

Meeting	Forensic Services Committee
Date	19 April 2021
Location	MS Teams
Title of Paper	Forensic Services Director's Report
Presented By	Tom Nelson, Director Forensic Services
Recommendation to Members	For Noting
Appendix Attached	No

PURPOSE

To update Members on the recent key activities across Forensic Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is to update Members on activities across Forensic Services during the past few months.

2. UPDATES**Murder case**

- 2.1 Graham McGill, 59, was convicted earlier this month of murdering Mary McLaughlin, 58, in her Glasgow flat on 26 September 1984.
- 2.2 The conviction, after more than 30 years, followed a cold case review which revealed opportunities using DNA 24 technology brought into Forensic Services in the past few years. The SPA Forensic Services Cold Case Review Team carried out a full forensic review of this case which identified a number of items for further DNA analysis.
- 2.3 Forensic Scientist Joanne Cochrane gave evidence at the High Court in Glasgow that this analysis resulted in finding DNA attributable to Graham McGill on several items.

COVID-19

- 2.4 The start of the removal of some COVID restrictions across Scotland is very welcome and Forensic Services continue to work in closely with Operation Talla to ensure a safe environment for all staff. While

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Operation Talla has indicated there is currently no intention to change the current arrangements until at least June, we will be working with them over the next few months to plan for future changes - when it is safe to do so. The health, safety, and wellbeing of staff will remain the priority for FS.

- 2.5 Throughout this past year, FS staff have continued to show their commitment and produce outstanding results – which is reflected in the FS performance report.

Media coverage

- 2.6 The dedication and commitment of staff was also reflected in an article in [last month's Dundee Courier](#) highlighting the work of the FS Scene Examiners. The article examines how Scene Examiners assess the risks from working with COVID as well as the importance FS places on supporting their wellbeing.

Operational update

- 2.7 Forensic Services Scene Examiners and Scientists have been working extensively with Police Scotland officers in Dundee where two bodies were discovered concealed in the house at Troon Avenue on 18 March. As reported at the recent SPA meeting by the Chief Constable, a 50-year-old man was arrested and subsequently appeared at Dundee Sheriff Court where he was remanded in custody in respect of the murders of Bennylyn Burke and her daughter Jellica. Enquiries are still ongoing and SPA Forensic Services continue to support the investigation.

New appeal after DNA breakthrough

- 2.8 A review of two cases from 2015 using the latest DNA techniques available to FS has given evidence they are linked which led Police Scotland to issue a fresh appeal about the rape and sexual assault, which was supported by FS.
- 2.9 Lead Forensic Scientist Amanda Pirie reviewed all the work that was undertaken in the original investigation for FS and told the BBC: "We retested samples taken at the time and carried out more tests with the new DNA testing systems that we now have. They're much more sensitive. We can get DNA profiles from much smaller amounts of material than we were able to do before. We can get DNA profiles that are usable where we previously just didn't get anything at all."

Biometrics

- 2.10 We are establishing a SPA FS Biometrics Working Group to provide strategic direction and oversight of all matters pertaining to “biometric data” which influences and impacts on FS. This group is to ensure that Forensic Services comply with the law and transparently uphold the rights of all citizens in Scotland.
- 2.11 The focus of the SPA FS Biometrics Strategy is the biometric samples with which SPA FS has direct engagement – Fingerprints and DNA - and particularly how we manage data exchange relationships with UK and international databases. We continue to work closely with Police Scotland and the Home Office Biometric Programme.

Managing workload

- 2.12 Forensic Services continue to work closely with our partners Police Scotland and The Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and have held fortnightly meetings to manage and prioritise our workload throughout the pandemic.
- 2.13 As the current restrictions change we are establishing a short-life working group, to be chaired by Vicki Morton and with representatives from Police Scotland and COPFS, to manage the transition for cases that have had extensions to their timelines and cases that have no extension. We will continue to keep members apprised of this work.

Staff training

- 2.14 An evaluation of the Forensic Services Management Development programme showed all participants confident that they will be able to apply the knowledge and skills they learned into the workplace. The programme was created to develop the leadership and management skills to deliver to the current and future demands of FS, including the proposed organisational change as part of the 2026 Forensic Services Strategy.
- 2.15 This modular programme for all line managers, led by Darren Tattersall who joined FS last year, consisted of seven two-day workshops spaced over nine months. The workshops focused on impact, teams, engagement and motivation, coaching, priority management, customer service, and change. A total of 90% of attendees expressed overall satisfaction with the workshop with 97% feeling that the learning outcomes had been met.

2026 Strategy update

- 2.16 A number of discussions have been held with the SPA Accountable Officer about the 2026 Operating Model Project since the Full Business Case was presented to the Forensic Services Committee in February. The Access to Lab and Scenes projects in the programme have now progressed to Full Business Case. A further update will also be provided today on Core Operating System Project following the previous approval of the Initial Business Case by the Forensic Services Programme Board.
- 2.17 Delivery of the plan to refresh the Forensic 2026 Strategy in conjunction with Police Scotland and other key stakeholders, including members of the Forensic Services Committee is progressing well.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this paper.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this paper.

6. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no reputational implications associated with this paper.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no social implications associated with this paper.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 8.1 There are no community implications associated with this paper.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality implications associated with this paper.

10. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental implications associated with this paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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