SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Forensic Services Committee

30 October 2025

Minutes of the Forensic Services Committee held on 7 August 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:	**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 Helen Haworth, Head of Function Paul Stewart, Head of Function Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance Kathryn Kirkwood, Operations Crime Manager Kenneth Laing, Operations Crime Manager **Crown Office** Stephen McGowan **HMICS** Brian Johnston (first hour) Craig Naylor

	Police Scotland Steve Johnson, Assistant Chief Constable (first hour) Hilary Sloan, Chief Superintendent (Item 4) Andrew Patrick, Detective Chief Superintendent John Sheehy, Head of Portfolio Delivery – Change **SPA** Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer

1. Introductions and Welcome:

1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed attendees and Stephen McGowan from Crown Office to his first meeting following the retirement of Ruth McQuaid.

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 12 - 13)

Members **AGREED** to take items 12 - 13 in private.

2 Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

2.1 Minute from meeting held on 3rd February 2025 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute from the Forensic Services Committee on 3rd 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 (FS). During discussions the following matters were raised;

- The Chair commended staff for their work on Operation Portaledge, however, sought clarity on where this will cause disruption and slippage within other areas of performance. FDouglas advised that it would result in increased timescales for the provision of more routine case work, particularly around areas with limited capacity.
- Members welcomed the update on the Wales Westminster Commission Report on Forensic Science in England and Wales and were advised on the benefits of the visit prior to publication, understanding how forensic science is delivered in Scotland in comparison to England and Wales.
- Members sought clarity on work underway to get the timelines for achieving a Full Business Case for Criminal Toxicology back on track, noting that Police Scotland have been unable to provide the required resources to the project. FDouglas advised that there is a project board for the Long-Term Sustainable Model which will look to prioritise all areas of that project. It is likely that it will be summer 2026 before the full business case will return to the Resources Committee and this will be dependent on the resource provided by Police Scotland. Members requested a further update on this area from Police Scotland at the next committee.
- Members were advised that FS are seeing a 20% sustained increase in demand out with what is set out in the MoU. This is a pressure on the Forensic Services budget, however, with other savings made elsewhere the additional outsourcing is being funded.

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

20250708-FSC-001: Police Scotland to bring forward a report to the next committee providing an update in relation to resource to support the progress in relation to achieving the Long-Term Sustainable Model Full Business Case.

3.2 Forensic Services Annual Performance Report

Vicki Morton (VMorton) members with the Forensic Services Performance Report, Financial Year 2024/25 for Committee consideration. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members referred to Post-Mortem Toxicology with issues around staff absence and sought assurance, that there were measures in place to ensure that demand is met. VMorton advised that there is continued and strong collaboration with COPFS and pathologists in line with this activity, ensuring cases are being prioritised. Members were advised on the challenges within this area, however, were assured that staff wellbeing is of prime importance.
- Members sought assurance that the decrease in scene attendance did not have any detrimental impact on evidence. Members were advised that this is an area of focus with room for improvement and being looked at within a short life working group to understand reasons for changes in demand. Members sought clarity on whether any training had taken place within wider groups of staff working in this area. Members were advised that there is an opportunity to engage with officers at the point of joining the force to provide an overview of what forensic science can do, and although there is documentation available, forensic services are keen to engage to reinforce those processes and provide updates on where areas had moved on.
- Members advised that the comprehensive and transparent data collected by Forensic Services provided the committee with great reassurance on the services. Members asked for consideration to be given to any data on spoiled evidence and the impact on cases that don't proceed through the justice system.
- Members referred to analysis of demand and output and sought clarity on how that fluctuation is managed by the service and if the new operating model would assist in maximising output. VMorton advised that the demand and fluctuation changes over different areas and that it is important to work with partners to understand the prioritisation, which links into the MoU. Demand forecasting and strategic workforce planning is also key to understand and be ready for the future. The operating model will offer more flexibility, which is also driven by the forensic services strategy.

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

20250708-FSC-002: Vicki Morton to consider the inclusion of data relating to spoiled evidence and the impact on cases that don't proceed through the justice system.

3.3 Forensic Services Performance Report Q1

Members were provided with the Forensic Services Performance Report Q1 2025/26. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members sought clarity on when the committee will see improvement around priority 2 delivery requests. VMorton advised that it is recognised that there is room for improvement and with timeliness not within an acceptable range. Members were advised that there has been a lot of change within this area and there has been a process of direct submissions being introduced, having a positive impact on demands placed on Police Scotland, but there are challenges on how that is being reported and a need for further training within the unit. It is anticipated that improvement will come into Q3/Q4.
- Members sought clarity on what action was being taken around Strategic Outcome 2, currently at amber status, to bring that back on track. VMorton advised that training and reassignment of resources will hopefully address this area.
- Members advised on the benefits of moving the current 602 FTE within forensic services to 652.5 FTE within the full Operating Model.
- Members referred to figures in relation to absences and working days lost, noting an increase within psychological disorders and miscellaneous category, and sought assurance that there is a full understanding on what is happening and correct measures in place to optimise resource. VMorton advised that there are a number of initiatives ongoing in relation to psychological disorder absences and encouragement for managers to have good relationships to discuss their reasons for absence. Miscellaneous is an area that is more difficult, as forensic services have no control around on how staff report their absences, however, staff are encouraged to report absences, as this will highlight trends.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.4 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 sought clarity on why outsourcing had reduced for May and June and were advised that due to QToF instrumentation work being delayed due to the requirement for additional software

upgrades, allowed internal staff to focus on casework. Members were advised that when the QToF instrumentation work is back online members will see this reflected in reports.

- Craig Naylor (CNaylor) welcomed the significant rise within SPA Forensics capacity, however, noted concerns around a single external outsourcing supplier. CNaylor referred to PS performance, with 94% of cases being submitted within the 28-day stretch target and noted concerns around it taking 28 days for a sample to be submitted and sought clarity on whether that was an acceptable level of performance. Chief Superintendent Hilary Sloan (CSHSloan) noted that there is room for improvement and work to be done around the delivery of samples more quickly. CSHSloan advised that there is an element of human error and a need for training to eradicate that. The Chair noted his concerns around the time it was taking Police Scotland to submit samples.
- Members welcomed the performance of the internal team but sought clarity on how sustainable that would be. In addition, members sought clarity on how an estimated additional £166K would be met to fund increased demand. Paul Stewart (PStewart) advised that maintaining this level of performance will be down to regular engagement between senior managers within criminal toxicology and monitoring the wellbeing of staff and offering support when required. FDouglas advised that the additional £166k, Forensic Services can account for within their budget, however, noted that it was a pressure.

Members **NOTED** the report.

3.5 Forensic Services Financial Monitoring Report Q1

FDouglas Members were provided with a report detailing the financial position of Forensic Services for Q1 2025/26. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members asked to be updated on the consequence of the investment in the outsourcing and what that means in terms of delayed investment in other areas.
- Members sought clarity on what the level of confidence on the delivery of projects within the capital spend area. FDouglas advised that internal process around the management of capital projects has been strengthened. A large part of the capital spend relates to one purchase which relates to the last part of the DNA process, with an invitation to tender should take place in a matter of weeks. FDouglas assured members that she has a high level of confidence around the spend within the capital budget.

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

20250708-FSC-003: Fiona Douglas to provide an update on the consequence of the investment in the outsourcing and what that means in terms of delayed investment in other areas.

4. Drug Driving Pilot

Chief Superintendent Hilary Sloan (CSuptHSloan) provided a report with details regarding the evaluation of the Shetland Drug Wipe pilot, the forthcoming incremental expansion of drug-wipes and the current communications in place internally and across road safety. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- CNaylor sought clarity on whether this had been through a budget process to secure the additional and required funding. In addition, sought clarity on how much sight COPFS and Scottish Court and Tribunal Service had of this additional 400 cases per month coming through. Outsourcing – lack of capacity in market place – have the risks been considered. Need to be carefully managed to avoid timebarring of cases. COPFS have been involved in conversations. Outsourcing is an issue, PS have been involved in pulling together the business case and this collaboration will continue and to better understand what demand will look like. FDouglas advised that there is a placeholder for additional funding, some discussions with CC yesterday and these will continue before going to SG for funding for next year.
- The Chair noted his concerns if PS started sending samples directly to eurofin and wants that clarified. advised that the outsourcing will continue to take place via forensics.
- Stephen mcgowan numbers spoken about do no raise concern any concerns, there is a need to adhere to keep to timescales.
- Members referred to the cost of outsourcing and asked if it would be presented to RC. Hilary Sloan said there is a need to go through an internal governance process, with a lot of work still to be done, but PS were keen to give members an idea.
- FDouglas advised that everyone is on the same page when addressing drug driving and noted the need to push on with work on the business case to assist with the roll out of the Long Term Sustainable model in a controlled way within budget.
- The Chair sought clarity on why there was a limit to the number of drug wipes provided to officers. They have an expiry date to ensure they are properly utilised. Across the country.
- Members look forward to receiving further reports in due course.
- The Chair paid tribute to HS ahead of her retirement.

Members **NOTED** the report.

5 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;

- Members sought clarity on the amber recommendation for N0. 10 and update any assurance that things are progressing. PStewart relates to work of the COS and work is ongoing in that space. Joanne Tierney (JTierney) advised that work is ongoing with colleagues to ensure that requirements are all in place for the criminal toxicology and aligned to the Long Term Sustainable Model.
- The Chair requested that when new target dates are set for recommendations that have slipped, they are circulated to members ahead of the next meeting.

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

20250708-FSC-004: Ahead of the next committee meeting, Paul Stewart to circulate revised target dates for the recommendations that have slipped.

6 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 noted the significant slippage in relation to FS COS & Data Migration which was no tracking at red status with a revised timetable, and sought clarity on how confident FS were that they would keep to the revised timetable. JTierney advised that the revised date had been reviewed by all key strategic stakeholders, SPA and PS colleagues at tactical and strategic level. The only thing that could now cause delay would be the requirement to take it through a technical assurance framework review which will become clearer in October 2025.
- Members recognise the complexity and number of teams involved and sought clarity that everyone is aware and it is explicit of the necessity to play their part and adhere to timelines. Yes there is an extensive project plan that articulates roles and responsibilities for all involved.

- Members asked that there is a clear escalation procedure in place to address delays quickly when they arise given the lengthy extension to the timeline.
- Although members were disappointed by the slippage in relation to FS COS & Data Migration, they also welcomed the change in approach which will lead to a better result, however, some advance notice would have been welcomed.

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

20250708-FSC-005: Joanne Tierney to ensure there is a clear escalation procedure in place to address delays quickly when they arise given the lengthy extension to the timeline.

The committee took at 10-minute comfort break.

7 Police Scotland & SPA Forensic Services Joint Biometrics Strategy

Members were provided with the draft Police Scotland & SPA Forensics Joint Biometrics Strategy to facilitate discussion and seek feedback prior to publication. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members sought clarity around the process of the public consultations and were advised that there would be engagement with SPA corporate colleagues around the best approach to public consultation. FDouglas committed to providing a timeline and details for the approach to consultations following discussions with SPA colleagues.
- The Chair asked for quarterly progress reports in relation to the Police Scotland & SPA Forensic Services Joint Biometrics Strategy going forward.

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

20250708-FSC-006: Fiona Douglas to provide a timeline and details for the approach to consultations following discussions with SPA colleagues.

20250708-FSC-007: Helen Haworth to provide quarterly progress updates in relation to the Police Scotland & SPA Forensic Services Joint Biometrics Strategy going forward.

8 Staff Survey – Short Life Working Group Update

Members were provided with a report which updated on the progress of the Staff Survey Short Life Working Group During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed progress in this area and the approach taken with focus groups and the involvement of non-managerial positions leading those groups. Although this offer opportunities, members sought clarity on whether this poses any risks. PStewart advised members that this opportunity has been well received by staff and although there might be some risk, managers are within these groups and there is an awareness of potential risks.
- Members were advised that a further update will come to the next committee meeting.

Members **NOTED** the report.

9 Forensic Services Customer Survey Update

Members were provided with a report which contained an update on the Forensic Services Customer Survey 2025. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members welcomed the positive report with 82% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied with the activities performed at scenes by Scene Examiners.
- Members noted that groups 3 – 7 crime satisfaction is lower and an area that can be looked to improve on.

Members **NOTED** the report.

10 Digital Forensics – Next Steps and Timeline for Progression

Chief Superintendent Andy Patrick (CSuptAPatrick) provided members with an update on Police Scotland's progress towards obtaining ISO 17025 within Digital Forensics (DF). CSuptAPatrick provided an overview of how he would like to take this area forward to make it become more efficient and return with a further update to the next committee. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- Members sought clarity on when a timeline is relation to accreditation would be available. CSuptAPatrick advised he would like to come back with his vision for digital data and evidence and advise where ISO fits into that. There is a need to do more work in this area before committing to something that was not achievable.

- Members advised that they would be keen to understand approaches taken by other forces and what learning can be gained from that.
- Members sought clarity that there is a degree of prioritisation from other teams within PS on this area. CSuptAPatrick agreed on the importance for the digital team to be focused on this and noted that some additional resource had been secured to work on this and take it forward.
- FDouglas offered FS continued support in this area.

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

20250708-FSC-008: Chief Superintendent Andy Patrick to return to the next committee meeting on progress and revised timelines.

11 Committee Work Plan

Members **NOTED** the report

APPROVED