EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE FIREARMS (VARIATION OF FEES) ORDER 2026

2026 No. 514

1. Introduction

1.1 This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Home Office and is laid before Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

2. Declaration

2.1 Sarah Jones MP, Minister of State for Policing and Crime at the Home Office confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

2.2 Nick Hunt, Deputy Director for the Firearms and Weapons Policy Unit, at the Home Office confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

3. Contact

3.1 Amrita Aurora, in the Firearms and Weapons Policy Unit at the Home Office can be contacted by email at the following address with any queries regarding the instrument: Amrita.Aurora1@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Part One: Explanation, and context, of the Instrument

4. Overview of the Instrument

What does the legislation do?

4.1 This instrument increases the fees charged for a range of firearms licensing services in line with inflation of 3%. These include applying for or renewing a firearm or shotgun certificate (including cases where both certificates expire at the same time), making changes to a firearm certificate, registering as a firearms dealer or renewing registration, and applying for a visitor's firearms permit.

4.2 The instrument also updates the statutory firearms licensing fees in line with inflation between full three-year reviews. The fees were last updated in February 2025, and this change applies an inflation-based increase since that time.

Where does the legislation extend to, and apply?

4.3 The extent of this instrument (that is, the jurisdiction(s) which the instrument forms part of the law of) is England, Wales and Scotland.

4.4 The territorial application of this instrument (that is, where the instrument produces a practical effect England, Wales and Scotland.

5. Policy Context

What is being done and why?

5.1 This instrument increases the statutory fees charged for specified firearms licensing applications by applying an uplift of 3%, in line with inflation.

5.2 Individuals and businesses are required to submit an application to their local police force in order to possess, use or trade in firearms or shotguns. Fees are charged to applicants to cover the costs incurred by the police in processing applications,

including background checks and enquiries such as criminal records checks, inspections of security arrangements and home visits, which are all carried out by specialist firearms licensing teams within police forces. No fee is payable where an application is refused. An individual's suitability is assessed on application, renewal and through continual assessment.

5.3 The firearms licensing fees were last increased on 5 February 2025 following a comprehensive review and were set at a level to provide full-cost recovery for police forces in line with HM Treasury guidance Managing Public Money and the Government's manifesto commitment to increase fees to achieve full-cost recovery.[1] The fees are used to meet the costs incurred by police forces in administering the firearms licensing regime, enabling police forces to deliver an effective and efficient licensing function that supports public safety

5.4 In 2025 the Government committed to more regular reviews of firearms licensing fees to ensure they keep pace with costs. Comprehensive reviews are now planned to take place every three years, with the next review due to commence in 2028. Applying an uplift linked to inflation between comprehensive reviews helps to maintain the real-terms value of fees and reduces the risk of significant under-recovery for police forces. It also helps to avoid the need for larger, less frequent fee increases in future.

5.5 This is the first time an uplift linked to inflation is being applied to firearms licensing fees. This change is not intended to recalibrate fees precisely to underlying costs or to generate surplus income. Rather, it provides a transparent and proportionate mechanism for maintaining the real-terms value of the fees between full reviews. The next comprehensive review of fees is expected to commence in 2028.

5.6 To illustrate the practical effect of the uplift, the most common application types will see modest increases. For example, the fee for a grant of a shotgun certificate, which is one of the most frequently used application routes, will increase from £194 to £200. A renewal of a shotgun certificate will increase from £126 to £130. For firearm certificates, the grant fee will increase from £198 to £204 and the renewal fee from £131 to £135. The fee for a firearms dealer registration or renewal will increase from £466 to £480. Other fees increase by comparable small amounts, typically £1 to £6, and some fees, such as replacement certificates, remain unchanged at £9. The additional cost that small and micro businesses are expected to face is low, with the cost of renewing or granting a firearm license increasing by £4 to £6.

5.7 As of 31 March 2025, there were 145,306 firearm certificates and 482,612 shotgun certificates on issue in England and Wales, and 2,782 registered firearms dealers. In Scotland, there were 25,223 firearm certificates on issue, 43,790 shotgun certificates and 331 registered firearms dealers. Most certificates are valid for five years, meaning the impact of the uplift will be spread across renewal cycles rather than felt immediately by all licence holders.

What was the previous policy, how is this different?

5.8 Prior to February 2025, the fees were last increased in 2015 which meant that the costs incurred by the police for administering the licensing function had fallen considerably behind the cost of the service provided.

[1] HMT Managing Public Money - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69e0b17861d2e8e9b9e42e13/Managing_Public_Money_-_April_2026.pdf

5.9 To avoid this happening again, this instrument varies the statutory firearms licensing fees to reflect the increase in inflation since the fees were last increased in February 2025 and will support police forces' ability to maintain effective licensing services.

5.10 The uplift is not intended to precisely track underlying costs, but rather to offer a predictable mechanism for updating fees until the next full cost assessment.

5.11 An annual increase in line with inflation is expected to be applied to the firearms fees each year, and a comprehensive review of the firearms fees will be conducted after three years, next commencing in 2028.

6. Legislative and Legal Context

How has the law changed?

6.1 The licensing of firearms and shotguns is administered by local police forces, in accordance with the Firearms Act 1968 ("the 1968 Act") and associated firearms legislation. Section 32(1) of the 1968 Act specifies the fees payable by an applicant, including for the grant or renewal of a firearm or shotgun certificate and the variation of a firearm certificate. Section 35 of the 1968 Act specifies the fees payable to register as a firearms dealer and renew registration. Section 11(3) of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 ("the 1988 Act") specifies the fees payable for the coterminous grant and renewal of firearm and shotgun certificates (a coterminous grant/renewal allows the certificate holder's firearm and shotgun certificates to expire on the same day. Combining the certificates reduces fees for the certificate holder and reduces the burden on police firearms licensing teams). Section 17(8) of the 1988 Act specifies the fees payable for the grant of visitors' permits. Section 43 of the 1968 Act and sections 11(4) and 17(9) of the 1988 Act, enable the Secretary of State to amend the fees by order. This instrument increases the present firearms licensing fees to provide a transparent inflation-based interim adjustment to help achieve full-cost recovery for the police.

Why was this approach taken to change the law?

6.2 This approach is the only way to make the necessary changes to firearms licensing fees.

7. Consultation

Summary of consultation outcome and methodology

7.1 Increasing firearms licensing fees to achieve full-cost recovery in 2025 was a commitment in the Government's manifesto commitment, and no further consultation was considered necessary. HM Treasury agrees that an annual increase in line with inflation, between comprehensive reviews, helps to avoid large increases in licensing fees in the future.

7.2 The National Police Chiefs' Council also welcome annual increases in line with inflation, between three-yearly comprehensive reviews and this has been discussed with them in routine governance meetings. They are aware that an uplift linked to inflation is planned and they have indicated their support, in order to maintain police forces' ability to provide effective firearms licensing controls. Organisations representing the shooting community recognise the need to increase fees more regularly to avoid the possible impact on gun owners of larger, less frequent, increases and for an improved service to be provided to applicants. This has been discussed with the organisations in routine stakeholder meetings.

7.3 Given the narrow nature of this uplift, its alignment to inflation, and the Government's manifesto commitment, further consultation was not considered necessary or proportionate.

8. Applicable Guidance

8.1 Guidance relating to this instrument will be updated and placed on the GOV.UK website when these changes take effect.

8.2 It is our practice to only publish guidance updates when this Order takes effect to mitigate the high risk of users using the wrong version.

Part Two: Impact and the Better Regulation Framework

9. Impact Assessment

9.1 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument because the quantified business impacts of the measures are below the +/- £10 million de minimis threshold as set out in the Better Regulation Framework. An Economic Note (EN) assessing the impacts of this instrument is submitted with this memorandum and published alongside the Explanatory Memorandum on the legislation.gov.uk website.

9.2 The EN assesses the impact of adjusting the fees charged for firearms certificates by applying a three per cent uplift linked to inflation for future fees using inflation from February 2025 to February 2026 and is rounded to the nearest pound.

9.3 The EN finds the Net Social Present Value (NSPV) of the proposed changes are zero, as the additional combined costs to households and businesses are equal to the increased revenue to the police.

9.4 The total benefits of increased income to policing are estimated to be between £3.64 million and £6.77 million, with a central estimate of £5.21 million Present Value (PV).

9.5 The costs to individuals are estimated to be between £3.26 million and £6.06 million with a central estimate of £4.66 million (PV). The costs to business can be seen in para 9.6 below.

Impact on businesses, charities and voluntary bodies

9.6 The impact on businesses, charities or voluntary bodies will come from firearms dealers and other businesses that require the use of firearms and shotguns (such as farmers and gamekeepers) paying increased licensing fees.

9.7 This additional cost is estimated to be between £0.38 million and £0.71 million, with a central estimate of £0.55 million (PV) over 10 years, with an Equivalent Annual Net Direct Cost to Business (EANDCB) of £0.06 million.

9.8 The legislation will have an impact on small and micro businesses as most businesses with firearm licences are small and micro businesses or businesses with no employees. However, the additional cost per small and micro business is low with the cost of renewing or granting a firearm license increasing by £4 to £6.

9.9 Small and micro businesses are not exempt from paying increased firearms fees, which are necessary to achieve full-cost recovery for the police so that they can safeguard the public through delivering more effective and efficient firearms licensing function e.g. through training for firearms licensing teams. Small and micro businesses will benefit from this improved service.

9.10 The impact on the public sector will come from police forces receiving increased revenue from firearms licensing fees, to support them in covering the cost of providing the firearms licensing service. This is estimated to provide policing with an additional £5.21 million (PV) over 10 years.

10. Monitoring and review

What is the approach to monitoring and reviewing this legislation?

10.1 The instrument does not include a statutory review clause. A comprehensive review of firearms licensing fees will take place every three years, to assess whether the fees still provide full-cost recovery. The Home Office will engage the main stakeholders in these reviews.

Part Three: Statements and Matters of Particular Interest to Parliament

11. Matters of special interest to Parliament

11.1 None.

12. European Convention on Human Rights

12.1 The Minister for Policing and Crime has made the following statement regarding Human Rights:

12.2 "In my view the provisions of the Firearms (Variation of Fees) Order 2026 are compatible with the Convention rights."

13. The Relevant European Union Acts

13.1 This instrument is not made under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020 or the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 ("relevant European Union Acts").