



## Forensic Services Committee

8 May 2023

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 01 February 2023  
via MS Teams.

Board Members present:	Paul Edie (Committee Chair) Jane Ryder (Committee Member) Caroline Stuart (Committee Member) Fiona McQueen (Committee Member) Katharina Kasper (Committee Member)
Board Member apologies:	
In attendance:	<b><u>SPA Forensic Services</u></b> Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer Gary Holcroft, Scientific Head of Function Alastair Patience, Head of Function Helen Haworth, Head of Function Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance Joanne Tierney, Head of Change & Development  <b><u>HMICS</u></b> Craig Naylor Brian Johnston  <b><u>Crown Office</u></b> Deborah Demick  <b><u>Police Scotland</u></b> DCS Raymond Brown  <b><u>SPA</u></b> Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance Lesley Carnagie, Performance and Impact Lead Eleanor Gaw, Governance and External Relations Lead Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer

## 1. Introductions and Welcome:

### 1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed attendees and noted that members had attended a successful development session at the Scottish Crime Campus. This allowed for some discussion around the medium to longer term strategic issues along with looking at the workings of some of the services they deliver. The Chair thanked Fiona Douglas and team for their work in delivering this session.

### 1.2 Apologies

Ruth McQuaid (COPFS) and ACC Bex Smith (Police Scotland)

### 1.3 Declarations of Interest and Connections

There were no declarations of interest or connections.

### 1.4 Decision on taking business in private (Item 7 – 10)

Members **AGREED** to take items 7 – 10 in private.

## 2. Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

### 2.1 Minute from meeting held on 14 December 2022 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 14 December 2022 was an accurate record of the meeting.

### 2.2 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

20222410– FSC – 003 – It was agreed that this action should remain open until the next committee in order for more trend data in relation to scene examination to come forward.

Fiona McQueen (FMcQueen) asked the actions listed but not yet due to be discharged are still updated, to advise members whether or not they are on track. Fiona Douglas (FDouglas) advised that she would ensure that is done going forward.

**20230202-FSC-001: Fiona Douglas/Lead Officers to ensure that actions that are not due for discharge until later in the year are provided with an update to assure members that they are on track or not.**

Members noted and agreed the written updates provided.

There were no matters arising.

### **2.3 Decisions since last meeting**

There were no decisions since the last meeting.

## **3. Performance**

### **3.1 Forensic Services Director's Report**

FDouglas provided an overview report which informed members on recent key activities across Forensic Services. During discussions the following matters were raised:

FMcQueen referred to mental health and asked for further details in relation to the pilot project. FDouglas advised that the pilot would look at embedding proactive, rather than reactive, supervision into psychological professional practice within forensic services. The first part of the pilot will look at the more overt physical exposure to traumatic incidents and will seek to establish how management can engage with staff to ensure that they want to be involved in this more proactive approach. It is a comprehensive piece of work and will take some time before Forensic Services can fully assess the impact that it is having. FMcQueen sought clarity around the funding of the pilot. FDouglas advised that she sees this as a critical piece of work therefore a bid has been put in via Reform Funding which was secured for the last financial year. That bid will be resubmitted for future funding, however, FDouglas has committed to covering this cost from the Forensic Services Revenue Budget if the bid is unsuccessful, as ultimately it is going to be a benefit to staff and service provision. The Chair sought clarity on whether there were other forensic services that cover this in order to gain insight into best practise. FDouglas advised that other organisations are starting to look at this, however, did not believe there was a lot of proactive support in this area. Police Forces throughout the UK have well established processes in place that are reactive to staff exposed to trauma, however, there is no clear exemplar around proactive supervision.

Members **NOTED** the report.

### **3.2 Forensic Services Performance Report – Q3**

FDouglas provided an overview of the Forensic Services Performance Report, Q3 2022/23. During discussions the following matters were raised:

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The Chair noted that there was limited narrative in relation to scene examination and no additional trend graph provided therefore asked that this be included in future reports as per action 20222410– FSC – 003. FDouglas advised that she would ensure this information was included in future reports.

Deborah Demick (DDemick) advised that she was encouraged by the significant improvement (80%) in relation to Section 4 and Section 5a cases. DDemick further advised that the new Standard Fiscal Instruction (SFI) went live on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023 and it is hoped this will make a significant difference and improvement in relation to collegiate working and lead to a further reduction in turnaround time for results.

Caroline Stuart (CStuart) sought clarity on unit costs to serve as we move into the constraints in terms of budget. FDouglas agreed the need to understand unit costs across different aspects of forensic services delivery, and assured members that it is a piece of work that is being captured. FDouglas noted the importance of when the budget is finalised that she is clear with members with regards to the commitment of forensics services across different areas of their catalogue and the available capacity to deliver against that, particularly within toxicology.

FMcQueen referred to increasing capacity and advised it would be helpful to understand what the root limiting factors are, people, money or kit. FMcQueen also sought clarity on whether there were marked differences (i.e age) in relation to sickness absences and does it have an impact on an aging workforce. FDouglas advised that capacity differed over the organisation, however, people are the root limiting factor. There is always room for more efficiency and improvement and there is an efficiencies programme that is looking at providing greater flexibility by multiskilling staff in the future. With regard to sickness absence, FDouglas reported that there are differences across the organisation, however, there is a higher absence in scene examination and noted that this can be physically demanding work..

JRyder sought clarity on the cost of achieving improvement and whether this is a sustainable cost. FDouglas advised that her overall assessment would be that it is sustainable however, she would place a caveat around toxicology which does not yet have a sustainable model, and there is a requirement for detailed focus and attention in this area.

The Chair referred to mark enhancement and noted that demand had been succeeding supply for a couple of months and sought clarity on what happening to address that. FDouglas advised that there were a number of internal initiatives, including recruitment to fill gaps. FDouglas noted that a lot of the work that mark enhancement do is due to multiple different

evidence types being looked at. Gateway activity is key to triage cases and this triage of work is being considered, to ensure that this workload is reduced where it can be. FDouglas is confident that casework will reduce over the next 6 months and that there will not be a backlog further down the line.

Katharina Kasper (KKasper) referred to toxicology outsourcing and advised that it would be helpful to have an analysis of how sustainable outsourcing will be and what risks are attached. FDouglas explained that the availability and capacity within the market remains a risk and work is ongoing with organisations to understand what the next 12 months will look like in terms of capacity within the marketplace.

The Chair sought clarity around the improved absence data in relation to the psychological disorders. FDouglas advised that this improvement is a result of Ill Health Retirals in relation to psychological disorders, so although there is a reduction in absence this is not a positive picture.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

**20230202-FSC-002: Fiona Douglas to provide an analysis of how sustainable outsourcing will be and risks attached.**

### **3.3 Drug Driving Update**

Alastair Patience (APatience) provided an overview of the report which updated members on the progress on the Drug Driving Toxicology Service. During discussions the following matters were raised:

The Chair sought clarity on when the HMICS Review Report will be provided. Craig Naylor (CNaylor) advised anticipates the report will be provided for 2-3 weeks of fact checking with publication in March 2023. CNaylor advised that conclusion meetings have taken place and thanked SPA Forensics staff for their input.

The Chair sought clarity on the number of staff being hired to fill posts within toxicology services. APatience advised that there will be 4 scientific staff and 1 manager and these posts are currently being progressed to completion.

The Chair asked for future reports to include charts which detail how many cases have been outsourced. In addition, the Chair asked for a briefing note to be circulated to members following the meeting, and ahead of the next committee, to update them on the realtime information in relation to outsourcing for toxicology.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following actions;

**20230202-FSC-003: Alastair Patience to ensure future reports include charts which detail how many cases have been outsourced.**

**20230202-FSC-004: Alastair Patience to provide members with a briefing note updating them on the realtime information in relation to outsourcing for toxicology.**

### **3.4 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report (Q3)**

FDouglas provided an overview of the report which provided an update on the financial position of Forensic Services as at the end of Q3 (31 December 2022) of the financial year 2022/23, as well as the final forecast for the full outturn to 31 March 2023.

Members **NOTED** the report.

## **4. Project Weaver**

Gary Holcroft (GHolcroft) provided a report which updated members on the successful transition of Post Mortem Toxicology services from Glasgow University to SPA Forensic Services (Project Weaver). During discussions the following was raised;

FMcQueen referred to the transfer having no backlog and sought clarity on how that will be maintained going forward. GHolcroft provided members with some background information in terms of backlog and how that was addressed. GHolcroft advised that outsourcing had assisted during the transition and it is anticipated that in a matter of weeks they should return to business as normal and will be back to providing a 5 week turnaround time for results.

The Chair sought assurance that resource levels can be tweaked to meet demand going forward. GHolcroft advised that the service is set up to deliver 3800 cases per year. The transfer of additional staff and new equipment in place provide additional resilience.

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The Chair and members paid tribute to the team for successful delivery of this change project, particularly in relation to the people side of business. Members asked for a lessons learned summary to be produced in order to emphasise the good practice, and to identify any areas that can be replicated further down the line.

The Chair asked that the end of year project report and post implementation review are shared with members on completion.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following actions;

**20230202-FSC-005: Gary Holcroft to produce a lessons learned report which emphasises the good, in order to identify what might be replicated in future.**

**20230202-FSC-006: Gary Holcroft to provide the end of year project report and post implementation review to members on completion.**

### 5. Forensic Services Change Programme Update

Joanne Tierney (JTierney) provided members with an update on the progress of the Forensic Services Change Programme.

Members thanked JTierney for the report and provided feedback. CStuart advised that she had found the report rather difficult to read, particularly the green RAG status applied to areas that have not been agreed. CStuart also referred to the Core Operating System (COS) and asked that an additional option of looking at Police Scotland's COS is included to either rule it in or out within the IBC. JTierney advised that she had queried the RAG status with project colleagues from PS and was assured that usual practice is for the RAG status to sit at green until th an IBC is progressed. CStuart also advised that would be helpful to have some form of assurance map in order to gain a sense of timeframes around what areas were ahead and lagging and the reasons for that. JTierney advised that she will take account of member feedback and work on a revised format ahead of the next committee meeting.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following actions;

**20230202-FSC-007: Joanne Tierney to revise the format of the report and include an assurance map to allow for indication of timeframes, where the service is ahead or lagging, and the reasons for that.**

**20230202-FSC-008: Joanne Tierney to include an option which includes the use of Police Scotland Core Operating System (COS).**

## **6. Regulation, Compliance and Assurance Activity of Forensic Services**

Craig Donnachie (CDonnachie) provided an overview of the report which provided oversight relating to the regulation, compliance and assurance activity of Forensic Services and the regulatory outcomes for forensic science in Scotland.

The Chair noted the complex regulatory landscape and sought clarity on the likely implications of the Regulators' Code of Practise. CDonnachie advised that the Code of Practise is a complicated document and has just gone to parliament, with a final draft being published by the regulator last week. There will be a shortlife working group set up within FS to ensure they have a detailed gap analysis between the requirements of the standard and FS Management System. There will be a clear plan for areas that need to be developed further and of any areas that will provide challenge. FDouglas added that there will be an external session with the regulator to allow a broader discussion around what this means for the devolved jurisdiction. FDouglas advised that an invitation will be extended to the Chair and colleagues from Scottish Government, Police Scotland and the NHS to understand this from a Scottish context.

FDouglas noted that although this report sets out the complexity of the regulatory environment, it also provides her with confidence as Director of Forensic Services that the level of scrutiny that FS are under and how they can demonstrate compliance with international standards.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

**20230202-FSC-008: Fiona Douglas to invite the Committee Chair to the session involving the regulator and other partners.**