



Forensic Services Committee

5 February 2024

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 30 October 2023 via MS Teams.

Board Members present:	Paul Edie (Committee Chair) Caroline Stuart (Committee Member) Mary Pitcaithly (Committee Member) Katharina Kasper (Committee Member)
Board Member apologies:	Jane Ryder (Committee Member)
In attendance:	<u>SPA Forensic Services</u> Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer Alastair Patience, Head of Function Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance Joanne Tierney, Head of Change & Development Derek Scrimger, Head of Function Louisa Thow, Service Deliver Manager Amanda Pirrie, Forensic Operations Lead <u>Crown Office</u> Ruth McQuaid, Procurator Fiscal High Court <u>Police Scotland</u> Suzanne Chow, Detective Chief Superintendent <u>HMICS</u> Craig Naylor, Chief Inspector of Constabulary

	<p>SPA Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance Lesley Carnegie, Performance & Impact Lead Graham Stickle, Audit and Risk Lead Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer</p>
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1. Introductions and Welcome:

1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed SPA Board Member, Mary Pitcaithly to her first meeting of the Forensic Services Committee and thanked Fiona McQueen for all her input as a previous member.

1.2 Apologies

Jane Ryder and ACC Bex Smith

1.3 Declarations of Interest and Connections

There were no declarations of interest or connections.

1.4 Decision on taking business in private (Item 7 and 8)

Members **AGREED** to take items 7 and 8 in private.

2. Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

2.1 Minute from meeting held on 10 August 2023 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 10 August 2023 was an accurate record of the meeting.

2.2 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

Members **NOTED** and **AGREED** the written updates provided.

There were no matters arising.

2.3 Decisions since last meeting

There were no decisions since the last meeting.

3. Performance

3.1 Forensic Services Director's Report

FDouglas provided an overview of recent key activities across Forensic Services. During discussions the following matters were raised:

The Chair welcomed the Annual Review and the signing of the updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Chair also sought assurance on the contingencies in place for continuity of service delivery during the replacement of the roof at the Howden Hall Laboratory. Alan Connell (AConnell) advised that there is a full scope of works planned and prepared with contractors and those working on site. The work has now commenced with no concerns being highlighted. AConnell added that this work will be monitored closely and it is hoped that work will be complete early 2024, with a target date of end Feb/start March.

Members commended the new branding and noted that they would be keen to support future excellence awards.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.2 Forensic Services Performance Framework

FDouglas provided provide the Forensic Services Performance Framework for discussion and approval. During discussions the following matters were raised:

The Chair noted that a lot of work had been carried out on the performance framework over the past 9 months as recently discussed in detail at a committee workshop. The Chair noted that document did reflect much of what members had requested but would continue to evolve through an annual refresh.

Members **NOTED** the report and **APPROVED** the Forensic Services Performance Framework.

3.3 Forensic Services Performance Report – Q2

Vicki Morton (VMorton) provided a detailed overview of the Forensic Services Performance Report, Q2 2023/24. During discussions the following matters were raised;

MPitcaithly referred to page 17 and page 24 of the report where it shows cases that are a priority 3 (consistently green) has a much higher

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performance compared to a priority 2 case (consistently red), and sought clarity on why that was and what was being done to address that. VMorton advised that much of the time it depends on what type of cases are within the category and advised that this was being looked at in more detail. It was noted that there has perhaps been a drive to look at easier, quicker and smaller cases which often sit in the priority 3 category as they tend to be easier from a forensic analytical reporting perspective. VMorton added that this could also be a result of the EMS System where multi-disciplinary cases are placed into different areas of the business. If an internal target is missed it has a knock-on effect making other areas red. VMorton assured members that work was being done in this area and that necessary actions will be taken to address the matter.

Katharina Kasper (KKasper) referred to forecasting and noted the importance of the organisation understanding the underlying assumptions that go into those forecasts and would welcome the output of that work presented to the committee in due course. VMorton advised that this will also feed into work being done with SPA Corporate around horizon scanning.

The Chair referred to firearms performance and staffing issues and asked if there were any associated risks in terms of missing deadlines with prosecution. VMorton advised there were no risks associated with deadlines with prosecution and added that forensics work closely with PS and COPFS in terms of prioritising cases. VMorton advised that an additional staff member was currently being recruited within firearms in anticipation of any future challenges in relation to resource.

The Chair referred to criminal toxicology and sought clarity over the poor performance. VMorton advised that criminal toxicology has a lot of different aspects with a small team delivering the work which has been a challenge, however, improvements are showing through. VMorton advised that outsourcing is being looked at along with ongoing dialogue with PS and COPFS around the prioritisation of cases. It is hoped there will be significant improvement in the coming months. Alastair Patience (APatience) assured members that there was no risk to any court dates as a result of these cases.

Caroline Stuart (CStuart) welcomed the report and advised that it would be good to see it streamlined in future iterations. CStuart referred to sickness and absence and sought clarity on those on short term sickness, how many convert into long term. VMorton advised that she would look to report that back to the committee.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

20233010-FSC-001: Vicki Morton to note within future reports those on short term sickness and how many convert into long term sickness. This will give members an indication of any trends.

3.4 Drug Driving Update

APatience provided members with an update on progress on the Drug Driving Toxicology Service. During discussions the following matters were raised;

The Chair sought clarity (para 2.6) on if the overall reduction in internal caseload, to a more manageable level, has had a positive impact on the staff within the team. APatience assured members that although there is less overtime being worked, the team continue to work to improve the position. APatience advised that his previous concerns were that the high levels of overtime being worked may result in increased sickness levels, however this has not been the case.

The Chair referred to the consideration being given to outsourcing and sought clarity on who would fund that outsourcing and how much would be required. APatience was unable to advise on what level of funding would be required, however, it is likely that a request will go to SG. The Chair sought clarity on progress on the Long-Term Sustainable Model. APatience advised that there had been a lot of dialogue with SG colleagues, however, as a result of HMICS recommendations, it is likely that there will be further iterations of the model to be developed. FDouglas advised that the model is influenced by a number of different factors and as a result work will continue with SG to reach a point on where a Long-Term Sustainable Model can be produced, with a reasonable set of options. There will also be a need for further discussions with PS around what future demand might look like.

The Chair referred to Section 5A and Section 4 cases and sought clarity on where the October data was within the report. APatience advised that he would provide that data following the committee.

The Chair sought clarity on what the financial and personnel implications were associated with the report. APatience advised that the personnel implications refers to staffing for the forensic services operating model of which the recruitment is already in place. The financial implications are in relation to the staffing and outsourcing associated with the operating model. FDouglas advised that the full business case for the operating model increases the resourcing within criminal toxicology for drugs driving.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

20233010-FSC-002: Alastair Patience to provide the Section 5A and Section 4 data for October 2023 to members.

3.5 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report Q2

FDouglas provided members with update on the financial position of Forensic Services for Q2 (three months ending 30 September 2023) of the financial year 2023/24, as well as forecasting the full outturn to the year end. During discussions the following matters were raised;

The Chair sought clarity on whether there was a risk of losing reform money due to the underspend. FDouglas advised that she did not believe so and noted that there had been some miscommunication around those areas, however, there were no risks associated with reform funding and spending.

Members **NOTED** the report.

4. HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology Provision – Improvement Plan

FDouglas provided members with an update on progress on the HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology Improvement Plan and timeline for delivery. During discussions the following matters were raised;

Craig Naylor (CNaylor) advised that a lot of very good work had been progressed and noted that work was still ongoing to ensure that the evidence provided for closure is targeted at recommendations. CNaylor advised that the update regarding the MoU will likely close off another recommendation. CNaylor advised that HMICS are encouraged by the progress that has been made however, remain concerned about outsourcing for next year. HMICS would be keen to see more detail in the performance report about expectation levels of service delivery in this space, along with what can be delivered through outsourcing.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action:

20233010-FSC-003: Fiona Douglas to provide more detail in the performance report about expectation levels of service delivery in this space, along with what can be delivered through outsourcing.

5. Forensic Services Change Programme Update

Joanne Tierney (JTierney) provided members with an update on progress against the Forensic Services Change Programme Plan and to introduce our Benefits Realisation Management Framework & Plan. During discussions the following matters were raised;

MPitcaithly was encouraged to hear about the development opportunities available and being taken forward by staff. The Chair agreed that having available progression within an organisation is very beneficial to staff morale.

Members **NOTED** the report.

6. 10th Anniversary of Forensic Services Cold Case Review

Louisa Thow, supported by, Amanda Pirie, provided an update on the work of Forensic Services Cold Case Review Team created a decade ago. During discussions the following matters were raised;

The Chair noted the importance of this work throughout the wider justice system. KKasper noted the importance of this work for victims and families, noting that it is not a luxury but a necessity.

Detective Chief Superintendent Suzanne Chow (DCSSChow) noted the complexities involved in these cases and commended the resilience, effort and patience of those within the team working on these cold cases. DCSSChow advised that Police Scotland would not have been able to follow through on some convictions without the work of team and expressed her thanks.

FDouglas advised that this is an example of some of the excellent work done throughout forensic services, delivering some excellent results. FDouglas advised that there is now opportunity to bring some of the skills from that team into current live cases. FDouglas added that this highlights the benefit of public sector forensic provision, particularly around the way forensic science works in Scotland, with all forensic disciplines under one roof.

Ruth McQuaid endorsed the comments made Police Scotland, and thanked the team on behalf of the Crown Office, noting that justice has no crime limit.

Members **NOTED** the report.

End.