

Omagh Bombing Inquiry:

Firearms Policy

September 2026

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1. Purpose

The Inquiry is committed to ensuring the safety, security and wellbeing of all witnesses, Core Participants, legal representatives, Inquiry staff, contractors, members of the media and members of the public attending Inquiry hearings.

This Policy establishes the arrangements governing the possession, carriage and control of firearms, ammunition and weapons at premises used by the Inquiry.

2. Legislative Framework

This Policy is made with reference to:

- The Inquiries Act 2005;
- The Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004.

Nothing in this Policy shall prejudice or limit the operation of any statutory powers exercised by the Police Service of Northern Ireland ("PSNI").

3. Scope

This Policy applies to:

- Witnesses;
- Core Participants;
- Legal representatives;
- Experts;
- Inquiry staff and contractors;
- Journalists and media representatives;
- Members of the public;
- Any person entering premises used by the Inquiry.

The Policy applies to:

- The Inquiry hearing venue, Bradford Court ('the venue');
- All public and private areas used by the Omagh Bombing Inquiry within the venue;
- Any other premises occupied or controlled by the Inquiry.

4. Definitions

Firearm

"Firearm" shall have the meaning assigned by Article 2 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 and includes:

- Handguns and pistols;
- Rifles;
- Shotguns;
- Component parts and accessories of firearms;
- Air weapons requiring certification;
- Any lethal barrelled weapon capable of discharging a missile.

Ammunition

Ammunition for any firearm, including cartridges, projectiles, blank ammunition and any other ammunition controlled under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004.

Imitation Firearm

Any item having the appearance of a firearm, whether capable of discharging a projectile or not.

5. General Prohibition

Subject to Sections 6 and 7 below:

No person may bring, possess, carry or otherwise have under their control within the Inquiry venue or any other premises occupied or controlled by the Inquiry any firearm, ammunition, imitation firearm or other offensive weapon where possession is prohibited or curtailed in law.

This prohibition applies, subject to the exceptions in Sections 6 and 7, irrespective of whether the individual holds a Firearm Certificate.

6. Firearms Certificate Holders

The Inquiry recognises that individuals in Northern Ireland may lawfully possess firearms under a Firearms Certificate issued by the PSNI.

Possession of a valid Firearms Certificate does not authorise a person to bring a firearm into the Inquiry venue or any premises controlled or occupied by the Inquiry, unless that is either (a) approved in advance by the Chairman or (b) the individual is a serving police officer or member of HM Armed Forces who is carrying a Personal Protection Weapon ('PPW').

The process for advance approval means that:

- (i) Not less than 7 days before the attendance of the named individual who wishes to have a firearm on their person at the Inquiry venue or any premises controlled or occupied by the Inquiry, a written application must be made to the Chairman providing –

- a) a copy of the up-to-date Firearms Certificate for the individual;
 - b) any conditions on that Firearms Certificate; and
 - c) the reasons the individual is said to require possession of the firearm in the Inquiry venue or other premises controlled by the Inquiry.
- (ii) If the individual is a former police officer or member of HM Armed Forces and, for that reason, they will have an authorised PPW with them when attending any Inquiry premises, they will be required to notify the Inquiry as per step (i) above. They must ensure their Firearms Certificate specifically states '*for personal protection purposes*'.
 - (iii) The written application must be submitted via the attendee's legal representative to the Solicitor to the Inquiry tim.suter@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk or directly to security.applications@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk. This mailbox is monitored by the Secretary and Deputy Secretary to the Inquiry only.
 - (iv) The contents of any application will only be shared with the Chairman, the Solicitor, Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Counsel to the Inquiry.

7. Personal Protection Weapons

The Inquiry recognises that certain individuals in Northern Ireland may possess firearms for personal protection under lawful authority.

This includes:

- Serving and former police officers;
- Serving and former military personnel;
- Individuals authorised under arrangements administered by the Chief Constable.

Serving PSNI officers and members of HM Armed Forces are permitted to carry their firearm within the Inquiry venue or any premises controlled by the Inquiry. For non-uniformed personnel, presentation of their Warrant Card is required before entering the building with a firearm. No advance notice is required for any serving PSNI officer or member of HM Armed Forces to enter Inquiry premises with a firearm.

Other persons, including former police officers and former members of HM Armed Forces, who carry a PPW must provide a valid Firearms Certificate 7 days in advance in accordance with section 6, above.

8. Security Screening

All attendees at the Inquiry venue or other Inquiry controlled premises shall be subject to reasonable security measures, which may include:

- Identity checks;
- Accreditation verification;
- Bag searches;
- Screening by metal detection equipment;
- Search of personal possessions.

The security screening requirements apply to all those carrying firearms, including a PPW. Attendance at any Inquiry premises constitutes acceptance of these security requirements.

Any individual who is permitted to bring a PPW to any Inquiry premises must ensure they bring a copy of their Firearms Certificate with them to confirm that it is for “*personal protection purposes*” and that this is shown to Inquiry staff or contractors if requested.

Individuals who refuse to comply or who have not complied with the advance notification requirements in Section 6 may be refused entry.

9. Discovery of Firearms or Weapons

Where a firearm, ammunition or other prohibited item is discovered:

- Security staff shall immediately secure the area;
- The PSNI may be notified where appropriate;
- Entry may be refused;
- The circumstances shall be recorded in an incident report.

The Inquiry may postpone or suspend proceedings where necessary to ensure safety.

10. Breach of Policy

Any person who breaches this policy may:

- Be denied entry;
- Be removed from the venue;
- Be excluded from future hearings;
- Have the matter referred to the PSNI;
- Be subject to any other lawful action considered necessary by the Inquiry.

Contact Details

For any queries you may have about this policy, please contact operations@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk.