



Home Office

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**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Christopher Graffius  
Executive Director of Communications and Public Affairs  
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18 July 2019

Dear Christopher

**Consultation on the statutory guidance for firearms, including revised medical arrangements**

I will shortly be publishing the consultation on the introduction of statutory guidance for firearms, which as you know will include revised medical arrangements for firearms. The introduction of statutory guidance is an important step forward in helping to ensure high standards and greater consistency across the country in police firearms licensing. The revised medical arrangements, which are included in the draft guidance, seek to strengthen medical information sharing between doctors and the police so as to ensure that those in possession of firearms are medically fit, in order to safeguard the firearm certificate holder themselves and other members of the public.

In advance of the launch of the consultation I wanted to write to you to thank you for your constructive engagement with the process to develop the improved medical arrangements. These have been discussed at several meetings with shooting organisations involving myself, other colleagues in Government, and my officials, and I am very grateful for the important contribution to our thinking that you have made.

I want to reassure you that I have listened carefully to the concerns you raised during these discussions. In particular, you wished to see greater consistency in how police forces handle the medical arrangements for firearms. I am pleased that the statutory guidance will help to address this matter head on, as the police will be obliged to have regard to the guidance when it is issued. This is not the case at present because the Home Office firearms guidance to police is not statutory.

The revised guidance in the consultation will require the police to have sight of information from the GP before proceeding to grant the firearm certificate. This is a new requirement which is being brought in to protect the public by making sure that the police have the information they need about an applicant's suitability before they

issue a firearm certificate. The police have told me that this is necessary so that they can make a fully informed decision on each firearms application which, as I am sure you appreciate, is a very serious responsibility with direct implications for the safety of the public. It is important that the new requirements are fair and that there is balance in how they are being implemented. Therefore, in order to minimise the administrative burden on shooters – a point made strongly to me – the draft statutory guidance specifies that the police must write to the GP to request the information, rather than the applicant being obliged to provide it at the time of application.

There has also been a great deal of discussion about the level of the fees which may be charged by GPs to provide the medical response to the police, as shooting organisations have reported that this can vary widely. While the level of a fee if it is charged must ultimately be a matter between the applicant and their GP, I remain committed to further work with partners to help encourage greater consistency and moderation in the level of the fees. I am determined to do all that I can to continue this dialogue so that shooting applicants do not feel they are disadvantaged by the process.

As part of the work towards greater consistency over the level of charges, it is important that shooting representatives continue to monitor the fees their members are being charged and share this information with Government and with partners, so that there is greater transparency over the fees and so that inappropriate pricing can be challenged. The sharing of best practice can also be a powerful tool for improvement. There are examples of strong partnership working in particular areas, such as in Lincolnshire, where joint working between the local medical committee members and the police firearms licensing department is helping to achieve a reasonable approach to pricing.

I would hope that many shooters will regard the medical changes contained in the draft statutory guidance as beneficial because they make the firearms licensing system a safer one. Furthermore, the consistent use by GPs of the firearms marker itself has the potential to deliver longer term gains for firearms applicants. I understand your wish for a move to a ten-year firearm certificate from the current validity of five years, and that the use of the firearms marker, once it is fully established, makes this much more of a realistic possibility because it allows the GP to alert the police to relevant changes in a person's medical health following the grant of a firearms certificate.

I have had discussions with medical representatives about the arrangements and the use of the marker and am very pleased that the guidance issued to GPs by the British Medical Association now supports the use of the marker in principle although concerns remain about how the system operates in practice. The longer-term ambition must be to have the firearms marker supported by a national IT system so that all GPs are participating in the process, and this has been raised with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care who oversee GP IT support.

I would like to offer you a meeting to discuss any further issues you may have about the revised medical content. My officials will be in contact with you to see if you would find this helpful and to arrange a suitable time. Following the consultation, I look forward to having regular meetings with the shooting organisations to help assess how the new processes are working in practice.

I look forward to receiving your responses to the consultation, which I will consider carefully. In due course, following introduction of the new statutory guidance and the revised medical arrangements I will review how the new system is operating to establish if further changes are necessary.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nick Hurd". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

**RT HON NICK HURD MP**  
**Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service**