

The Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

19 August 2026

Dear Karen,

Consultation on tightening controls on Gamma-Butyrolactone and 1,4-Butanediol

I am writing to inform you that I intend to publish a consultation on tightening controls on Gamma-Butyrolactone ('GBL') and 1,4-Butanediol ('1,4-BD') on 19 August 2026. In line with the Government's ambition to tackle violence against women and girls, the intention of this proposal is to inhibit the ability of criminals to access GBL and 1,4-BD, which are linked to drug-facilitated sexual assault.

Summary of Proposals

GBL and 1,4-BD are Class B controlled drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 ('the 1971 Act'). They are closely related to Gamma-hydroxybutyric Acid ('GHB'). Together, these drugs are referred to as 'GHB and related substances' ('GHBRs'). GHBRs can cause profound unconsciousness and have been used in crimes such as drug-facilitated sexual assault and homicides.

GBL and 1,4-BD, however, are subject to a conditional exemption under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 ('the 2001 Regulations') from drug licensing controls because they have many uses in industry across a variety of sectors. The draft consultation seeks views on proposals to replace the existing exemption with a more limited exemption.

Purpose

The current exemption applies to GBL and 1,4-BD and products containing them and makes it lawful to import, export, possess, produce and supply them without a licence if they are not for human ingestion, other than as a flavouring in food. In some cases, this exemption has been exploited by offenders. High purity GBL and 1,4-BD are sold as purported industrial products.

The consultation proposal has been developed in discussion with representatives of the chemical industry, including representatives of the ink and coatings sectors, and is modelled on the exemption for GBL under US legislation.

The proposal is to introduce licensing requirements for high purity GBL and 1,4-BD (the consultation considers 70% and, alternatively, 99% as the maximum purity level) while retaining a qualified exemption (similar to the current exemption) for mixtures with a lower concentration. The consultation contains detail about what would constitute a qualifying mixture for the purposes of the exemption.

Growth Impacts

The attached Options Assessment estimates that these proposals will mean that 70 to 300 businesses will require a controlled drugs licence granted by the Home Office's Drugs and Firearms Licensing Unit (DFLU), with a central estimate of 100. Should we proceed following consultation, the Home Office intends that there is a substantial period (a year) between the introduction of the legislation and its commencement, to enable businesses to apply for and be granted licences.

The public consultation will be open for twelve weeks, with a view to reducing the risk of unintended consequences for industry and ensuring that the burdens on those sectors that use these substances are proportionate. The closing date for the consultation will be 11 November 2026.

Devolution

The Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 apply in England, Scotland and Wales. The Minister for Health, Northern Ireland has requested that the consultation is issued as a Home Office-DHNI document with a view to making equivalent legislative change in Northern Ireland. The consultation document therefore contains questions on equalities and rural impacts required for consideration of the proposals in Northern Ireland.

The Home Office intends to publish a response to the consultation on GOV.UK in due course.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter and the consultation document to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S. Jones', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Jones MP
Minister of State for Policing and Crime