GENERAL

# how to obtain a police check

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## How to Obtain a Police Check: A Step by Step Guide

When you need a police check—whether for a job, a visa, a volunteer role, or simply to verify your own criminal record—you're stepping into a process that can feel intimidating at first glance. A police check, also known as a police clearance or background check, is a formal request for a record of any convictions, cautions, or pending charges that have been documented by law enforcement agencies. In many countries, a police check is required by employers, immigration authorities, and licensing bodies to ensure public safety and compliance with legal standards.

This comprehensive guide will walk you through every stage of obtaining a police check, from understanding what it is and why you need it, to navigating the application process in the UK, and covering international considerations. By the end, you'll know exactly what documents to prepare, which offices to contact, how long to expect processing times, and how to avoid common pitfalls. Let's dive in.

## What Is a Police Check?

A police check is an official record produced by a law enforcement agency that details any criminal convictions, cautions, or pending charges on an individual's file. In the UK, this is commonly referred to as a **police clearance certificate** or **police record check**. The information disclosed can range from minor offences to serious crimes, depending on the level of clearance requested. Police checks are often used to assess suitability for roles that involve working with vulnerable populations, handling sensitive information, or operating in regulated industries.

## Types of Police Checks

- Basic Police Check (Local) – Provides a record of convictions in the local area where the request is made.
- Standard Police Check (National) – Covers the entire country and is often required for employment, volunteering, and certain licensing.
- Enhanced Police Check – Includes a check of the National Criminal Records Bureau (NCRB) database and is mandatory for roles such as childcare, healthcare, and education.
- International Police Check – Tailored for individuals moving abroad, often involving cooperation with foreign police agencies.

## Why You Might Need a Police Check

Police checks are requested for a variety of reasons, each tied to legal, regulatory, or safety concerns:

1. Employment – Many employers, especially in finance, healthcare, and education, require a clearance to protect their clients and employees.
2. Volunteering – Non profits and charities often mandate checks for roles that involve children or vulnerable adults.
3. Licensing and Registration – Certain professional licences (e.g., solicitor, teacher, driver) require a police clearance.
4. Immigration and Visa Applications – Countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand ask for police

checks to assess an applicant's background.

5. Pet Adoption – Some shelters request a police clearance to ensure the adopter's suitability.
6. Personal Assurance – Individuals may want to confirm their own record for peace of mind.

## Who Can Request a Police Check?

In most jurisdictions, anyone can request a police check for themselves. However, if you're applying on behalf of someone else—such as a child or a dependent—you'll typically need written consent and a valid reason, like a job or volunteer position. Employers or organizations usually provide the necessary paperwork and may cover the cost.

## Where to Get a Police Check in the UK

In the United Kingdom, the primary source for police checks is the **UK Police National Computer (PNC)** and the **Police National Computer (PNC) and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)**. Requests can be made through:

- The local police department where you reside.
- Online portals such as police.uk for basic checks.
- Third  party providers authorized by the police (e.g., CRB.co.uk).
- Employers or charitable organizations that issue official certificates.

## Step 1: Gather Your Documentation

Before you even touch a form, make sure you have the following ready:

- Valid photo ID (passport, driving licence, or national ID).
- Proof of address (utility bill, council tax statement, or bank statement).
- Completed application form (available online or in person).
- Any supporting documents requested by the authority (e.g., employment reference letters).
- Payment method (credit card, debit card, or cheque).

Having all documents organized will speed up the process and reduce the chance of delays.

## Step 2: Choose the Correct Authority

Decide whether you need a local, national, or enhanced check. If you're unsure, consult the organization requesting the certificate. For example, a childcare charity will likely require an enhanced check, while a local community centre may only need a basic check. Selecting the right level ensures you provide the necessary information without overpaying.

## Step 3: Complete the Application Form

Application forms differ slightly between local police departments and national agencies. Generally, you'll need to provide:

1. Full name and date of birth.
2. Current and previous addresses (last 5 years).
3. Contact details.
4. Consent to release information to the requesting party.
5. Signature and date.

When filling out the form, double  check for spelling errors and missing information. A single mistake can postpone your application.

## Step 4: Pay the Fee

Fees vary depending on the type of check:

- Basic local check: £10–£15.
- Standard national check: £20–£25.
- Enhanced check: £30–£40.
- International check: £40–£60.

Payment is usually accepted by credit/debit card, bank transfer, or cheque. Keep the receipt as proof of payment—some authorities require it for record keeping.

## Step 5: Submit the Application

You can submit your application in several ways:

- In person – Visit your local police station, bring all documents, and hand in the form.
- Online – Use the police.uk portal or a third party provider's secure website.
- Mail – Send the completed form, ID copies, and payment receipt to the police department's address.

Always keep a copy of everything you send. If you apply online, save the confirmation number; it will help you track your request.

## Processing Times

Typical processing times in the UK are:

- Local checks: 1–5 working days.
- Standard checks: 5–10 working days.
- Enhanced checks: 10–15 working days.
- International checks: 15–20 working days.

Delays can occur if the police need to verify additional information, if there are high volumes of requests, or if you submit incomplete documentation. If you're on a tight deadline, consider requesting an expedited service—many agencies offer this for an additional fee.

## Common Mistakes to Avoid

Even a small oversight can delay your police check. Watch out for these pitfalls:

- Missing or mismatched personal details (e.g., incorrect date of birth).
- Inadequate proof of address.
- Failing to sign the consent form.
- Submitting the wrong type of check for your needs.
- Using an expired ID or outdated documents.

Double checking your application before submission can save you days of waiting.

## Tips for Speeding Up the Process

Need your certificate sooner? Try these strategies:

1. Use the online portal – Digital applications are processed faster than paper.

2. Provide full, accurate information – The less the police have to verify, the quicker the result.
3. Opt for expedited processing – Many agencies allow you to pay an extra fee for faster delivery.
4. Check the police website for peak times – Avoid submitting during holiday periods or weekends.
5. Track your application – Use the confirmation number to monitor status updates.

## Online vs. In Person Applications

Online applications are typically more convenient and faster, especially for standard checks. However, in-person visits can be beneficial if:

- You're unsure about the correct type of check.
- You need immediate assistance with documentation.
- You prefer a face to face conversation for clarity.

Regardless of the method, ensure you're using an official or authorized website to avoid scams.

## International Police Checks

When moving abroad or applying for work overseas, you'll likely need an international police check. The process often involves:

1. Obtaining a standard or enhanced check from your home country.
2. Requesting a certified, sealed copy of the certificate.
3. Having the document notarized and, in some cases, apostilled by the relevant authority.
4. Submitting the sealed certificate to the foreign embassy or immigration office.

Always check the specific requirements of the destination country, as some may require additional verification steps.

## Police Checks for Volunteering

Volunteers who work with


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