

Minutes

NPCC FELWG, DURHAM, THURSDAY 7TH OCTOBER 2021.

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Attachments @ paragraphs:	<u>None</u>

1. ATTENDANCE

1.1 Apologies –

1.2 Present

Dave Orford, Durham Constabulary – Chair
Debbie Tedds – Warwickshire Constabulary
Alister Davies – Warwickshire Constabulary
Cat Starkey – Warwickshire Constabulary
Umberto Cuzzo, Durham Constabulary
Terry France, Durham Constabulary
Graham Widdecombe - Home Office
Gregg Taylor - NABIS
Christian Ashwell – NCA
Matt Irvine - NFLMS
Dr Frank Pike – College of Policing
Alison Higgins – Police Scotland
Ewan Henderson – Police Scotland
Lesley Gillespie – Police Scotland
Jonathan Cumberbatch, Staffs Police
Chris Downs - Met Police
Louise Seabrook - Herts Police
Tony Hill - Hampshire Police
Bridget Hodgson - Northamptonshire Police
Helan Reese – Dyfed-Powys
Fiona Smith - West Yorkshire Police
Sara Williams - South Wales Police
Michelle Moore - D & C Police



Janet Jones – Merseyside Police
Darren Deex – Essex Police
James O’Donnell – Essex Police
Ben Ellen – City of London
Andy Killmurray – Gloucestershire Police
Linda Eckford – Gloucestershire Police
Sharon Deighton – Cheshire Police
Lee Davenport – West Mercia Police
Mark Groothuis - Mowbray Partners
Ken Mcintosh - Mowbray Partners
Martin Parker - BASC

2. **Action Log**

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was held both ‘in person’ and virtually and DCC Orford welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

Actions & Minutes

The minutes were agreed to be a true representation and the following two actions were discharged:

- Environmental Scanning for the Zeroing –

Zeroing – environmental scanning was undertaken following the previous meeting. There were 3 main areas of opinion:

Legislation – the guidance states that there should be no prescribed limits set on the number of rounds of ammunition that can be expected during zeroing., although this will need to be compatible with the functions and consistency of the overall limits on possession.

NABIS – typically between 3 and 5 rounds. Wait for the barrel to cool. Fire a further 3 rounds as a group and test to confirm.

BASC - the process of zeroing is to ensure that the sights are aligned to the bore so that the point of impact is the same as the point of aim at the range for which the rifle is zeroed. This process takes as long as it takes and as many cartridges as are needed to achieve it, plus a few on top to make certain the zero is secure and not wandering.

It was raised within the meeting that several police armourers had stated that it should be 3 to 5 rounds and this would be the expectation and not ‘as many as you want’.

- FEO Training and the use of Grandfather rights –

There is currently no national policy in this area. The starting point would be assessing against the learning outcomes for their role, and then develop planning to get people up to speed within a determined timescale. It is important that people use the identified learning outcomes and that Chief officers are signing off that they are happy with the training/CPD their staff have undertaken.

Two actions were generated from this meeting:

- **Action – DCS Cuzzo to reinstate and chair NFLMS steering group**
- **Action from DCC Orford for the next FELWG – regional representative to canvass their areas to see if this is a wider problem and if it needs to be formally tabled with the Home Office for consideration to amend or update the forms.**

3. Main Agenda

- Online Training

Mowbray Update from Ken McIntosh – there are currently 10 forces who have signed up and are undertaking the training. There are others waiting to secure funding with two other forces fully trained and have achieved their CMI certification.

CPD is the next element Mowbray are focusing on and as well as the video and document library there is a developing online community where everyone can share good ideas, information and lessons learnt etc. There is no additional cost to the CPD other than the annual cost to the organisation.

The online resource centre has been developed and now contains several reference documents including material referencing key events or milestones relating to firearms licensing as well as the learning that came from them.

There is also a working group being put together from those using the training to assist in feedback and development of the course.

There is also work to look at providing training and CPD for other elements of the firearms licensing process including decision makers and administration staff.

Dr Frank Pike, CoP – CoP involvement with Firearms Licensing has focused on the APP and more recently looking at the learning outcomes for FEO's. Moving forward the CoP will be speaking with the Home Office regarding training and CPD for the Firearms Licensing arena as currently there's training and CPD being conducted by various means and forces have been left to do their own thing, with no checks and balances against the learning outcomes. The CoP are exploring different mechanisms around licensing individuals and accreditation of units like other existing aspects of policing.

There was a discussion regarding learning outcomes and training for Decision Makers. Neal Bickford stated that learning outcomes had already been identified and were held by the College of Policing.

- Practitioner's update

BASC – Martin Parker

Martin introduced himself and his new role within BASC. He then talked through his PowerPoint presentation (previously circulated).

Martin outlined that it his intent, over the coming 18 months, to visit every force to assist in building the best possible relationship with each Firearms Licencing unit.

There was a group discussion focusing on the use of metrics to allow forces to have a standard approach regardless of their staffing levels. It was explained to and acknowledged by Martin that all forces strive for the same thing but get there by their own means and the management was an absolute priority for departments and that should not be compromised to facilitate a performance framework or league table. There was some concern expressed regarding BASC introducing performance indicators for police forces. CC Tedds highlighted the language used on the BASC website was not conducive to developing professional working relationships.

The cost of licences was discussed and cost recovery from licence holders. It was raised that in one area 2% of the population are licence holders and are subsidised by the other 98%. The recent APCC survey, which directly references this funding point was brought into the conversation and that there was a broader review of Firearms Licensing being undertaken following the tragic events in Plymouth.

The subject of Sound Moderators being subject to certificate control as “items designed to reduce the noise or flash of a firearm”. The practitioners would like this to be reviewed with a view to them being removed from certification. It was discussed and the advantages for both agreed.

There was agreement by all parties that everyone should enter meaningful conversation rather than ‘going to war’.

- NPCC portfolio update

DDC Orford – Thanked, Mark Groothuis for his help (at short notice) with the PEER review that was carried out in Plymouth.

At this point BASC & Mowbray Partner's left the meeting.

DCC Orford introduced CC Tedds from Warwickshire who will be the new portfolio holder. She and her team will be supported moving forward with staff from Durham. This will help to ensure business continuity, that conversations are maintained, as well as ensuring the hard work that has been done previously isn't lost.

DCC Orford referenced the forthcoming changes to the Statutory Guidance and that he had written to all Chief Constables informing them the changes would be published on the 18th October with a go live date of the 1st of November.

Plymouth – DCC Orford referenced the PEER review that was commissioned by the CC of Devon & Cornwall Constabulary and their PCC and carried out by experienced officers from Durham.

Michell Moore responded from Devon & Cornwall and thanked everyone who had shown overwhelming support to both her and the Firearms Licencing team.

HMIC - DCC Orford discussed a recent conversation he had with HMICFRS & Home Office post Plymouth and advised not to push Firearms Licencing into their inspection process, but to pause and allow the new guidance to embed. DCC Orford reaffirmed his previous position that it has been an ambition to get Firearms Licencing embed into the 2023 PEEL inspection process which will hopefully happen.

- Home Office Update

Home Office - Graham Widdecombe

New Statutory Guidance – this will be published on the 18th of October and go live on the 1st November. This has been communicated to police forces and the Home Office will be communicating this to the wider stakeholder community. There have been amendments in chapters 1, 10, 11 and 16. The Home Office didn't want to hold the publication up waiting for anything to come from the Plymouth incident. Moving forward it is difficult to say whether there needs to be any more changes to the Statutory Guidance.

The group discussed the transition into the new application process and the management of 2 process's running simultaneously. The Home Office will circulate advice and guidance on how and when they expect the new process to be up and running and fully replace the existing.

A further discussion took place about the new forms, GP turnaround time and how this is then fed into Firearms Licencing units. Certain electronic platforms used by some forces will not allow for an online application unless they already have the GP report completed. The guidance is clear that it is the shooter's responsibility to get the medical information. If the new forms don't correlate with the guidance it is a matter for the Home Office to rectify or give clarity on. Those forces using different IT systems will have to identify a work around to make the changes work, which may mean some CC's making local based decisions. The paramount thing is putting public safety first and that any identified work around is justifiable.

- Practitioners (FELWG) Update

Misuse Data – Zoe Evans

Returns circulated prior to the meeting. From the last update in February there has been an additional 40 updates, 2 of which were historical.

Explosives – Fiona Smith

Nothing to report for England & Wales although there's a piece of work ongoing with Scotland and the HSE policy. This will involve Police Scotland accepting the RCA document to include the acquire only and acquiring a keep certificate rather than holders having to apply to the HSE separately.

Starting Pistols – Chris Downs

Following on from Chris introducing this item in the previous FELWG meeting there have been ongoing conversations with UK Athletics around the use of starting pistols. They (UK Athletics) estimate

that they have 250 qualified starters registered to them, each of these is anticipated to have 2 starting pistols. UK Athletics have written to all of these starters reminding them of their obligations regarding pistols, including safe and secure storage and transportation. Following this (to date) 5 starters have surrendered their guns.

The next stage of the process will be the production of a master list that once produced will be circulated to all forces to check against their records and where needed, contact the individual. UK Athletics estimate it will cost them £1 million to replace / phase out these pistols and replace them with an alternative 'non firearm' device, if this funding was available the process could be completed within 1 year. This would see the removal of approximately between 500 & 700 S5 Pistols removed from circulation.

- Best Use of Intel – PND

Umberto Cuzzo

A request for change (RFC) has been submitted to the Home Office to integrate LH & RFD records with intelligence (crime, intel, custody (including images), DA, CP, SOC, County Lines and MSHT) recorded in PND. This would create an automatic alerting system for any relevant information that is required to be considered as part an application, ongoing management of risk or renewal. This would reduce the need for double keying and manual checks and would make the best use of technology to effectively manage risk with the limited number of resources within firearms licensing units.

This also links into a wider piece of work ensuring that firearms 'Selector Forms' are submitted into PND via each force's intelligence system and the mapping of all seized firearms, component parts and ballistic material (non firearms licensing seizures). Having this additional information in one single system would allow technology to assist in identifying any links to criminality and vulnerability when assessing suitability to be a LH or RFD.

There is a concern that the Home Office Technology PND product and system owners have commented that this will not commence until 2023 at the earliest even though the risk is here and now.

The portfolio is now waiting for the cost, timescales for delivery and decision to proceed from the Home Office.

- PND Pilot with Northants

Umberto Cuzzo

The PND pilot goes live on the 1st November. This is a manual process to wash NFLMS data through PND on a monthly basis to identify any potential risk. The pilot has already identified that the manual process is inefficient, requires constant manual monitoring, does not immediately identify risk due to be a monthly process and PND requires an increase in its search and alerting capacity. All learning points are relevant for the RFC submitted and the interoperability of a new NFLMS capability.

- NCA, CUF & Prevent Board Update

Christian Ashwell gave an update on the criminal use of firearms and current threat picture including the importation and use of both original lethal purpose and non lethal purpose weapons. Working alongside the NPCC Firearms & Explosives Licensing Portfolio was seen as vital in order to understand and respond to any threat from the lawful to unlawful use of firearms. This included ensuring the integration and 'whole system approach' of relevant information and intelligence to ensure that all of law enforcement is able to implement a technology enabled safeguarding reassurance model to manage the risk of allowing a LH and RFDs to possess a firearm.

- NABIS Update

NABIS - Gregg Taylor

From the recent seizures there are several blank firing weapons being brought into the UK from Europe being converted and being used on the streets of the UK. There has been an upward trend in the quality of the conversions being done and the importation of component parts to enable a gun to be converted.

There is also a concern around auction houses and their sale of S5 weapons, which are being passed off as antiques. It's appreciated that it is too early to see if the recent legislation changes will have an impact upon this but can FELWG members be mindful of the problem and any licencing work around or solution that could be looked to assist.

- NFLMS

NFLMS - Matt Irvine

The current system is being managed and maintained in readiness for the replacement. At some point current changes planned for the current system will need to be delivered within a future capability. Funding for a replacement system is subject to SR decisions due by the end of October / beginning of November. Support received from Chief Constables, NCA and Border Force in writing to the Home Office was appreciated. Once the money has been agreed then the work on the new system should start this next financial year.

A discussion took place regarding the NFLMS working group had not met for a considerable period of time. It was acknowledged that this will need to be reinstated both to address key issues that needed to be addressed now and identify the work and decisions for the new system.

Action – DCS Cuzzo to reinstate and chair NFLMS steering group

AOB

- Tony Hill raised an issue in cases where guns and certificates have been voluntarily surrendered in suitability cases. Do forces allow these holders to lodge guns (shotguns) with another holder then continue to use them under Section 11A, or any other exemption (72 hour rule)?

This point was discussed within the room and the consensus was that the risk needed to be mitigated. How that was done would have to be determined on a case-by-case basis and where the

risk lay i.e., from an individual or a physical security issue. Revocation is always an option if appropriate.

- Tony Hill also asked that following Plymouth, in order for GPs to DQ their records, are forces being asked to provide GPs with lists of patients who are certificate holders. If so, are we aware that NFLMS will only return 50 nominals, which is relevant for the larger surgeries. PNC Admin don't believe there is an immediate solution and suggest an RFC.

Requests from GPs for a list of licence holders they may have and require a marker placing on their records. Forces have endeavoured to obtain lists from NFLMS, but it will only produce the most recent 50 records. There is nothing at present in business objectives and any possible solution would have to be a formal request to make changes to NFLMS with no guarantee if it would be authorised or when it could be delivered.

- James O'Donnell asked if there are any plans for the Home Office to amend the 201 further to include the info needed to meet the new stat guidance with regard to foreign nationals, or a UK national who has lived abroad for more than 6 months. Unless this information is on the form, forces will not know unless they make a point of asking every person after the application is received.

This was discussed and acknowledged that it was too late to change the forms prior to the go live of the 1st November however the below action was tasked by DCC Orford to be discussed at the next FELWG:

Action from DCC Orford for the next FELWG – regional representative to canvass their areas to see if this is a wider problem and if it needs to be formally tabled with the Home Office for consideration to amend or update the forms.

- Sarah Williams raised the issue of medical reports for club members

DCC Orford recognised that this was part of a bigger risk area such as servants and dealers and their access to firearms. The forthcoming changes won't close this gap, but the Home Office would need to review the legislation and may be included in their recent safety review along with gallery ranges. There was also a need for forces to have ownership and be intrusive around the clubs in their areas and try to be proactive to help prevent and deter any mismanagement by the club.

- Umberto Cuozzo had an action from the CUF prevent board regarding Regulation 28 notices issued by a Coroner to prevent future deaths

The tragic events in November 2020 which resulted in the loss of life at a miniature rifle range in Manchester were discussed and the Reg 28 from the coroner. This directly links into the ongoing Home Office Safety Consultation paper that directly references miniature rifle ranges. It is acknowledged by FELWG (both in this meeting and previous) the risk such ranges pose. It is hoped that any lessons learnt will be looked and form part of any changes going forward.

DCC Orford thanked the group for their support over the last 5 years and that he had absolute confidence that the portfolio was in a great place to hand over to CC Tedds.

Next Meeting

TBC