



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Máinnystrie O tha Laa

**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED  
AMENDMENTS TO FIREARMS LICENSING  
FEES AND THE “BANDED SYSTEM”  
MARCH 2026**

## Contents

### Ministerial Foreword

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. <u>Introduction</u>                                   | 4    |
| 2. <u>Background</u>                                     | 6    |
| 3. <u>Proposed amendments to firearms licensing fees</u> | 8    |
| 4. <u>Proposed amendments to the “banded system”</u>     | 11   |
| 5. <u>Impact Assessments</u>                             | 13   |
| 6. <u>Next steps</u>                                     | 15   |

## **MINISTERIAL FOREWORD**

The Department is seeking views on two proposed changes to firearms legislation. The first seeks to achieve full cost recovery of firearms licensing fees and the second proposal seeks to add to the calibres of firearms that may be exchanged in a “one-off-one-on” transaction carried out by a registered firearms dealer.

Firstly, for many years, firearms licensing has been heavily subsidised by PSNI mainstream funding and therefore the taxpayer. Firearms licensing fees in Northern Ireland (NI) have remained unchanged since 2016. A 2018 report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) recommended “The PSNI should establish a plan to move towards full cost recovery for firearms licensing in the longer term.” The Department of Finance (DoF) document, Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI), states that “charges for services provided by public sector organisations normally pass on the full cost of providing them”.

Currently, firearms certificate (FAC) application fees are only contributing around 40% towards the cost of providing the service and the estimated shortfall for the financial year 2025/26 is almost two million pounds. This subsidy can no longer continue, especially at a time when funding and delivery of public services in NI are under pressure. The firearms licensing service must be appropriately funded to enable PSNI to safeguard the public in NI from the misuse of firearms and to support an efficient and professional service to applicants and FAC holders.

Adding further calibres of firearms to the current “banded system” will help to reduce the number of variation applications made to the Chief Constable which are more costly and take longer to process.

I encourage the public to have their say on these matters as it has been almost 10 years since the introduction of the “banded system” and firearms licensing fees were last increased.

## **Naomi Long MLA**

**Minister of Justice**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This consultation is seeking your views on proposals by the Department of Justice (DoJ) to amend firearms licensing fees as set out in Schedule 6 of The Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 (“2004 Order”).
- 1.2 The Department is also seeking your views on proposals to make amendments to Schedule 1A of the 2004 Order, commonly referred to as the “banded system”.
- 1.3 The Department encourages respondents to answer the consultation questions via the [Northern Ireland Government Citizen Space website](#). If you are unable to respond using our online consultation facility you can complete a Response Questionnaire, which is available on our [website](#), and email it to the following address: [FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can post the Response Questionnaire to:

Firearms and Explosives Branch  
Department of Justice  
Block 4  
Knockview Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast, BT4 3SJ

- 1.4 The consultation is open until **29 May 2026**. Please note that responses received after the closing date may not be considered.
- 1.5 If you have any queries about the information provided in this document, please contact DoJ Firearms and Explosives Branch using the contact information at paragraph 1.3.

### **Alternative Formats**

- 1.6 Copies in alternative formats may be made available upon request. If it would assist you to access a copy in an alternative format or a language other than English, please let us know and we will do our best to assist you.

### **What happens next?**

- 1.7 Following the closure of the consultation **on 29 May 2026**, all responses will be analysed and a summary of responses and next steps will be made available on the Department's [website](#).

### **Complaints**

- 1.8 If you have any complaints or concerns about this consultation process, please submit your complaint/concern by email to [FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk) or write to the address detailed at paragraph 1.3.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 DoJ is responsible for devolved firearms legislation and a number of statutory functions including museum firearms licences. The Northern Ireland Office retains responsibility for firearms legislation and authorisations relating to matters of National Security. The Chief Constable is responsible for the operational delivery for the majority of firearms licensing in Northern Ireland (NI) including firearm certificates (FAC); visitor's firearm permits; Registered Firearms Dealers (RFD) certificates and authorisations for firearm and shotgun clubs.
- 2.2 PSNI Firearms and Explosives Branch (PSNI FEB) receive between 1600 and 2000 online applications and 400-500 other application types every month.
- 2.3 Since 2004, the only amendments to Schedule 6, Fees, were made in 2016. At that time the cost for the most common application, the grant of a FAC, increased from £50 to £98. The cost of a RFD's certificate increased from £150 to £300.
- 2.4 The "banded system", was also introduced in 2016 and permits similar calibre firearms to be exchanged through a RFD and currently the cost is £15. This fee is then sent to PSNI FEB along with the notification, whereby PSNI FEB updates its systems. There are approximately 400 "banded system" transactions each month.
- 2.5 There are around 80 RFDs in NI and 54,000 FAC holders, with approximately 180,000 firearms held in NI. FACs are granted for various sporting purposes and for pest control on land the holder has lawful permission to shoot over. Some are held for collection purposes. There are also approximately 90 firearm and shotgun clubs, and around 600 visitor's firearm permits were issued in 2025.

- 2.6 At present, the costs recovered by PSNI FEB, for the firearms licensing service, do not cover the administrative and operational costs incurred. Each year the shortfall in revenue has to be met from PSNI mainstream funding.
- 2.7 In 2018 the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) published its [report](#) on firearms licensing in NI and said PSNI FEB cost £1.6 million annually and recovered approximately £1.3 million. The report stated that there was a public subsidy for firearms licensing of £267,000 for the financial year 2017-18. The report recommended “The PSNI should establish a plan to move towards full cost recovery for firearms licensing in the longer term.” PSNI have estimated that the shortfall for the financial year 2025-26 will be £1,995,000.
- 2.8 A review of the firearms licensing fees is now required to make PSNI FEB more self-sufficient and less reliant on mainstream PSNI funding. The Department of Finance (DoF) document [Managing Public Money Northern Ireland \(MPMNI\)](#) states that “charges for services provided by public sector organisations normally pass on the full cost of providing them”. Moving towards full cost recovery would help reduce the current income shortfall for PSNI FEB. This would reduce the amount of funding required from elsewhere in the PSNI budget therefore minimising the cost to the taxpayer as much as possible. The wider NI community may also benefit as PSNI will be able to redirect funding, which would have been used to subsidise the firearms licensing process, to other policing priorities.
- 2.9 The Department is seeking views on proposed increases to firearms licensing fees and amendments to the “banded system”.

### 3. Proposed amendments to firearms licensing fees

#### Current firearms licensing fees

- 3.1 Most firearms licensing is administered by PSNI FEB on behalf of the Chief Constable and requires a fee to be paid by applicants. This Department processes museum firearm licences. The current fees are set out in [Schedule 6 of the 2004 Order](#).
- 3.2 The fees were last revised in 2016 and are now considerably below the cost of the service provided, which results in PSNI subsidising the firearms licensing team from other areas of the policing budget. Firearms licensing is not compliant with the DoF document MPMNI.
- 3.3 PSNI provided information to the Northern Ireland Policing Board in June 2025 which said, “if a constant demand were to be assumed across all licence types then an average increase of 153% would need to be applied across all licence categories to ensure that all costs can be funded out of receipts”.
- 3.4 An increase in firearms licensing fees to achieve full cost recovery for PSNI FEB will help safeguard the public by providing PSNI with scope to better resource and train its firearms licensing teams, and to carry out thorough checks and continuous assessment of the suitability of applicants to possess firearms. The funding and delivery of public services in NI are under pressure, with reduced budgets and all public services are exploring full cost recovery for chargeable services provided where possible. In Great Britain, the Home Office has recently increased firearms licensing fees to full cost recovery.
- 3.5 Failure to recover the costs of firearms licensing will continue to put further pressures on an already stretched budget, leaving PSNI unable to drive forward strategic objectives in other areas of policing and potentially negatively impact the services provided. This is not a sustainable position.

## Proposed amendment

3.6 The proposed fees, alongside the current fees are set out below.

| Type of Licence   | Current fees (£) as per Schedule 6 of 2004 Order | Proposed fees (£) |
|---|--|-------------------|
| <b>Firearm Certificate</b>  |  |                   |
| Grant of firearm certificate  | 98   | 250               |
| Variation by Chief Constable  | 30   | 77                |
| Variation by RFD under Article 11(3) to substitute firearm  | 15   | 38                |
| Variation by RFD under Article 11(5) to delete firearm  | no fee   | no fee            |
| Duplicate certificate   | 14   | 35                |
| Updated certificate   | 14   | 35                |
| <b>Museums firearms licence</b>   |  |                   |
| Grant of museum firearms licence by DoJ   | 110  | 280               |
| Extension to additional premises  | 75   | 191               |
| <b>Visitor's firearm permit</b>   |  |                   |
| Grant of visitor's permit (except where paragraph 10 applies)   | 16   | 40                |
| Grant of six or more permits (taken together) on a group application  | 80   | 203               |
| <b>Certificate of approval for air gun for resident in Great Britain</b>  |  |                   |
| Certificate of approval for air gun for resident in Great Britain   | 11   | 28                |
| <b>Firearms dealer's certificate</b>  |  |                   |
| Grant of firearms dealer's certificate  | 300  | 764               |
| Duplicate certificate   | 14   | 35                |
| Updated certificate   | 14   | 35                |
| <b>Firearms clubs and shotgun clubs</b>   |  |                   |
| Authorisation of firearms club  | 71   | 181               |
| Authorisation of shotgun club to allow use of shotgun by persons 12 or over but under 16, except where the shotgun club is also a firearms club and an authorisation under Article 49 is granted at the same time | 71   | 181               |

3.7 DoJ proposes that all fee levels are increased by 153% and adjusted for inflation from June 2025 (set out in paragraph 3.6 of this consultation document). The proposal is based upon the PSNI assessment that they require a 153% increase across all firearms licensing applications to move to a full cost recovery model as recommended by the NIAO in 2018 and in line with MPMNI guidance. This percentage increase is supported by the findings of a data collection exercise which was carried out by PSNI FEB in June 2025. The data collection exercise results were analysed by this Department. This proposal will address the budgetary shortfall, and firearms licensing will no longer need to be subsidised from other areas of the PSNI budget.

- 3.8 The fee levels were calculated with a 153% increase and were then uplifted in line with inflation to January 2026. It should be noted that the low starting cost of a variation by the Chief Constable in the current Schedule of fees has resulted in the proposed new cost of a variation still being less than the calculated cost to process by PSNI FEB. However, the proposed amendments to Schedule 1A (set out in paragraph 4.2 of this consultation document) are also expected to reduce the number of variation applications processed by PSNI FEB, with a larger number of one-off-one-on transactions being processed by RFDs.
- 3.9 If the proposed increase is applied across the existing fee levels, the full costs of processing an application will be recovered (as evidenced by the data collection exercise) and will also cover the costs for activities that PSNI FEB may undertake once a FAC has been granted. These activities include seizures, work on firearm appeals to this Department and the Northern Ireland Office, changes of address and issuing Article 13 letters when an applicant has failed to apply for a further FAC.
- 3.10 Furthermore, if an application is refused, the fee is refunded even though the work has been carried out, meaning there is no remuneration for this work. In NI, the cost of medical reports is currently paid for in applicable cases by PSNI FEB.

**We invite your views and any comments on the proposed amendments to the firearms licensing fees.**

## 4. Proposed amendments to the “banded system”

- 4.1 We are also seeking your views on proposals to amend [Schedule 1A](#) of the 2004 Order, the “banded system”, to add additional calibres of rifles that may be exchanged, in a one-off-one-on transaction by a RFD.
- 4.2 A copy of the proposed amended Schedule, to include the additional calibres (**in bold**), is shown below.

| BAND                       | CALIBRE   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Small quarry air rifles | .177<br>.20<br>.22<br>.25   |
| 2. Small quarry            | .17 Mach 2<br>.17 HMR (Hornady Magnum Rimfire)<br>.22 LR (Long Rifle)<br>.22 WMR (Winchester Magnum Rimfire)<br><b><u>9mm/.357 air rifle</u></b>  |
| 3. Medium quarry           | .17 Hornet<br>.17 Remington<br>.17 Remington Fireball<br>.22 Hornet/5.6x36Rmm<br>.222 Remington<br>.204 Ruger<br>.223 Remington/5.56x45mm<br>.220 Swift<br>.22-250<br><b><u>.17 Winchester Super Magnum</u></b>                     |
| 4. Large quarry            | .243 Winchester<br>.25-06<br>6.5mm x 55/.256<br>7mm x 08 Remington<br>.270<br>7.62 x 51mm/.308 Winchester<br><b><u>6.5 Creedmoor</u></b><br><b><u>6.5x47 Lapua</u></b><br><b><u>.260 Remington</u></b><br><b><u>7x57 Mauser</u></b> |

### **Current rules applying to the “banded system”**

- 4.3 [Schedule 1A](#) lists the rifles and calibres that can be exchanged by a RFD. The RFD then notifies the Chief Constable within 72 hours of the transaction taking place and PSNI FEB updates its systems accordingly. There are four bands, in Schedule 1A, for shooting small to large quarry and the Schedule provides the calibres of firearms included in each band.

### **Proposed amendments to the bands**

- 4.4 The following are the proposed additions and the applicable band they would be added to—
- Addition of 9mm/.357 air rifle proposed to Band 2.
  - Addition of .17 Winchester Super Magnum to Band 3.
  - Addition of 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5x47 Lapua, .260 Remington and 7x57 Mauser to Band 4.
- 4.5 There are no proposed amendments to Band 1.
- 4.6 By adding more calibres to the “banded system”, the intention is to make it easier and quicker for FAC holders to vary their firearm(s) holdings, within a band, without having to make a variation application and therefore further reduce the administrative burden on PSNI FEB and FAC variation applicants. Fees for a one-off-one-on transaction by a RFD are 50% less than a variation application to the Chief Constable.
- 4.7 Further information relating to how the “banded system” operates can be found on the [Department’s website](#).

**We invite your views and any comments on the proposed amendments to the “banded system”.**

## 5. Impact Assessments

### Equality Impact Assessment

- 5.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires all public authorities in NI to have due regard to equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories and have regard to promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Public Authorities are also required to meet legislative obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, particularly in the formation of public policy making.
- 5.2 DoJ is fully committed to fulfilling its Section 75 obligations regarding the promotion of equality of opportunity, good relations and meeting legislative requirements in NI.
- 5.3 The proposals set out in this consultation have been screened for equality impacts. An Equality Screening Form is available on our [website](#) alongside this consultation document and DoJ welcomes views on this.

### Rural Needs Impact Assessment

- 5.4 The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 introduced a duty on public authorities in NI to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. It also requires public authorities to compile information on the exercise of the due regard duty and for this information to be published.
- 5.5 As part of its due regard, DoJ is developing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment to examine any impact on the rural community in more detail. A draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment is available on our [website](#) alongside this consultation paper and DoJ welcomes views on this.

### **Regulatory Impact Assessments**

- 5.6 DoJ has commenced Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) for both of the proposals set out in this consultation. Draft RIAs are available on our [website](#) alongside this consultation paper and DoJ welcomes views on these.

### **Summary**

- 5.7 Responses to this consultation will be used to finalise the draft impact assessments/screening forms referred to in the paragraphs above.

## 6. Next Steps

6.1 DoJ welcomes responses on both of the proposals contained in this document in addition to the draft Impact Assessments. You can find a list of the proposals below.

- Proposed amendments to the firearms licensing fees
- Proposed amendments to the “banded system”

6.2 Responses to the consultation questions can be made via the [Northern Ireland Government Citizen Space website](#).

6.3 If you are unable to respond using our online consultation facility you can complete a Response Questionnaire, which is available on our [website](#), and email it to the following address: [FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:FEB@justice-ni.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can post the Response Questionnaire to:

Firearms and Explosives Branch  
Department of Justice  
Block 4  
Knockview Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast, BT4 3SJ

6.4 For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity will be published. We will remove email addresses from these responses, but apart from this, we will publish them in full.

- 6.5 Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). However, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679.
- 6.6 If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA.
- 6.7 For more information about how we handle your personal data, please see our Privacy Notice which is available alongside this consultation.
- 6.8 The consultation period will end **on 29 May 2026**. Please note that responses received after the closing date may not be considered.
- 6.9 It is intended that legislation will come into effect as soon as practical, following completion of the Assembly process.