

Sentence increased for Walsall man who imported illegal firearms

News story

Robert Bartell has had his sentence increased by the Court of Appeal following intervention by the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.



A man who imported illegal firearms has had his sentence increased following intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Robert Bartell, aged 54, imported a number of blank-firing pistols in February 2019 and advertised two of them for sale on the internet. The two illegal weapons were subsequently seized by the police. Bartell was sentenced in the magistrates' court to a £100 fine and £100 in costs.

Bartell did not tell the police he still had several other firearms in his possession that he had imported. He converted some of these weapons to fire live ammunition and imported two further guns in October 2019.

In November 2019, police searched Bartell's house and found a box containing firearms and ammunition in his bedroom. They also searched a shed in his back garden, which was being used as a workshop to convert the firearms to fire live ammunition and included a test-firing area.

On 28 February 2020, Bartell was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months' imprisonment at Wolverhampton Crown Court. Following a referral to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General, a remote hearing took place on 1 May. The original sentence was found to be unduly lenient and has been increased to a sentence of 5 years' imprisonment.

After the hearing the Solicitor General said:

"Bartell created a number of lethal weapons and continued to work on illegal firearms despite being sentenced only a few months earlier for having them in his possession. Converting these dangerous weapons put lives at risk, and it is important to send a strong message that crimes of this nature and repeat

offending will be met with robust action.”

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[£6.1 million funding boost to help high streets and town centres through pandemic](#)

- Business Improvement Districts set to receive £6.1 million in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- Hundreds of BIDs across England will receive support to help cover their day to day costs for the next 3 months
- Today’s funding comes on top of the government’s comprehensive package of support for business and workers during the economic emergency

Hundreds of local business partnerships across England will share £6.1m of funding to spend on projects that will help their local economies through the uncertainty of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, High Streets Minister Simon Clarke MP confirmed today (1 May 2020).

The money will be paid to local authorities and dispersed to Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). These are local business partnerships that bring developers and communities together to provide local leadership, drive regeneration and deliver projects and additional local services.

Many BIDs are now playing a crucial role during these challenging economic times, offering hands-on support to those businesses affected, including advice services, increased security to protect businesses that have closed, and providing key intelligence to local and central government on the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on their local economies.

High Streets Minister Simon Clarke MP said:

The government has announced a comprehensive programme of support for businesses to help them deal with the economic impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and today we are extending that support to Business Improvement Districts.

BIDs are uniquely placed and have a proven track record of success in supporting local businesses, empowering communities, championing our town centres and driving forward the renewal of our high

streets.

It's only right that during these unprecedented times we give them all the necessary support they need to continue operating, so that they can carry on their vital work now and crucially when we move into the recovery phase from the current crisis.

Today's funding comes on top of the government's comprehensive package of support for business and workers during the economic emergency including:

- the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme where small and large employers will be eligible to apply for a government grant of 80% of workers' salaries up to £2,500 a month, backdated to 1 March and available for at least 3 months
- £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses including a new Bounce Back Loans scheme, which will provide loans of up to £50,000 available to the smallest businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic
- a deferral of the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June 2020 – representing a £30 billion injection into the economy
- a £12.3 billion package for local authorities to deliver grants of up to £25,000 to eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors
- new temporary measures to safeguard the UK high street against aggressive debt recovery actions during the coronavirus pandemic

British BIDs Chris Turner commented:

Government has listened to the requests that we have made on behalf of the BID industry.

I am exceptionally grateful to the numerous BIDs that have actively supported and engaged with this process, particularly those who joined in our initial Q&A sessions and completed the online survey which, together, provided us with the evidence that we needed.

My thanks also must go to those levy paying businesses that have backed their BIDs in the request for assistance and to the ATCM and the BID Foundation who have worked in partnership with us on this.

I am pleased that the outcome is this announcement of much needed support for the industry.

Bill Addy, Chair of The BID Foundation, said:

BIDs have already stepped up to support those affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

This includes working with local councils, emergency services and businesses to ensure help and information gets to those who need it; supporting shuttered shops to adapt and deliver their services online; and helping to coordinate safe and secure spaces that meet health advice.

This new government support is a partial safeguard for BIDs, which are paid for by their member businesses, and will enable them in the short term to continue their vital local efforts now and to plan for the future.

Simon Quin, Executive Director of the High Streets Task Force, said:

BIDs have established networks and capacity in their local areas which provide vital coordination and help, both for businesses getting back on their feet and for communities that will need guidance and reassurance to return to the high street, when it is safe to do so.

By accessing this support, BIDs can ensure they continue to make a real difference to the recovery of our town and city centres.

BIDs are proven an effective vehicle of leveraging private investment and have a significant role to play in high street regeneration: in 2019, BIDs across England raised over £106.7 million through levy payments to invest back into their respective towns and cities. Their role will be even more important in the recovery phase from the current crisis.

BIDs have been a key tool in the development of local leadership and growth in high streets and town centres since 2004.

There are 261 BIDs in England, For more information, please visit the [British BIDs website](#).

The majority of BIDs in England collect their levies at the start of the financial year and the support for BIDs has been calculated on the basis that:

- BIDs in England spend their operational costs evenly every quarter
- BIDs in England would have spent approximately £6.1 million on operational costs

Funding to local authorities will come through a section 31 grant.

The money will go to Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), local business partnerships that bring local authorities, developers and communities together to provide local leadership, drive regeneration and deliver projects

and additional local services.

These monies will be distributed via a grant to local authorities to be passed on to BIDs, and will cover funding for 3 months and contribute to their operational costs.

Today's announcement is in addition to measures announced in March to support BIDs:

- on 23 March we announced emergency legislation to support BIDs in the Coronavirus Act 2020
- the clauses enables BIDs to extend the maximum duration of their BID arrangements until 31 March 2021, delaying BID ballots
- it delays BIDs' ballots between Royal Assent of the Act (25 March) and 31 December 2020 by extending the BID arrangements until 31 March 2021
- this allows businesses to focus on recovery from economic shock before deciding whether to participate in BID arrangements for the following 5-year period, and allows BIDs to coordinate their places' recovery

[Lifetime ISA rules changed to help people whose incomes are affected by Coronavirus](#)

People whose income has been affected by Coronavirus and who want to access their Lifetime ISA funds early will no longer face an additional withdrawal charge thanks to a temporary rule change, John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, announced today.

The move is part of the government's unprecedented package of support to help individuals, businesses and the economy during this difficult time.

The Lifetime ISA is intended to help younger people save for their first home or for later life. As with many other long-term saving products, withdrawing funds early or for unintended purposes normally incurs a charge.

But to help people who need to access to their money earlier as a result of the outbreak, the charge on unauthorised withdrawals will be temporarily reduced. This means savers will get back all the money they originally put

in, subject to any investment losses incurred on stocks and shares Lifetime ISAs.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen said:

We know that some people are experiencing financial difficulties during these unprecedented times and we want to make it as easy as possible for people to access their savings, especially if it helps them avoid falling into high cost or unmanageable debt.

That's why we are reducing the withdrawal charge for Lifetime ISAs, so people can access their funds to help get them back on their feet. This is part of the wide range of support we have put in place to help people who have been affected by Coronavirus with their finances.

The Lifetime ISA offers a 25% bonus, paid monthly, on up to £4,000 of savings each year. The current charge is 25% of the amount withdrawn. This is to disincentivise people from using LISA funds, including the generous government bonus, for a purpose other than buying a first home or for later life as intended.

The Treasury will legislate for a temporary reduction in the LISA withdrawal charge to 20% between 6 March 2020 and 5 April 2021 (inclusive). This will mean account holders will only have to pay back any government bonus they have received, but will not pay the additional withdrawal charge of 5%.

The rule change will be backdated to 6th March, so anyone who has withdrawn their money early since that date and paid a 25% charge will have the difference refunded.

It is important for people to weigh up their options when considering the use of savings at this time; further guidance on managing finances through this crisis can be found on the Money and Pensions Service website:

<https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-and-your-money>

Notes

Illustrative Example (excluding any interest, investment growth or losses that might have accrued on the account):

Person A puts the maximum £4,000 into a LISA in a given tax year. They receive a 25% (£1,000) bonus so the balance would be £5,000.

Prior to the change, if they withdrew their funds early, they would be charged 25% of the balance, which recoups the bonus plus an additional charge (equivalent to 6.25% of the money they put in) to reflect the specific purposes of the account = £1,250, returning £3,750.

Now with the charge at 20%, the original £1,000 government bonus would be

recouped but with no additional charge, returning the full £4,000 originally invested.

Further information available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lifetime-isa-withdrawal-charge-reduced-to-20>

<https://www.gov.uk/lifetime-isa>

[£12 million improvements for Manchester to Wales motorway](#)

Press release

The motorway which links Manchester to North Wales is getting £12 million worth of improvements to provide better journeys for drivers.



Highways England is carrying out a series of maintenance schemes along a 28-mile-stretch of the M56 during the next 12 months, including replacing the central reservation barrier near Warrington, revitalising a viaduct near Helsby, and resurfacing the motorway near Ellesmere Port.

Work is also due to take place next month to improve drainage on the section of the M56 near Manchester Airport (junctions 6 to 8) ahead of the main construction work on a major upgrade starting this autumn to reduce congestion and increase the motorway's capacity.

Reduced speed limits and lane closures will be in place on parts of the M56 for the safety of drivers, and road workers are following strict Public Health England safeguarding measures.

Gary Knowles, Highways England's head of scheme delivery in the north west, said:

The M56 provides an important link between Manchester and Wales, and we need to carry out a series of maintenance improvements to keep drivers safe and support essential journeys across the region.

The smoother road surface, better drainage and new central reservation barrier will improve safety for drivers, whether they're travelling to and from work, getting food to supermarkets or delivering medical supplies to hospitals.

We're doing everything we can to keep workers safe and would urge drivers to do their bit too by sticking to the speed limit for their own and our road workers' safety.

A bridge maintenance scheme is also due to start this weekend at a junction on the A55, along the route from the M56 which links Chester to Wrexham in North Wales.

Get more details and roadworks information on the [M56 maintenance schemes](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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[Changes to identity verification and signing deeds](#)

News story

We're making it easier to verify a person's identity and sign deeds for land registration purposes.



From Monday 4 May, we have introduced temporary changes when verifying a person's identity and for signing deeds. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak HM Land Registry is regularly reviewing its practice, policy and procedures, taking guidance from customer feedback.

Identity verification

In addition to conveyancers and chartered legal executives, verification can now be undertaken by people who work, or have worked, in certain professions including:

- retired conveyancers, chartered legal executives, solicitors and barristers
- bank officials and regulated financial advisers
- medical doctors, dentists and veterinary surgeons
- chartered and certified accountants
- police officers and officers in the UK armed forces
- teachers and college and university teaching staff
- Members of Parliament and Welsh Assembly members
- UK civil servants of senior executive officer (SE0) grade or above
- magistrates

The verification can also be done by way of a video call.

Further details on these changes are available in our new [practice guide 67A: temporary changes to HM Land Registry's evidence of identity requirements](#).

Signing deeds

HM Land Registry will accept deeds that have been signed using the 'Mercury signing approach'.

This means that, for land registration purposes, a signature page will need to be signed in pen and witnessed in person (not by a video call). The signature will then need to be captured, with a scanner or a camera, to produce a PDF, JPEG or other suitable copy of the signed signature page. Each party sends a single email to their conveyancer to which is attached the final agreed copy of the document and the copy of the signed signature page.

This is effective from Monday 4 May. [Practice guide 8: execution of deeds](#) has

been updated with more information.

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Last updated 4 May 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 4 May 2020

We have added a link to new practice guide 67A: temporary changes to HM Land Registry's evidence of identity requirements.

2. 1 May 2020

First published.