

News story: Biometrics Commissioner 2018 annual report: update

On 29 March 2019, the Biometrics Commissioner presented his annual report for 2018 to the Home Secretary, as required under section 21 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (PoFA).

Once the Home Secretary has considered the report, it will then be laid before Parliament.

The role of the Biometrics Commissioner was established by PoFA and Paul Wiles was appointed as the second Commissioner on 1 June 2016.

His role is to provide independent oversight of the regime established by PoFA, which came into force on 31 October 2013, to govern the retention and use by the police in England and Wales of DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints.

In addition to various casework responsibilities in relation to DNA and fingerprints, he also has a UK-wide oversight function as regards their retention and use by the police on national security grounds.

The Commissioner's 2018 report, which will be published once it has been laid before Parliament, deals primarily with developments since the publication of his 2017 report. It covers his casework activities, the general operation of the PoFA regime and a variety of wider issues that have arisen in connection with biometrics in both the normal policing and national security spheres.

If you have any queries, please contact Justin Hawkins on 0779 255 1301.

News story: Government publishes new action plan to improve police forensics

These commitments are designed to improve public confidence, support the criminal justice system, and ensure the quality and stability of forensics provision.

The plan is published alongside the findings of a Home Office commissioned review into the provision of forensic services in policing, such as DNA and fingerprint evidence. It finds that urgent action is required to make the current system sustainable.

Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, Nick Hurd, said:

Forensic science is an invaluable tool for bringing criminals to justice.

We must ensure it's sustainable, works at a high standard, and has the confidence of the public.

This is why I commissioned this review and we are now taking action to strengthen the market.

The [review](#) makes a series of recommendations, including making providers adhere to the quality standards set by the Forensic Science Regulator and ensuring the market's commercial models are sustainable and open to investment.

The government is committed to meeting these aims with a 13-point implementation plan. This includes:

- stabilising the market through a new, long-term commercial strategy delivered by the Forensics Capability Network to better co-ordinate police forces' approach to forensics
- continuing to support Chris Green MP's Private Member's Bill to give the regulator statutory powers of enforcement, as well as supporting the regulator's accreditation timetable
- working with national bodies, such as UK Research and Innovation, alongside the Ministry of Justice to establish a new oversight mechanism for research and development

The Home Office carried out the review jointly with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC).

APCC Forensics Lead Martyn Underhill PCC and Deputy Lead Mark Burns-Williamson PCC said:

The effectiveness of our criminal justice system is often dependent on the evidence obtained by high quality dedicated forensic experts that help keep our communities safe.

We are world leaders in the provision of forensic science, but we have recently seen significant issues that need urgently addressing. This review highlights those issues and provides recommendations and actions to ensure we continue to provide excellent forensic provision into the future.

The APCC will continue to work with police chiefs and the government to ensure investment in forensic science is increased and that this is reflected in the forthcoming spending review.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Forensic Science, Chief Constable James Vaughan QPM said:

We welcome the findings of the forensic review which was undertaken jointly by the NPCC, APCC and Home Office and are now working to implement the recommendations which will assist us to stabilise the market while making further improvements around quality standards and accreditation.

The Transforming Forensics Programme, which secured police transformation funding is already delivering capability in line with the findings of the review. It provides a long-term opportunity to ensure this vital area of policing and criminal justice is sustainable and will enable forces to achieve and maintain high quality, efficient and standardised processes while acting as a single voice on behalf of policing with key stakeholders.

[News story: General licences for bird control: major changes to licensing requirements](#)

Natural England is revoking three general licences for controlling certain wild birds as of Thursday 25 April 2019.

These licences (GL 04/05/06) cover 16 species of birds including several members of the crow family, Canada goose, some gulls and pigeons.

The change follows a legal challenge to the way the licences have been issued, which could mean users who rely on them are not acting lawfully.

Natural England is working at pace to put in place over the next few weeks alternative measures to allow lawful control of these bird species to continue where necessary. In the meantime, once the licences have been revoked and until new licences are issued, anyone needing to control one of these 16 bird species where there is no reasonable non-lethal alternative will need to apply for an individual licence.

The action is the first stage of a planned review of general and class licences, which will be completed this year.

Natural England's interim chief executive Marian Spain said:

We recognise this change will cause disruption for some people, but we are working hard to ensure it is kept to a minimum.

We will bring forward interim measures as quickly as possible as the first stage of our planned review of the licences. We want to make sure our licensing system is robust and proportionate, taking into account the needs of wildlife and people.

What to do if you use a general licence

It is expected that, over time, many situations currently covered by the three general licences will be covered by new licences.

Natural England is undertaking new licensing assessments to support lethal control of certain birds in defined situations, such as to prevent serious damage to livestock from carrion crow and to preserve public health and safety from the impacts of feral pigeons. It intends to start issuing these licences on gov.uk from the week commencing 29 April when more details will be available.

If people need to take action in the meantime they will need to apply for an individual licence, using a simplified process which will be available on gov.uk from 25 April.

In limited circumstances, people may be allowed to undertake urgent action in accordance with the existing requirements of section 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Anyone exercising lethal control of birds after Thursday 25 April 2019 without taking the above steps will not be covered by a general licence and could be committing an offence.

If you are unsure what you should do on your land, [visit the Natural England licensing webpage for more information and advice](#).

Background on the general licences

General licences were introduced in the 1990s to allow the legal control of bird species of low conservation concern to protect public health and safety, prevent serious damage and disease, and protect plants and wildlife.

Further details of the wider review into the operation and provision of general licences will be shared shortly. We will seek feedback from those using them and from wildlife protection and other groups. We expect to complete this review by the end of the year.

Part of Natural England's role is to ensure relevant provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are upheld to protect wildlife, as well as recognising the needs of people.

Background

Currently the three licences subject to the legal challenge cover 16 bird species, including several members of the crow family (crows, magpies, rooks, jackdaws and jays), feral and wood pigeon and number of invasive non-native species (such as Canada goose).

The specific licences:

- General licence GL04: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to prevent serious damage or disease
- General licence GL05: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to preserve public health or public safety
- General licence GL06: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to conserve wild birds or flora or fauna

[News story: Terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka](#)

Applications can be made to the [Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority \(CICA\)](#), under the [Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme 2012](#), by those victims injured, or the families of those killed, in the attack.

If you have been directly affected by this incident you can find out more about the Scheme and how to apply on [GOV.UK](#). Alternatively, you can call the CICA helpline on 0300 003 3601.

You do not need a paid representative, such as a solicitor or claims management company, to apply for compensation. Free independent advice may be available from the [Victim and Witness Information website](#) or other charitable organisations. You can find out more about this within our Guide to applying to the Scheme on [GOV.UK](#).

[Press release: Foreign Secretary Statement on Ukraine Presidential Elections](#)

The Foreign Secretary congratulates the next President of Ukraine on his election success