

FORENSIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
26 October 2020

Minute of the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services
Committee held by MS Teams on Monday 26 October 2020.

Authority Members Present: Tom Halpin (Chair)
Bob Hayes
Jane Ryder
Elaine Wilkinson (Item 12)
Grant Macrae (Item 12)
Caroline Wilkinson (Item 12)

In attendance: Scottish Police Authority (SPA)
Tom Nelson, Director of Forensic Services
Gary Holcroft, Scientific Head of Function
Fiona Douglas, Scientific Head of Function
Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality
Derek Scrimger, Scientific Head of Function
Amy McDonald, 2026 Forensics Strategic Programme
Manager
Alistair Patience, Operations Manager
Joanne Tierney, Operations Manager
Vicki Morton, Scientific Head of Function
Andrew Hendry, Chief Digital and Information Officer

Deborah Christie, SPA Committee Co-ordinator

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

COPFS
Kenny Donnelly (left after item 11)

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting of the SPA Forensics Services Committee. It was confirmed that due to the cross committee interest in the matter, members of the SPA resources would join the

meeting to participate in the discussions for agenda item 12, Morbid Toxicology – Proposed Service Transfer.

The Chair noted no apologies.

1.2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this stage of the meeting however it should be noted that prior to the discussions starting in respect of agenda item 12, Morbid Toxicology – Proposed Service Transfer Kenny Donnelly withdrew from the meeting as it was agreed there was a conflict of interest.

1.3 Forensics Services Committee minute of meeting held 27 July 2020 for approval

Members agreed the Minute from the Forensics Services Committee on July 27th 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.

With reference to action *20190725-FS-003*: Members heard that engagement continued with stake holders on how this would be progressed but agreed to keep this action on-going and requested that a light touch interim solution be considered at the same time as the committee considered the MOU to ensure the matter did not slip any further.

There were no matters arising.

1.5 Decisions taken since last Committee

It was confirmed there had been no decisions taken since the last committee meeting.

1.6 Decision on taking business in private (items 8-12)

Members agreed, in accordance with paragraphs 21 and 22 of the SPA Standing Orders, to consider items 8-12 on the agenda in private for the reasons set out in the agenda.

2. Forensic Services Performance Report – Q2 – Tom Nelson

Members considered the Forensic Services Performance Report, Q2 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.
- The committee were provided with an assurance that there had been a focus on Health, Safety and Wellbeing of staff as they performed their roles across all areas of Forensics Services during the pandemic.
- Tom Nelson reported that actions taken to target Drugs workload had resulted in positive impacts now being seen with the workload having reduced and aging of the work had fallen significantly.
- Members explored the comparisons between Q2 2019/20 and Q2 2020/21 and the increased in demand for some areas was highlighted.
- The Committee considered the staff absence data and it was confirmed that absence levels would be closely monitored and the impacts of Covid would continue to be tracked.
- Members were updated that the UKAS 2020 accreditation programme had commenced and would continue until the end for November. An update was provided that the Aberdeen laboratory had completed their inspection and positive feedback had been received. It was noted that a recent flood had resulted in the temporary loss of the Aberdeen laboratory and the feedback provided by ACAS had included some positive findings in respect of the business recovery and business continuity for that site which was especially welcome.
- It was explained that UCAS had worked closely with Forensic Services to ensure the amount of time required to be spend in the laboratories was kept to a minimum wherever possible to limit the risks to staff in relation to Covid. It was confirmed that learning would be taken from this revised approach to accreditation and if possible new ways of working to ensure the accreditation process is a streamlined and effective as possible. Members heard that options for a model of blended assessment was being considered by ACAS and engagement with SPA Forensic Services would continue to support this work.
- In response to a question about whether the casework backlogs included the build-up from the early days of lockdown it was confirmed that the reported figures were inclusive of all casework.
- The Committee requested an update on the Digital Forensics work and requested an understanding of the associated timelines for this work to progress and it was agreed this would be available for the next committee meeting.

Members noted the report and agreed the following actions;

20201103-FS-001: Paper to be considered by FS Committee which provides an overview of the proposed way forward in respect of Digital Forensics. Indicative timeline to be provided.

3. Draft Workforce Plan – verbal update

Tom Nelson provided the Committee with an update on the workforce planning which was considered a key part of the future Forensics operating model. During discussion the following points were raised and noted;

- There was close partnership working with Police Scotland colleagues and learning would be taken from their recent workforce planning development work.
- Tom Nelson advised that the intention was to bring the draft workforce plan to the April meeting of the Forensic Services Committee for consideration and recommendation to the Board for approval.
- Members welcomed the engagement with colleagues who had been involved in the Police Scotland workforce planning and agreed that it was a valuable source of information and learning could be taken from their experience. The committee discussed that as responsibility for workforce lay with The Authority the appropriate governance and oversight should be considered going forward.
- Give the importance of this work the Committee requested an interim report to be considered at the February committee which would provide an update on progress, an opportunity to flag any issues whilst allowing the Committee to offer advice and guidance in any relevant aspects of the plan as it developed.

20201103-FS-002: Options to be explored for timelines to be compressed in relation to the workforce planning activity and progress update to be provided to committee in February.

4. HMICS Update – Vicki Morton

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 since the last update to committee there had been no movement on the number of discharged recommendations with 9 remaining outstanding and a summary of the recent activity was provided.

- It was highlighted that a significant amount of supporting evidence has been provided to HMICS particularly in relation to recommendations 11,12 and 14 to date with further information to support closure of the majority of recommendations now anticipated to be submitted during Q3/Q4 20/21.

Members noted the report.

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;

- Fiona Douglas walked the committee through the project progress as reported in the table at 2.1 of the submitted report.
- It was confirmed that work continued on the revised MOU and a draft MOU would be brought forward to the February meeting of the Forensic Services committee.
- Members noted the plans for staff engagement and welcomed the plans for this activity.
- Members commended the partnership working being seen across organisations and welcomed the continuing commitment to joint working as this work developed.
- The good progress was welcomed and Members noted this was of particular note given the recent events which had impacted across business areas.
- The Committee questioned how any slippage due to a lack of resource was being tracked and asked if this could be included in future updates to the committee. Fiona Douglas explained that it was not anticipated that significant slippage would be seen in the planned timescales however the impact would be perhaps be expected to be seen in the level of detail being able to be provided in individual projects.
- The Chief Digital and Information Officer reminded the committee that resourcing challenges existed across Police Scotland and the SPA but that teams are encouraged to state their requirements and this would be fed into the resource planning for the 2021/22 budget and considered as part of the overall approach to budget setting. It was agreed that it was important for the resource to be clearly stated to allow sufficient awareness as the future resource planning was considered.
- Tom Nelson confirmed that the team was fully engaged with Police Scotland Finance colleagues as the TOM was being developed with a view to the final proposal being considered by the Board in February 2021.

Members noted the report.

6. 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 legislation was now just over a year old and work was continuing to better understand demand in this area of service. It was reported that the review work was still ongoing but would complete at the end of October 2020 with the intention of establishing ways that new sustainable working arrangements can be put in place as currently it is not the case.
- Members challenged the planned timescales for the progression of this work and recognising the pressures that were being placed on SPA staff, stated the absolute need to find a resolution to this issue that would mitigate against the risk of staff being burned out or a large backlog being created.
- It was reported that strong and supportive engagement had taken place across the partner organisations a further working group meeting was planned and it was anticipated that a resolution would be agreed which would identified a joint way forward.
- It was agreed that an update would be provided to the committee after the working group met in early November.

20201103-FS-003: Update on discussions from working group session to be circulated to Members between meetings. Update to give details of agreed resolution between partners.

7. Forensic Services Committee Workplan

Members noted the committee workplan.

The following items were taken in private.

End.