



Meeting	Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Date	15 August 2024
Location	Virtual
Title of Paper	Forensic Services Best Value Update
Presented By	Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer, Forensic Services
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	No

PURPOSE

SPA Forensic Services is committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring Best Value in public service. This paper provides the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) with an update on work that is under way in Forensic Services to undertake a Best Value self-assessment exercise.

The paper is presented in line with the corporate governance framework of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) terms of reference and is submitted for consultation.

1 THE DUTY OF BEST VALUE

1.1. The duty of Best Value in public services is:

- *To make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and in making those arrangements and securing that balance,*
- *to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities requirements, and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.*

1.2. Best Value characteristics have been grouped to reflect the key themes which will support the development of an effective organisational context from which public services can deliver key outcomes and ultimately achieve best value. The seven Best Value themes are:

- *Vision and Leadership*
- *Governance and Accountability*
- *Use of Resources*
- *Partnership and Collaborative working*
- *Working with Communities*
- *Sustainability*
- *Fairness and Equality*

1.3. The duty of Best Value for Forensic Services as part of the Scottish Police Authority is set out in Chapter 5 (section 37) of the Police and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012 ('the Act'). The Act states: "It is the duty of the Authority to make arrangements which secure best value for the Authority (that is, a continuous improvement in the carrying out of the Authority's functions)."

1.4. Accountable Officers appointed by the Principal Accountable Officer (PAO) for the Scottish Administration have a specific responsibility to ensure that arrangements have been made to secure Best Value. The SPA Chief Executive Officer holds this responsibility for the whole of the SPA. The Director of Forensic Services is responsible for developing and implementing Best Value principles within Forensic Services.

2 THE ROLE OF AUDIT AND INSPECTION

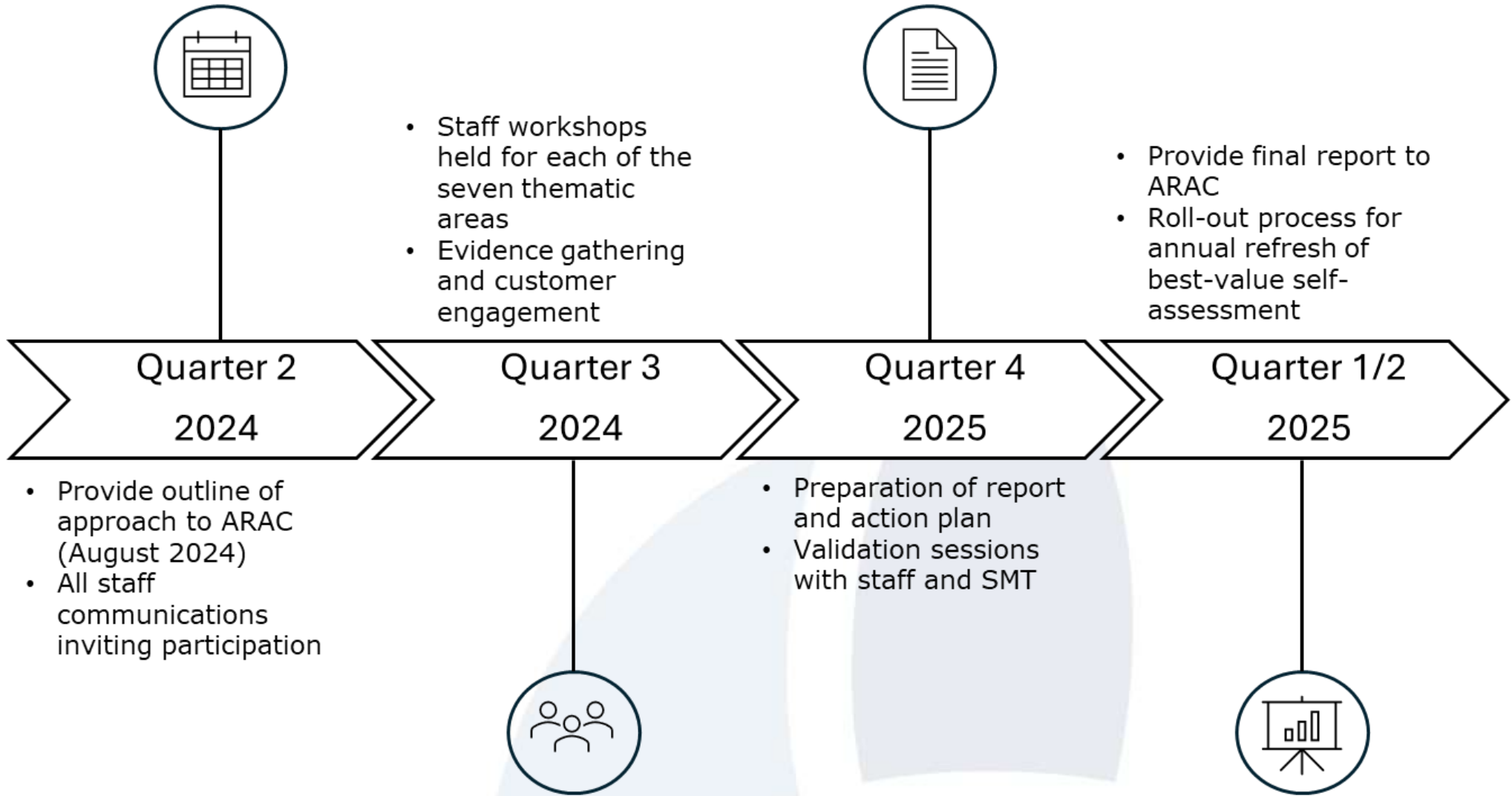
- 2.1. Under Section 23 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000 ('the PFA Act'), the Auditor General for Scotland can choose to examine the arrangements made by public bodies, including the Scottish Police Authority to secure Best Value.
- 2.2. Audit and inspection of Best Value are welcomed as they provide an objective and independent assessment of how well public bodies are delivering value for the public. This external scrutiny helps identify areas of strength as well as areas for further development or improvement.
- 2.3. [The Auditor General for Scotland's draft work programme](#) was presented to the public Audit Committee on 18 April 2024. This work programme details areas of focus between April 2024 to March 2026. Included in the plan is a Best Value audit of Police and Fire and Rescue:

"We will undertake Best Value audit work on policing and fire and rescue service during the current audit appointment period. We are conducting research and development work on policing to inform the potential scope and approach to this work. We anticipate reporting in the second half of 2025 at the earliest. This will be followed by development work on Fire and Rescue services. We will work closely with two relevant inspectorates (HMICS and HMFSI) on the scope and timing of this work."

3 BEST VALUE SELF ASSESMENT

- 3.1. Forensic Services has started work on a comprehensive self-assessment of Best Value. This will provide valuable management information in support of continuous improvement and will also serve as preparation for any future inspections by Audit Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS).
- 3.2. A workshop was held in June 2024 with the Forensic Services Senior Leadership Team and SPA Corporate staff. At this workshop, SPA staff shared their recent experiences in Best Value self-assessment and a forward plan for Forensic Services was agreed.
- 3.3. To facilitate robust self-assessment, seven Short Life Working Groups will be established for each of the Best Value themes. These will explore:

- **Vision and Leadership:** Evaluating the strategic direction and leadership provided by Forensic Services, including the effectiveness of communication and stakeholder engagement.
 - **Governance and Accountability:** Assessing the governance structures, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms in place to ensure transparency and integrity.
 - **Use of Resources:** Reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation, including financial management, human resources, and technological infrastructure.
 - **Partnerships and Collaborative Working:** Examining the extent and effectiveness of partnerships with other criminal justice agencies, academic institutions, and private sector partners.
 - **Community Responsiveness:** Evaluating how well Forensic Services meets the needs of the communities it serves, including responsiveness to feedback and adaptability to changing demands.
 - **Fairness and Equality:** Assessing the commitment to promoting equality and diversity within the organisation and in service delivery.
 - **Performance Management and Improvement:** Reviewing the systems in place for monitoring performance, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing changes to enhance service quality.
- 3.4. Staff from across Forensic Services will be provided the opportunity to nominate themselves for involvement in the Best Value self-assessment work. This self-nomination process aims to tap into diverse expertise and perspectives within Forensic Services, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of our practices and services.
- 3.5. Self-assessment will be facilitated through Best Value workshops that use the Scottish Government's guidance for Accountable Officers and include assessment against defined indicators. These workshops will be supported by SPA Corporate colleagues and will also include key partners, including Police Scotland and COPFS where appropriate.
- 3.6. Workshops are planned to take place in Q3 of 2023/24 with a final report of findings being prepared and presented to the SPA Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee in Q1 2025. The below schematic provides a high-level summary of the proposed timeline.



- 3.7. The findings of this initial self-assessment will be used to identify areas that may require further exploration or may benefit from development.
- 3.8. To ensure ongoing improvement, Forensic Services will establish regular review cycles for self-assessment. This will involve periodic evaluations of performance against the Best Value criteria and incorporating lessons learned from previous inspections and audits.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are financial implications associated with this paper. Use of resources, which includes financial resources, is a key consideration of Best Value.

5 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There are personnel implications associated with this paper. Use of resources, which includes human resources, is a key consideration of Best Value.
- 5.2. Encouraging broad participation in the self-assessment process will require a commitment of time and effort from across the organisation. It is expected that this will require a reprioritisation of workload which will be managed within the business.
- 5.3. The benefits of involving a broad range of people from across the organisation include increased engagement, professional development, and a shared sense of ownership of Best Value.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are legal implications associated with this paper. Forensic Services must ensure robust governance practices. This obligation is part of the Best Value Framework.

7 REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There may be reputational implications associated with this paper, if SPA Forensic Services is unable to demonstrate good stewardship of public money in the delivery of Best Value.

8 SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are equalities implications associated with this paper. Partnership and collaborative working are key themes of Best Value that require to be considered as part of the self-assessment.

9 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1. There are equalities implications associated with this paper. Working with communities is a key theme of Best Value that requires to be considered as part of the self-assessment.

10 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are equalities implications associated with this paper. Fairness and equality are key themes of Best Value that require to be considered as part of the self-assessment.

11 ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. There are environmental implications associated with this paper. Sustainability is a key theme of Best Value that requires to be considered as part of the self-assessment.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are invited to discuss the information provided in this report.