

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

In his address to the GTA AGM, chairman Oskar Waktare reflects on a year of licensing-policy work, expanding member support and training, and plans to modernise the association's systems and grow its membership.

I should like to begin my address by thanking those who have served as Members of Council over the course of the past year. During the year, David Stapley stepped down, and I should like to thank him for his voluntary service. Sean O'Driscoll of Rothery's is stepping down at this AGM. Sean, our grateful thanks for the contribution you have made. Alex Levett-Scrivener of Shooting Star joined Council by co-option.

Over the past 12 months, the Gun Trade Association (GTA) has experienced one of its busiest years on record.

The Government's proposed review of Sections 1 and 2 licensing may have been kicked into the long grass by the current Home Secretary, but the existential threat it posed consumed a huge amount of our time and resources during the first half of this year. A particular thank you to those of you who contributed so generously to our research project, which demonstrated the enormous damage such reforms could inflict not only on the trade, but on the wider UK economy.

The threat posed by proposed changes to Sections 1 and 2 has also helped galvanise the sector. The GTA took a leadership role, working with the Shooting Industry Fund to establish a coalition of 16 organisations which, under the umbrella of the British Shooting Sports Council (BSSC), are now united in opposition to proposed changes to shotgun controls that, in our view, cannot be justified on public-safety grounds.

It is therefore regrettable that, in its August report on national police firearms licensing, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) saw fit to resurrect this proposal. It is our understanding that the report received a muted response from Home Office officials.

The GTA is a lean organisation with an influence and workload far greater than its size might suggest. This year, our help desk has been busier than ever, our RFD training courses have been oversubscribed, and we have been heavily involved in an extraordinary range of issues. These have included new Home Office guidance, licensing delays, a proposed ban on the private sale of firearms, ongoing lead restrictions, an import-control testing regime for blank firers, implementation of the Online Safety Act, and the introduction of the new public-facing National Firearms Licensing Portal. We have also committed significant time to helping members struggling with changes to Parcelforce systems and to the removal of moderators from licensing - an issue on which the GTA and BSSC ultimately had to draft the official guidance for the Home Office to publish.

Looking ahead, all eyes are on the Home Secretary's plans for police reform. Together with our sister organisations, we continue to argue vigorously for the formation of a single national firearms licensing agency.

The GTA's technical director, Paul Green, continues to work hard to expand our training offer, developing and delivering tailored courses for individual businesses and organisations around the UK. He has recently extended our provision to Section 5 providers, and we are working to introduce Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accreditation for Paul's courses. Expect a survey in the New Year to gauge your appetite for further training, including professional qualifications for RFD servants and a customised pre-renewal audit product for RFDs.

The GTA is now a fully virtual organisation. We have continued to bear down on costs, while our operations manager, Elaine Gallen, has led the drive to streamline and improve our office procedures. Elaine manages our website and membership database, assists members with subscriptions and processes new membership applications. We now have well over 400 members and are beginning to explore opportunities to expand our membership overseas and within the fast-growing defence sector.

Our programme of modernisation will also come to fruition over the next few weeks. This includes a new IT system, a new customer relationship management (CRM) system, a new website, refreshed branding, enhanced financial reporting and improved workflow systems.

As another year passes, I should like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of the Gun Trade Association during what remain challenging times. Inevitably, the sadness of losing former GTA director John Batley, one of the trade's great champions, has cast a shadow over our work.

Nevertheless, you can be assured that we will continue to protect, promote and represent your businesses. It is only by working together, and by speaking with a strong and unified voice, that we can sustain a strong gun trade now and into the future. ■

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