



Home Office

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02 January 2019

Thank you for letter of 26 October about the death of John Hill, who killed himself with a rifle he held lawfully under a firearm certificate. In my letter of 13 August, I undertook to seek police views before responding further to the letter of 25 June from Rachel Griffin, the Senior Coroner for Dorset. In her letter, Rachel Griffin asked that consideration be given to whether national and local guidance on the assessment of applications for firearms certificates should provide for police enquiries to involve the applicant's family members routinely.

I have obtained the views of the National Police Chief Council on this issue, which were informed by discussions with members of the Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group. The advice that I have received is that there is no need to introduce a new blanket policy of interviewing members of an applicant's family in the case of all applications for firearms certificates, in order to establish whether they have any concerns. The alternative is an intelligence-based approach, which will now be delivered through new accreditation standards for Firearms Enquiry Officers in police forces, which is being developed by the College of Policing. This will encourage "professional curiosity" to ensure that such avenues are pursued whenever they are likely to be relevant.

The Government introduced a power, through the Policing and Crime Act 2017, for the Home Secretary to publish statutory guidance to the police on their firearms licensing functions. The legislation requires that we consult with the police before publishing the new guidance. We intend to consult on the terms of this shortly. We intend that the draft should go further than the current guidance, in inviting the police to consider whether to conduct interviews with individuals other than the applicant or their referees, including neighbours, partners or representatives of shooting clubs attended by the applicant. We intend that these checks be considered where, following initial enquiries, they believe them to be necessary to assess suitability.

I have seen the letter of 28 September from James Vaughan, the Chief Constable of Dorset, to Rachel Griffin in which he indicates that he wishes to consider this matter further. I will be very happy to consider any recommendations made by Chief Constable Vaughan, and in particular those arising from the sad circumstances of Mr Hill's case, as part of the forthcoming consultation on the statutory guidance which I mention above.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Assistant Chief Constable Dave Orford, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms, and to Chief Constable James Vaughan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Hurd". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**RT HON NICK HURD MP**  
**Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service**



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Date 28 09 2018

Dear Madam Coroner

**Re: Regulation 28 - Inquest touching the death of John Edward Hill**

I am now in a position to send you a further response with regards to your regulation 28 recommendations which you raised at the inquest of John Edward Hill:

- i) When the Police consider a firearm application, there may be valuable information that those close to the applicant may have, in circumstances where there is no domestic abuse or violence. Those living with the applicant may have vital information, which could impact upon the grant of a firearms certificate. This information may therefore be key to preventing a future death.
- ii) In view of this I would request that consideration is given to reviewing the national and local guidance in relation to the assessment criteria and enquiries to be considered regarding applications for firearms certificates, and for consideration to be given that those enquiries involve the applicant's family members, or at the very least those living with the applicant.

I can reassure you that our firearms licensing team in Dorset Police which in fact is a Strategic Alliance capability across the three counties of Dorset,

Devon and Cornwall D&C have fully considered your directions and have reviewed local guidance which follows current national guidance.

I am now in receipt of a very detailed and comprehensive report which unfortunately I am not yet satisfied meets our obligations to respond appropriately to your directions. This is in no way due to any resistance from my teams or indeed those that govern policy and practice nationally. However, I have called for further work ahead of the submission of a final report.

The firearms licensing manager, [REDACTED] has taken this case study and your recommendations for discussion at national level with the NPCC lead, ACC Orford on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September, hence our prior need for an extension.

The minutes of this meeting are not yet signed off but I have seen the draft minutes and that the specific recommendations were raised at my request. The consensus of the national group was that an arbitrary policy of consultation with wider family members on application and renewal of a firearms license, was not appropriate, given that one could not draw lines of delineation as to how far such enquiries should reach, the depth and nature of the questions and the lack of proportionality involved.

The group did consider however that the new Firearms Enquiry Officer accreditation standards focus much more on being professionally curious, and are much more inquisitorial in approach. It was commented on by the group that in some cases, work colleagues would know individuals better than their families might know them - where would one draw the line?

The NPCC Lead, ACC Orford is of the view that we cannot have a mandated series of steps but rather address each applicant on its merits and employing the new professional curiosity, in line with the new College of Policing standards.

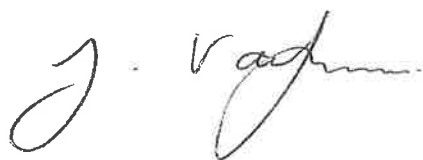
The new standards, subject to ratification at the Serious and Organised Crime Board chaired by [REDACTED] are to go live on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018. These standards will run alongside current authorised professional practice and Home Office Guidance for Firearms Licensing Law 2016.

Therefore, I feel we have only partially fulfilled our obligations under your direction and suspect that you will be unhappy with this outcome. I would ask that you allow my ACC [REDACTED] who is my Director of Operations

to meet with you and discuss some of the finer detail and challenges posed, so that we are able, to fully deliver the full extent of your directions.

I apologise for the length of time this has taken whilst my senior managers have waded through national governance, please be assured that I fully concur with your directions which are capable of preventing future deaths at scale in England and Wales.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Vaughan', written in a cursive style.

**James Vaughan**  
**Chief Constable**