



Agenda Item 7

Meeting	Authority Meeting
Date	22nd February 2024
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

Budget underspend

- 1.1. Forensic Services are currently working on the detail of the budget setting for the next financial year 2024-25 with colleagues in SPA and Police Scotland. Forensic Services is reporting a £0.5 million revenue underspend against the Q3 forecast for this financial year.
- 1.2. This underspend reflects slower than expected recruitment during the current year than predicted originally for the Forensic Services New Operating Model. However, the full-year costs of these posts have been included in the planning for 2024-25 budget.

Efficiency savings

- 1.3. In Q3, Forensic Services have reported year-to-date efficiency savings of £270,000 with a prediction this will rise to £407,000 by the end of the financial year. While this is below the original target, the financial pressures are being met by an underspend on staff costs.
- 1.4. The roll-out of the Forensic Services New Operating Model was slowed to ensure we remained within budget during the current year.

New Operating Model

- 1.5. Focusing on delivering efficiencies will allow Forensic Services to finalise the delivery of our New Operating Model and fulfil its full potential which will lead to a more flexible service to Police Scotland, PIRC and the COPFS.
- 1.6. The New Operating Model has been designed so that Forensic Services staff can adapt swiftly to the changing crime profiles and demands across the country. This will allow Forensic Services to support the impact of possible changes in Police Scotland's delivery model more quickly than would have been the case previously.

Benefits delivered

- 1.7. Forensic Services have developed the Benefits Realisation Management Framework and Plan for our change programme which was reported for the first time to the SPA Forensic Services Committee on 5th February 2024. It showed eight benefits have been realised, seven still in progress and with just one not being realised so far.
- 1.8. Cashable benefits have been reinvested in Forensic Services in the establishment of the Tasking Unit and new roles such as the Research, Development & Innovation Manager, Forensic Operations Leads, and Senior Fingerprint Examiners. It also includes benefits for partners - such as the reduction in time taken to submit Standard Forensic Instruction (SFI) requests which will benefit Police Scotland.

Strong performance

- 1.9. In spite of the significant changes across Forensic Services for the past few years, performance remains strong with overall output in Q3 exceeding demand; while there has been a drop in demand, capacity remained stable across the business. A short-life working group is in the process of being established to assess the long-term demand forecast for Police Scotland and COPFS.
- 1.10. The compliance with the Performance Framework – which was approved by the SPA last year – shows eight areas on track (green); two being managed closely (amber) – these relate to absence rates and performance data; and no areas in need to attention (red).

Post Mortem Toxicology

- 1.11. The Post Mortem Toxicology team, based at Moorepark Laboratory, have delivered exceptional performance over the past few months. At Q3 they reported there had been a 67% reduction from the 1340 cases in July to 445 cases.
- 1.12. This has continued into the New Year and, as from January, Post Mortem Toxicology are reporting non-priority cases within the 35-day target. They have been reporting the priority cases within the 28-day target since August.

Drug driving

- 1.13. We continue to work closely with Police Scotland, COPFS and the Scottish Government to manage and minimise risks, ahead of the decision for a long-term, sustainable, solution which will meet future demand for drug-driving.
- 1.14. In the past few months Forensic Services saw a deterioration in the timeliness of provision of drug driving reports from our outsource partner, who confirmed that unforeseen case processing issues resulted in a delay regarding the reporting of our drug driving cases, beyond the timescale originally agreed.
- 1.15. Extensive dialogue has taken place and Forensic Services have received a firm assurance that the position will not deteriorate further and actions have been taken which have resulted in an immediate improvement since January, which is projected to continue and is being monitored weekly. We are working with Police Scotland and COPFS to ensure no cases exceed the current 12-month statutory time limit.

Priority on inclusivity

- 1.16. In setting out my priorities for the staff in Forensic Services for the year I highlighted that a priority must be further improving the culture and ensuring that inclusivity is at the heart of all the work we are do.
- 1.17. We need to ensure that Forensic Services have an environment where everyone can be their best, which values our differences and ensures that how we work includes everyone.

Internal audit programme

- 1.18. Forensic Services conducts an internal audit programme in compliance with ISO 1702. This requires accredited laboratories to plan, establish, implement and maintain an audit programme including: the frequency; methods; responsibilities; planning requirements; and reporting.
- 1.19. All accredited testing activities are subject to a method witnessing audit at least once in a four year cycle. Over the past four year accreditation and audit cycle, Forensic Services has scheduled and conducted more than 219 internal audits.

1.20. Internal audit ensures the effective review and assurance of compliance to an increasingly complex regulatory landscape, which supports testing and inspection activity in forensic science. Forensic science in Scotland is assured through compliance with this documented regulatory framework, as well as being independently assured through assessment and audit by 3rd parties.

Assessing the value of forensic science

1.21. We have been working closely with academia, particularly the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science, on how best to quantify and understand the value of forensic science and specifically Forensic Services. I am pleased to report that Leverhulme have now identified a researcher to take on this work, which is likely to start in May/June 2024.

1.22. I want to thank Jane Ryder, Vice Chair of the SPA, for her work and commitment in helping drive this project forward over the past few years. The Working Group on *Demonstrating the Value of Forensic Services* is seeking a suitable methodology to assess the value of the work carried out by Forensic Services. Reporting back to the SPA Forensic Services Committee, the working group will look:

- To understand the contribution of forensic science within the Justice System
- To determine how forensic science contributes to overall public safety, crime prevention and confidence in policing
- To influence decision making in the justice process
- To influence research and innovation
- To support change and future strategic direction
- To use resources effectively
- To define and track investment outcomes
- To demonstrate value for money to the taxpayer

Biometrics

1.23. The Biometrics Commissioner for Scotland has published his first annual assessment on compliance with the Scottish Code of Practice by the SPA Forensic Services and his determination for 2023/24 was that the SPA Forensic Services "are using biometric data and technologies in a lawful, effective, and ethical manner and are currently compliant with the Scottish Biometric Commissioner's Code of Practice".

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.