



Home Office

Minister of State for Policing, Fire
and Crime Prevention

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www.gov.uk/home-office

Richard Travers
HM Coroner for Surrey

Dear Mr Travers,

Thank you for your report of 8 August about the deaths of Emma, Ellette and George Pattison, made under paragraph 7(1) of Schedule 5, of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. I offer my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of those who have been affected. The safety of the firearms licensing system is paramount and I have carefully considered the matters you raise regarding firearms licensing controls in relation to this most tragic case.

In your report you raise concerns that an applicant for a firearm certificate is able to obtain medication from an online doctor without the knowledge of their GP, giving rise to a risk that a certificate could be granted without the police being aware that the applicant has a relevant medical history, and that this enables an applicant to avoid providing full disclosure of their medical history to the police.

There are already strong controls in place in relation to an applicant's medical suitability. Every applicant is required to declare all relevant medical conditions when they complete their firearm or shotgun application form and they must also provide details of their GP. A proforma is completed by the applicant's doctor who checks the GP medical record, and details of all relevant medical conditions must be provided to the police before a firearm certificate can be issued. The GP also places a firearms marker on the patient record so that they can alert the police if the certificate holder begins to experience a relevant medical condition while the certificate is valid, so that the police can review the person's suitability and, if necessary, revoke the certificate.

I have taken careful note of the issue you raise in relation to the medical checks, that there is no requirement for an online or third-party doctor to inform a patient's GP about medication they have prescribed for them. This is an issue which the Government is considering. In the meantime, in order to further strengthen the firearms licensing process I intend to make arrangements to amend the firearms and shotgun licence application form so that in future applicants are required to provide details if they have consulted an online or third party prescriber who is not their GP. This will enable further enquiries to be made with the online or third-party prescriber, and the police may require the applicant to provide a completed medical proforma from this prescriber in relation to any relevant medical conditions. I also intend to amend the firearm certificate to include a new condition requiring the holder to inform the police if they consult an online or third-party doctor about a relevant medical condition during the five years the licence is valid. These changes will

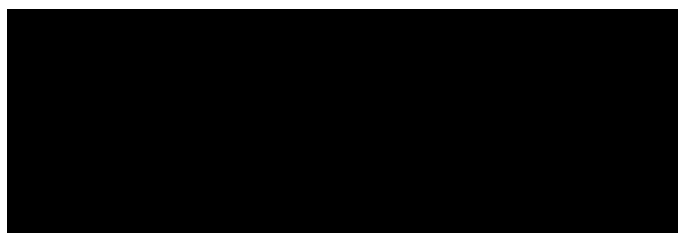
be implemented by statutory instrument and are planned to take effect in the course of 2025.

In your report you have also proposed that consideration is given to how the police can obtain full and accurate disclosure of an applicant's history of coercive controlling behaviour. The Home Office publishes Statutory Firearms Guidance for Chief Officers of Police which sets out the processes and criteria for assessing an applicant's suitability to possess firearms. This assists the police in their firearms licensing functions and promotes high standards and consistency between forces. We are intending to issue a refreshed version of the Statutory Guidance early in 2025 which will include additional guidance for the police to help ensure that those who are the perpetrators of domestic abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour, do not have access to firearms. In particular, we will strengthen the guidance so that it is clear and emphasises the need to interview partners, relatives and possibly former partners if there are allegations or suspicions of domestic abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour in the household. The Statutory Guidance for Firearms will make clear that such interviews need to be conducted with sensitivity, taking into account that a victim of domestic abuse may be unwilling to speak openly with the police for fear of further violence or reprisals, and that information provided during interview must be treated as confidential. We will also ensure that the Statutory Guidance is sufficiently clear in relation to other allegations of violence and the need for the police to investigate such allegations and take this information into account when making their assessment of suitability.

There is a further safeguard contained in the separate Statutory Guidance framework in relation to controlling or coercive behaviour, published by the Department and which was updated in July 2023 and applies to those investigating offences in relation to controlling or coercive behaviour. This states at paragraph 51 that in domestic abuse cases, if firearms are held by the perpetrator or are in the home, the local police firearms licensing team should be notified. The guidance also advises that for intelligence purposes and to mitigate risk officers attending future calls must have this information.

Thank you again for your report. We will review firearms licensing to ensure that the strongest possible safeguards are in place.

Yours sincerely,

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