



Forensic Services Committee

3 February 2025

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 28 October 2024 via Webex.

Board Members present:	Paul Edie (Committee Chair) Caroline Stuart (Committee Member) Angela Leitch (Committee Member) Christopher Creegan (Committee Member) Katharina Kasper (Committee Member) Mary Pitcaithly (Committee Member)
Board Member apologies:	
In attendance:	<p><u>SPA Forensic Services</u> Fiona Douglas, Director of Forensic Services Alastair Patience, Head of Function Joanne Tierney, Head of Change & Development Sam Curran, Head of Function Helen Haworth, Head of Function Paul Stewart, Head of Function Kevin O'Hare, Communications and Engagement Specialist Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance Kathryn Kirkwood, Operations Crime Manager Adrian Service, Operations Crime Manager</p> <p><u>Crown Office</u> Ruth McQuaid, Procurator Fiscal High Court</p> <p><u>Police Scotland</u> Steve Johnson, Assistant Chief Constable</p>

	<p>John Sheehy, Head of Portfolio Delivery - Change</p> <p><u>HMICS</u> Brian Johnston, Lead Inspector Craig Naylor, Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland</p> <p><u>SPA</u> Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy & Performance 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 to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies

Vicki Morton, Chief Operating Officer

Raymond Brown, PIRC

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 and 8)

Members **AGREED** to take items 8 and 9 in private.

2. Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

2.1 Minute from meeting held on 6 August 2024 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 6th August 2024.

2.2 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

20240507-FSC – 001 – The Chair sought clarity over the delay on the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan (SWP). Fiona Douglas (FDouglas)

noted the need for PS to articulate their long-term demand for forensic science, that demand forecasting work is ongoing, with a short life working group taking that forward. There is a need to procure external support services due to there being no internal support available for forensic services to develop the SWP, therefore FS have gone out to procurement (which is currently on hold subject to budget agreement) to bring in organisation to build on the demand forecast. It is hoped that a further update will be brought to the next Forensic Services Committee meeting. The Chair noted concerns around the slippage and asked for a projected date for delivery. FDouglas shared her concerns, however, could not confirm a date, noting the importance of getting this right. In the meantime, the previously approved SWP was being used, although that version does not contain the level of detail required from partners to understand their expectations from the service. Members acknowledged the need for this to be a dynamic piece of work and noted the need to ensure that behaviours and cultures within the organisation reinforces the agility that is needed with current and future staff and asked who this was being pursued in the absence of the SWP. FDouglas advised that the implementation of the new Operating Model within FS which will allow more flexibility of the capacity within the organisation.

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. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- The Chair paid tribute to the event and staff awarded at the recent Forensic Services Excellence Awards.
- The Chair referred to the positive BDO Audit and sought clarity on how the implementation of recommendations would be progressed. In addition, the Chair asked for more information on the remit of the short life working group on the review of reduction in scene examination requests. FDouglas advised that FS would work with PS to understand the reasons for the reduction, the purpose of the working group is for it to be the evidence base for the causes of reduction and to assist with future decisions. FDouglas advised that

the implementation and progress of recommendations following the BDO audit will be fed into the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

- Members asked when the committee would see the output of the people related surveys. FDouglas advised that it is hoped that the output of both Your Voice Matters and INvolve surveys will be reviewed, involving stakeholders and a draft brought to the February committee meeting, with a view of finalising the approach to changes in April/May 2025, allowing the Forensics Services Committee and People Committee to hold Forensic Services to account for driving cultural improvement.
- Members sought clarity on how the INvolve survey outputs would be aligned to the Policing Together. FDouglas advised that INvolve was very much focused on diversity, equality and inclusion and how FS address the issues within FS and how that aligns to the priorities set out within Policing Together. There are areas that will work hand in hand with Policing Together, however, some of it will also look different, and FS will continue to work closely with PS on that. The challenge will be on how those differences are reported to committee and what FS propose in terms of addressing the feedback from staff.
- Members referred to a concern raised directly with the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) about the use of Fast Blue B which is a chemical used within our laboratories and at crime scenes by Forensic Services staff, and sought assurance that the internal processes agreed with staff associations and trade unions are being reinforced amongst staff. In addition, sought more information on the staff training being taken forward following this incident. FDouglas noted the need to strengthen the internal reporting and governance structures within FS to avoid this happening again. Members were assured that there has been effective collaboration with Trade Union colleagues in relation to this specific matter, all actions have now been addressed, however, broader improvements need to be made. FDouglas noted the need to refresh the basics through to strategic areas in relation to health and safety management, therefore the intention is to bring in an external organisation to support that training for all levels of management which will feed into all areas of staff.

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

20242810-FSC – 001: Fiona Douglas to provide the output of both Your Voice Matters and INvolve surveys to the committee.

3.2 Forensic Services Performance Report – Quarter 2 2024/25

FDouglas provided Forensic Services Performance Report, Q2 2024/25 for Committee consideration. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- The Chair praised staff for the improvements noted within the report and sought clarity on when the UKAS assessments would take place. Craig Donnachie (CDonnachie) advised that the extensive planning for assessments was in place in June 2024 and due to take place from November 2024. FDouglas advised that the one area requiring further discussion will be in relation to GEN 6 and it is hoped that an agreement between PS, FS, PIRC and COPFS will be reached to understand how that can be complied with.
- The Chair sought clarity on when firearms will move from a red status and whether there will be any resilience built in for the future. Paul Stewart (PStewart) updated members on the current capacity within firearms and what training stages they were at. In addition, members were advised on additional posts being advertised to be brought in to improve the output and performance.
- Members sought more information in relation to priority 2 improvement work and timescales for impact in performance. Helen Haworth (HHaworth) advised that this piece was part of the new operating model which has involved some recruitment and that the training for these staff members will take some time. FDouglas advised that the volume crime (priority 2 cases) performance target should sit at 21 days and is currently at 28 days, noting that there is not a substantial movement required. FDouglas advised that there is a need to review this target through discussion with partners to see if this target has been reviewed appropriately.
- Members referred to long term absence, and paid tribute to improvements in this area, however, sought clarity on whether there had been any staff off for longer than a year where sick pay would traditionally terminate. Members also noted the benefit of future reports containing more narrative in relation to amber areas (similar to the verbal update provided by PStewart for firearms).
- FDouglas advised that all the stats provided include 6 months and above absences, however, there have been a couple of staff that have left the organisation through ill health retiral. FDouglas advised that long term sickness and absence was discussed at a recent people board, and there are a number of areas being looked at to drive improvements within this area.
- Members commended the recording of accidents and near misses however, suggested that consideration is given to how they were recorded to ensure that area of the report isn't overstated.

- Members referred to laboratory delivery and sought clarity on why this area is taking so long and what the associated risks were running with that overdue casework. FDouglas advised that there is no significant risk in terms of statutory time limit with cases being able to proceed to prosecution. The reason for it taking time is due to it being led by high volume areas of the service (drugs, volume crime and DNA) and it is hoped this will be improved as part of the long-term investment within the new operating model.
 - Members sought clarity on when the committee would have sight of benchmarking of what areas cost to deliver. FDouglas advised that it is difficult to gain that data, however, agreed with the need to achieve it. There is a need to look at what data can be pulled out of existing systems and work in ongoing with SPA Corporate Finance colleagues to look at how to cost different priorities around the finance function in order to develop this work. The priority area for FDouglas would be DNA costs, however, would be keen to bring back an iterative report on unit costing for FS activities to future committees. FDouglas committed to bring an outline report to the February committee on how that would look. Members would welcome this to give them a general view for going forward.
- Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

20242810-FSC – 002: Fiona Douglas to bring an iterative report on unit costing for FS activities to the next FS committee.

3.3 Drug Driving Update

PStewart provided members with an update on progress on the Drug Driving Toxicology performance and turnaround times. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- The Chair referred to the late submission of samples from PS and advised that 6 months is absolutely unacceptable to hold a sample.
- Craig Naylor (CNaylor) expressed the same frustrations, noting that this is something that has been an ongoing discussion with FDouglas for some time. CNaylor believes something radical needs to be done because this is something that will impinge and lead to further cases that will be lost and HMICS are not in a position to accept that. CNaylor was very appreciative of the Chair's views and advised that if there is anything HMICS can do to assist they will. CNaylor suggested the use of DX, legal communicators across Scotland, like most organisations do as this cannot be tolerated any longer.

- The Chair sought clarity on what the technical issue were noted within the report referencing in house capacity. PStewart advised members that the issue was around plates provided to transfer samples, discussions with the supplier have resulted in a solution. In addition, FS have taken the step to extend the number of suppliers to have immediate additional resource if required in the future and limited the likelihood of this reoccurring.
- Members referred to the Long-Term Sustainable model and sought clarity on what the criteria was for a realistic financial scenario in terms of options that will be considered. In addition, sought clarity on when the revised timeline would be agreed with all relevant stakeholders to ensure a whole system approach. PStewart advised that the timeline is agreed by the sub-group and has reached the stage of getting an agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and will be in place for the 30th November with the pending introduction of the 6 month timeline. FDouglas advised that a piece of work has been carried out within PS around what the future demand for Drug Driving could be for FS to then develop and look at different options for delivering a forensic toxicology service that meets at the future level of demand. Members noted the need to understand how realistic the zero tolerance was from both a PS and FS perspective and encouraged some thought in that area.
- Members sought clarity on the status of outsourcing contractual obligations. PStewart advised that FS are content that Eurofins are currently meeting contractual obligations, with ongoing monthly discussions that this continues and so far assurances are being provided.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.4 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report Q2

FDouglas provided members with an update on the financial position of Forensic Services for Q2 (six months ending 30 September 2024) of the financial year 2024/25, as well as forecasting the full outturn to the year end. During the discussion the following matters were raised;

- Members were updated on budgeting in relation to recruitment and were advised that FS are confident that they will reach the budgeted establishment figure by the end of the financial year.
- Members sought clarity in relation to efficiency targets for the year and how they would come from staff saving and asked how that would play into the 25/26 budget and how that would move to a more sustainable footing. In addition, members asked if the H&S aspect was factored into projections and the assistance that would be required for the SWP. FDouglas advised that the SWP was not

included as there was a need to be clearer around the budget before a contract can be awarded. The H&S work is part of the budget assumptions, and the agreement is to reallocate some reform funding that FS had secured for this financial year and prioritise that onto the H&S training. FDouglas advised that the efficiency targets are non-recurring and non-staff related costs captured within the efficiencies plan and briefly explained how the approach to change was currently being taken forward.

- Members were assured by PS that FS are being appropriately supported by resource from the change function to support FS through the change process.

Members **NOTED** the report.

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

Members were provided with an update on progress on the HMICS Assurance Review of Forensic Toxicology Improvement Plan and timeline for delivery. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- CNaynor advised that FS were progressing the recommendations appropriately. HMICS are keen to see the Long-Term Sustainable Model progressed and how that works in terms of budget. CNaylor further noted his concerns in relation to single scientist reports and the proposal that was made by HMICS and the transporting of samples, an issue that HMICS are not content with.
- The Chair asked CNaylor if there were any concerns around the slippage in relation to the core operating system. CNaylor advised that there are concerns however, with what there is in terms of capability and IT support within PS it is understood that they can only deal with what they have got. CNaylor believes that this is in area for the SPA Board to consider how funding is apportioned going forward. The Chair noted the importance of getting this IT improvement correct rather at fast pace.

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;

- The Chair asked for more information on the £900k savings in rationalisation of search & recovery roles which is being reinvested

in operating model implementation. JTierney advised that the £900k was reinvested into a number of roles to progress the new operating model to deliver some of the key benefits, with one of the areas being the implementation of the capability team manager roles, which has resulted in 31 team manager roles for analysis and search & recovery capabilities, these are not technical roles, but more people management roles.

- Members referred to the table at 2.4.5 within the report and advised that it requires further work to understand which projects have the most impact, noting that all impacts are not cashable. JTierney agreed and advised that the support now being provided by PS Change Team means they are going back to first principles on benefits profiles and properly articulating what baseline measures are. Members were advised that the intelligence piece is missing but the committee will see this area develop within future reports.
- Members referred to the costs of data migration (showing amber) and phasing activity that moves into 2026 before that will be approved, what are the risks associated with the timescale. JTierney agreed that there had been a delay but noted the importance of getting the planning aspect correct, however assured members that resource is now in place with digital division to progress. FDouglas advised that going by conversations had at project board and programme board, she is confident that this is the correct solution to allow this to be progressed. Members were advised that the implementation phase will be clearer following the Information to Tender Process.

Members **NOTED** the report.

6. Committee Work Plan

Members **NOTED** the report.