

Meeting	SPA Authority Meeting
Date	26 May 2026
Location	MS Teams
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. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is to update members on activities across SPA Forensic Services.

2. UPDATES

Performance

- 2.1 Performance across Forensic Services remains strong with capacity now matching demand in most areas. The key exception is for Toxicology, led by the continued pressures from drug-driving case demand. The focus is now on reducing caseloads across all areas and driving incremental improvement in the timeliness of forensic casework.
- 2.2 Forensic Services have risen to the challenge of moving forward with the proposed new Operating Model while maintaining service delivery to our Partners, even with the significant staff abstractions needed to devote time to consultations and meetings.
- 2.3 The impact of COVID-19, while resulting in increased levels of sickness absence across Forensic Services, by and large, has been managed to ensure that no significant impact on service has been experienced by our partners.

Operation Avancier

- 2.4 More than twenty members of Forensic Services staff played a significant role in supporting Operation Avancier, the investigation into the murder of two-year-old Juliusz Czapla - who had been shot, stabbed and smothered by his father. Juliusz's father was given a life sentence and Lord Beckett told him would serve at least 23 years before being eligible for parole.
- 2.5 These staff included: Scene Examiners; Forensic Scientists from Biology, Firearms, Drugs and Toxicology; Mark Enhancement officers; Fingerprint Examiners; and Imaging Support officers. Forensic Services are very mindful of the impact dealing with such traumatic cases has on our staff – which is why we are putting such an emphasis on the importance of staff mental health and wellbeing in the delivery of our current Forensic Strategy.

Drug-driving cases

- 2.6 Demand for Section 5A drug-driving analysis remains significantly higher than Forensic Services capacity, with the caseload remaining at an elevated level. Outsourcing of Section 5A cases has continued since the last update to an authority meeting.
- 2.7 Marginal gains, with modest capacity increases have been implemented or are being taken forward, but these initiatives will not solve the underlying issue of demand outstripping available capacity. Additional funding was approved by the Scottish Government in November 2021 which will allow around 900 cases to be outsourced.
- 2.8 The backlog of cases has been significantly reduced and we will continue to work closely with partners across the justice sector including Police Scotland, COPFS, and Scottish Government to understand and manage future demand and to develop a sustainable new drug-driving toxicology service.

Project Weaver

- 2.9 Members of the Forensic Services Senior Management Team have attended the first of a series of engagement sessions for the University of Glasgow Post Mortem Toxicology staff who will transfer to Forensic Services later in the year. Organised by the Forensic Services Leadership Development Programme Lead, these series of sessions will support the university staff through this transition.
- 2.10 Several of these university staff members will be seconded to Forensic Services for short periods to assist in the set-up of the new laboratory and instrumentation. Forensic Services are grateful for this support from the University of Glasgow and COPFS and we continue to engage closely with them to manage this transition while staff continue work to fulfil their existing contract.

Consultations on change

- 2.11 Extensive staff consultation on the organisational change proposals of the Operating Model, Access to Laboratory, and Deployment of Scene Examination projects commenced in October 2021 following approval at the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC). Group Consultation sessions were held in November with Individual Consultations starting in December 21. Counter-proposals have

been encouraged from our people and these have been evaluated against set criteria and the outcomes fed-back to staff.

- 2.12 We recognise that this is an unsettling time for many of our people and support from the Senior Management Team, Managers, Change Agent Network, and Police Scotland People and Development has been important during this time – there is also access to external support providers for further wellbeing support. The ongoing dialogue with Trade Unions throughout the Programme has continued, particularly around Operating Model Project.

HMICS

- 2.13 All 23 recommendations from the HMICS *Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services* published in June 2017 have now been formally closed by HMICS. The final three recommendations were reviewed and closed by HMICS since my previous report to the SPA Authority meeting.
- 2.14 It is noted from the publication of the HMICS Scrutiny plan 2022 – 2025 published on the 12th April 2022 that a thematic inspection of Forensic Services is planned in 2023 which will “*seek to examine the effectiveness of the new strategy and provide assurance around how forensic services are delivered across Scotland*”.

Forensic Medical Services Act

- 2.15 Members of Forensic Services staff played an important role supporting the delivery of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Act 2021 (FMS Act) which came into force on 1 April 2022. During the past five years Forensic Services staff helped create supporting documentation and consulted to determine the retention period and samples/items to be taken during a Forensic Medical Examination (FME).
- 2.16 This Act places a statutory duty on health boards to provide forensic medical services for victims of sexual offences. The Act also establishes a legal framework for consistent access to “self-referral” where a victim can access healthcare and request a FME without first having to make a report to the police. As part of a person-centred approach, individuals will be able to request the sex of the examiner involved in their care and shows how much services are

improving for victims of rape and sexual assault.

Firearms campaign

- 2.17 Forensic Services will be supporting Police Scotland's firearms surrender campaign launched this month. We will play our part supporting Police Scotland to remove firearms and ammunition from society and reduce the risk of harm to communities across Scotland.

Forensic Strategy

- 2.18 The first Forensic Services Leadership Day in 2022 was held in April with members of the Senior Management Team, Operations Managers and Team Managers meeting in Stirling. It was the first time we have been able to all come together in more than two years and our leaders will plan how we can deliver and embed the Forensic Strategy in all our work.

Demonstrating Value

- 2.19 We have launched a working group to seek a suitable methodology to assess the value of the work carried out by Forensic Services SPA brings to the public sector. The first meeting will review a draft Terms of Reference, membership of the working group – which includes a member of the Scottish Police Authority - and how best to take this project forward.

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 reputational implications associated with the drug-driving toxicology service provision.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

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