

FORENSIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
27 July 2020

**Minute of the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services
Committee held by MS Teams on Monday 27 July 2020.**

Authority Members Present: Tom Halpin (Chair)
Bob Hayes
Jane Ryder

In attendance: Scottish Police Authority (SPA)
Tom Nelson, Director of Forensic Services
Gary Holcroft, Head of Physical Sciences
Fiona Douglas, Temporary Head of Forensic Services 2026
Programme
Jennifer Muir, Head of Strategy and Business Performance
Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality
Derek Scrimger, Temporary Head of Biology
Amy McDonald, Forensic Services

Deborah Christie, SPA Committee Co-ordinator

Police Scotland (PS)
ACC Judi Heaton
Detective Chief Superintendent Gary Cunningham
Liz Nimmo, Programme Manager (seconded to Forensic
Services)

COPFS
Kenny Donnelly

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and welcomed ACC Judi Heaton to what was her first attendance at the SPA Forensics Services Committee.

The Chair noted apologies from Police Scotland's Chief Digital and Information Officer, Andrew Hendry.

1.2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1.3 Forensics Services Committee minute of meeting held 20 April 2020 for approval

Members agreed the Minute from the Forensics Services committee on the April 20 2020 was an accurate record of the meeting.

1.4 Action Log and Matters Arising

Members reviewed the action log and noted the updates provided.

There were no matters arising.

1.5 Decision on taking business in private (items 8-15)

Members agreed, in accordance with paragraphs 21 and 22 of the SPA Standing Orders, to consider items 8-15 on the agenda in private for the reasons set out in the agenda.

2. Forensic Services Performance Report – Q1

Members considered the Forensic Services Performance Report, Q1 2020/21. During discussion and in addition to the report the following points were raised and noted;

- Tom Nelson provided an overview of the report highlighting the following areas as detailed in the executive summary; Performance, Engagement and Business Updates.
- Members heard that the impacts of COVID19 could now be seen reflected in the performance in April and May with an improvement in output in June.
- It was reported that capacity had been mapped against demand on services and this would continue to help monitor future demands. Members noted the tracking would become more important in the future as the workload was expected to increase. It was reported that the blended approach to working had been well received by staff and would be considered in forward planning.
- The committee noted that plans for UKAS Accreditation were underway and these would include necessary adjustments to ensure safety and compliance with physical distancing as required.
- Members joined the Committee Chair in his sincere appreciation to all SPA Forensics Staff for their continued commitment and professionalism during the COVID19 restrictions. It was agreed that the recent events had demonstrated that the model of 'crime scene to court' for forensic science was a robust approach which had been sustained during the recent COVID19 restrictions.
- Members explored the issues in relation to ability to deliver the required standard required by the Criminal Justice system and

questioned if there were any barriers to meeting the required standards in this area. Tom Nelson explained that there has always been a pressure to meeting required timescales but that additional staff were being trained to reduce the backlog to a more acceptable level. It was reported that the team was working with the Procurator Fiscal and Crown Office to explore new ways of working to be more efficient going forward and it should be expected that the backlog in this area will reduce in the coming months.

- Clarity was sought on the specific reasons for the negative feedback in relation to Scene Examination in Q4. This information was not available and it was agreed that this information would be provided in a briefing to the Members.
- Members heard that physical distancing had reduced capacity across the Forensics estate and this had presented challenges in some business areas. It was agreed this would be actively managed and details of this reported to future meetings in order that the committee can be assured safeguards are in place to address any issues in a timely manner. It was confirmed that the extension of the time bar does not cover the Misuse of Drugs Act therefore there was a requirement to ensure arrangements were in place and cases continue to be delivered on time.
- Members took assurance from an update that Tom Nelson met regularly with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) to ensure the very dynamic situation was being actively managed and mitigating actions were taken when required.

Members noted the report and agreed the following actions;

20200727-FS-001: Further analysis of specific reasons for negative feedback received in Physical Sciences and Scene Examination to be circulated to committee members.

20200727-FS-002: Future committee updates to include explanation of what mitigating actions have been put in place to ensure any backlog of work when courts re-start after lockdown over COVID19 period does not have any avoidable implications in respect of the time bar for COPFS.

3. Drug Driving Update – Gary Holcroft

Members considered the paper which provided an update on the Drug Driving Toxicology Service. During discussion and in addition to the report the following points were raised and noted;

- The committee heard the demand for this service had increased and was now significantly exceeding the capacity. Members heard that

the additional investment from Scottish Government had not addressed the full extent of the capacity issues.

- The added value of this service was noted with 85% of samples yielding a result of at least 1 drug above the stated limit.
- Members noted the anticipated continued media interest in this area.
- Gary Holcroft invited Members to consider any options to explore the options available in this area to establish a way that stakeholders can all work collaboratively to find a sustainable solution.
- The committee explored options to carry out the necessary work to assess how best the volume of demand coming into the system can be managed and what steps can be taken to better manage demand until the required resilience is in place. Bob Hayes proposed that the Police Scotland Drugs Strategy Board and the development of the MOU be considered as opportunities to address some of the capacity issues.
- Members heard that Police Scotland currently have limited officers who are trained in this new procedure and the intention is to explore ways in which capacity can be managed. Members noted that work would be done to better understand the demand and to take learning from other forces.
- It was agreed that there were some matters that required to be addressed urgently and further multi agency discussions would take place to identify the required next steps.

Members noted the report and agreed the following action;

20200727-FS-003: Discussion to take place between Committee Chair/SPA Interim Chair/Director of Forensic Services/SG/Police Scotland to collectively agree what next steps are required to ensure the required capacity is in place to match the demand on an ongoing sustainable basis.

4. Digital Forensics Working Group Verbal Update - Bob Hayes

Members considered a verbal update from the Chair of the Digital Forensics Working group. The following key points were noted;

- The Working Group's recommendations had been accepted by The Authority at a recent meeting and the governance and oversight will be finalised and agreed in due course.
- Reports on accreditation will be through Forensics Services Committee going forward.

Members noted the verbal update.

5. Forensic Services 2026 Update – Fiona Douglas

Members consider the report which provided a comprehensive update on the progress of the Forensics 2026 Programme of work. During discussion and in addition to the report the following points were raised and noted;

- The committee was walked through the progress as reported in the Roadmap with progress in respect of key areas highlighted including; the development of the MOU, the development of the IBC for the Operating Model and the Core Operating System Project. Members were assured that learning from COVID19 would feed into the project work.
- Clarity was sought on how the Police Scotland Unify Project linked to the recent Internal Audit Report on Productions Remodelling - Jane Ryder expressed concern as to how the Unify Projects linked to the recommendations from the Productions Remodelling work. Fiona Douglas explained that there were a number of efficiencies that would be created in Police Scotland and a number of systems that could be better integrated to achieve a new way of working, this was being explored. The committee was advised that it is not going to be possible to integrate Unify and EMS at this stage. The possible impact of the project on Forensics Services was being highlighted to the Committee as the changes to Unify mean that Forensic Services will have to enter information into Unify, work which is not currently done. There is an impact that more staff time will be required to do this. It was reported that the change team was working with Police Scotland to establish how this will be taken forward.
- The Committee recognised the risk in this area and the Chair advised that the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee would continue to pursue the matter.
- The Chair invited the team to reflect on the feedback from the committee discussion and for it to be considered in future update brought to the committee.

Members noted the progress report.

6. HMICS Update – Derek Scrimger

Members consider the report which provided an update on work to implement the improvements set out in the HMICS Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Service. During discussion and in addition to the report the following points were raised and noted;

- It was reported that due to COVID19 impacts, there had been limited engagement and work continued to address the recommendation.

Members noted the report.

**7. Forensic Services Committee Workplan
Members noted the committee workplan.**

Items 8 to 15 were taken in private.

End

Approved