



**HEDDLU
GOGLEDD CYMRU
NORTH WALES
POLICE**

[REDACTED]

Date 02/05/2023

[REDACTED]

Prif Gwnstabl / Chief Constable

Dear Mr M Arrow,

With regards to the Report to Prevent Future Deaths dated 8th March 2023.

The following concern were raised:

"I am concerned that the figures provided to the Home Secretary in 2021 may not reflect the accurate position, and that if sufficiently stringent checks are performed these may reveal other cases where a firearm or shotgun certificate had been seized, refused, revoked or surrendered but was subsequently issued/returned in circumstances when the certificate should not have been approved. I am concerned that if there are other cases that were not subject to a proper or thorough review of the risk of returning the weapon then the person may continue to have a firearms/shotgun certificate and hold weapons in circumstances that place the public and the licence holder themselves at risk."

To address the concerns raised regarding the accuracy of the 2021 review, it is relevant to detail the steps that we took as a Force to assure ourselves and the Home Secretary. At the time, North Wales Police identified 34 cases where firearms and shotgun certificates had been seized,

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refused, revoked, or surrendered and subsequently returned to the certificate holder over the specified time period.

A full review was conducted by a Chief Superintendent with a panel including an operational Superintendent, a Solicitor from the Force Legal Service Team and members of the Firearms Licencing Team operating as subject matter experts. All 34 cases were reviewed, and the decisions made in returning the weapons were found to be correct. I am confident, based on the 2021 review and reinforced with the subsequent implementation of the Home Office Statutory Guidance, that an accurate set of figures were submitted to the Home Secretary.

The current practice is as follows for context:

- All high-risk decisions as defined in the relevant guidance are made by the Head of Firearms Licensing. These decisions which involve refusal, grant, revocation and return of seized firearms are subject to dip sample review on a bimonthly basis by the Force Solicitor and a Superintendent. In addition, the Head of Firearms dip samples the decisions made by the other two members of the team monthly. These reviews are recorded and archived for audit purposes and the overall process was recently identified as best practice in the recent external audit (March 2023).

Furthermore, in May 2022 the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit identified that for the period 2020/21, the Force refused the most firearms related certificates in England and Wales. In addition, we revoked more certificates than any other Force in the North West region and were amongst the top 5 Forces nationally for the same period.

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I am fully cognisant of the risks and public expectations for the issuing of firearms licenses. My risk tolerance in this area is extremely low however I acknowledge that providing additional assurance in the context of national events has significant merit. I am also fully aware that there is no room for complacency, and I will always be seeking to make improvements in our working practises.

Therefore, in response to the concerns raised I propose to review all cases over the last 5 years where applications have been refused or licences revoked, but where subsequent applications or appeals by the same licence holder resulted in a grant. If the Crown Court ordered the return or grant, we will note this and review with our Force legal team.

I will aim to complete this review by 2nd October 2023 and hope that this step and the demonstrable rigour applied to the 2021 process provide the required assurance.

Your Sincerely

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Prif Gwnstabl / Chief Constable

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