

UK's strict gun laws strengthened with new medical arrangements

The UK's strict laws on gun ownership will be tightened further to protect the public, with additional safety checks introduced for those applying for a licence, the government confirms today (Wednesday 20 October).

No one will be given a firearms licence unless the police have reviewed information from a registered doctor setting out whether or not the applicant has any relevant medical history – including mental health, neurological conditions or substance abuse.

[Comprehensive statutory guidance](#) has been published by the Home Office which sets a clear framework for police to follow when considering applications. For the first time, police will be legally required to have regard to the guidance, to help improve standards and consistency across forces in the UK.

Following the shocking shooting in Plymouth, where five people were killed on 12 August, the Home Secretary made clear that today's guidance will be kept under close review, and updated with any further lessons learned from the ongoing inquiries into these murders.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The UK has some of the toughest firearms laws in world, but we must never become complacent about these high standards.

This new guidance prioritises public safety above all else and we have taken considerable care to ensure it is comprehensive and enforceable, having worked closely with the medical, policing and shooting sectors.

We are delivering on our promise to the British people to ensure everyone feels safe in their communities.

From 1 November, individuals will be required to provide a medical pro forma alongside their application, filled out and signed by a registered doctor. The doctor providing the medical information must be registered with the General Medical Council and have a licence to practise.

Today's guidance was developed following extensive cooperation with the British Medical Association (BMA), as well as policing partners and shooting representatives, and incorporates lessons learned from previous shooting incidents.

Dr Mark Sanford-Wood, deputy chair of BMA GP committee England said:

We are very pleased that this new guidance reflects the BMA's significant contribution to its lengthy and complicated development. Public safety is paramount and we are delighted that this finally sets the standards, clarifies the national process and provides a clear approach for doctors and police forces to follow.

As doctors we support the government's overall message – that gun ownership is a privilege and not a right – and that firearms must be in the hands of only those who are deemed safe and responsible.

We have been emphatic throughout the consultation period that clarity was needed over where responsibility for licensing and safety lay and this has now been settled, with the BMA's points taken fully into consideration.

As we requested, this guidance states that doctors are responsible for providing medical evidence with the police force making the final judgement on the issuing of the firearms licence. Our close collaborative working with the National Police Chiefs' Council has resulted in unilateral agreement on this point.

The statutory guidance also sets out other areas the police should review before granting a licence – including examining an applicant's social media, financial history, interviewing associates, or checking with domestic violence or public protection units. The importance of this is stressed in cases where the police consider that more evidence is needed before authorising a licence.

Background checks which can be conducted by the police are already extensive, spanning everything from criminal convictions and previous run-ins with the law, to evidence of domestic turmoil, unmanaged debt or even dishonesty.

Existing laws also require a home visit by the police for first-time applicants, to ensure they have utmost confidence in an individual's suitability to own a gun with no risk to public. Two credible referees for a firearm and one for a shotgun must be provided before a licence can be issued.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing, Chief Constable Debbie Tedds, said:

We welcome the new statutory guidance for firearms licensing from the Home Office.

Police forces are responsible for issuing firearms certificates to individuals and will only do so after their application has been assessed by a dedicated team of experts, a robust process of background checks is completed and the individual meets criteria set out in the Home Office's national legislation.

The need for medical records to be viewed by officers carrying out

the licensing check is something policing has been encouraging for many years and have been utilising as part of the Home Office scheme. The consultation process has been thorough and we welcome this addition to the guidance.

Policing take this matter incredibly seriously and any advancement on the already extensive checks will help to ensure that only those who are safe to carry a firearms licence will receive one.

[View the statutory guidance](#) and the [new pro forma](#).

A public consultation on the statutory guidance and the arrangements for medical checks of applications was also held and the [government response has been published today](#).

The statutory guidance will come into effect on 1 November 2021, and has been published now to ensure that police have sufficient time to review it and incorporate changes into their processes.