Joint Protective Services

Cambridgeshire Police Accountability Board
BCH Firearms & Explosives Licensing

Purpose: Commissioned by OPCC to provide the Police Accountability Board with assurance on the current position of BCH Firearms & Explosives Licensing (FEL).

People:
Full Time Establishment: Staffing within BCH FEL has remained stable at approximately 89 officers and staff, providing the department with the resilience and capacity required to sustain performance improvements and manage ongoing demand. Operation Cordite Gold Group are expected to receive a formal proposal in relation to a final operating model to take BCH forward into the next financial year.

Training:

- All staff FEOs have attended the (i) College of Policing FEO training and are completing the supplementary continued professional development sessions and (ii) have completed Safe Weapons Handling courses within the BCH Firearms Training Centre.

- Constable 'enquiry officers' are now starting to be filtered onto the FEO College course. The final numbers of attendees will be determined through formalisation of the operating model.

- BCH FEL have remained engaged with the College of Policing and have 4 places reserved on the new Delegated Authorities course scheduled for the end of the year.

Sickness/Abstraction:
FEL sickness is well governed:

- 88% return to work completion rate.
- 79% fit notes completion rate.

Dip sampling suggests that where these elements have not been completed they are either (i) administrative errors or (ii) relate to officers that moved in and out of the unit quickly through Op Cordite.

Performance:
Performance across BCH FEL has improved significantly, demonstrating sustained progress in reducing historic backlogs and strengthening service delivery.

Work type	BCH	Cambridgeshire
Outstanding renewals	709	312
Outstanding grants	1,871	724
Outstanding variations	11	7
Outstanding temporary permits	122 certificates across 87 holders	51 certificates across 37 holders

Decision-making process - No Superintendent, Inspector or Sergeant decision-making queues exceed five working days and Suitability Decision-Maker queues are now operating within business-as-usual parameters.

Complaints have reduced significantly, supported by improved telephone access, enhanced communication with applicants and increased engagement with key stakeholder groups.

Resources:
BCH FEL: The forward-facing team continues to make use of the Nectar AI initiative. The initiative is supporting improved efficiency, consistency and oversight of application processing and forms part of the department's wider programme of technological improvement. The continued development of Nectar provides a valuable opportunity to enhance productivity and support the department's ongoing performance improvement activity whilst wider national system developments continue.

National NFLP: BCH FEL continues to engage with the National Firearms Licensing Platform (NFLP) and the associated Palantir development programme. Whilst national development activity appears to have slowed and communication from the project team has been limited in recent weeks, the department remains actively involved in shaping future delivery. A BCH FEL Manager is a member of the national practitioner working group, providing operational insight and supporting the development of the programme to ensure that practitioner requirements are reflected within the future solution. BCH will continue to work closely with national leads and maintain readiness for implementation whilst utilising existing local systems and governance arrangements to support performance and operational delivery.

HMICFRS Inspection: Following the Accelerated Cause of Concern issued in December 2025, HMICFRS completed a return visit, week commencing 17th August 2026. BCH considers that the initial action plan had been completed and that the department has moved from recovery into sustained performance management.

The formal inspection findings have not yet been received and will be reviewed through the relevant governance arrangements when issued. Until then, the department will continue to evidence sustainability and maintain focus on Quality Assurance, Training and Grants.

National HMICFRS Thematic Report: HMICFRS has published a National Thematic Report containing 23 recommendations with implications for firearms licensing. BCH has reviewed its compliance position and will monitor the impact through Operation Cordite Gold and Silver.

Conclusion: BCH FEL is in a considerably stronger and more controlled position. The work undertaken through Operation Cordite has produced material improvements in governance, resources, visibility of demand, productivity, Temporary Permits, decision-making queues, communications and complaints.

The department now needs to consolidate these gains and demonstrate that they are sustainable.

The principal areas requiring continued attention are:

- Outstanding new grant backlog
- Consistent and evidenced training
- Further development of Quality Assurance

Subject to sustained delivery in these areas and consideration of the awaited HMICFRS findings, the overall direction of travel is positive and provides a significantly improved level of assurance to the Police Accountability Board.

End.