

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Justice

WITHDRAWAL OF THE CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO FIREARMS LICENSING FEES AND THE “BANDED SYSTEM”

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Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice):

Today, I wish to inform the Assembly that I have taken the decision to withdraw the consultation on proposed amendments to firearms licensing fees and the “banded system”.

The consultation sought the public’s views on proposals to achieve full cost recovery for firearms licensing fees, as well as proposals 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.

Achieving full cost recovery for firearms licencing is essential to ensure the service is sustainably funded, removes the burden from the wider policing budget and taxpayers, and enables the police to maintain robust, well-resourced controls that protect public safety.

I remain fully aware that Northern Ireland’s firearms licensing fees have not increased in ten years and are now significantly less than in Great Britain where fees were increased last year, with a further inflationary increase due to come into effect next week.

I wish to acknowledge and thank those that have responded to the consultation to date. However, following its launch, the Department has received feedback and responses from consultees and stakeholder groups seeking additional information on the options considered, whilst raising some concerns on matters related to the consultation process itself.

Having considered that feedback and recent advice from officials, I have decided to withdraw the consultation at this time.

Whilst NI firearms licensing fees continue to be heavily subsidised from the core PSNI budget, I acknowledge the concerns raised and my Department will take time to carefully consider the issues highlighted.

I hope that by withdrawing the current consultation, it will provide the space for positive engagement, in good faith, to find a way forward as the current situation is not sustainable. Departmental officials will seek to engage with stakeholders to understand the concerns raised, explore options and develop proposals to inform a new consultation which will launch at a later date.