



Matthew Barber

Police & Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Response to HMICFRS: An Inspection of Firearms Licensing Across Police Forces in England and Wales

[An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England and Wales - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

Report Published: 28 August 2026

PCC Response: September 2026

Introduction

I welcome the publication of HMICFRS's report, *An Inspection of Firearms Licensing Across Police Forces in England and Wales*, and thank HMICFRS for its comprehensive review of this important area of policing. The report provides a detailed assessment of firearms licensing arrangements nationally and identifies a number of opportunities to strengthen public safety, consistency and accountability across England and Wales.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I take the findings of HMICFRS seriously. Firearms licensing represents a critical public safety function and it is essential that appropriate safeguards, governance arrangements and decision-making processes are in place to ensure only suitable individuals are granted authority to possess firearms. The report's conclusion that the current firearms licensing system is not fit for purpose, together with its recommendations for far-reaching national reform, warrants careful consideration by policing leaders, the Government and Police and Crime Commissioners.

It is important to note that Thames Valley Police was not one of the forces inspected as part of this thematic review. The findings should therefore be viewed as national observations rather than evidence of specific shortcomings within Thames Valley Police. However, I have sought assurance from the Chief Constable regarding Thames Valley Police's current position against the recommendations relevant to police forces.

PCC Response

Thames Valley Police Position

I have received and considered a detailed assessment from Thames Valley Police regarding the recommendations directed towards Chief Constables and local firearms licensing functions. The Force has reviewed its governance arrangements, decision-making processes, audit activity, performance management arrangements and readiness to implement the recommendations arising from the inspection.



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The assessment concludes that Thames Valley Police is currently compliant with six of the seven recommendations applicable to Chief Constables. One recommendation relating to visitor permit assurance arrangements has been assessed as partially compliant, with an improvement plan already in place to strengthen audit and dip-sampling activity and achieve full compliance by March 2027. No recommendations have been identified as requiring immediate Chief Officer escalation.

The Force has also provided assurance that established governance, performance and quality assurance arrangements are in place to oversee firearms licensing activity. These include regular audit and dip-sampling processes, strategic governance boards, performance monitoring arrangements and Chief Officer oversight. Thames Valley Police has further advised that no significant backlog-related risks or performance concerns requiring escalation have been identified through its current governance arrangements.

National Reform and Future Implications

While most recommendations within the report are directed towards the Home Office, National Police Chiefs' Council, College of Policing and other national bodies, I recognise that several proposals have the potential to significantly affect police forces, including Thames Valley Police. These include the proposed creation of a National Firearms Licensing Authority, the development of a national firearms licensing system, changes to competency and medical assessment requirements, and wider legislative reform.

Many of these proposals remain subject to further national development and consultation. It is therefore too early to fully assess the operational, workforce, technological and financial implications for individual police forces. I welcome the Force's commitment to monitor these developments and prepare for implementation where required. Whilst public safety should remain the principal consideration, regard must be given to legitimate conservation, work and recreational use of firearms and the need to have a system that considers the needs of license holders to continue with safe and legitimate uses.

PCC Oversight

I am satisfied that Thames Valley Police has undertaken a thorough assessment of the HMICFRS findings and has identified appropriate arrangements to address the single area assessed as partially compliant. I am also reassured that governance, audit and performance arrangements are already established and that progress against any actions arising from the report will continue to be monitored through existing governance structures.



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As Police and Crime Commissioner, I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for the effective delivery of firearms licensing responsibilities and will seek ongoing assurance that any relevant recommendations arising from this inspection are implemented appropriately. Progress will be monitored through existing governance and accountability channels across the OPCC and force.

Conclusion

HMICFRS has identified important national issues regarding the consistency and future operation of firearms licensing arrangements across England and Wales. While Thames Valley Police was not one of the forces inspected, I welcome the proactive assessment undertaken by the Force and the assurance provided in response to the recommendations directed towards Chief Constables.

I will continue to monitor developments arising from the inspection and any subsequent national reforms, whilst maintaining oversight of the Force's ongoing compliance with relevant firearms licensing requirements and its commitment to protecting public safety.

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