not have been involved in any physical violence to be considered unsuitable. Abusive behaviour, a lack of self-control, recklessness, disregard for the law in other areas, or a reasonable likelihood that the firearm could be accessed by another individual who is unsuitable, is more than likely to suggest that the applicant's ownership of the firearm could result in a danger to public safety or to the peace and will normally suggest that the application be refused. Any link to terrorism or proscribed groups or organisations or organised crime will mean the applicant is unsuitable and the application must be refused.

<sup>20</sup> Guide on Firearms Licensing Law, available at: [Guide on Firearms Licensing Law](#)

- 3.8 Given the potential for loss of life or serious injury arising from the misuse of firearms and shotguns, the chief officer should weigh up the risks of granting or renewing a certificate or registration very carefully whenever there is evidence or a suggestion that the applicant could pose a danger to public safety or the to the peace. Similar considerations apply to revocation or to the return of seized firearms. Where there is a risk of misuse, the chief officer should be prepared to exercise their power to seize the firearms or shotguns and revoke the certificate (section 30A and 30C of the Firearms Act 1968) or RFD registration (section 38 of the Firearms Act 1968) to mitigate the risk to public safety and the peace.

## **B: Factors to be taken into account**

- 3.9 The chief officer should, when assessing the grant, renewal, or revocation of a firearm or shotgun certificate or RFD registration, ensure that all the available information that may be relevant to the case is considered. The factors listed below will form the foundation for the chief officer's decision in relation to whether a danger to public safety or the peace exists. The list is not exhaustive, and the police may use their knowledge of the individual case to identify other relevant information. It is acknowledged that all the information will not be available in every case, particularly where the initial checks in Chapter 2 have not indicated any need for more detailed enquiries.
- 3.10 The previous criminal, or allegedly criminal, behaviour of an applicant may indicate a future or ongoing risk to public safety or to the peace should they be permitted to possess a firearm. Information that may be relevant in indicating criminal or possible criminal behaviour will include, but is not limited to:
- (i) previous convictions, cautions, reprimands, fixed penalty notices and any other disposal including out of court disposals, for any offence (including speeding but not including parking offences); in particular, any criminal sanction for violent and abusive offences, including coercive and controlling behaviour, which indicate a risk to public safety must be taken into account, including where the threshold for the statutory prohibition in section 21 of the Firearms Act 1968 is not met;
  - (ii) all overseas convictions and disposals should be taken into account. While an overseas conviction and custodial sentence will not contribute to consideration of the statutory prohibition on possession of firearms and ammunition provided for by section 21 of the Firearms Act 1968, the police should consider the circumstances and nature of any such conviction and disposal in assessing suitability;
  - (iii) arrests, police call-outs and bind-overs;
  - (iv) any civil orders the applicant has been subject to, for example Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) or Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) or their Scottish equivalents, and compliance with those orders<sup>21</sup>;
  - (v) evidence relating to criminal proceedings that resulted in an acquittal;

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<sup>21</sup> Based on the existing offences which will be replaced as the provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are implemented.

- (vi) evidence, including intelligence, of any criminal behaviour where no charges, conviction or other disposal resulted; and
- (vii) safeguarding assessments, including domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH) assessments or those made by multi-agency safeguarding hubs<sup>22</sup>.

3.11 Other information that may be suggestive of the existence of a danger to the public safety or the peace includes, but is not limited to:

- (i) associations with known criminals or suspected criminals, including members of gangs or organised crime groups, or associations with terrorist or proscribed groups or organisations; or aggressive, abusive or anti-social behaviour or incitement to hatred against particular groups categorised by, for example, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion;
- (ii) evidence of dishonesty or any other information which raises questions about the person's integrity, for example, where they are found to have been deliberately dishonest or to have knowingly or recklessly made a false statement;
- (iii) evidence of threatening or abusive behaviour;
- (iv) evidence of anti-social behaviour;
- (v) evidence of reckless behaviour, lack of self-control or restraint, or disregard for the safety of others;
- (vi) indications that the individual will not handle the firearm responsibly;
- (vii) insufficiently secure storage arrangements;
- (viii) relationship difficulties or other domestic turmoil;
- (ix) unmanaged debts, financial pressures, abnormal financial activity, or unexplained sources of income;
- (x) relevant medical conditions including alcohol and drug abuse (see section D below);
- (xi) previous non-compliance with a firearm certificate or other types of licences held; and
- (xii) any of the above factors in relation to a person other than the certificate holder living at, or with unsupervised access to, the address or addresses.

3.12 In addition to the factors above, chief officers should consider any positive evidence supporting the application, for example, evidence of rehabilitation, change in circumstances, good character or a history of responsible ownership of firearms.

## C: Assessment

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<sup>22</sup> In Scotland the term 'protection' is used rather than 'safeguarding.'

- 3.13 In assessing whether or not the available information indicates a danger to the public safety or to the peace, the chief officer must assess:
- (i) the strength of the evidence;
  - (ii) the length of time since the incident took place (and the behaviour in the intervening period);
  - (iii) whether it is an isolated incident or part of a pattern of behaviour; and
  - (iv) the level of seriousness (see sections on “most serious and “other serious” factors below).
- 3.14 In certain circumstances (see paragraphs 3.49 and 3.50), the law requires automatic grant, refusal or revocation, without any further consideration.

### *Strength of evidence*

- 3.15 More weight will always be attached to a conviction where the evidence has been tested in court or after a disposal where there has been an admission of guilt. However, behaviour that has not resulted in a criminal sanction will still be a key part of any consideration about suitability. This may be particularly important in offence types such as domestic abuse where reporting rates are low.
- 3.16 Where information has not resulted in a conviction, chief officers should consider the credibility of the information, recognising the potential for malicious, but unfounded, allegations being made about the applicant. The applicant should be given the opportunity to comment on information about them which has not been tested by the courts, unless doing so may compromise an ongoing investigation, give rise to a risk of retribution, disclose confidential information about an individual other than the applicant, or reveal the identity of someone who has given information in confidence.
- 3.17 Where the evidence concerning an allegation or conduct is sufficient to reach a conclusion on the balance of probabilities as to whether it is true or the conduct occurred, then the balance of probabilities test should be applied. In other words, the chief officer should consider whether an allegation about the applicant or their conduct is more likely than not to be true. Chief officers should however think critically about the reliability of the source where an allegation is made against an applicant, including whether the source has any motivation to discredit the applicant.
- 3.18 In determining the weight to be given concerning an allegation or conduct of the applicant in the risk assessment, the chief officer should first investigate the facts to enable them to make findings on the truthfulness of the allegation or conduct. If, as may be the case, despite such efforts the police are unable to make such a finding, they should investigate and/or consider the facts available to make findings as to the surrounding circumstances of the allegation or conduct which may point to behaviour which is relevant to the assessment of risk.
- 3.19 In circumstances where the information falls below the balance of probabilities threshold, but the allegation or conduct of the applicant causes sufficient concern about the risk, the available information should still be treated as relevant to the assessment of risk. However, chief officers should be mindful that the weight to be

attached to an allegation or conduct by an applicant in the risk assessment is subject to the constraints of public law.

**Balance of probabilities when testing information in the assessment of risk: summary**

In most instances, where the evidence before the police is sufficient to reach a conclusion on the balance of probabilities, this should be the test that is applied.

It is, however, important that the police consider all the available evidence and information when assessing suitability. There will be circumstances where, despite the best efforts of the police, the evidence before them is insufficient to reach a conclusion on the balance of probabilities. In such circumstances, the police should not disregard such evidence but, in the interests of public safety, should weigh it alongside all the other information available to them, in reaching their decision on suitability when assessing risk.

*Length of time*

- 3.20 As a general rule the weight that should be assigned to past incidents or behaviour will diminish over time if there have been no further occurrences. However, this will depend on the nature and seriousness of the behaviour. A single serious incident in the past may be enough to demonstrate an ongoing danger to public safety in certain cases.
- 3.21 The age of the applicant at the time should also be considered. Less weight may be assigned if the applicant was under the age of 18 at the time of the incident.

*Pattern of behaviour*

- 3.22 Information or allegations relating to a pattern of behaviour should be assigned more weight than a single incident of the same type, particularly if the pattern shows escalation.
- 3.23 Chief officers will need to consider whether past behaviour has been linked to a trigger factor, such as alcohol use or the end of a relationship. The re-emergence of that trigger factor may indicate a higher risk, even if there is no ongoing pattern of behaviour.
- 3.24 When considering all the circumstances of the case, several relatively minor factors may cumulatively indicate a danger to public safety. For example, evidence of domestic instability in combination with financial or alcohol issues or a relatively minor example of reckless behaviour might indicate a volatile environment and provide sufficient reason to believe there is a danger to public safety, even if one factor alone would not.
- 3.25 A past conviction for a single relatively minor offence, for example a motoring offence, would not in itself be sufficient grounds for refusing an application.



*Relevance*

- 3.26 Chief officers should assess how relevant the information is to the applicant's ability to possess firearms without danger to public safety or the peace, bearing in mind the tests set out in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.12 above.
- 3.27 For example, evidence of or information about dishonesty or bribery is likely to be particularly serious in relation to an RFD applicant's ability to trade without danger to public safety or to the peace.

*Most serious factors*

- 3.28 There are some factors which, if the chief officer, having considered all the available information, reasonably believes to be present in an application, pose such a serious risk that the possession of firearms must only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.
- 3.29 Each application must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, evidence of behaviour or offences in any of the following categories, while not an exhaustive list, must mean that the application is refused or certificate revoked unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated:
- (i) affiliation or involvement in terrorism or proscribed groups or organisations; or aggressive, abusive or anti-social behaviour or incitement to hatred against particular groups categorised by, for example, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion;
  - (ii) affiliation with a serious organised crime group, or other involvement in serious organised crime;
  - (iii) affiliation with a gang, or other involvement in gang activities;
  - (iv) domestic abuse;
  - (v) any other violence or credible threats of violence;
  - (vi) robbery or burglary;
  - (vii) criminal use of firearms or other offensive weapons;
  - (viii) sexual offences.
- 3.30 Evidence of any of the above in relation to a family member or associate who lives at the address or has unsupervised access to the address should be considered, as it will tend to suggest that an application should be refused or the certificate revoked.
- 3.31 Where evidence falls short of the balance of probabilities, it should be considered alongside other factors as part of the overall assessment of suitability.

*Exceptional circumstances*

- 3.32 Exceptional circumstances may be demonstrated if the applicant can provide positive evidence that they no longer pose a risk: for example, evidence of rehabilitation, change of circumstances, a long period of stability and law-abiding behaviour and evidence of good character.



3.33 There may be rare cases where a certificate is not refused or revoked despite the presence of one of the factors in paragraph 3.29 above because an ongoing investigation could be compromised as a result. These decisions are a matter for the chief officer.

#### *Other serious factors*

3.34 In addition to the most serious factors above, evidence of any of the following, although not exhaustive, will tend to demonstrate a potential danger to public safety or to the peace:

- (i) any criminal offence that can be dealt with only on indictment;
- (ii) a series of convictions, cautions, fixed penalty notices or other disposals, when one on its own would not be sufficient to justify refusal or revocation;
- (iii) deliberate failure to declare relevant convictions or medical conditions, regardless of whether the certificate would have been refused if the appropriate declaration had been made;
- (iv) failure to comply with firearms licensing requirements (in Scotland, including those relating to air weapons);
- (v) alcohol or drug abuse which could result in impairment of judgement or loss of self-control;
- (vi) relevant medical conditions, based on a case-by case assessment (see paragraphs 3.37 - 3.42);
- (vii) aggressive, abusive or anti-social behaviour of a nature that is likely to lead to harm, or fear of harm, in others;
- (ix) any history of serious incidents involving firearms, or a careless approach to the handling of other dangerous items;
- (x) behaviour indicating recklessness, loss of self-control or lack of regard for public safety or to the peace, for example, drink driving; and
- (xi) any of the above in relation to a family member or associate who lives at the address or has unsupervised access to the address.

3.35 Chief officers are encouraged to think critically about whether these factors demonstrate that an applicant would pose a danger to public safety considered as part of the general assessment.

3.36 There may be circumstances in which the applicant may possess firearms without danger to public safety or to the peace, particularly if the incident occurred well in the past. Having considered all the facts of the case, the chief officer will need to consider whether any mitigating factors or positive evidence reduces the danger to public safety or the peace.

#### **D: Assessment of medical suitability**

3.37 Relevant medical conditions are set out in Chapter 2 of this guidance.

- 3.38 Chief officers should reach their own conclusions where possible as to the significance of the medical information supplied based on their own knowledge and experience. While they may wish to seek advice from the force medical officer or an independent approved medical practitioner in cases where the medical information supplied is difficult to understand, or where its significance in terms of the possession of firearms is unclear, they should not consult specialists or consultants unnecessarily.
- 3.39 The fact that a person has received treatment for certain illnesses or conditions does not make them automatically unsuitable to possess a firearm. It is one of the factors to be considered with all other evidence relating to the applicant's character and history. In such cases, account should be taken of the most recent medical information, and particular attention should be paid to whether this suggests to the police that the applicant's condition impacts on their suitability to possess a firearm including where the condition is liable to recur or fluctuate or is unstable.

### *Mental health*

- 3.40 Particular attention should be given to anyone who has previously been subject to a hospital order, guardianship order or restriction order under the provisions of Part 3 of the Mental Health Act 1983 following the commission of offences. It is important for officers to examine the nature of the offences and the length of the order in these situations. The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 contains provisions covering similar situations.
- 3.41 The police should take into account any situations where applicants have been detained under the civil powers in Part 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 where it is necessary for the health and safety of the person or for the protection of other people. The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 contains provisions covering similar situations.
- 3.42 In all cases, the final decision as to the applicant's fitness, whether on medical or other grounds, should be taken by the properly authorised officer in the usual way.

### **E: Good reason**

- 3.43 Guidance on good reason is provided in the non-statutory Home Office guide on firearms licensing law<sup>23</sup>.
- 3.44 Whilst the law allows for a firearm certificate to be revoked on the grounds that the original good reason for possessing a firearm no longer exists, a shotgun certificate may not be similarly revoked.

### **F: Outcome of assessment and final decision**

- 3.45 If the chief officer decides it is likely that the applicant cannot possess firearms without danger to public safety or the peace, they should consider, in relation to the firearms concerned, whether any conditions can be applied which would mitigate that danger. Possible conditions are listed at Appendix 3 of the non-statutory Home Office guide, although chief officers of police may impose other conditions appropriate to individual circumstances which they consider to be proportionate and

<sup>23</sup> Guide on Firearms Licensing Law, available at: [Guide on Firearms Licensing Law](#)

necessary. Where conditions are added, these should be set out clearly so that there can be no misunderstandings about their meaning. If no conditions can be found to mitigate the danger, the certificate should be refused or revoked.

- 3.46 Where information is sufficient to indicate a danger to public safety or to the peace, it will not usually be justified to reach a different outcome because of the impact on the individual's employment prospects, although a wider range of conditions may be applicable.
- 3.47 In relation to firearm certificates (but not shotgun certificates) there is an additional criterion of "fit to be entrusted with a firearm". Furthermore, a firearm certificate can be revoked where the chief officer has reason to believe that the holder "is of intemperate habits or unsound mind or otherwise unfitted to be entrusted with a firearm". There may, therefore, be limited circumstances where there is no danger to public safety or the peace, but the applicant is considered otherwise unfit to possess the firearm. In most cases, however, it is likely that evidence of unfitness, intemperate habits or unsound mind will have formed part of the assessment of danger to public safety or to the peace.
- 3.48 Decisions should be authorised at an appropriate level of seniority (see paragraphs 3.52 and 3.53 below) and in all cases the applicant must be notified of the reasons in the case of a refusal or revocation with as much detail given of the reasons for the decision as is possible to reasonably provide.

#### *Automatic refusal and revocation (prohibited persons)*

- 3.49 Section 21 of the 1968 Act prescribes when individuals are automatically prohibited from possessing firearms or ammunition, including antiques. The prohibited list is replicated at the end of this Chapter. An application from any prohibited person must be refused. If any existing certificate holder becomes a prohibited person, their certificate must be revoked.

#### *Automatic grant (section 5 authority holders)*

- 3.50 Under section 31(1) of the 1968 Act, a chief officer has no discretion to refuse a firearm certificate in respect of prohibited weapons or ammunition for which a valid authority exists issued by the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers. Similarly, under section 34(3) of that Act, a chief officer may not refuse to register an RFD on the basis that they may cause a danger to public safety or to the peace where a section 5 authority has been obtained from the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers.
- 3.51 Any concerns about applicants who hold an authority issued by the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers should be notified to the Home Office or the Scottish Government as soon as possible to enable a review of the authority.

#### *Authorising decisions*

- 3.52 All decisions should include a full and documented assessment of all the evidence available and reasons for the final decision.
- 3.53 Chief officers must ensure high risk decisions relating to firearm and shotgun certificates and RFDs are approved, as a minimum, by the firearms licensing

manager. The firearms licensing manager should seek additional support if required with significantly complex high risk cases from a more senior manager and/ or from an officer or member of staff with particular subject matter expertise. High risk decisions are those where applicants are allowed to possess firearms when:

- (i) an application for a firearms certificate or RFD status is made following a previous refusal or revocation or surrender, including by another force;
- (ii) the applicant has been assessed as suitable, based on all the facts of the case, when there is evidence of any of the most serious or serious factors under paragraphs 3.28 to 3.30; or
- (iii) a decision is made not to revoke a certificate following a review of suitability triggered by evidence of any of the factors under paragraphs 3.28 to 3.30. This includes cases where firearms have been seized to allow such enquiries to be completed and a decision is made to return those firearms. Where firearms are surrendered or seized, the firearm or shotgun certificate must also be provided to police.

### *Serving and former police officers or employees*

3.54 Where the applicant or certificate holder is a serving or former police officer or employee, chief officers should ensure that both the handling of the application and the decision are overseen by a senior manager. Should a complaint or conflict of interest arise, or any evidence in relation to the factors set out in paragraphs 3.28 to 3.30, the matter should be referred to the Professional Standards Department for its advice.

### *Reasons for refusal or revocation*

3.55 Chief officers must inform applicants, including RFDs, of each of the contributing factors in their decision to refuse or revoke a certificate, setting out the reasons clearly with reference to the evidence involved, whilst being mindful of the need to minimise to the greatest extent possible any possible risk to the partner or other household member of the applicant (see paragraph 2.16 above). It may therefore be justified for the police to withhold some or all of the factors if they can demonstrate that disclosure would present a genuine risk, for example, to an ongoing investigation, if there is a risk of retribution, if the reason involves confidential information about an individual other than the applicant, or if disclosing the reason may reveal the identity of someone who has given information in confidence.

### *Appeals and the treatment of sensitive information*

3.56 In the event of an appeal, the chief officer might consider an application for public interest immunity to avoid compromising an investigation or intelligence source. The High Court of England and Wales has ruled [in *R (on the Application of the Metropolitan Police) v. Crown Court at Kingston and Scott*, 2023] that a Closed Material Procedure (CMP) may be used in a firearms appeal, but only where it is 'critical for the fair disposal of a firearms appeal'. This means that in some cases, subject to a successful application for Public Interest Immunity, sensitive information or intelligence does not have to be disclosed to the appellant at appeal. This may be relevant where there is information or intelligence relating to domestic abuse,

terrorism, ongoing criminal investigations or other sensitive matters. It remains the position that as much information as possible should be disclosed to the appellant and non-disclosure must be justified in the particular case. As the Court said in Scott, 'the existence of the CMP jurisdiction in such cases emphatically does not mean that such a procedure should become the norm'.

3.57 Annex 2 to the Scott judgment ([High Court Judgment Template](#) [\(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#) sets out the recommended procedure for appeals where an application is made for Closed Material Procedure.

## STATUTORY TESTS FOR FIREARM AND SHOTGUN CERTIFICATES

### 1. Firearms

#### **Grant:**

Section 27(1) of the 1968 Act:

A firearm certificate shall be granted where the chief officer of police is satisfied:

- (a) that the applicant is fit to be entrusted with a firearm to which section 1 of this Act applies and is not a person prohibited by this Act from possessing such a firearm;
- (b) that he has a good reason for having in his possession, or for purchasing or acquiring, the firearm or ammunition in respect of which the application is made; and
- (c) that in all the circumstances the applicant can be permitted to have the firearm or ammunition in his possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace.

#### **Revocation:**

Section 30A(2) of the 1968 Act:

The [firearm] certificate may be revoked if the chief officer of police has reason to believe:

- (a) that the holder is of intemperate habits or unsound mind or is otherwise unfitted to be entrusted with a firearm; or
- (b) that the holder can no longer be permitted to have a firearm or ammunition to which the certificate relates in his possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace.

### 2. Shotguns

#### **Grant:**

Section 28(1) of the 1968 Act:

Subject to subsection (1A) below, a shotgun certificate shall be granted or, as the case may be, renewed by the chief officer of police if he is satisfied that the applicant can be permitted to possess a shotgun without danger to the public safety or to the peace.

- (1A) No such certificate shall be granted or renewed if the chief officer of police--
- (a) has reason to believe that the applicant is prohibited by this Act from possessing a shotgun; or
  - (b) is satisfied that the applicant does not have a good reason for possessing, purchasing or acquiring one.

**Revocation:**

Section 30C(1) of the 1968 Act:

A shotgun certificate may be revoked by the chief officer of police for the area in which the holder resides if he is satisfied that the holder is prohibited by this Act from possessing a shotgun or cannot be permitted to possess a shotgun without danger to the public safety or to the peace.

## PROHIBITED PERSONS UNDER THE FIREARMS ACT

Section 21 of the 1968 Act (extract):

- (1) A person who has been sentenced to custody for life or to preventive detention, or to imprisonment or to corrective training for a term of three years or more or to youth custody or detention in a young offender institution for such a term, or who has been sentenced to be detained for such a term in a young offenders institution in Scotland, shall not at any time have a firearm or ammunition in his possession.
  - (2) A person who has been sentenced to imprisonment for a term of three months or more but less than three years or to youth custody or detention in a young offender institution for such a term, or who has been sentenced to be detained for such a term in a detention centre or in a young offenders institution in Scotland or who has been subject to a secure training order or a detention and training order, shall not at any time before the expiration of the period of five years from the date of his release have a firearm or ammunition in his possession.
- (2A) For the purposes of subsection (2) above, "the date of his release" means--
- (a) in the case of a person sentenced to imprisonment with an order under section 47(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977 (prison sentence partly served and partly suspended), the date on which he completes service of so much of the sentence as was by that order required to be served in prison;
  - (b) in the case of a person who has been subject to a secure training order—
    - (i) the date on which he is released from detention under the order;
    - (ii) the date on which he is released from detention ordered under section 4 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; or
    - (iii) the date halfway through the total period specified by the court in making the order, whichever is the later;
  - (c) in the case of a person who has been subject to a detention and training order—
    - (i) the date on which he is released from detention under the order;
    - (ii) the date on which he is released from detention ordered under section 104 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000; or

- (iii) the date of the half-way point of the term of the order, whichever is the later;

*[2B has been repealed]*

(2C) Where —

- (a) a person has been sentenced to imprisonment for a term of three months or more, and
- (b) the sentence is suspended under section 189 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003,

the person shall not have a firearm or ammunition in his possession at any time during the period of five years beginning with the second day after the date on which the sentence is passed.

(3) A person who—

- (a) is the holder of a licence issued under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 or section 57 of the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937 (which sections provide for the detention of children and young persons convicted of serious crime, but enable them to be discharged on licence by the Secretary of State); or
- (b) is subject to a recognizance to keep the peace or to be of good behaviour, a condition of which is that he shall not possess, use or carry a firearm, or is subject to a community order containing a requirement that he shall not possess, use or carry a firearm; or
- (c) has, in Scotland, been ordained to find caution a condition of which is that he shall not possess, use or carry a firearm;

shall not, at any time during which he holds the licence or is so subject or has been so ordained, have a firearm or ammunition in his possession.

(3ZA) In subsection (3)(b) above, "community order" means—

- (a) a community order within the meaning of Part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, or a youth rehabilitation order within the meaning of Part 1 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, made in England and Wales, or
- (b) a community payback order under section 227A of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 (c 46).

(3A) Where by section 19 of the Firearms Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, or by any other enactment for the time being in force in Northern Ireland and corresponding to this section, a person is prohibited in Northern Ireland from having a firearm or ammunition in his possession, he shall also be so prohibited in Great Britain at any time when to have it in his possession in Northern Ireland would be a contravention of the said section 19 or corresponding enactment.



## 4. Continuous assessment

- 4.1 In addition to the checks at grant and renewal set out in Chapter 2 and, in relation to RFDs, in the Annex to this guidance, chief officers must ensure that processes are in place to allow continuous assessment of suitability to possess firearms or to be an RFD between grant and renewal throughout the lifetime of the certificate or RFD registration.
- 4.2 These processes should consist of either:
  - (i) ensuring other parts of the force, including command and control and domestic abuse (or public protection) units, MARAC, MATAC, MAPPA and other multi-agency structures, systematically and routinely notify the firearms licensing department as soon as possible of any new intelligence or incidents involving certificate holders or RFDs, whether by automated processes or manually; or
  - (ii) the firearms licensing department completing cross-checks of certificate holders and RFDs against all relevant local and national databases and intelligence systems on a regular basis.
- 4.3 These processes will help to determine whether there are any changes in circumstances or other factors that may make continued access to firearms inappropriate, because of a higher risk to public safety. As described in Chapter 2, any new information, including intelligence or medical concerns, that could increase the level of risk associated with a certificate holder or RFD should trigger a review of suitability following the principles set out in Chapter 3. In particular, any proceedings or sanctions for an offence including violence by a certificate holder must trigger an immediate review of continuing suitability, as this may indicate a risk to public safety. Where there has been an out of court disposal involving a certificate holder, the police must consider the circumstances of the offence when reviewing the certificate holder's ongoing suitability to possess firearms.
- 4.4 If any new information or intelligence is received relating to domestic abuse, violent conduct, or any of the other most serious matters as described in Chapter 3, or any incident that results in the surrender or seizure of firearms, a full review of the certificate holder's or RFD's suitability (and not merely the most recent incident) must immediately take place. If a certificate holder is involved in a violent or abusive offence or there is an allegation of domestic abuse, consideration should be given to interviewing the certificate holder's partner, ex-partner, family or household members in confidence about their relationship with the certificate holder and any domestic issues or other concerns they may have, including any recent changes in the certificate holder's mental health or life circumstances. New information or intelligence about other serious matters should also result in an immediate review at the chief officer's discretion (noting the requirements of paragraph 2.16, above).
- 4.5 Information about a certificate holder's or RFD's suitability may also be provided by members of the public known to the certificate holder or RFD, either directly to the force or its firearms licensing unit. All such reports must be investigated and recorded on the case file. If the evidence suggests a risk to public safety or the peace, a review of the continued suitability of the certificate holder or RFD must then take place following the principles set out in Chapter 3. Reports made confidentially



should be treated as intelligence (whilst being aware of the potential for malicious allegations) and steps taken to ensure any inquiries or subsequent court proceedings do not reveal the source of the information.

- 4.6 Where there is evidence that a certificate holder or RFD presents a higher risk but is not considered to meet the threshold for refusal or revocation, home visits or inspections, interviews or other follow-up enquiries are justified so as to check on the certificate holder's continuing suitability.

### Unannounced visits

- 4.7 In the case of certificate holders, the police should undertake an unannounced visit or inspection where it is judged necessary to do so, based on specific intelligence in light of a particular threat, or risk of harm. It is not expected that the police will undertake unannounced visits or inspections at an unsociable hour unless there is a justified and specific requirement to do so on the grounds of crime prevention or public safety concerns, and the police consider that this action is both justified and proportionate. If domestic abuse is known or suspected, a multi-agency risk assessment and safety plan may be necessary to mitigate and manage the ongoing risk, including how to communicate with household members, partners or ex-partners.
- 4.8 The police have powers to seize firearms, shotguns and ammunition where they consider there is an immediate threat to life. Where the police consider there is no immediate threat to life, a power of entry subject to obtaining a warrant is available to the police. While this is an important power, it will not be necessary in all cases where an inspection or home visit is required. The police officers must supply the certificate holder with relevant identification details. It is expected that responsible certificate holders will co-operate with reasonable requests to inspect security arrangements or other aspects of suitability, and failure to do so may be taken into account when police consider suitability to possess the firearms. To mitigate any misunderstanding on the part of the certificate holder, the police must provide a clear and reasoned explanation to the certificate holder at the time of the visit.
- 4.9 RFDs' premises should be visited from time to time to inspect stock in hand and/or the register. Dealers are required by section 40(4) of the 1968 Act to permit such inspections by police officers or civilian officers, authorised in writing by the chief officer of police. Such written authorisation must be produced on demand.

### Surrender or seizure of firearms or shotguns

- 4.10 Where a chief officer has serious concerns about a certificate holder's continued access to firearms, prompt action must be taken to ensure no preventable harm is caused to public safety. This may involve the certificate holder being invited to surrender their firearms voluntarily pending a review of their continued suitability. The police have powers to seize firearms, shotguns and ammunition where there is an immediate threat to life, but there is no specific power for the police to enter property and to seize firearms, shotguns or ammunition where there was a justification for reviewing suitability to hold a firearm certificate. In such circumstances, the police will normally need to rely on either a voluntary surrender by the certificate holder or by seeking a warrant from a Magistrate (or Sheriff in Scotland) under section 46 of the Firearms Act 1968.

- 4.11 When firearms are surrendered or seized, ammunition and the certificate must also be seized and stored securely and safely by the police or by a Registered Firearms Dealer. A properly itemised record and photograph must be provided in all cases detailing the firearms, accessories and ammunition removed.
- 4.12 Following surrender or seizure of firearms, a full review must be carried out as soon as is practicable following the principles set out in Chapter 3, and the certificate holder must be advised of the result of the review as soon as possible. The certificate holder must be kept informed of the progress of the review at frequent and regular intervals recognising, for example, that in some cases the firearms may be required for the certificate holder's work. Particular care must be taken to ensure that firearms are not returned where this may create any risk to public safety. Should the review conclude that there is no danger to public safety or the peace, the firearms, ammunition and certificates must be returned promptly, subject to the relevant authorisation.

## 5. Record keeping

- 5.1 Chief officers should record the following on the relevant national firearms licensing database:
- (i) the nominal details of all applicants and certificate holders and the status of those certificates including firearms possessed;
  - (ii) any information relevant to the suitability of the applicant, including intelligence and allegations or concerns raised even if not proven;
  - (iii) the reasons for each grant/renewal decision, whether approval or refusal;
  - (iv) details of any review of suitability, including the reasons for the review and its outcome;
  - (v) details of any appeal, including the outcome;
  - (vi) details of storage of firearms;
  - (vii) dates of visits and inspections, and types of inspection (including RFD inspections);
  - (viii) whether a medical marker has been added by the GP (if known);
  - (ix) whether the certificate holder is an officer, former officer, or police staff or former police staff (if known);
  - (x) the outcome of any checks relating to periods of residence abroad;
  - (xi) details of the applicant's GP and referees; and
  - (xii) any other information the chief officer considers useful.
- 5.2 Records should not be deleted due to the applicant moving to another force area.
- 5.3 Records of applicants and certificate holders on the relevant national firearms licensing database should be kept up to date at all times, so that accurate information on possession of firearms is available to local police via the PNC.
- 5.4 For RFDs, in the event of a variation of a condition, removal from the register or surrender of a dealer's certificate of registration, an appropriate notification should be sent to all other forces.

## 6. Duration of certificates and registrations

- 6.1 Firearm and shotgun certificates last for five years (unless they are revoked). An RFD's registration continues in force for a period of three years from the grant of registration.

### Renewals

- 6.2 The onus for making a timely application for the renewal of a certificate, or for a new registration as an RFD, rests with the holder. Chief officers should issue reminders to holders sufficiently far in advance to allow the renewal process to be completed before the original certificate or registration expires. 16 weeks or more should suffice. Certificate holders should submit a photocopy (signed and dated) of their certificate for the purposes of renewal and retain the expiring certificate in order to be able to buy ammunition. When applications for renewals are received not less than eight weeks before the certificate's expiry date, the police should make every effort to decide the application before the expiry date is reached, provided there are no suitability issues.

### *No application received*

- 6.3 Where a certificate holder or RFD fails to submit a renewal application, enquiries must be made prior to the date of expiry of the certificate or registration to confirm that the holder has suitable arrangements to dispose of their firearms and ammunition by the time that the relevant certificate or registration expires (though a shotgun certificate holder is not required to lodge their cartridges). The police must make further enquiries as a priority once the certificate or registration has expired to confirm that the holder is no longer in possession of the firearms or ammunition to which their certificate or registration related. It is of paramount importance that the police satisfy themselves that nobody retains possession of any firearms or ammunition if they no longer have a valid certificate or registration. The police should consider whether a visit to the former certificate holder's home or any other premises where they formerly kept their firearms or ammunition would be appropriate in all the circumstances.

### *Limited automatic extension of certificates*

- 6.4 The chief officer should normally make a decision on an application for renewal before the expiry of the certificate or registration, provided that the application has been made at least 8 weeks before the date of the expiry of the certificate. In the case of firearms and shotguns, where an application for renewal has been made at least 8 weeks before the date of the expiry of the certificate, and the police have not been able to make a decision on the application by the date of expiry, a limited extension of the certificate automatically comes into effect. The extension begins from the original expiry date of the certificate for a period of 8 weeks or until the police decide the application, whichever occurs first. This extension period allows the police a further period in which to decide the application. This is a statutory extension provided by section 28B of the Firearms Act 1968 and is intended to provide a safety net for applicants in exceptional circumstances where the police are unable to process and decide a case before the original expiry date of the applicant's certificate. During this period of extension the applicant will remain entitled to

possess, purchase and acquire firearms and ammunition as per the conditions of the original certificate. Chief officers should facilitate this extended entitlement by ensuring that the applicant is provided with a letter or other clear evidence that the certificate benefits from the automatic statutory extension. (A suitable letter is provided on the National Firearms Licensing Management System (or SHOGUN in Scotland)).

- 6.5 The chief officer must always endeavour to make a timely decision on an application that benefits from the extended 8 week period before expiry of the extension period. A failure to do so will leave the applicant without a lawful basis for the possession of their firearms or shotguns and associated ammunition. Should such circumstances arise, the police should work with the applicant to make the necessary arrangements for the safe, legal storage of their property until such time as the application is decided, or the police may consider the issue of a temporary permit, issued in accordance with section 7 of the Firearms Act 1968 (see below).

### *Section 7 police permit*

- 6.6 Section 7 of the Firearms Act 1968 allows chief officers to issue a temporary permit to allow for the lawful possession of a firearm and ammunition in accordance with the terms that are set out in the permit. These permits may be used to allow a certificate holder to continue to possess their firearms and ammunition where their certificate is about to expire and an application for renewal has been received. This can apply to circumstances both where an application has been received more or less than 8 weeks before expiry. These permits should not be used routinely to benefit applicants who do not submit timely renewal applications e.g. less than 8 weeks, unless in exceptional circumstances. Temporary permits should not be issued to those who are uncooperative with the police while consideration is being given to their application.
- 6.7 The police must be satisfied that the issue of a section 7 police permit does not give rise to any public safety risk, which can normally only be determined after full consideration of their renewal application. Therefore, section 7 permits issued to provide more time to consider a renewal application should only be on an exceptional basis and where unavoidable. Police are encouraged prior to issuing the temporary permit to check if there are other options, for example in cases of bereavement of a certificate holder, whether they go to another licence holder or RFD. Where required, temporary permits should be supplied with an end date no longer than is reasonable to cover the expected period of processing and should not be issued if no renewal application has been received.
- 6.8 Chief officers should also avoid routinely using temporary permits as a means of managing licensing caseloads within their force.
- 6.9 Chief Officers should ensure that their firearms licensing departments are sufficiently resourced to enable effective processing of applications, to avoid the need to rely routinely on the use of section 7 permits.
- 6.10 While it is the case that some police forces have made significant use of section 7 permits in the past to help manage certificate renewal backlogs with large numbers of

people subject to these permits, this practice must now be avoided as it conflicts with the principle of maintaining efficient and effective licensing arrangements.

**6.11 Certificate holders must not be asked to rely on an expired certificate or registration. It is unlawful for them to do so.**

# Annex:

## Additional checks and assessments for Registered Firearms Dealers (RFDs)

### Inspections

- A.1 In addition to the checks in Chapter 2, a formal inspection of all the RFD's business premises where firearms could be held should take place for all RFD applicants on grant and renewal.
- A.2 During the three-year period of registration, further formal inspections or ad hoc liaison visits should take place, on average, at least once per year. Special attention must be given to the inspection of dealerships that involve prohibited firearms and the manufacture of firearms. These should be visited more regularly to ensure security and that all relevant conditions are complied with.
- A.3 The Firearms & Explosives Officer Network of the National Crime Agency conducts firearms import, export and supply chain activity including assurance visits to firearms trade. These are conducted as individual enquiries or on a risk-assessed basis. Where possible, police and the National Crime Agency should, in order to minimise interference with legal trade and to avoid duplication, coordinate visits where possible.
- A.4 The inspection at grant or renewal should include, but is not limited to:
- (i) interviews that assess the applicant's suitability (see Chapter 3);
  - (ii) interviews that assess the applicant's expertise (see paragraph A.6);
  - (iii) ascertaining those employees that have access to firearms ('servants') and assessing due diligence practices relating to employees or other individuals associated with the business who have access to the firearms, or involvement in activities relating to the firearms (see paragraph A.7);
  - (iv) ascertaining the nature of the business, including its background, its customers and suppliers;
  - (v) ascertaining the financial stability of the business;
  - (vi) assessing compliance of business practices with the law and with licensing conditions;
  - (vii) inspection of the premises, to include security arrangements and discussion of any previous thefts;
  - (viii) a full stock take (in the case of large dealerships, extensive dip samples can be used); and
  - (ix) inspection of record keeping, to include a check of transactions (see paragraphs A.11 – A.14).

- A.5 If the initial inspection reveals cause for concern, it may be necessary to carry out additional enquiries and/or to challenge the dealer's account. Such causes for concern include, but are not limited to:
- (i) inability to produce records for stock (firearms and ammunition);
  - (ii) a lack of systems for the management of firearms or ammunition stored at the registered premises;
  - (iii) firearms and/or ammunition being stored in such a way so as to make it difficult to account for them in the dealership's records;
  - (iv) a lack of systems in place to control unauthorised access to firearms or ammunition; and
  - (v) a lack of audit procedures for the accounting of component parts.

### Expertise

- A.6 A reasonable level of experience and knowledge of firearms will be needed for a RFD to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to public safety or to the peace. RFDs should be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of any firearms legislation relating to their particular sphere of business. If, for example, they are running a retail outlet, it is reasonable to expect them to know of the scope of the Gun Barrel Proof Acts, which relate to the sale of firearms, and of the ages at which they may sell or let on hire firearms or ammunition. The assessment may best be conducted as a series of questions in a structured, planned interview.

### Servants – notification and due diligence

- A.7 As set out in paragraph 2.65 above, RFDs are required to provide details of their servants on application. Failing to notify the police of the existence of any relevant servants, to take reasonable steps to check the suitability of such servants or to act on a police recommendation about a servant without good reason may indicate a danger to public safety or the peace, even if the servant concerned is no longer employed. In England and Wales, in line with the Common Law Disclosure Scheme, police should disclose, in writing to the RFD, information regarding an individual in order to enable the employer to consider risk mitigation measures in respect of employment or work done in a voluntary capacity by them<sup>24</sup>. In Scotland, this is covered by the Information Sharing – Standard Operating Procedure<sup>25</sup>. In such matters firearms licensing teams should seek the advice of their legal advisors.

### Premises

- A.8 Each place of business at which the applicant proposes to carry on business as a dealer must be entered in the register of dealers.
- A.9 An RFD who wishes to open an additional place of business within the same police area must furnish the prescribed particulars as set out in the notification form at Part II of Schedule 5 to the Firearms Rules 1998. Provided there is no question of refusing or revoking the registration of the dealer, a chief officer may refuse to enter

<sup>24</sup> Further guidance is available on the Common Law Police Disclosure web page on Gov.uk at the following link: [Common Law Police Disclosure](#)

<sup>25</sup> Further guidance is available at [Information Sharing \(Scotland\)](#)



particular premises in, or remove them from, the register only on the grounds that it is a place in which the person cannot carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to public safety or to the peace.

- A.10 Where dealers have places of business in more than one area, they must be registered by the chief officers of each. Chief officers should consult each other in cases of this kind; the conditions of registration should be appropriate to each premises but need not be the same in each police area.

### Checking transactions

- A.11 A random sample of entries should be selected from the register for verification purposes. The number selected should be relative to the level of business being conducted, but should include:

- (i) sale or transfer of a firearm to a certificate holder within the police force area;
- (ii) sale or transfer of a firearm to an RFD within the police force area;
- (iii) sale or transfer of a firearm to a certificate holder outside the police force area; and
- (iv) sale or transfer of a firearm to an RFD outside the police force area.

- A.12 The total number of transactions conducted by the dealer since the date of the previous inspection should also be recorded in order that the chief officer can satisfy themselves that this is consistent with the stated intentions of the dealer.

- A.13 RFDs may be expected to either refuse sale, or report to the police, any transactions about which they have concerns, whether relating to the suitability of the buyer or the intended use of the firearm. Failure to do so when a concern was clearly evident should be treated as a most serious factor (see paragraphs 3.28 and 3.30 above).

- A.14 Chief officers should provide advice on detecting and reporting suspicious transactions.

### Assessing applications

- A.15 Chief officers should reject an application to register if they are satisfied that the applicant cannot be permitted to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to public safety or to the peace. “Business need” is described below (see paragraphs A.21 - A.26). Automatic grant and refusal are set out in paragraphs 3.49 to 3.51.

- A.16 In considering an application to be entered on the register of firearms dealers, chief officers should assess the named applicants. This assessment should be conducted in the same manner as an assessment as set out in Chapter 3 in order to assess whether registration would result in a risk to public safety or the peace. In addition, there are issues specific to trade or business involving firearms that will be relevant to assessing any risk to public safety. These include, but are not limited to, the matters at paragraphs A.6 to A.10.

- A.17 The police should identify the relevant factors on the basis of their knowledge of the case and assess the weight to be assigned to each, according to the strength of

evidence, length of time, pattern and seriousness (see Chapter 3). Chief officers will need to consider whether the general suitability factors, together with more specific matters, are collectively of sufficient weight to demonstrate that the applicant cannot be permitted to carry on business without danger to public safety or the peace. In addition to the public safety tests, chief officers will need to be satisfied of the RFD's business need (see below). This assessment will take into account the size and staffing of the business. These issues could also be relevant to public safety, given the potential vulnerability associated with small businesses, sole traders, and businesses operating from domestic premises.

- A.18 If the chief officer decides it is likely that the applicant cannot be permitted to carry on business without danger to public safety or the peace, they should consider whether any conditions can be applied which would mitigate that danger before making a decision to refuse (see paragraphs A.27 – A.30).
- A.19 An application to be entered on the register may be subject to automatic refusal under section 34 of the 1968 Act if the applicant has been subject to a court order made under section 45, following conviction of a relevant offence. This is in addition to the prohibition on granting a firearms certificate to a person prohibited under the Act from possessing a firearm, and section 21 of the 1968 Act, which makes it an offence for a prohibited person to be in possession of a firearm.
- A.20 The final decision on RFDs is subject to the guidance regarding the appropriate level of authorisation and the provision of reasons for refusal set out in paragraphs 3.52 to 3.53.

### Business need

- A.21 Section 34(1A) of the 1968 Act provides that the chief officer may refuse an application to be placed on the register if not satisfied that the applicant will engage in business as a dealer in firearms to a substantial extent or as an essential part of another trade, business or profession. 'Substantial' does not necessarily imply volume but should indicate a serious and genuine intention to engage in business. Each case must be decided on its merits.
- A.22 It is not intended that registration should be withheld because the turnover is comparatively small on account of a specialist service or a service directed at an exclusive section of the market. However, the dealer provisions should not be used to facilitate private collections of firearms and shotguns. Nor should they be used by a dealer to provide a service to friends and associates only, rather than to the general public or the gun trade or other trades which may involve firearms.
- A.23 A person who needs to purchase, possess or transfer firearms and ammunition as an essential part of another trade, business or profession should be registered as a dealer regardless of the extent of their transactions in firearms. Such applicants might include manufacturers of associated equipment or businesses engaged in research and development, journalism or research into firearms. In the latter cases, some documentary evidence will be required.

### *New applicants*

- A.24 Factors which should be taken into account before reaching a conclusion about business likely to be conducted include, but are not limited to, the size and location of premises for conducting the business proposed and the extent of any other business activities being carried on. The applicant should be able to show that they will be providing a service to the public or to the gun trade or other trades which may involve firearms or ammunition.
- A.25 The chief officer should normally expect to be provided with a business plan, indicating the nature of the business, which will assist the licensing staff to assess the proposed extent of trading or whether dealing in firearms will be an essential part of another business. Where a business plan is not appropriate, for example, in the case of applicants not intending to deal in firearms or ammunition for their principal livelihood and therefore less likely to 'engage in business as a firearms dealer to a substantial extent', the chief officer will want to review other available evidence regarding business need.

### *Existing applicants*

- A.26 In respect of applications from existing dealers, it should be sufficient to reach a conclusion on the basis of transactions during the previous period of registration with particular regard to any trade in the recent past and any business plan for the future. A small number of transactions may be indicative of the business type (for example, a dealer specialising in older, heritage firearms, or in high value items) and should not in itself suggest that the business activity is not legitimate. The substantial extent test is therefore to be applied on a relative, rather than an absolute, basis in the context of the business under consideration.

### **Conditions of Registration**

- A.27 A chief officer may impose, vary or revoke conditions subject to which registration is to have effect. In most cases it should only be necessary to impose the standard condition (i) (shown in Appendix 6 to the non-statutory Home Office Guide<sup>26</sup>). Other discretionary conditions are set out in Part 4 of the Firearms Security Handbook<sup>27</sup>. Before reaching a final decision on which, if any, additional conditions should be imposed on a registration, the matter should be discussed with the RFD to ensure that the proposed conditions, whilst being practical and effective, will not place an undue burden on the dealer.
- A.28 Any such conditions must be specified in the certificate of registration. Where a condition is imposed, varied or revoked during the currency of a certificate, the chief officer must give the dealer notice in writing, giving particulars. A chief officer, having given that notice, may recall the certificate of registration within 21 days for the purpose of amending it. This period of notice will allow time for any representations to be made to chief officers.
- A.29 Conditions should be used to ensure that an RFD takes reasonable precautions for the safekeeping of their firearms and ammunition. Crime prevention officers, in

<sup>26</sup> Guide on Firearms Licensing Law, available at: [Guide on Firearms Licensing Law](#)

<sup>27</sup> Firearms Security Handbook, available at: [Firearms Security Handbook 2020](#)

consultation with their firearms departments, must consider carefully the level of security required in the light of the circumstances of each case. Circumstances may vary between one district and another and between one dealer or premises and another. Much will depend on the degree of risk and the steps that it is practicable to take. Such a condition must not be used to arbitrarily restrict the nature of the business concerned. (Security requirements for dealers trading only in air weapons should normally be equivalent to level 1 from the Firearms Security Handbook 2020.)

- A.30 Where a person deals only in one type of weapon or in a restricted range of weapons at the time of the application, it may be appropriate to include a condition to the effect that any change in the nature of the business should be notified without delay to the chief officer of police, so that further safekeeping restrictions may, if necessary, be imposed. Such a condition should not be used to arbitrarily restrict the nature of the business concerned.

**STATUTORY TESTS FOR REGISTERED FIREARMS DEALERS (RFDs)****RFD (grant)**

Section 34 of the 1968 Act:

- (1) The chief officer of police shall not register an applicant as a firearms dealer if he is prohibited to be so registered by order of a court in Great Britain made under section 45 of this Act, or by order of a court in Northern Ireland under section 8(5) of the Firearms Act 1920 or any enactment of the Parliament of Northern Ireland amending or substituted for that section.
- (1A) The chief officer of police may refuse to register an applicant unless he is satisfied that the applicant will engage in business as a firearms dealer to a substantial extent or as an essential part of another trade, business or profession.
- (2) Subject to subsection (3) below, the chief officer of police may refuse to register an applicant, if he is satisfied that the applicant cannot be permitted to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace.
- (3) In the case of a person for the time being authorised by the Secretary of State under section 5 of this Act to manufacture, sell or transfer prohibited weapons or ammunition, the chief officer of police shall not refuse to enter his name in the register on the grounds that he cannot be permitted to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace.
- (4) The chief officer of police, if he is satisfied that a place of business notified to him under section 33(3) of this Act by an applicant for registration is a place at which the person cannot be permitted to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace, may refuse to enter that place of business in the register.

**Conditions of registration**

Section 36 of the 1968 Act

- (1) The chief officer of police may at any time impose conditions subject to which the registration of a person as a firearms dealer is to have effect and may at any time, of his own motion or on the application of the dealer, vary or revoke any such condition.
- (2) The chief officer of police shall specify the conditions for the time being in force under this section in the certificate of registration granted to the firearms dealer and, where any such condition is imposed, varied or revoked during the currency of the certificate of registration, the chief officer of police--
  - (a) shall give to the dealer notice in writing of the condition or variation (giving particulars) or of the revocation, as the case may be; and
  - (b) may by that notice require the dealer to deliver up to him his certificate of registration within twenty-one days from the date of the notice, for the purpose of amending the certificate.
- (3) A person aggrieved by the imposition or variation of, or refusal to vary or revoke, any condition of a firearms dealer's registration may in accordance with section 44 of this Act appeal against the imposition, variation or refusal.

**RFD (Removal from register of dealer's name or place of business)**

## Section 38 of the 1968 Act

- (1) If the chief officer of police, after giving reasonable notice to a person whose name is on the register, is satisfied that the person--
  - (a) is no longer carrying on business as a firearms dealer; or
  - (b) has ceased to have a place of business in the area; or
  - (c) cannot be permitted to continue to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace,

he shall (subject to this section) cause the name of that person to be removed from the register.
- (2) In the case of a person for the time being authorised by [the Secretary of State] under section 5 of this Act to manufacture, sell or transfer prohibited weapons or ammunition, the chief officer of police shall not remove his name from the register on the ground that he cannot be permitted to continue to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace.
- (3) If the chief officer of police is satisfied that a person registered as a firearms dealer has failed to comply with any of the conditions of registration in force under section 36 of this Act, he may remove from the register either that person's name or any place of business of his to which the condition relates.
- (4) If the chief officer of police is satisfied that a place entered in the register as a person's place of business is one at which that person cannot be permitted to carry on business as a firearms dealer without danger to the public safety or to the peace, he may remove that place from the register.
- (5) The chief officer of police shall cause the name of a person to be removed from the register if the person so desires.
- (6) If a person for the time being registered fails to comply with any requirement of section 33(5) of this Act, the chief officer of police shall by notice in writing require him to comply with that requirement and, if the person fails to do so within twenty-one days from the date of the notice or within such further time as the chief officer may in special circumstances allow, shall cause his name to be removed from the register.
- (7) A person aggrieved by the removal of his name from the register, or by the removal from the register of a place of business of his, may in accordance with section 44 of this Act appeal against the removal.
- (8) Where the chief officer of police causes the name of a firearms dealer to be removed from the register, he shall by notice in writing require the dealer to surrender his certificate of registration [and the register of transactions kept by him under section 40 of this Act] [(or, if the register is kept by means of a computer, a copy of the information comprised in that register in a visible and legible form)]; and it is an offence for the dealer to fail to do so within twenty-one days from the date of the notice:

Provided that, if an appeal is brought against the removal, this subsection shall not apply to that removal unless the appeal is abandoned or dismissed and shall then apply with the substitution, for the reference to the date of the notice, of a reference to the date on which the appeal was abandoned or dismissed.