



RECORD OF DECISION

TITLE: Firearms Licensing Unit Investment / Recovery Plan

Ref: PCC/D/2023/06

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Additional multi-year investment is proposed in West Mercia Police's (WMP) Firearms Licensing Unit (FLU), in order to reduce current backlogs and waiting times for members of the public seeking a firearms licence.

The PCC is committed to ensuring that processing times for firearms licencing significantly improves. An initial investment of £200,000 will enable additional capacity within the FLU aimed at delivering a faster and more convenient service, without compromising the central focus of public protection and safety.

The initial investment will improve capacity, thus reducing the backlog by between 30% to 50% within 2023/24

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that the Police and Crime Commissioner supports an initial investment of £200,000 into the FLU within West Mercia Police, to enable faster services with improved accessibility for the public

The potential for additional funding in subsequent years in this area will be considered during the 24/25 budget process

**APPROVAL OF
West Mercia Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner**

I hereby approve the above proposal

Signed

Marc Bayliss, DPCC

PART 1 – NON-CONFIDENTIAL/EXEMPT FACTS AND FIGURES

SUPPORTING REPORT

The use of licensed firearms is a central part of many communities across West Mercia. The area is now the Force with the largest quantity of registered firearms holders in England and Wales. 38,000 licences are now held in our area (overtaking Devon and Cornwall by approx. 200 licence holders).

The recently published National Firearms Procedure, refreshed in the light of the Plymouth shootings, requires the FLU to undertake many more checks and balances prior to the issue of a licence. As a consequence, the application process is much longer, is much more labour intensive, and takes more time for all parties in order to assure wider public safety. As an example, the number of 'tasks', existing within the FLU has almost quadrupled within the space of a year.

The central focus of WMP in dealing with these changes has consistently been public protection and safety. Whilst recognising the additional demand placed on the FLU there has been no compromise in standards or process. As a consequence, waiting times and backlogs have increased. Determining (and where applicable issue of) a firearms licence now takes 230 days, or 251 for a shotgun. Renewal averages are 86 days and 66 days respectively.

There is also a public challenge regarding access to the FLU service. Phone lines are currently open for one hour a day to enable staff to focus on casework.

It is a priority for the PCC to enable greater access to the service, as well as reducing backlogs and enabling faster decision making in the licensing process. The PCC has stated his desire to see backlogs and waiting times return to acceptable levels.

WMP's preferred option is to temporarily recruit staff into the FLU.

With an initial £200,000 investment it is projected that the current backlog will reduce by 30% to 50% within 2023/24 and that the average wait time for applications should reduce to 150 days as a maximum. The PCC expects further improvements to this initial milestone. This is subject to the current approach. It is understood that Coronial recommendations, following the Plymouth shooting, may significantly alter the APP on firearms licensing. Any changes may alter these performance projections.

To support this objective, an initial £200,000 is provided to the Chief Constable in 2023/24 to enable the required investments and service enhancements. Progress against delivery will be reported to the PCC on a quarterly basis via West Mercia Governance Board.

The Commissioner's commitment is that in the first instance, both waiting times and case backlogs are returned to pre-Covid levels, with a view to then seeking further sustained improvements. Irrespective of any further national changes to the licensing process, it is recognised that this will require a multi-year approach,

along with further investment This investment would be reviewed and determined either as part of annual budgets, or as one-off decisions when required

This investment and approach is supported by West Mercia Police Chief Officers. It is agreed that the investment and additional capacity will support progress to reduce FLU backlogs and waiting times without compromising the existing high quality of service and focus on public safety

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

This decision supports the following element(s) of the Safer West Mercia Plan:

- Putting Victims and Survivors First Building a More Secure West Mercia
 Reforming West Mercia Reassuring West Mercia's Communities

The decision supports this/ these objective(s) through the following.

- Enabling an improved service and access for the public
- Maintaining core focus on public safety

BENEFITS AND THEIR REALISATION

- A reduction in FLU backlog of 30-50% in 2023/24.
- A reduction in FLU waiting times to 150 days in 2023/24
- Further progress to ultimately returning to pre-Covid backlogs and waiting times
- Improved access to service via increased phone line hours. To be implemented as soon as practicable
- Improved customer satisfaction, and reduction in resulting complaints. To be monitored and reviewed in March 2024

AUTHOR

Name Gareth Boulton

Date 19th January 2023

FINANCIAL AND TREASURER COMMENTS

The £200k funding for this would come from in year underspend on the 2022/23 revenue budget

Treasurer



Signature

Date 23/01/2023

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

By virtue of schedule 11, paragraph 14 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 the Police and Crime Commissioner may do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the functions of commissioner That includes. entering into contracts and other agreements (whether legally binding or not) and acquiring and disposing of property (including land)

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information in this form is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI Act) and other legislation Part 1 of this form will be made available on the West Mercia Commissioner's website Any facts and advice that should not be made automatically available on request are not included in Part 1 but instead in a separate Part 2 report

OFFICER APPROVAL

Chief Executive Officer



Signature

Date 1st March 2023