SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Forensic Services Committee

5 February 2026

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 30 October 2026 via Webex.

Board Members present:	Paul Edie (Committee Chair) Christopher Creegan (Committee Member) Katharina Kasper (Committee Member) Mary Pitcaithly (Committee Member)
Board Member apologies:	Angela Leitch (Committee Member)
In attendance:	**SPA Forensic Services** Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer Alastair Patience, Head of Function Joanne Tierney, Head of Change & Development Sam Curran, Head of Function Paul Stewart, Head of Function Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance Adrian Service, Operations Crime Manager **Police Scotland** Lorna Ferguson, Detective Chief Superintendent Andrew Patrick, Detective Chief Superintendent Scott McCarren, Chief Superintendent David Bellingham, Inspector (SECU)

APPROVED

	SPA Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive Strategy and Performance Scott Ross, Head of Change and Operational Scrutiny Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance Lesley Carnegie, Performance and Impact Lead Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer **Crown Office** Stephen McGowan **HMICS** John Paterson

1. Introductions and Welcome:

1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies

Angela Leitch

1.3 Declarations of Interest and Connections

There were no declarations of interest or connections.

1.4 Decision on taking business in private (Item 11 - 13)

In accordance with paragraph 20 of the SPA Standing Orders, the Committee **AGREED** to consider items 11 – 13 in private.

2 Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

2.1 Minute from meeting held on 7th August 2025 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 7th August 2025.

2.2 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

20250708- FSC-002 – Vicki Morton (VMorton) advised the committee that there had been discussions around the concept of spoiled evidence and challenges on how that would be captured. This is being taken forward and hoped to be reflected in the Annual Report in August 2027.

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

Fiona Douglas (FDouglas) provided an update on activities within Forensic Services in line with the Forensic Services Committee Terms of Reference. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members referred to the review of COSHH documentation and sought clarity on the issues that had been identified through the review, and what action was being taken for the required improvements. Members were advised that there was comprehensive health and safety improvement work underway to ensure that documentation is up to date and accessible for staff. There were 32 recommendations in total and from those, 10 have now been closed with the remaining in progress. Members were provided with an overview of actions being taken, noting work in relation to signage, training and review of other activities.
- Members sought clarity on themes that had been identified from the staff survey and being taken through the Staff Survey Work Group and what analysis had been done so far. FDouglas advised on the themes around leadership, fairness, training and making the workforce a more inclusive environment had been identified. The richness of feedback from staff surveys had allowed management to understand what the right activities need to be to make the biggest difference to the workforce. Members were advised that staff involvement has been beneficial, and they are now working on building recommendations against themes identified to include in an action plan to bring to committee.
- Members endorsed the annual review publication which reflected the year end performance position reported at the last committee.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.2 Forensic Services Performance Report Q2

Members were provided with the Forensic Services Performance Report Q2 2025/26. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members sought clarity around how improvements have been made in relation to caseload for Volume Crime Unit (VCU). VMorton advised that the focus and dedication of managers in this area and wider has been key along with the professionalism and dedication of staff. More recently taken forward necessary training around reporting, has made a significant improvement. The caseload has reduced by 47% in the past month due to more streamlined processes and it is hoped that a more positive position will be reached by the end of the financial year. There will be a review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) targets as forensic services do not think 21 days is achievable at this point. Sam Curran (SCurran) agreed there was more work to be done to improve the current performance and noted the need for a discussion to be had around what the correct target should be. The Chair agreed that the agreed target needed to suit Forensic Services to ensure it was achievable.
- Members welcomed the expansion of the Psychological Supervision work across operational areas of the organisation and sought clarity on how that would be monitored. Members also referred to the reporting of near misses and sought clarity around whether there are any themes identified and what learning, corrective and preventative action is being taken as a result. VMorton advised that FS have been working with an external organisation for their expertise in that area and they perform regular assessments to measure individuals and their resilience, something that has been done in scene attendance staff for some time. There is a well-defined framework which is being widened out that they will look to build into the budget next year. VMorton advised that from a reporting perspective it is important to encourage the reporting of nearer misses. There have been initiatives to encourage this reporting and this has been increasing, although could be higher to ensure a preventative piece. FDouglas noted further benefits to the recording of near misses and the benefits it can have on crime scene examinations. Members welcomed this preventative approach.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.3 Drug Driving

Members were provided with a report updating on progress of the Criminal Toxicology Drug Driving workload. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed the improvements with internal performance, however, noted concerns on delayed cases and sought clarity around the risk of cases being time barred. PStewart advised that there had been one of two cases that had time barred due to late submission and discussions are ongoing with PS in that regard. The current late cases are not due to be time barred and should be progressed in a timely manner. The Chair noted his concerns, however, agreed that the issue did not sit with FS. PStewart advised that PS were aware of the situation and working with the road policing department to address the human error element of reporting. FDouglas assured members that PS have a commitment to make an improvement in this space by automating some of the systems and this area is being monitored closely via operation Hitch Improvement Group where there has already been substantial improvement.
- The Chair sought assurance around the level of confidence that there remains medium term capacity to deliver in the market and that can be accommodated by the budget. PStewart assured members that there was the correct level of internal and external capacity, with regular engagement with the outsource provider, who have a strong performance. In terms of finance, there is a pressure for next financial year which is being discussed through budget development.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.4 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report Q2

FDouglas Members were provided with a report detailing the financial position of Forensic Services for Q2 2025/26. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- FDouglas advised that there are a number of areas of the operating model that have not been progressed due to not having the full investment. This then has an impact on the benefits realisation; however, the committee will be updated in the new year about what and has not been progressed.

Members **NOTED** the report.

4. Incremental Rollout of Roadside Testing

Chief Superintendent Scott McCarren (CSSMcCarren) provided a report updating members on the forthcoming incremental expansion of drug-wipes within Police Scotland, and ongoing performance information in relation to growth and demand. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed a much clearer report which provided more reassurance on what is being proposed to address this matter.
- Members sought clarity on the process around the timeliness of submission of samples. CSSMcCarren advised that he had requested a breakdown of the failures in relation to the late submission of samples as this was a concern for him, which has been emphasised and will continue to be monitored.
- Members sought clarity that the £90,000 investment would be sufficient to cover costs of demand for A and U Division. CSSMcCarren advised that it could increase but would be monitored month on month. If they need to, they will go back to finance partners to see if the allocation can be increased.
- The Chair requested regular updates on this going forward.

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

20253010 – FSC – 001: Chief Superintendent Scott McCarren to bring a further update to the committee on the Incremental Rollout of Roadside Testing.

5. Long-Term Sustainable Model – Resource Update

On behalf of Breeda McCaffrey (Director of Transformation - PS), FDouglas provided members with a report updating them on the resourcing provided for the development of the full business case for the Long-Term Sustainable Model for Criminal Toxicology services, including Drug Driving.

Members **NOTED** the report.

6. HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology Provision – Improvement Plan and Timeline for Delivery

PStewart provided an update to members on progress on the HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology provision and timeline for delivery. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- John Paterson from HMICS welcomed the report and noted the importance of reflecting on the journey that Forensic Services have been on and the positive progress that has been made.
- Members agreed that this report was only required to come to every second meeting of the FSC going forward which will be reflected within the committee work plan.

Members **NOTED** the report.

7. Forensic Services Change Programme Update

Joanne Tierney (JTierney) provided members with an update on progress against the Forensic Services Change Programme Plan. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed a very positive report and sought clarity that FS were confident that delivery timescales will be met. JTierney advised members that there will be a concerted effort required from staff to prioritise this piece, however, after discussions with procurement colleagues it is hoped the timelines will be met as laid out within the report.
- Members sought clarity on the impact and mitigations of the ITT delay and subsequent delay in delivery and benefits realisation. FDouglas advised that there has been a real step change in the people now involved in this project, with such a lot of exemplary work done to agree an approach to the procurement that is robust, and they can now be confident that the right approach has now been gained with the correct learning included to get the best possible outcome for the future.

Members **NOTED** the report.

8. Research Development and Innovation Strategy Police Scotland & SPA Forensic Services Joint Biometrics Strategy

Members were provided with the Research Development & Innovation Strategy for Forensic Services, for approval by members. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed the strategy and sought clarity on the associated budget. FDouglas advised that from a financial

perspective there are a lot of unknowns, noting the need to build collaborations across academic partners to work in partnership to harness some of the capability that exists and not to be delivered by FS exclusively.
- Members sought clarity on how the stakeholder engagement had shaped the strategy along with staff engagement. JTierney noted that staff have a wealth of knowledge, and it was important that they were part of the development. There were a series of workshops to gain their input giving them a sense of ownership. JTierney thanked Amanda Coulthard from SPA Corporate for her support throughout and noted engagement at knowledge exchange events with SIPR colleagues, Professor Niamh Nic Daéid from the Leverhulme Research Centre, Police Scotland, COPFS and Home Office.

Members **APPROVED** the Research Development and Innovation Strategy Police Scotland & SPA Forensic Services Joint Biometrics Strategy

Joanne Tierney left the meeting at this point.

9. Digital Forensics – Next Steps and Timeline for Progression

Members were provided with a report which updated members on Police Scotland's intention to pause work towards obtaining ISO 17025 within Digital Forensics (DF), and to update on the future vision for the DF business area. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed the update and were assured that there were no risks associated with not having ISO 17025 but that much learning has been gained reaching this stage.
- Members agreed that this pause is necessary for Police Scotland at this stage, however, requested timelines in due course. CSAPatrick advised he would report back on timelines and inform members on how the critical nature of risk has been managed along with noting key updates.

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

20253010 – FSC – 002: Chief Superintendent Andrew Patrick to report back on timelines, inform members on how the critical nature of risk has been managed along with additional key updates.

10. Committee Work Plan

Members **NOTED** the report

APPROVED