



**HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland**  
Improving Policing across Scotland

**Tuesday, March 6, 2018**

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **HMICS publishes review of firearms licensing in Scotland**

Firearms licensing across Scotland has become more consistent since the introduction of the single police service, although several areas for improvement remain, states a report published today (6th March 2018).

Following an inspection of the firearms licensing function provided by Police Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) has made a number of recommendations aimed at improving licensing arrangements and the service provided to certificate holders.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Derek Penman, said: “The primary purpose of firearms licensing is to protect and promote public safety. Whilst the vast majority of firearm certificate holders use their firearms responsibly and safely, tragic incidents in the past have shown the need for effective licensing and processes, which assess the suitability of individuals to possess and use firearms.

“Significant progress has been made since the establishment of Police Scotland to develop a national firearms licensing service and to deliver a new system of air weapon licensing. There is now a single IT system for licensing, national training and new processes to assess the suitability of all applicants. There has also been a renewed focus on providing a more efficient service.”

But the review highlighted the national model for resourcing firearms licensing across Scotland has been implemented inconsistently and does not suit the needs of all local policing divisions.

HMICS also identified that although efforts have been made to improve firearms licensing arrangements, there has only been limited work to assess their effectiveness. There are no published standards, detailing the service applicants can expect to receive and HMICS believes there is a need to improve communication both internally within Police Scotland and externally with applicants and stakeholders.

Some of the officers and staff working in this area would also benefit from more training and conducting firearms licensing enquiries more frequently to maintain their knowledge and skills.

Mr Penman added: "Firearms licensing law, policy and procedures are complex and need to be supported by effective guidance for police officers and staff. Police Scotland's standard operating procedure is out of date and does not reflect current practice and should be updated as soon as possible."

HMICS welcomed the increased focus on gathering information about an applicant's medical history and their suitability to possess a firearm, and highlighted the need for Police Scotland to agree a protocol with GPs on what steps should be taken when ill health or unsuitability is identified.

Work also needs to get underway to link Police Scotland's national firearms licensing system with its command and control system so that police officers can be made aware when they are attending premises where licensed firearms may be held.

When the air weapon licensing system was introduced, the Scottish Government indicated there would be less enquiry into the background of applicants than there is for other firearms licences. However, HMICS found there is a lack of clarity over these enquiries and has recommended that Police Scotland confirm processes with the Scottish Government and thereafter implement them more consistently across the country.

As part of the inspection, HMICS sought views from members of the public who have experience of Police Scotland's firearms licensing service. Analysis of almost 1000 online responses, gathered by HMICS, showed that while two thirds were satisfied overall with the service, there were concerns around the speed and efficiency of the service.

The review also highlighted weaknesses in how the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) scrutinises change within Police Scotland and found it has taken no action to review the roll out of the new national firearms licensing model, since approving it in 2015. HMICS has taken the opportunity within this report to emphasise the need for the SPA to have robust governance arrangements in place to both authorise and oversee all the major transformation envisaged under the "Policing 2026" Strategy.

Mr Penman added: "I would have expected greater scrutiny over the new firearms licensing model approved by the SPA. This is reflective of weaknesses in wider governance and highlights the imperative for the SPA to put arrangements in place as a matter of urgency to oversee the implementation of major change. It is important that the scrutiny of major change should take place in public, providing greater transparency and increasing public awareness over the costs, benefits and timescales for implementation."

Police Scotland and the SPA will be asked to create an action plan to address the recommendations contained within the report. HMICS will monitor progress against this plan.

**Ends**

## **FOOTNOTE**

This inspection, which was carried out in the second half of 2017, focused on firearms licensing arrangements for individual certificate holders and applicants. It did not look at registered firearms dealers nor review decisions taken by Police Scotland in respect of applications.

**Ends footnote**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The HMICS Local Policing+ Inspection of firearms licensing is available to download at the HMICS website [www.hmics.scot](http://www.hmics.scot) from 1100hrs, Tuesday 6 March, 2018.

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**Ends**