SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Agenda Item 3.1

Meeting	**Forensic Services Committee**
Date	**07 August 2025**
Location	**Webex**
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 the Committee on the recent key activities across Forensic Services.

1. Updates

Budget for 2025-26

1.1 The Q1 forecast for the Forensic Services revenue budget has been concluded and is forecasting broadly a break-even position for the end of financial year based on the budget of £47.4M with a pressure relating to the increased demand for outsourcing of drug driving toxicology analysis because of sustained additional demand from Police Scotland.

1.2 The capital budget of £2.7M for 25/26 is allocated and progressing broadly to plan, a large portion of this relates to the procurement of replacement for part of the DNA automated platforms used within the Scottish Crime Campus and the Rushton Court laboratories.

Operation Portaledge

1.4 Forensic Services is working closely with Police Scotland and COPFS colleagues to support Operation Portaledge which is the investigation into organised gang violence in the East and West of Scotland. Fifty-five arrests have been made and the specialist forensic support provided by Forensic Services has made a significant contribution to many of these.

1.5 Within Forensic Services this work has consisted of more than 91 cases with more than 227 individual packages of work which are being undertaken across disciplines involving many staff. At the request of the Lord Advocate these cases are being expedited to ensure that intelligence and evidential reports are provided at the earliest opportunity.

1.6 In order to support this important operation, further overtime is being worked across the relevant teams however there will inevitably be an impact on some of the routine casework being undertaken within the service. Managers will continue to liaise with Police Scotland and COPFS colleagues to ensure that this does not impact on high priority casework and discussions will continue within the Forensic Performance Operational Group.

Drug Driving

1.4 Forensic Services continues to work with Police Scotland colleagues to ensure that forensic toxicology testing is delivered to support roadside drug and alcohol testing. A Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) is in place which was published in January 2025 and sets out the level of service provided and the roles and responsibilities of each organisation within the Criminal Justice System to ensure robust delivery of service within statutory timeframes.

1.5 Current demand for toxicology testing continues to run at 20% over the agreed level of demand set out in the MOU, despite this performance targets are being met consistently albeit with an increased level of outsourcing than was planned. This is posing a financial pressure for Forensic Services which will continue to be monitored as the year progresses.

1.6 It is well understood that there is a need to roll out the roadside testing beyond Roads Policing officers and this is also set out in the Three-Year Business Plan and Annual Policing Plan published by Police Scotland. An Initial Business Case was agreed at the SPA Resources Committee meeting in December 2024 which set out the options for Forensic Services to deliver a robust and resilient service that meets Police Scotland needs in the medium to long term.

1.7 Whist the project board to implement the Long-Term Sustainable Model for Criminal Toxicology was established in March 2025 there has not been the commitment provided by Police Scotland Estates to support progress within the timescales previously discussed with the Forensic Services Committee due to competing priorities within Police Scotland. Whilst an option has now been facilitated to allow Forensic Services to bring in external estates support, this has increased the risks to the project and will result in a delay to the provision of the FBC to the Resources Committee.

1.8 The decision made by the Resources Committee on the initial business case for the Long-Term Sustainable Model was to progress the preferred option to 'Invest to Automate'. This was the only option that would reliably meet the anticipated level of increasing demand based on detailed modelling of drug driving toxicology demand over the next 10 years undertaken by Police Scotland. The option to 'Maintain the criminal toxicology service in its current form and meet growth in demand by outsourcing to private sector suppliers' was discounted.

1.9 A recent pilot was undertaken by Police Scotland, with Forensic Services support, in Shetland to assess the roll out of roadside drug testing to Local Policing officers on the island, and this has provided positive outcomes for the local community and learning in terms of officer training and sample logistics. Alongside retaining the

roadside testing in Shetland, Police Scotland have now indicated an intention to roll out further pilots to two subdivisions later this calendar year as part of Operation Seltern which has been created to manage the incremental expansion of drug-wipes across Local Policing Divisions between 2025 and 2027.

1.10 Forensic Services has sufficient internal capacity, alongside a budget for planned outsourcing, to meet the requirements set out in the MOU. A project is ongoing to bring a FBC with associated investment case to the SPA Resources Committee which sets out the investment required to build a resilient and sustainable model to meet Police Scotland's demand in the future. Once investment is agreed, it will take two to three years to build this solution, the timescale being set out in the FBC. Development of this FBC, and subsequent implementation, is dependent on Police Scotland Estates, Digital Division, Procurement and Change providing appropriate support as set out in service back agreements.

1.11 An incremental roll out of roadside testing to Local Policing officers in the absence of the long-term sustainable model in Forensic Services will require reliance on additional outsourcing of toxicology testing to England and Wales. This, in turn, will rely upon sufficient capacity being available in the commercial market and significant additional funding, alongside making the case for investment to enable Forensic Services to deliver this testing in Scotland.

1.12 Forensic Services entirely supports the ambition of Police Scotland to roll out the roadside drug testing and how important this is to reduce the impact of fatalities and serious incidents on the roads of Scotland.

Westminster Commission Report on Forensic Science in England and Wales

1.13 In June 2025 the Westminster Commission published a report *Forensic Science in England and Wales: Pulling out of the Graveyard Spiral.* The Commission was co-chaired by forensic experts Angela Gallop and Baroness Sue Black.

1.14 The report sets out its diagnosis of a deep crisis in forensic science in England and Wales describing the system as '*in a graveyard spiral'.* It attributes key failings to significant policy shifts since 2012 and the closure of the Forensic Science Service, reliance on in-house Police laboratories and the near monopoly created through the recent acquisition of Cellmark by Eurofins.

1.15 The report makes 34 recommendations, highlighting potential risks of bias in the commissioning and reporting of forensic science outcomes, alongside the potential of the collapse of some forensic disciplines. The report calls for halting police in-house forensic expansion, the establishment of an independent national forensic science institute, improving legal aid access for defence experts and reforming the Criminal Cases Review Commission's scientific capacity.

1.16 The Commission visited Forensic Services in early 2025 prior to the publication of their report which highlighted our different model of forensic delivery in Scotland in comparison with the police/privatised market driven model in England and Wales. Our model of delivery is cited as publicly governed, multi-disciplinary and scientifically rigorous in comparison to the fragmentation and decline laid out in England and Wales.

Health and Safety

1.17 All Forensic Services staff recently undertook mandatory Working Safely training which was developed by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). This consisted of a course programme delivered as an E-learning package (of approximately 7 hours in duration) covering workplace safety, focus on hazards and risk as well as covering UK legislative and regulatory requirements.

1.18 This training is part of an organisation wide programme to further improve the management of health and safety across Forensic Services. Further activity is underway to improve management planning and practice and to make documentation more comprehensive, accessible and user friendly for staff working across every area of the service. This is a core management priority for the year ahead, ensuring continuous improvement to keep the workplace safe for our staff, partners and the public that we interact with daily.

Best Value Audit

1.19 Forensic Services have previously reported to the Committee on our Best Value self-assessment. The Best Value audit is currently underway, and interviews have been held with members of the Senior Management Team by HMICS and Audit Scotland.

1.20 Work is progressing to make progress in areas highlighted in the self-assessment as part of the Forensic Services business plan and

it is anticipated that some emerging feedback from the audit will be provided in early August.

Forensic Services Committee Development Day

1.21 On the 9th June 2025 members of the Forensic Services Committee met with the Senior Management Team and other members of staff for the last committee development day. Alongside committee members having the opportunity for a tour through the Post Mortem Toxicology Laboratory in Moorepark, a range of areas were discussed which included a focus on each of the strategic outcomes set out in the revised Forensic Strategy which was agreed in the last committee meeting, alongside specific discussions on risk and benchmarking.

Police Strategy Forum

1.22 Over the 17th and 18th June, I attended the Police Strategy Forum held in Gloucestershire and chaired by the Chief Constable of South Wales Police, Jeremy Vaughan, the Chair of the NPCC Science and Innovation Committee. The event included discussion around a range of areas including the use of artificial intelligence in policing, maximising value around data analytics, the power of multi-agency collaboration in tackling crime and the future of cybercrime and digital forensics.

1.23 I chaired a workshop titled "Reforming Forensic Science with Collaborative Models" focussing on the integrated and collaborative model of forensic science provision in Scotland and insights and learning particularly following challenges in forensic toxicology provision.

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 IMPLICATIONSs

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.