



## Forensic Services Committee

8 May 2025

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 8 May 2025 via Webex.

Board Members present:	Paul Edie (Committee Chair) Angela Leitch (Committee Member) Christopher Creegan (Committee Member) Katharina Kasper (Committee Member)
Board Member apologies:	Mary Pitcaithly (Committee Member)
In attendance:	<p><b><u>SPA Forensic Services</u></b>            Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services            Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer            Alastair Patience, Head of Function            Joanne Tierney, Head of Change &amp; Development            Sam Curran, Head of Function            Helen Haworth, Head of Function            Susan Ure, Operations Crime Manager            Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance            Ivan Cunningham</p> <p><b><u>Crown Office</u></b>            Ruth McQuaid, Procurator Fiscal High Court</p> <p><b><u>Police Scotland</u></b>            Gordon McCreadie, Detective Chief Superintendent            John Sheehy, Head of Portfolio Delivery – Change</p>

	<p><b><u>SPA</u></b> Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance Scott Ross, Head of Change and Operational Scrutiny Graham Stickle, Audit and Risk Lead  Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer</p>
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## 1. Introductions and Welcome:

### 1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed attendees and noted that Chris Creegan would be departing the meeting at 12noon.

### 1.2 Apologies

Mary Pitcaithly

### 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 - 12)

Members **AGREED** to take items 11 - 12 in private.

## 2 Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

### 2.1 Minute from meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025.

### 2.2 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

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 the recent key activities across Forensic Services. In addition to the report FDouglas advised that she was in a position to confirm that the Forensic Services Year End figure was £0.5m under budget. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- The Chair paid tribute to the team for their work on the budget to reach an underspend. The Chair also welcomed progress being made around the Operating Model.
- The Chair asked what learning had been shared following the Forensic Alliance Wales Visit to Gartcosh. FDouglas explained the differences in structure and delivery of forensics science for both organisations, however, this was an opportunity to share learning in terms of leadership and culture.
- Members sought assurance around the prioritisation of the Drug Driving Full Business Case is now being progressed by all involved. FDouglas assured members that she had a productive discussion with Police Scotland colleagues on the development of the full business case and she has been assured that it is a priority for all to have this progressed as quickly as possible. Members were advised that phase 4 of the change programme will complete at the end of the financial year where the operating model operating model will be closed.

Members **NOTED** the report.

#### 3.2 Forensic Services Performance Report – Quarter 4 2024/25

Vicki Morton (VMorton) provided Forensic Services Performance Report, Q4 2024/25 for Committee consideration and thanked staff for their commitment and support during Q4. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed the improvements within the report, particularly in relation to firearms.
- The Chair sought clarity on the reference to urgent case work targets not being met for postmortem toxicology. VMorton advised there were two different targets, one for priority case and the other for non-priority cases. This is an area of the business with short turnaround times and targets. There have been issues with staff

absence and instrumentation issues, however, it is hoped this will improve within the next two quarters.

- Members were advised that there is a lot of activity within volume crime currently, however, it is hoped that there will be an improvement in this area as we move into 2025/26.
- Members sought clarity on the overdue timescales in relation to Lab delivery. VMorton was unable to provide exact detail but assured members that there are no risks to cases being time barred with ongoing dialogue with partners taking place.
- Members were assured around the next phase of the operating model would impact on staff absence and how the last phase will impact the stability of the current performance.

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

### 3.3 Drug Driving Update

Susan Ure (SUr) provided members with an update on progress on the Criminal Toxicology, Drug Driving. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- SUr advise that whilst demand had increased by 18% it is currently balanced with a combination of internal output and outsourcing supporting. Performance remains strong both for Section 5A and Section 4 cases, resulting in good compliance to MoU targets and no cases at risk of being time barred.
- DCS Gordon McCreadie advised that with PS outstripping capacity this demonstrates a strong message to be delivered in terms of public safety and the need to work with FS to identify a sustainable way forward, noting the aspiration to roll this out further.
- FDouglas advised that FS share the ambition of PS to roll the roadside testing out further, with strong and collaborative discussions taking place. FDouglas noted that the answer is within the Long-Term Sustainable Model (LTSM), however, there is a need for further discussions around the medium-term plan and what can be done to manage that and deal with costs in relation to additional outsourcing.
- Members were to avoid a situation where there is another backlog and were assured by FDouglas that an internal backlog will not be created, it will be outsourced. The challenge will be financially and if there is insufficient capacity with the outsourcing company, however, this has not been highlighted as a risk.
- DCS Gordon McCreadie assured members that PS are committed to the MoU, however, when they encounter offences there is a need to deal with them and bring people to justice.

- Members were advised that there is no potential at this stage to work with other outsourcing providers due to their non-compliance with GDPR along with their being no capacity.
- Members sought clarity around the communications plan in relation to Drug Driving and whether other partners are involved in spreading the word effectively. DCS Gordon McCreadie assured members that there has been a complete shift in tolerance and an increase on awareness in relation to drug driving, although still a way to go. DCS Gordon McCreadie advised the need for more to be done by partners and advised that he would get a written response in relation to communications in this area.
- Members sought clarity on whether there was any opportunity for the timescale for the LTSM to be reduced. FDouglas advised that everything that could be done was, with a project team established and it is hoped that when that is up and running timescales will become clearer. Members appreciated the all system approach for this, however, noted concerns around prioritisation in this area and asked if there was anything the committee could do to assist with timescales as a matter of urgency. FDouglas assured members that conversations have progressed since the report was submitted. John Sheehy further assured members that the project teams Terms of Reference is now in place and the journey is now being progressed with areas in good order at the moment.

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

**20250508-FSC – 001: DCS Gordon McCreadie to ensure members are provided with a written update on what is being done in terms of communications in relation to Drug Driving and what is being done with partners in this area.**

### **3.4 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report Q4**

FDouglas Members were provided with a report detailing the financial position of Forensic Services for Period 11 (28 February 2025) of the financial year 2024/25. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- FDouglas advised that there was a 0.5m underspend on revenue, with only 50% of the capital allocation being spent, noting a need for lessons learned in this area and how capital spend is being managed across FS.
- Members noted concerns around capital and FDouglas advised that it would be reallocated, however, it will causes pressure on certain areas for capital for the year ahead.

Members **NOTED** the report.

### **3 HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology Provision – Improvement Plan and Timeline for Delivery**

FDouglas provided an update to members on progress on the HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology provision and timeline for delivery, noting that 12 of the 25 recommendations have now been closed.

Members **NOTED** the report.

### **5 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 sought clarity on why the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) strategy had moved to amber status. JTierney advised that it was due to a date slippage in reporting to the committee.
- Members referred to the Forensic Services Core Operating System (FS COS) and sought clarity on the thinking around data storage (cloud based or server-based solution). JTierney advised there has been detailed discussions with digital and procurement colleagues at PS. FS are committed to getting the best solutions for data storage and the conversations remain ongoing on this process to ensure the right decision is made. FDouglas advised that the voice of different stakeholders has been taken into consideration, and assured members that the learning from DESC has been taken into consideration, however, FS remain openminded to ensure that the system agreed on is fit for purpose.
- Members sought clarity that when developing the RDI strategy, would a plan be in place. JTierney advised that the strategy document would outline the direction of travel and vision for FS. There will be a series of plans, however, there will be a need to work with partners around strategic priorities to ensure it is meaningful and put Scotland on the map as a leader in this field.

Members **NOTED** the report.

### **6 Refresh of Forensic Services Refresh**



FDouglas provided the Forensic Strategy 2025-2030 to members for discussion and recommendation for approval by the Authority Board. FDouglas thanked those involved in the development of the refresh. During discussions the following matters were raised.

- The Chair requested an update to include the policing plan which supports the FS Strategy.
- Members sought why there was no reference to the RDI strategy within the FS Strategy. FDouglas advised that it is captured within outcome 3 of the document "Drive research, development, and innovation to improve forensic science and delivery of our services". Although not explicitly referred to as the RDI strategy.

Members AGREED the following action:

**20250508-FSC – 002: Fiona Douglas to update the Forensic Services Strategy to include reference to the Policing Plan which supports the Strategy.**

Members **AGREED** the Forensic Services Strategy for Recommendation to the Authority for approval.

## **7 Forensic Services Strategic Workforce Plan Update**

Sam Curran (SCurran) provided a report with an update on work to develop a strategic workforce plan for Forensic Services. SCurran advised that they are on track to deliver the plan by September 2025 and will report back to the committee when they have reached a final stage. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members sought clarity on how this is kept up to date so that the same level of resource is not required time and time again. SCurran assured members that they have asked that this can be futureproofed as time moves on and advised on what has been done to ensure this happens.

**20250508-FSC – 003: Colette Craig to add final Forensic Services Strategic Workforce Plan to work plan for October 2025.**

## **8 Staff Survey – Short Life Working Group Update**

Members were provided with an update on the progress of the Staff Survey Short Life Working Group and further updates will come to the committee in due course. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed progress in this area and will welcome further updates on the outcomes and feedback from the focus groups.
- Members sought assurance that the approach will take into consideration the new equality outcomes to ensure strategic alignment and streamlining. FDouglas provided that assurance and advised that a document will be produced pulling this together which will detail the activities being undertaken based on the feedback and how that aligns with FS Strategic and joint equalities outcome.
- A further update will come to the August committee.

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

**20250508-FSC – 004: Fiona Douglas to provide a further update on the work of the Staff Survey Short Life Working Group to the August committee meeting.**

## **9 Joint Assurance Review of the acquisition, retention, use and destruction of DNA for criminal justice and police purposes in Scotland**

Brian Plastow (BPlastow) provided an overview of the Joint Assurance Review of the acquisition, retention, use and destruction of DNA for criminal justice and police purposes in Scotland which was laid in Scottish Parliament in February 2025. BPlastow thanked the SPA Forensics and Police Scotland for their help in facilitating meetings and requests for information and advised that the strategic conclusion is that DNA is being used lawfully, effectively and ethically. BPlastow advised, however, there is a need for Police Scotland to strengthen some of the governance around this area. Members were advised that there are 7 recommendations noted to improve effectiveness, 5 directed to PS, 1 to SPA Forensic Services and the final one being a joint recommendation around strategy. Members were provided with an overview of the recommendations and it was agreed that the reporting of the recommendations would be considered by SPA officers.

The Chair thanked BPlastow for his input to the committee.

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

**20251305-FSC – 004: SPA Officers to confirm what governance committee within the SPA that progress on recommendations contained within the report are reported.**



*Members took a 2 minute silence in respect of VE Day.*

## **10 Committee Work Plan**

Members **NOTED** the report

