

An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England and Wales
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Avon & Somerset PCC response dated 29 September 2026

In this country we have strict controls of firearms and explosives which is really important for public safety. To maintain this robust system we need to ensure that our firearms licensing remains effective and this inspection is an opportunity to improve on this.

It should be noted that I have a legal duty to respond to inspection reports within eight weeks of their publication. However, the Constabulary have longer to address these recommendations. Below I set out the recommendations applicable to Chief Constables and the initial response to each of these

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

The Constabulary have confirmed that they assess visitors' permit applications in line with legislation and Authorised Professional Practice and have a process of managers within the team quality assuring these processes.

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

The Constabulary have confirmed that their scheme of delegation is in line with Authorised Professional Practice and have a process of managers within the team quality assuring that decision making.

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

As mentioned in the previous recommendation the Constabulary does have a process of auditing and dip sampling, but they are planning to review how effective this process is.

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.

Response

The Constabulary already have robust financial management in place and will follow guidance and reporting practice when specified by the National Police Chiefs' Council.

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

While the Constabulary does have governance in place, including performance management information they will review these processes to ensure they are working effectively.

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 Constabulary will conduct an annual review of the engagement plan, and stakeholder engagement prior to signing-off this recommendation.

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

The Constabulary maintain a list of personnel authorised to handle and transport firearms. They maintain central training records for these staff and provide regular refreshing training.

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