



ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

Firearms & Explosives Licensing Working Group



Andy Marsh, Chair
Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary
Police Headquarters, West Hill, Romsey Road
Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 5DB
(01962) 871148
chief.constable@hampshire.pnn.police.uk

11 November 2014

Dear Certificate Holder,

You may be aware of the national activity around firearms licensing which commenced on 13 October 2014. Concerns were raised about this activity by some members of the shooting community and I wanted to write to you to provide some more information about the activity.

As the national lead for firearms I have worked closely with the firearms community including the main shooting organisations for nearly four years and very intensely in the past few weeks. I understand the importance of shooting as both an essential part of some business practices as well as a much valued leisure pursuit. I want to be very clear that the vast majority of firearms owners in the UK are law-abiding and safety-conscious.

To provide some background to the national initiative on firearms licensing: over the last five years, an average of 659 firearms, shotguns and certificated items have been lost or stolen each year. This number is coming down, but there are many individuals with criminal intent who want to get hold of guns. In this context, every gun lost or stolen is one too many.

The terrorist threat was raised recently from substantial to severe, meaning that an attack is likely. Presently there is little evidence of legal firearms users being involved in terrorism or criminal activity but we need to work together to ensure that this remains the case and to do everything we can to stop legally held firearms getting into the wrong hands and being misused.

To this end, a reminder was issued to gun owners to check the secure storage of their firearms to ensure that they were not inadvertently putting people at risk by making access to a firearm easy. People were informed that this would be followed up through visits to firearm owners to check their gun was being kept securely and provide advice if it was not. A national Crimestoppers hotline was also launched, so that anyone with any concerns about a certificate holder, which may include a gun being kept insecurely or a gun owner possibly showing changes in behaviour that could indicate signs of radicalisation or extremism or involvement in criminal activity, could report their concerns anonymously.

All of these actions have been taken to prevent harm, working with those in the firearms community to explain what we were doing and why. However, I am conscious that what we are doing may have been misunderstood.

The concerns raised have been appreciated and I would like to provide some reassurance to those in the shooting community who may feel that they are being unfairly targeted. This is not our intention. It would be neither productive nor effective.



ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

Firearms & Explosives Licensing Working Group



I understand that the dedicated Crimestoppers hotline has caused concerns and anxiety amongst the shooting community, and in particular amongst certificate holders who feel that they could be targeted by those opposed to shooting. As a result of listening to the shooting community we have agreed that there will no longer be a specific firearms licensing hotline number.

However we will continue to work with Crimestoppers, in close consultation with shooting organisations, around further campaigns on firearms licensing. However, these campaigns will only use the main Crimestoppers number. We will aim to reach the shooting community, their friends, family and loved ones, asking them to be vigilant about any potential concerns or risks.

The police and Crimestoppers already receive a high volume of calls on a daily basis about a range of issues. We are experienced at screening out false and malicious reporting, and at identifying cases in which reports made by telephone, text or email may be part of an organised campaign against lawful activities. The call handlers are trained in cognitive interviewing, and engage in conversations rather than simply reading from scripts. They monitor call levels and review them for trends and patterns, closely liaising with the police about the calls and referrals they make. Together, we carefully assess the intelligence received and respond proportionately and sensitively. Our only aim is to identify and deal with genuine risks and dangers to public safety.

The police have a responsibility to keep people safe so we need to be sure that concerns about gun owners are heard and looked into; even if the vast majority come to nothing. I can assure you that all the home visits will be intelligence led, carried out professionally and that gun-owners will be treated with respect. It is important to recognise that the primary purpose of the police as the licensing authority is where possible, to prevent harm being caused with lawfully held guns and further reduce the already low levels of gun crime and harm that we experience in the UK. This is clearly in the interest of the shooting community and underlines why we will only be effective in achieving this if we work together.

Our shared interest is to safeguard the public not impede the legitimate pursuit of shooting activity.

If you are in any way unsure of the best way to maintain proper security of your guns and ammunition, then you can find current and up to date advice in Chapter 19 of the Home Office Guide on Firearms Licensing Law, which can be found on the internet at <https://www.gov.uk>. Alternatively, telephone 101 and ask to speak to your local police crime prevention or firearms licensing department.

I hope this letter has explained why this action has been taken and reassured those with concerns that it is being done proportionately and in the public interest.

Yours sincerely

Andy Marsh
Chief Constable
Chair, ACPO FELWG