

First meeting of the Firearms Expert Committee
26th July 2022
51 St Stephens Green
Minute

Attendees

Chair Emma Meagher Neville

Paul Walsh

Fabian Connolly

John Guinane

Paul Greene

Minister Browne (attended for agenda point 1.1 only).

Secretary Aoife Byrne

1. Introduction of issues.

1.1. Introduction by Chair.

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. Minister Browne welcomed the committee and wished it well in preparing its recommendations.

1.2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Presentation by AGS outlining the firearms licensing process and the perspective of An Garda Síochána.

Inspector Paul Greene, on behalf of An Garda Síochána outlined the role and powers of An Garda Síochána in the firearms licencing system. Inspector Green spoke of the difficulties faced by An Garda Síochána when assessing if a firearm certificate should be granted and that public safety is paramount when making these decisions. It was noted that most firearms holders possess their firearms in a safe and responsible manner.

Inspector Greene's presentation identified the matters of the use of firearms in different locations and the number of firearms a person may hold as matters of interest to An Garda Síochána that will be discussed by the Committee.

There was a brief discussion of the use of firearms in different locations in the State and the use of limited certificates.

3. Presentation on experiences of non-governmental members of the issues under review in the licensing system.

Fabian Connolly and Paul Walsh, spoke of their experiences of the licensing system in Ireland.

Fabian Connolly discussed that a good reason must be presented for a person to acquire any firearm, that a higher level of security is applied to persons who wish to possess six or more firearms and advised of challenges he had encountered with the licencing system as a high-level target shooter. He advised that in his perspective legislation cannot account for every circumstance and responsibility must remain with the shooter.

Paul Walsh discussed his experience of over 30 years of shooting and hunting and his previous engagement with the Department on the Firearms Consultation Panel. He advised that in his perspective the problems of inconsistency in the licencing system stems from the large number of licencing officers tasked with implementing outdated legislation that requires modernisation and redrafting.

4. Format of work of Committee.

4.1 Disclosure of Committee work.

The members agreed that the documents and discussions of the committee should remain confidential.

The members agreed that when appropriate, updates relating to the work of the committee could be published on the Departments website. The members will agree these updates prior to publication.

The members agreed that persons who wish to share views of issues under discussion by the Committee should be directed to submit these to FEC@justice.ie

4.2 Discussion and agreement of road map.

The members agreed the roadmap for the work of the committee.

5. Preparation of Report one

5.1. Discuss initial list of firearms identified as being available to be licenced.

The Committee considered document 1.1 detailing the types of the firearms available for licencing. The list was amended in line with member's suggestions and will be circulated by the secretary.

5.2. Agree a list of purposes for which firearms can be licenced in order to undertake the second half of the assessment.

The Committee considered document 2.1 detailing the purposes for which firearms can be licenced. The list was amended in line with member's suggestions and will be circulated by the secretary.

It was agreed that these lists would be circulated by the secretary before 5 August 2022 with a return date of 19 August 2022. The responses will be compiled and circulated before 2 September 2022 for discussion at the second meeting of the Committee.

6. AOB

It was recommended that it could be beneficial for the Committee to consult with licencing authorities in other jurisdictions, potentially with Northern Ireland. The secretary will seek permission from the Minister for the Committee to engage in this consultation.

It was recommended that the Committee discuss items classified as firearms under Irish legislation but currently outside the Committee's terms of reference (silencers, thermal imaging and night sights), with a view of forming a recommendation on these items in report 2. The secretary will seek permission from the Minister to expand the committee remit to consider these items.

It was recommended that Committee Members review the following documentation published by the UK Authorities: [Guide on firearms licencing law December 2021](#); [Firearms Security handbook](#); and [the Firearms \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2004](#).

It was recommended that consideration should be given to S.I. No 21/2008 – Firearms(Restricted Firearms and Ammunition) Order 2008 and its interaction with Section (4)(2)(h) of the Firearms Act 1925, as amended. In particular its impact on the treatment of firearms that resemble assault rifles.

The Committee was advised of several pieces of correspondence received by the secretary, including a statement from the Firearms Users Representative Group and an email from a researcher Frank McCann. Submissions have been received from Frank Brennan and Frank Brophy, which will be circulated to the members.

An invitation to visit Harbour House shooting range was considered. It was agreed that given the number of shooting facilities and clubs in the State it would not be appropriate for the Committee to visit a specific club at this time. A response will be issued by the secretary.

The Committee agreed that the secretary would brief the members of correspondence received at each meeting. If substantive submissions are received which are deemed to be relevant to the Committee's work these will be circulated 7 days before the Committee meets.

The date for the next meeting was agreed for 6 September 2022 at 11am.