



Agenda Item 7

Meeting	Authority Meeting
Date	20 February 2025
Location	Merchants House, Glasgow
Title of Paper	Forensic Services Director's report
Presented By	Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services
Recommendation to Members	For discussion
Appendix Attached	No

PURPOSE

To update members on the recent key activities across Forensic Services.

1. Updates

Drug driving

- 1.1 The number of drug-driving samples being submitted to Forensic Services continues to rise. Forensic Services and Police Scotland have an agreed capacity for the submission of Drug driving samples which forecasts a demand of 250 cases per month, stretching to 270 when required.
- 1.2 As detailed at the most recent SPA Forensic Services Committee in the Drug Driving update paper (Paper 3.3), Forensic Services received 958 samples during Quarter 3: 352 in October; 312 in November; and 294 in December. As per the jointly agreed, signed, and published [Memorandum of Understanding for the Provision of Drug Driving Forensic Services in Scotland](#), there has been a sustained increase in demand for three months. As outlined at Section 10.5 of the MoU, this now requires formal engagement with the SPA Forensic Services Committee.
- 1.3 Forensic Services will be unable to meet the increasing drug-driving demands without implementing a sustainable long-term solution. An Initial Business Case for the Long-Term Sustainable Model for Criminal Toxicology was presented and supported by the Resources Committee on 18 December 2024. The Full Business Case is now under development and will be considered by the Authority in 2025/26. If the model is fully funded, it will be in place following a 2-3 year implementation phase.
- 1.4 Recent rises in demand for drug driving testing are being managed through the Memorandum of Understanding, with additional capacity being addressed through increased outsourcing. If this rise in demand continues in the period before implementation of the long-term model, there will be an additional cost pressure in 2025/26 and beyond.

Supporting the Shetland roadside testing pilot

- 1.5 The Director of Forensic Services visited Shetland on 5th December 2024 with Chief Superintendent Hilary Sloan, Police Scotland Head of Road Policing, to support Police Scotland at the launch of the roadside drug testing pilot. Forensic Services are working closely with Police Scotland, as the force seeks to expand the use of Drug Wipes, so we can understand better their future requirements for drug-driving testing.

- 1.6 We are committed to support justice in Scotland and keep our communities safe and protected from drug drivers and the danger they cause on our roads. Drug drivers in Shetland are now more likely to be caught as roadside testing kits are rolled out to local policing officers.
- 1.7 Training is being delivered as part of the pilot to give local policing officers the ability to use Drug Wipe – a mouth swab drug detection kit – which will give an instant result to check for cannabis and cocaine. If the test is positive, drivers are then taken to a police station for a blood test which can detect other substances. It is then sent away to a laboratory and if appropriate, a case prepared for court.

Finance update

- 1.8 At the end of Quarter 3, Forensic Services are currently forecasting an overspend of around £300,000 on the revenue budget and an underspend of £200,000 capital by the end of the year.
- 1.9 While the current predicted overspend represents around 0.6% of the £44.7 million revenue budget, significant steps have already been taken to reduce this overspend to try to ensure Forensic Services are back on budget by the financial year end.

UKAS accreditation maintained for 26th consecutive year

- 1.10 UKAS completed their ISO 17025 accreditation assessment programme in Howden Hall, Edinburgh, on 5th December 2024 after more than five weeks of assessment activity at our five laboratory sites, which had begun at Rushton Court, Dundee, on 4th November. Forensic Services maintained our accreditation status for the 26th consecutive year.
- 1.11 There were more than 75 days of UKAS assessment time, covering all accredited areas, as well as an additional eight days of new extensions to our accredited scope. Feedback from the UKAS assessment team was very positive, thanking everyone that they met for their professionalism, openness, and the high-level competence of staff.
- 1.12 The UKAS requirements regarding GEN6 - '*Reference to accreditation and multilateral recognition signatory status by UKAS-accredited bodies*' with full implementation of the GEN6 requirements are now being implemented after discussions with COPFS.

Ethical use of biometric data

- 1.13 Dr Brian Plastow, the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner, wrote to the Director of Forensic Services on 8th January 2025 saying: "From independent review of the available evidence, I am satisfied that the SPA Forensic Services are currently using biometric data in a lawful, effective, and ethical manner."
- 1.14 He added: "I am also satisfied that the SPA Forensic Services is currently complying with the statutory [Code of Practice](#) approved by the Parliament and Scottish Ministers on 16 November 2022."

Staff surveys

- 1.15 Forensic Services have held two staff surveys in the past year. The first was the *Your Voice Matters* carried out in conjunction with Police Scotland. The findings of this survey have been shared with staff and trade union colleagues.
- 1.16 The second survey was run by Involve, who champion diversity and inclusion in business, and supported their survey with focus groups. Involve have brought the data from both surveys into a single output, and have made highlighted three priorities which will make the largest impact:
- Develop and implement clear, measurable objectives for senior leaders regarding DEI initiatives
 - Develop clear, documented career progression pathways accessible to all employees
 - Offer targeted training and professional development opportunities
- 1.17 Forensic Services will be: sharing these joint results with our staff and trade unions colleagues; develop an action plan to take forward all the recommendations; Create a short-life working group with representatives from staff associations and trade unions; seek staff with lived experiences to join – so we can maximise the benefit of this work. We will report the outcomes internally through the Forensic Services People Board and governance will be through the SPA Forensic Services Committee and SPA People Committee.

Westminster Forensic Commission team visit Gartcosh

- 1.18 Four members of the Westminster Commission on Forensic Science visited the Scottish Crime Campus, Gartcosh, in January 2025. They

are looking at the provision of forensic science in England and Wales and were interested understating more about the delivery model used by Forensic Services in Scotland. They spent a day being briefed by member of the Senior Management Team as well as touring the laboratories with a Lead Forensic Scientist.

- 1.19 The Westminster Commission on Forensic Science was set up in March 2023 by the Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group on Miscarriages of Justice and is due to publish its finding in the Spring 2025.

Crime Writers visit Forensic Services

- 1.20 A dozen of the top Scottish Crime Writers visited Forensic Services at Gartcosh at the beginning of February. All members of the Bloody Scotland group of crime writers, they had forensic techniques explained by Forensic Operational Leads while they toured the site. The authors asked many detailed and incisive questions.
- 1.21 The writers were also briefed about new and future developments in forensic science and had the opportunity to try out the VR technology Forensic Services are now using for fire investigations training - as part of a joint international project with fire and academic colleagues.
- 1.22 The writers attending were: Val McDermid; Chris Brookmyre; Denise Mina; Lin Anderson; Craig Robertson; Marion Todd; Neil Lancaster; Carole Mitchell; Callum McSorley; Ed James; Alexandra Sokoloff; and Tariq Ashkanani

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

3. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no personnel implications in this report.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

5. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no reputational implications in this report.

6. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no social implications in this report.

7. COMMUNITY IMPACT

7.1 There are no community implications in this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no equality implications in this report.

9. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to note the information contained within this report.