DORSET POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER DAVID SIDWICK

13 October 2026

Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary

HMICFRS Report – An Inspection of Firearms Licensing across Police Forces in England and Wales

In line with my statutory responsibilities as Police and Crime Commissioner, I am pleased to provide the following response to the HMICFRS and the Secretary of State for the Home Office to the above report published on 28 August 2026.

I have liaised closely with the Chief Constable in submitting this response.

Please see the response below from Dorset Police to the recommendations for forces. These are in respect of the recommendations numbered 12, 13, 14, 20, 21 and 23.

The Chief Constable and I note the remaining recommendations are subject to progress by the Home Office, NPCC and PDS.

Recommendation 1
By 1 September 2029, the Home Office should establish a single firearms licensing authority for England and Wales and make it fully operational.

Such an authority should have as a minimum:

- appropriate powers.
- a decision-making function under central control.
- locally based personnel to carry out suitability visits.
- internal audit functions.
- a qualitative and quantitative performance framework that reflects both risk and timeliness.
- direct access to all relevant police intelligence and information, including access to and alerts from the Police National Database.
- standardised training; and
- external inspection by an independent body, such as His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

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Recommendation 2
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should prepare, and as soon as reasonably possible thereafter lay before Parliament, a bill setting out simplified and modernised firearms legislation for England, Wales, and Scotland.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 3
By 1 December 2027, the Home Office should introduce a firearms licensing verification system to supplement physical certificates and permits.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 4
By 1 September 2028, as part of new firearms legislation, the Home Office should require all new firearm and shotgun certificate applicants to pass a standardised assessment of competence that includes the safe handling and use of firearms.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 5
By 1 September 2028, as part of new firearms legislation, the Home Office should work to align the firearms licensing regimes for Firearms Act 1968 section 1 and section 2 firearms and ammunition.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 6
By 1 September 2027, the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing, working with the Registrar General for England and Wales and the General Register Office, should seek to develop a process to:

- notify police forces regularly of all deaths registered in their area; and
- require forces to cross-reference this information with firearm and shotgun certificate records so they can recover firearms promptly after a certificate holder's death.

We note this action is for the Home Office and the NPCC.

Recommendation 7
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office, in consultation with the College of Policing, the National Police Chiefs' Council, Police Scotland and other stakeholders, should introduce legally enforceable rules for firearms licensing on a similar legal footing to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 codes of practice.

This should replace firearms licensing guidance that is in the:

- Statutory guidance for chief officers of police.
- Guide on firearms licensing law; and
- Firearms security handbook 2020.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 8
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should make sure that new statutory rules for firearms licensing clearly set out the processes that apply to foreign nationals or those who have lived overseas for a prolonged period who apply for a firearm or shotgun certificate.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 9
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should make sure that the new statutory rules for firearms licensing clearly set out when forces must make in-person home visits as part of the firearms licensing renewal process.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 10
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should introduce a requirement for all firearm and shotgun certificate applicants, and certificate holders at renewal, to have an in-person medical assessment with an approved clinician.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 11
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should establish a statutory requirement for firearms and shotgun certificate holders to notify the firearms and explosives licensing unit and when operational, the national firearms licensing authority, within seven days of any relevant changes to their medical circumstances.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 12
By 31 March 2027, the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the visitors' permit regime to reduce the inherent risks to public safety. As part of this review, they should consider whether visitors' permits should be restricted to applicants from countries with firearms licensing and safety practices similar to those in Great Britain.

In the interim, chief constables should make sure that firearms and explosives licensing units assess visitors' permit applications in line with the Guide on firearms licensing law.

Response: All visitor permits assessed by Dorset Police are completed in accordance with the September 2026 Home Office Guide on Firearms Licensing Law. As part of the application Dorset Police requests a shooting permit from the visitor's country of origin, however the force is not able to assess whether the assessment process conducted by the country of origin is as thorough as those conducted in the UK.

Recommendation 13
By 1 December 2026, chief constables should:

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

Response: Following the appointment of a new Chief Constable, the scheme of delegation has been reviewed by the force legal department and signed by the new Chief Constable. The scheme of delegation has been deemed as fit for purpose and in line with APP. The scheme defines, in writing, the parameters of the delegated authorities and what decisions can be made and by whom. Staff have received suitable training and have the relevant experience to allow decision making in line with their delegated authorities. Force Incident Managers have been given delegated authorities which allows for 24/7 decision making around urgent decisions such as revocation. The force has documented delegated authorities against different types of decisions, including:

- Grant.
- Renewal.
- Variations.
- Refusal.
- Revocation.
- Return of firearms.

The DIP sampling process in place checks that decision-making is in accordance with the scheme of delegation. Records of DIP sampling is maintained with any feedback shared across the Firearms & Explosives Licensing Unit (FELU) through a lessons learned tracker.

Recommendation 14
By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure that they have audit and dip sampling processes in place to review firearms licensing decisions in line with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

Response: Dorset Police has a DIP sampling process in place which ensures regular checks are made of decisions made at all levels, including dip sampling conducted by the Head of FELU and ACC Operations and Innovation. A record of DIP sampling is maintained, with any feedback and learning shared across FELU via a lessons learned tracker.

Recommendation 15
By 1 September 2029, the Home Office should consider establishing a national firearms licensing tribunal composed of appropriately qualified panel members to hear appeals.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 16
By 1 December 2027, the Home Office, working with the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Police Digital Service and in consultation with other stakeholders, including Police Scotland, should introduce a secure, integrated, online national firearms register and firearms licensing system that:

- operates as a single authoritative record of all certificate applicants, holders, registered firearms dealers, those with section 5 authorities, Home Office-approved clubs, museum licensees, and visitor permit holders.
- allows Border Force to enter details of imported firearms and shotguns and monitor the export of firearms and shotguns at the border, and monitor the transit of visitor permit holders' firearms and shotguns.
- facilitates real-time verification that the recipient of a licensed firearm or shotgun holds a valid certificate before any sale or transfer.
- automates updates of the national register after sale or transfer; and
- operates as a case management system for all certificate applications, renewals and ongoing monitoring.

We note this action is for the Home Office, NPCC and PDS.

Recommendation 17
By 1 December 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing should:
- make sure each region appoints a chief officer lead for firearms licensing; and
- implement a meeting structure where regions meet and then report back to the national meeting.

We note this action is for the NPCC.

Recommendation 18
By 1 December 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing should specify the financial information that forces need to have a clear understanding of the cost of firearms licensing. Chief constables should then record and report this information, including data on actual costs, to the National Police Chiefs' Council lead annually.

We note this action is initially for the NPCC.

Recommendation 19
By 1 September 2028, the Home Office should introduce legislation to:
- make sure that firearms licensing fees increase annually, at least in line with inflation; and
- stop licensing authorities from having to refund applicants' fees when they refuse an application.

We note this action is for the Home Office.

Recommendation 20
By 1 December 2026, chief constables should establish or maintain:
- a force-level firearms licensing governance structure that is compliant with the firearms licensing authorised professional practice; and
- a qualitative and quantitative performance framework that covers both risk and how quickly firearms and explosives licensing units process applications.

Response: The ACC Operations and Transformation is the senior responsible officer and acts as the strategic lead with responsibility for governance of FELU within Dorset Police. The ACC holds as two monthly Strategic Operations Board which discusses and assess the overall performance of FELU. A performance framework is in place which measures the time within which applications for the grant and renewal of certificates are processed. The DIP sampling process assesses the qualitative aspect of these applications.

Recommendation 21
By 1 December 2026, chief constables should make sure they have a documented engagement plan in line with firearms licensing authorised professional practice.

Response: The latest engagement plan was reviewed and updated in Aug 2025 and is led by the force's Firearms Licensing Managers. The plan details the engagement objectives, key stakeholders, key engagement activities & their frequency, the key messages to be communicated, measures of success, delivery priorities, and desired outcomes. This plan is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

Recommendation 22
By 1 February 2027, the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing, working with the College of Policing and police forces, should secure long-term funding for national training for those involved in firearms licensing.

We note this action is for the Home Office and the NPCC.

Recommendation 23
With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that any firearms and explosives licensing unit practitioners who are responsible for handling and transporting firearms are qualified to handle them safely.

Response: All of the Firearms Enquiry Officers within FELU have received safe handling training of firearms and explosives. Records of this training is held on the force Kallidus system and is refreshed on an annual basis.

I hope this provides appropriate reassurance in response to the recommendations in the report.

For completeness I have copied this letter to both Mr Evans and CI Tamblyn.

This response will be published on the OPCC website HMIC Inspection Reports · Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely



David Sidwick
Police and Crime Commissioner

cc: CI Danny Tamblyn, Dorset Police
Mark Evans, Force Liaison Lead, HMICFRS