



Position Paper: Home Office Consultation on Licensing Knife Sales

Purpose

To highlight critical risks arising from the Home Office consultation on licensing knife sellers and importers, and to set out why the current proposals are unlikely to deliver improved public safety.

Key Points

1. Police Capacity – Risk of System Failure

Police licensing units are already operating under severe pressure. Introducing a large-scale knife licensing regime—alongside further demands within existing licensing systems—risks overwhelming capacity and causing a systemic failure in delivery. Additionally, there is another consultation that is due to be published imminently into the potential alignment of Section 1 and 2 Firearms. Depending on the result of that process then licensing departments will be under considerably more strain already without adding further workload. A licensing framework that cannot be administered consistently and in timely fashion undermines enforcement, public confidence, and safety.

2. Misaligned Focus on Knife Crime

Most serious knife-related offences involve **domestic or kitchen knives**, which are excluded from the proposed licensing scheme. As drafted, the consultation focuses regulatory effort on categories of knives that are not the primary drivers of serious violence, limiting the policy's likely impact on public safety and in fact is sufficiently covered in existing legislation.

3. Impact on Heavily Regulated, Compliant Sectors

Many legitimate retailers, including Registered Firearms Dealers, already operate under extensive regulatory oversight. Adding a further licensing layer for knives risks creating unworkable bureaucracy, diverting police resources, and penalising compliant businesses without delivering measurable public safety benefits. There are additionally collectors of historic and unique items that may be adversely impacted by such a measure.

4. Data and Recent Trends

Recent official data indicates a reduction in overall knife crime over the past two years. If current policing strategies are contributing to this trend, Government should prioritise sustaining and expanding those effective interventions rather than introducing broad new licensing regimes with uncertain impact.

BSSC Assessment

- The consultation lacks clear evidential link between proposed licensing measures & reduced knife crime
- Enforcement and administrative capacity have not been realistically assessed
- Policy risks being expanded in areas that do not address the principal sources of harm

BSSC Recommendations

- Reassess the evidential basis for licensing knife sellers and importers
- Align policy with the actual drivers of knife crime
- Ensure any regulatory framework is deliverable within existing policing capacity
- Focus resources on interventions proven to reduce violence

Note on Consultation Responses

Stakeholders should exercise caution when responding via the online consultation form, as some questions may implicitly assume acceptance of a licensing scheme. Written responses submitted by email allow positions to be expressed clearly and without constraint.

Conclusion

Knife crime demands evidence-led action. The current proposals risk expanding regulation without delivering commensurate public safety benefits, while placing unsustainable pressure on policing and compliant sectors.

The British Shooting Sports Council stands ready to engage constructively with Government to develop proportionate and effective solutions.