Police & Crime Commissioner FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

To:
Secretary of State for the Home Department
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

27th October 2026

Dear Colleagues

An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England & Wales
Response from Police & Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

I welcome the inspection by HMICFRS into firearms licensing in England & Wales.

Firearms licensing plays an important role in facilitating the lawful and responsible use of firearms and shotguns, whilst maintaining public safety. In a number of sectors, especially our rural communities, firearms are a necessary part of people's legitimate business and livelihoods. Ensuring the firearms licensing system is efficient and effective and prevents unsuitable people from having access is critical.

I recognise that the firearms licensing system needs change. It is based on old fashioned legislation and competes for resourcing alongside other critical policing functions.

I broadly welcome the recommendation that the Home Office should establish a single national firearms licensing authority, with the caveat that it must have sufficient resources to provide personnel for local visits and checks. There must also be sufficient ability for police forces to object to individuals living or working in their area having firearms if they believe they are unsuitable.

During the national inspection, the collaborated firearms licensing unit for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) was inspected. This resulted in the issuing of an accelerated cause of concern, to which I have made previous response.

I welcomed the findings of the inspection of BCH which recognised the scale of improvements required in the service provided to our three counties, a subject which I have been raising through my Accountability & Performance Meetings since I took office in 2024.

The changes made by BCH are now driving significant improvements in the service provided and reducing the backlogs of renewals and applications and the use of temporary permits. Governance, resourcing and communication with license holders has all improved.

Notwithstanding this, I recognise that the scale of the challenges within BCH mean a quick fix was not going to be possible and that further improvements are needed, along with time for the changes to continue to take effect.

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I continue to monitor progress through my Accountability & Performance Meetings, the latest agenda item being this month, as well as through BCH governance.

In relation to the seven recommendations for all police forces, I have received a report from the Deputy Chief Constable on progress towards addressing these.

The recommendations have been assessed for compliance. Five recommendations have been assessed as being complied with and BCH will be writing to HMICFRS to have those recommendations closed. The remaining two recommendations relate to training and quality assurance (dip sampling) which continue to form part of the improvement work commenced following the inspection in 2025.

I am assured by the Deputy Chief Constable that this work remains a priority for Hertfordshire Constabulary with an ongoing commitment to ensuring that the response to this high-risk area of public safety is both effective and sustainable, and that the service meets public expectation and national standards.

I will continue to keep this area of the Constabulary's work under regular scrutiny.

Yours faithfully

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Jonathan Ash-Edwards
Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire