

Firearms Licensing in Scotland

A joint statement 25th March 2020

Police Scotland, like all police services in the United Kingdom, are facing unprecedented demands at a time of national crisis in dealing with the effects of the Covid – 19 pandemic.

We, the principal membership shooting organisations of the Scottish Firearms Licensing Practitioners Group, recognise the difficulties faced by Police Scotland and their staff and fully understand that it cannot be business as usual given the unique circumstances we are all facing. We do not live in normal times.

Police Scotland have made us aware of the interim arrangements that will be operating as they seek to deal with the demands of an emergency service of the current situation, hampered by diminishing resources as staff either fall ill or self-isolate.

Police Scotland are suspending the processing of most applications for grants of either firearm, shotgun or air weapon certificates and applications for variations or visitor permits. We are aware that at this time applications for visitor permits have reduced dramatically in view of travel restrictions and given the current operating restrictions in non-essential retail premises, it is likely that demand for variations will also be small so the impact of this on these services should be minimal.

The processing of certificate renewals will still take place and those seeking to renew will be contacted by Police Scotland in due course. Applications will be taken in context of applicant activity prior to this pandemic and will not be viewed negatively due to the current social restrictions in place. In view of the latest Government messaging for the management of Covid-19, renewals will take place remotely, without the need for home visits. Police Scotland are acutely aware of the demands on General Practitioners at this time and will adopt a pragmatic approach with respect to the requirement for General Practitioner involvement in firearms licensing. Police Scotland are keen to reinforce that as each case will be judged on its merits it is unable to provide definitive guidance for every scenario. This is understandable.

If an application is to grant or renew a certificate for employment purposes (e.g. gamekeeping, professional pest control or working in the oil industry) Police Scotland have said that they will do their utmost to process these applications as best they can, and we support this prioritisation.

Police Scotland have also taken the decision to return centralised decision making back to the processing centres during this time to allow the policing divisions to deal with their pressing demands. This will allow for decisions to be made quickly and consistently and will hopefully ensure Police Scotland do not need to rely on the eight-week extension or the issue of temporary Section 7 permits currently available to them, which operationally can cause problems.

To be clear, we collectively understand that these are critical times for the country. It is not business as usual and this must be fully understood. We do hope that, when the country returns to a more even keel, the commercial, personal and sporting needs of Scottish communities are recognised and that visitor permits and variations are dealt with quickly to allow businesses and the shooting communities to pick themselves up and move forwards to enjoy the wider rewards that an active target shooting, game shooting and deer stalking community provides.

During these uncertain times, we understand that pressures can increase in respect of employment concerns and also anxiety in relation to health. The members of the Scottish Firearms Licensing Practitioners Group, including Police Scotland and Scottish Government, have been working on a leaflet explaining why it's important to say if you're not okay, recognising the challenges of poor mental health and provide some advice about what help is available to certificate holders (as well as their friends and families) should they have concerns. It also explains the police position in respect of such matters. Due to the current crisis, it has been decided to publish this material now, ahead of formal publication, to get this key message out that support is available. It is important for the whole shooting community, including friends and families, to make themselves aware of this advice and where they can turn to for support. This advice will be published on the respective websites.

These are unprecedented times and key workers are being asked to perform important roles while no doubt worrying about the future, the welfare of their families, loved ones and themselves. We ask the shooting community to be pragmatic and understanding. Please respect the latest Government and medical messaging and limit contact with the firearms licensing departments unless it is a matter of urgency.

By working as one Scottish shooting community, we can limit the impact this virus can have to ensure life can return to normal as soon as possible. We thank you for your support.

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (Scotland)

Gun Trade Association

Scottish Association for Country Sports

Scottish Countryside Alliance

Scottish Gamekeepers Association

Scottish Target Shooting