

Report to the Commissioner's Governance Board

Date: 1 March 2017

Title: Firearms Licensing Update

From: Chief Constable



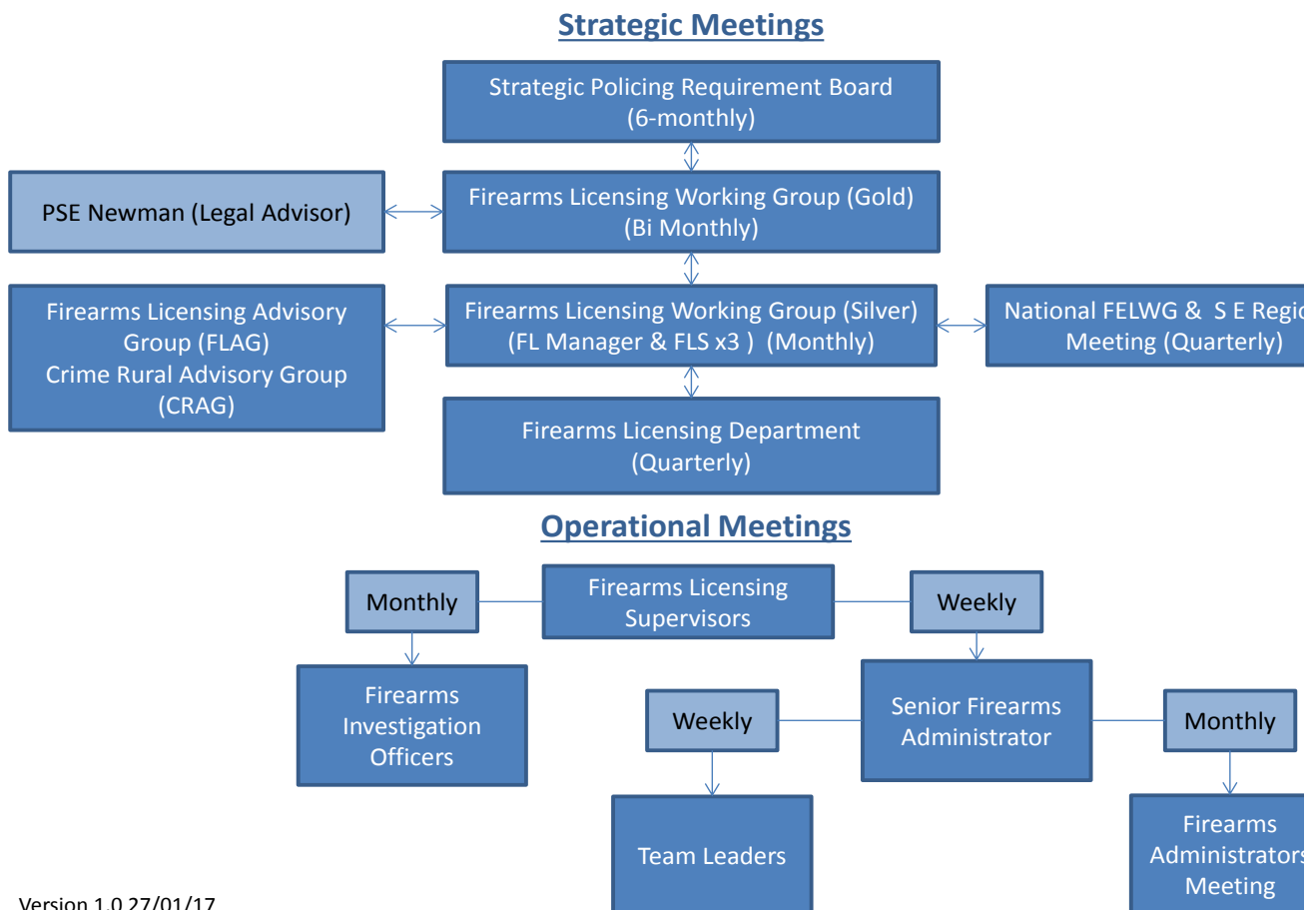
INTRODUCTION

1. The following report provides an update on the significant work undertaken within firearms licensing and provides an overview of our current performance in addition to the following:

- Context around number of firearms, licences etc. within the county
 - Comparison with MSG/nationally
- Overview of Force processes for managing Threat Harm and Risk
- How was PCC's £39k spent & impact
- Update on Strategic Threat & Risk Assessment recommendations (incl. HMIC 'Targeting the Risk' inspection)
- Opportunities/Threats for future

GOVERNANCE AND PERFORMANCE

2. Following the increase in supervision within the department a new governance structure has been implemented to maintain the momentum of change and an overview of the quality and performance of the department.



- The following management data is now presented to the management team on a monthly basis, to enable assessment of systems and processes introduced, ensuring an improved service to the public and reduction of the backlog.
- Weeks of action have been introduced into the department and have seen early positive results in reducing the back log. The OPCC funding has contributed significantly to reducing delays in grant applications, providing a member of staff on a 12 month temporary contract which has been dedicated to the process. Delays in processing grants have an impact on the individual who may have chosen to purchase a shotgun or firearm either for leisure or as part of their employment and retail business that have guns held on deposit for a considerable length of time.

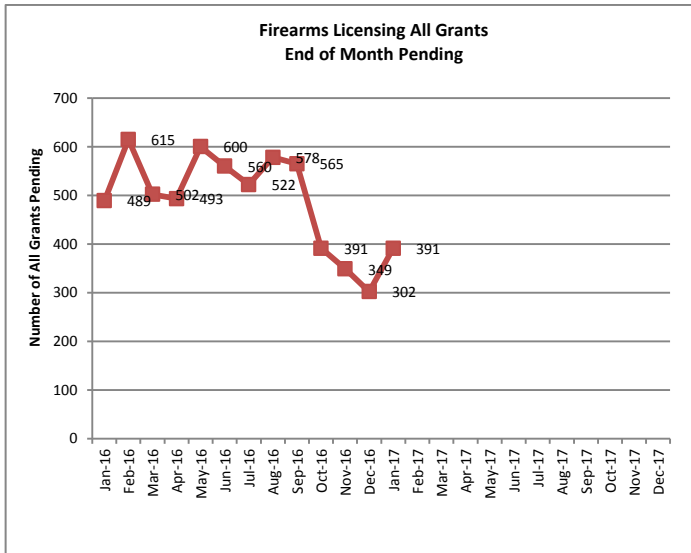


Figure 1 shows the number of grants still pending at the end of each month. Due to the complexity of some grants these are carried over from one month to the next. The investment of the member of staff on a 12 month contract by the OPCC has allowed a dedicated resource to grant applications, allowing for new applications and the backlog to be processed, reducing the number of applicants waiting on their application to be processed. The rise in the January 2017 figure reflects the greater than average number of grants received in the month December 2016–January 2017 (165 as opposed to a monthly average of 135).

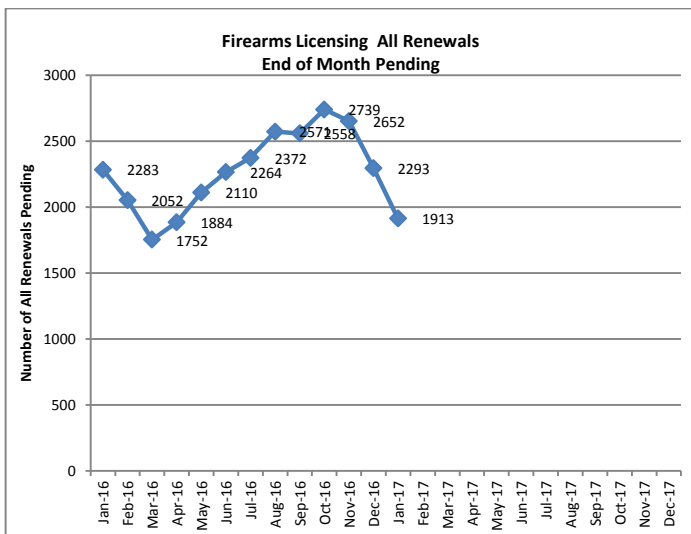


Figure 2 shows the number of renewals pending at the end of each month. Due to the volume and requirement to ensure certificates holders do not become unlawfully in possession of their weapons, Section 7 temporary permits are currently issued. The increase in staff and new dedicated authority allows the department to hold at least one week of action every month to clear the backlog. The initial rise in temporary permits ensured we met the requirement of the HMIC, preventing anyone being unlawfully expired. With the new staff and training we are now seeing positive results.

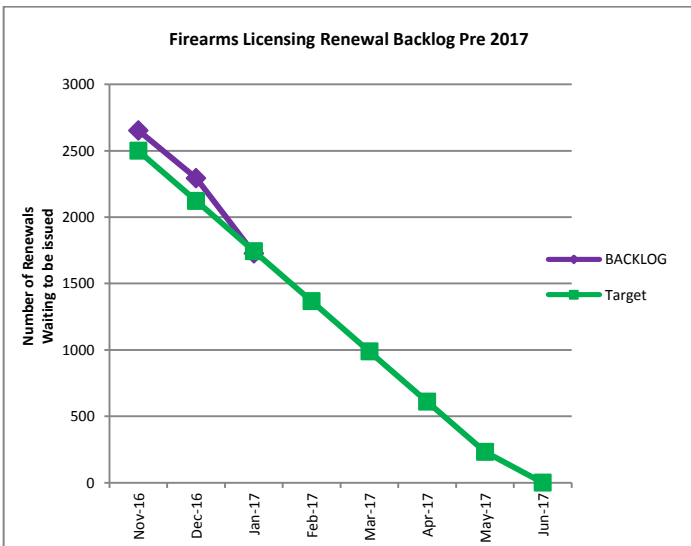


Figure 3 shows the results of the first week of action and the department's ambition to have the backlog cleared by June 2017. Due to the impact a temporary permit can have on a certificate holder, restricting types of ammunition which can be purchased, this is also a priority for the department.

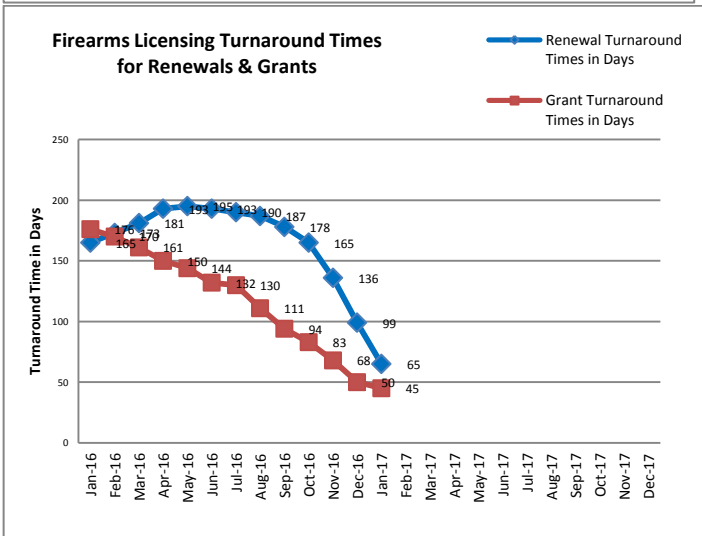


Figure 4 shows the number of days in which grants and renewals are turned around in the department. Each month shows the result for the average turnaround time in the preceding six month period. For grants we can see between 01/07/15 – 31/01/16 average turnaround was 176 days. In the last six months of 2016 this had reduced to an average turnaround of 50 days.

MSG COMPARISON

- Kent's volume of certificate holders, in relation to our MSG, is significant. Of the eleven forces within our MSG, Hertfordshire Bedfordshire & Cambridgeshire are a combined unit, as are Staffordshire and West Midlands. Taking the combined forces as a single entity, Kent is ranked fourth in terms of volume. Figure 5 shows the comparisons of the volume of shotgun and firearms certificates and the combined volume of both of these by force (combined forces where relevant).

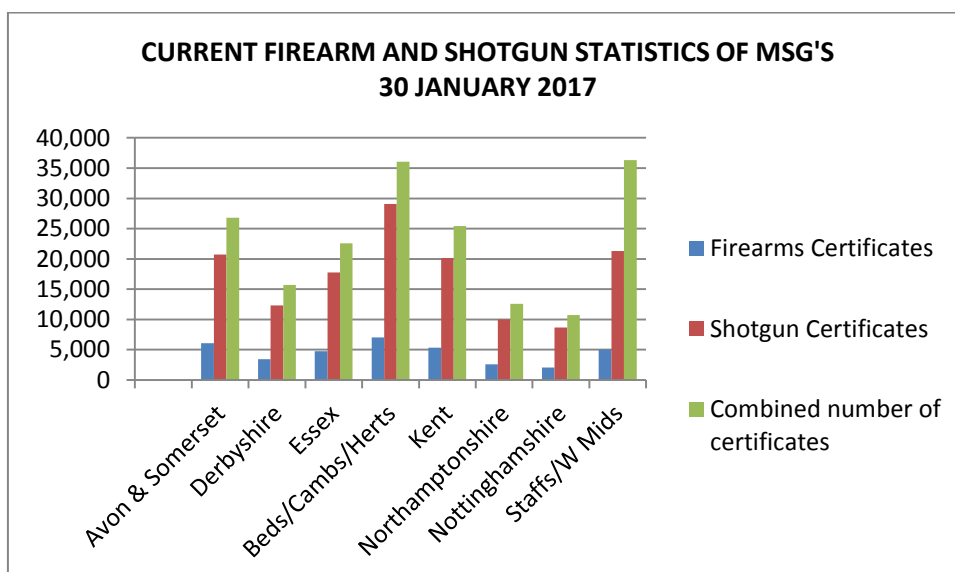


Figure 5

MANAGING THREAT HARM AND RISK

6. The HMIC recommendations highlighted the importance of constantly reviewing the suitability of certificate holders to maximise public safety. The Firearms Licensing Department constantly review information and intelligence on certificate holders, using the NDM and THRIVE principles and where a threat is posed take positive action, ranging from a revocation to warning letter. The whole department has recently been trained in this area with a bespoke package developed by Kent's command training team, a result of the STRA recommendations. A dip sampling process is in place to ensure high standards and includes the ACC dip sampling decisions on revocations and the return of weapons. The FCR and Firearms Licensing Department has an agreed referral policy in place (Copy attached in the HMIC update below) to ensure certificate holders identified during call handling are assessed and officers are briefed where required. Working with Corporate Communications a number of Spotlight articles have been published to remind officers of their responsibilities. Work in this area is constantly under review and we are currently looking at how we can engage with the proposed vulnerability hubs and SCD to mitigate risk to those most at harm and prevent access to weapons by those who pose the greatest threat.

HMIC TARGETTING THE RISK

7. The HMIC recommendations within 'Targeting the Risk' have all been met and new governance, systems and processes have been introduced to monitor the continued delivery of these.

OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS FOR THE FUTURE

8. Currently Kent has 25,437 certificates (firearms 5,316, shotguns 20,121). Both certificates require renewal every 5 years, so the cycle of checking the suitability of applicants undertaken when granting a certificate is repeated. Additional risk assessments and preventative work are also required on licence holders where for example domestic abuse incidents have taken place. This places a significant demand on the department's resources. Currently for each of these interactions a paper file is either created, for new applications or removed from storage and circulated between the administrators, Firearms Investigating Officers (FIO) and supervisors.
9. In line with the recommendations put forward by Methods Advisory, moving to an electronic, paperless system would reduce contact time on any one file, streamlining the process leading to a significant improvement in turnaround times and reducing risk around the movement of paper files containing sensitive information.
10. Following Chief Inspector Steenhuis meeting with Police ICT and attendance at the National Firearms and Explosive Working Group (FELWG) we now understand the funding is no longer available for a new NFLMS system and work is underway to see if the platform from which it operates can be refurbished. We have been briefed that the new system will not offer any electronic case management opportunity and these will need to be developed in house.
11. A capital bid is currently being prepared to introduce CYCLOPS, the case management system used by Essex Police Firearms Licensing Department, providing stability to our process and future opportunities around collaboration. This will be another significant investment for Kent Police but is a fundamental element to manage the electronic files, replacing the functions expected from the national system which is no longer being provided.
12. To realise the benefits of an electronic system we will need the FIO's to move to a more agile and mobile working practice. Due to the current Windows Seven operating platform, Kent Police is not in a position to purchase new laptops operating on Windows Ten. Currently the allocation of laptops within the force is under review, with the intention to recall laptops from individuals and departments where the desk top is the primary source of IT interface. It is expected that 80 Laptops could be recalled for reallocation to users who would benefit from more agile working, surrendering their base station for a laptop. FIO's are currently based around the county and travel to remote locations to meet certificate holders needing to return each day to their allocated place of work to complete administrative tasks. The ability to complete these tasks remotely and email actions directly back to the HQ administrative team would significantly improve individual performance and contact time on each file as actions are not waiting for files to be returned in the post before they can be updated on NFLMS and closed. IT is awaiting the return of laptops and will allocate to Firearms Licensing as they are received. The provision of MIFI, the Force approved system to

allow mobile access to the server through 4G would allow FIO's to complete actions whilst with the certificate holder/applicant. The cost of the data tariffs and devices was not captured as part of the revenue bid for 2017 / 2018 IT Mobile budget and will therefore be provided from the tactical operations budget for 2017/18 with provision included in the 2018/2019 IT Mobile budget.

13. FIO's are currently being issued force approved lock boxes with security cables to allow for the safe transportation of files. These have been ordered of a suitable size to hold the proposed laptops.
14. Until the national direction is fully understood, a change to the forms with legislative parameters is not possible (Grant and Renewal). We are however able to look at a number of firearms transactions which currently remain paper based. The channel shift team working with the Firearms Licensing Department and Firearms Licensing Advisory Group to develop access to e-forms through the website which will be completed and then sent directly to the department electronically. These will include; Change of address, Notifications of sale/acquisition and Replacement certificates.
15. The development of more complex forms for grants and renewals will have cost implications, however until the national direction has been agreed work cannot commence on this element of the project.
16. The ability to undertake electronic payments is being investigated by the Kent Police. Chief Inspector Steenhuis sits on the working group and will keep the OPCC and Chief Officers briefed on progress for Firearms Licensing.
17. Finally NPCC lead for Firearms Licensing, ACC Orford, has contacted a number of forces following concerns being raised surrounding their performance by shooting groups and interested parties. ACC Orford has sign-posted these forces to Kent Police and North Yorkshire as an example of good practice.

CONCLUSION

18. Firearms licensing is realising the benefits of the investment by the Chief Constable and OPCC with significantly improved performance and service delivery to the Public.
19. To futureproof and cement the improved service delivery of the department, continued investment in the training of our staff supported by improvements in technology, will allow for more fluid interactions between the user, admin team and investigators, ensuring the threat harm and risk is mitigated to a high standard whilst delivering a quality service to the public.