



Aiming for  
EXCELLENCE

**Mike Barton LL.B.**  
**Chief Constable**

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Date: 10 December, 2013

*Dear Mr. Tweddle,*

**Re: Inquest into the death of Robert Wilkinson b.20/06/1947**

Thank you for your letter of 21st of October 2013 subsequent to the inquest which you held into the death of the above named person and in accordance with regulation 28 & 29 of the Coroner's (Investigations) Regulations 2013.

I note your comments in Section 5 of your letter that you accept that this was a difficult case for the police to manage.

Having considered your letter I will respond now to the two matters of concern you raise.

1. The benefit of a face to face meeting between a certificate holder and a member of the Firearms Licensing Team. I acknowledge that such a meeting could provide better quality of information to enable more informed decision making. Indeed I am aware that Chief Inspector [REDACTED] acknowledged this point in his evidence before you, on the 18th October 2013. I would confirm that when such a meeting

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Mr Andrew Tweddle  
H.M Coroner's Office  
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would add value to any review of a shotgun/firearms certificate holder then this will be undertaken and now forms part of the structured review process. I would add that it is important that such a meeting should have a specific aim in view of the numbers of reviews currently undertaken by Durham Constabulary.

I am pleased to report that the Constabulary's efforts to monitor 8,500 certificates has led to over 100 refusals and revocations so far this year. In many of these cases the behaviour of the certificate holder was sufficiently disturbing that a face to face meeting would not have added value to the refusal/revocation process.

2. You requested an objective review of how the Robert Wilkinson case was managed so that improvements to the system might be identified.

After the sudden death of Mr Robert Wilkinson was reported to the police a Gold Group was set up and managed by Deputy Chief Constable [REDACTED] and the facts of the case reported to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). As a consequence the decision making around this case was scrutinised by the IPCC who forwarded the Constabulary a number of key questions to answer. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] also referred the matter to the Professional and Legal Services Department (PS & LS) for investigation with a specific focus on the rationale around the circumstances of Mr Wilkinson retaining his firearms and the related record keeping. I know the IPCC were satisfied once their queries were answered that this case should be investigated locally.

The subsequent review by the PS & LS Department was undertaken with specific terms of reference and a particular focus on whether agreed protocols and procedures had been followed (post Atherton).

What became apparent from these processes was the amount of information provided to the Licensing Authority by Robert Wilkinson's immediate family in mitigation of the seriousness of his health issues and his passion for shooting. My staff endeavoured to balance Mr Wilkinson's wishes to continue with his pastime and have to a great extent relied on his family's on-going support. On reflection an earlier meeting with Mr Wilkinson once the initial GP report was received and lesser emphasis on the information from his family may have led to a different outcome.

My Professional Standards Department reported that procedures were indeed followed. Lessons were also identified and these highlighted the potential weaknesses with the current paper format of Firearms Licensing files; the number of systems used to record actions and decisions and the volume and apparent disorganised state of the (Robert Wilkinson) Licensing files which made prompt retrieval of information problematic. These matters are currently being addressed with a considerable investment in time by the Firearms Licensing Department in the rationalising and indexing of the 8,500 live certificate files. The aim is to convert all of the certificate files into a more efficient electronic format.

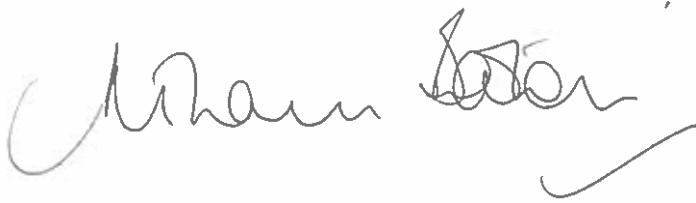
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I hope the evidence presented by Chief Inspector [REDACTED] at the inquest and my response here provides you with reassurance that Durham Constabulary continues to invest to ensure the effective and efficient management of Firearms Licensing.

We are also working closely with our Local Medical Committee and the Counties ninety GP surgeries in a pilot that seeks to more effectively and proactively identify medical risks relevant to firearms and shotgun certificate holders. This has national implications and our work is being closely followed by ACPO and Home Office.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in these issues please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Barton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Barton  
Chief Constable

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