

Forensic Strategy

Delivering excellence in forensic science
for a safe and resilient Scotland

September 2021

FORENSIC SERVICES

SCOTTISH POLICE
AUTHORITY

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Foreword



Fiona Douglas
Director of Forensic Services SPA

Our strategy for Forensic Services SPA sets out our aspirations for service excellence as we seek to continue delivering world leading, high quality and value-for-money forensic services which better meet the needs of our criminal justice partners, and the expectations of the Scottish public.

Since our Forensic 2026 Strategy: *Scientific Excellence for Safer Communities* was created in 2018, the forensic and wider policing landscape has undergone significant change in relation to the type of criminality that requires investigation, and the available capabilities for doing so. As an organisation we are faced with the dual challenge of applying scientific analysis to increasingly complex and resource intensive investigations, whilst also facing increasing levels of demand in relation to the provision of forensic services.

This forensic strategy recognises the unique responsibilities placed upon the organisation as the provider for forensic services to the criminal justice system in Scotland. Forensic Services provides the vital services that form the basis of a transparent, impartial, fair and evidence-based legal system.

Our future approach recognises that levels of demand for forensic services to support investigations are increasing. With this recognition comes the need to ensure that we have the right capabilities and resources to continue to meet these demands. Through in-depth analysis of our demand and performance data, we will create a better understanding of current and future demand to ensure we recognise and respond to the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Ensuring Forensic Services has the right ICT infrastructure in place will be a key focus during the implementation of this strategy. Through historical underfunding, we have faced a continual challenge of ensuring we are able to fulfil our vital responsibilities as a forensic service provider while being supported by an aging infrastructure and systems. We will continue to adapt our infrastructure and systems to support the needs of our people and customers, whilst exploring every avenue to adopt and upgrade to more efficient and effective ways of working and information sharing.

Key partnerships will be vital to support us in achieving our ambitions in this strategy. We are committed to strengthening our existing relationships with partners to support the sharing of knowledge and expertise that allows us to deliver scientific results and solutions from complex incidents. We are committed to finding new ways to collaborate with partners to support the development of innovative forensic science capabilities and to create opportunities for our people to support and engage with this work, including the assimilation of new forensic services into our organisation.

We recognise that our highly trained and qualified people are our most important asset, and we are committed to ensuring that they have readily accessible support to empower them in their roles. The health, safety and wellbeing of our people is a priority and we will ensure that the appropriate resources are available to offer support and guidance. We recognise that leadership skills and development opportunities are important to our people. We will ensure the service has fair and clear career pathways to support mobility throughout the organisation, and create enhanced professional support resources to invest in the development of all our people.

Implementation of our strategy and the key changes will ensure we continue to deliver exceptional value in the scientific services we provide to our partners, and fulfil our key role in the Scottish justice system for the people of Scotland.

This, our second strategy for Forensic Services, builds on the substantial legacy of Forensic Services' founding director, Tom Nelson, who retires after a lifetime of distinguished public service as this strategy is being published. His vision and leadership were key in bringing together legacy organisations to create a national Forensic Services to serve the people of Scotland and in driving us to reach the highest standards - which has been and recognised across the UK and around the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Douglas', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Fiona Douglas
Director of Forensic Services SPA

Executive Summary

Introduction

Forensic Services provides services in a rapidly changing and shifting environment where we are increasingly seeing new developments in both technology and science. This refreshed strategy provides a clear vision as to how we can continue to provide excellent forensic services which remain at the cutting edge of scientific and technological advances, whilst being sustainable, providing value for money as a public service, maintaining and enhancing public trust and confidence and building on our successful operating model.

This refreshed forensic strategy will cover a five year period. This period will be comprised of 3 phases.

Phase 1 – Implementation of the Target Operating Model

Phase 2 – Developing our infrastructure and partnership arrangements

Phase 3 – Embedding sustainability and leading advances in science

Whilst each of these phases are distinct, they are interdependent and there is likely to be overlap during their implementation. The implementation of the strategy will be supported by business plans which will provide more detail about the application of the delivery plan.

We will build on the significant progress made as we implemented our Forensic 2026 Strategy: *Scientific Excellence for Safer Communities*, which outlined the importance of continuing to focus on providing impartial evidence based on scientific excellence to prevent, detect and investigate crime and non-crime incidents. Our new Target Operating Model will also transform the service that we provide to Local Policing, enhancing our response and the support we provide, especially in relation to volume crime.

Our unique crime scene to court model enables us to operate from a position of strength, allowing for collaboration and a swift, coordinated response and enabling forensic science to be delivered at pace across the criminal justice system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all in the past 18 months and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Our people have showed incredible commitment, dedication and resilience, continuing to deliver excellent forensic services in our communities despite the challenges caused by this pandemic. The health, safety and wellbeing of our people will remain a priority for us as we move forward.

Forensic Services works closely with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). We value our relationship as partners within the wider criminal justice service as we work together to establish truth, bring criminals to justice, and ensure that Scotland is a safer place for its people. Both Police Scotland and COPFS are also customers of Forensic Services to whom we provide forensic expertise, analysis and evidence.

Case for change

The case for change is driven by a complex set of challenges facing Forensic Services, namely:

- Supporting and empowering our people: our people are our most important asset and we need to ensure that they continue to thrive and develop, and that they are supported and empowered to provide excellent forensic science across Scotland.
- Sustainability: we need to ensure that we are suitably equipped and prepared to face and adapt to future challenges.
- Advances in forensic science: we need to be in a position to contribute and influence scientific advancements and to be in a position to adopt new forensic methods quickly ensuring that quality standards are maintained and enhanced
- Collaboration and partnership: we operate in a complex ecosystem across the criminal justice system and must work collaboratively with our partners to continue to provide excellent services.

Strategic outcomes for Forensic Services

Our new strategy is framed around four strategic outcomes. These describe the impact we aim to have and the forensic service we want to be in the future. Each outcome is supported by strategic objectives.

- Our people are supported through a positive working environment, enabling them to provide excellent forensic services
- We are sustainable, adaptable and prepared for future challenges
- We deliver high quality, ethical services; and lead in order to advance forensic science
- We work collaboratively with partners to serve the needs of the public and criminal justice in Scotland

Key changes

The strategy will enable us to implement the following changes to benefit both our services and our people:

- **Our People:** Providing opportunities for our people to develop professionally, empowering and equipping our leaders and continuing to prioritise wellbeing so that our people are safe, healthy and thriving.
- **Demand:** Expanding the utilisation of our capacity and capabilities and taking preventative and proactive approaches to bring scientific value when managing our demand.
- **IT:** Ensuring we have access to appropriate technologies, tools and skills through a fast, fit for purpose and dedicated IT infrastructure.
- **Research and Innovation:** building the right expertise and environment to enable and promote innovative approaches, research and development to ensure we are leading the advancement of forensic science.
- **Trust and confidence:** maintaining and building on our transparent and ethical approaches to ensure that we are compliant with changing legislative / regulatory standards and maintain public trust and confidence.
- **Customer service:** Ensuring we provide excellent customer service with a strong focus on quality and continue to provide best value.
- **Collaborative:** Developing and building collaborative relationships with our partners and across the criminal justice system to tackle demand, promote mutual understanding and collective solutions.

Implementing change

The implementation programme will set out how we deliver and subsequently measure the success of this strategy. This will include an overall delivery plan, along with annual delivery plans, which will ensure focus, accountability and provide clarity on investment and benefits. Engaging with our people and collaborating with our partners during development and future implementation will both be key to delivering this strategy successfully.

Investment is required to enable successful delivery of the key elements of the strategy, which will bring considerable benefits across the whole criminal justice system. We will invest in technology, leadership and development and implement strategic workforce planning to ensure our people are empowered and enabled to meet current and future demands.

Conclusion

This forensic strategy is ambitious but achieving our aspirations is critical if we are to continue to deliver excellent forensic services to the public in Scotland.

This strategy has been developed to ensure that we have tested our direction against the emerging futures themes, wider forensic services models, the criminal justice and criminal investigation landscape, industry developments and our own progress in transformation.

Plan on a page

Forensic Strategy:

Delivering excellence in forensic science for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland

Our values	Integrity – Professionalism – Impartiality
Our purpose	To provide excellent, innovative forensic services to support justice in Scotland and keep our communities safe and protected
Our vision	Scientific excellence for safer communities
Strategic outcomes	Objectives
Our people are supported through a positive working environment, enabling them to provide excellent forensic services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on wellbeing so that our people are safe, supported and empowered 2. Support our people to be confident leaders, innovative active contributors and influencers 3. Support our people to identify with and demonstrate forensic services values and have a strong sense of belonging
Forensic Services SPA is sustainable, adaptable and prepared for future challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use innovative approaches to build our capability and capacity to provide high quality forensic services 2. Commit to making a positive impact through an increased focus on environmental sustainability 3. Drive forward the implementation of digital and new technologies to enable forensic services for the future
Forensic Services SPA delivers high quality, ethical services; and leads in order to advance forensic science	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence and collaborate to enable the advancement of forensic capabilities 2. Promote exceptional customer service for our services and focus on best value 3. Embed ethical considerations into every aspect of our forensic services
Forensic Services SPA works collaboratively with partners to serve the needs of the public and Criminal Justice in Scotland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborate and work effectively with criminal justice partners to develop strategies to maximise the value of forensic science particularly where there are increasing demands 2. Adopt a whole justice sector approach to design new future-focused services with partners 3. Demonstrate and promote the value that forensic services provide to our customers, partners and the public

About us

About us	Wider context	What we do
 <p>580 scientists and staff in Forensic Services (FTE)</p>	 <p>We were the first large-scale forensic provider in the UK to be awarded accreditation from UKAS for fingerprint comparisons in 2016</p>	 <p>We attended 24,506 scenes in 2019/20 and maintained forensic services during 20/21 and the Coronavirus Pandemic</p>
 <p>ISO 17025 – the international standard to which we are accredited</p>	 <p>£34.2 million – our revenue budget in 2020/2021</p>	 <p>61% - success rate for a new Crime Scene profile to match an existing Criminal Justice profile</p>
 <p>We have main offices in Gartcosh, Dundee, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, with scene examiners at strategic locations throughout Scotland</p>	 <p>£2.3 million – our capital budget in 2020/2021</p>	 <p>22,639 New laboratory cases opened across forensic services in 2019/2020 and continued to progress laboratory case work during 20/21 and the Coronavirus Pandemic</p>
 <p>Forensic Services has centres of excellence for Firearms, Chemistry and Documents, Hairs and Fibres</p>	 <p>356,423 – number of CJ profiles retained on the Scottish DNA database 15,151 – average number of CJ profiles added to the Scottish DNA database every year</p>	 <p>93% of serious crime scenes attended within 24 hours</p>

Improvements we have made

 DNA technology	<p>Since 2015, Forensic Services has invested £6m in new DNA24 technology to provide more sensitive and informative DNA profiling results.</p> <p>Using this new DNA24 technology, the perpetrator of a murder was found guilty and jailed in 2021 after a cold case review. This was 36 years after the murder took place, finally bringing the perpetrator to justice and closure to the victim's family and loved ones.</p>
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Forensic science caseloads

 Casework	We have seen a 13% increase in casework from 2016/17 to 2019/20.
 Violent crime	We deal with an average of 1,837 cases a year for non-sexual crimes of violence
 Sexual crime	We deal with an average of 1,174 cases a year for sexual crime
 Dishonesty crime	We deal with an average of 5,942 cases of dishonesty
 Drugs	We deal with an average of 9,815 cases of drugs, involving multi-discipline analysis by Drugs, mark enhancement, DNA and Fingerprints teams.
 Drug change	We have seen a 40% increase in demand for drugs case analysis over five years, with changes in drug trends across Scotland shared with partners.
 Traffic	In 2019/2020, there were 1,634 traffic-related cases following the introduction of drug-driving legislation

Did you know?



Digital

Did you know that we have uploaded and managed 3.5 million digital assets on our image management system since the system went live in November 2016, an average of 750,000 per year



Drugs

Did you know that Forensic Services can screen for 17 different drugs in drug-driving cases



Mobile devices

All scene examiners have been issued with mobile devices allowing them to respond directly to requests for attendance

Vision, purpose and values

Forensic Services vision

Scientific Excellence for Safer Communities

Forensic Services purpose

To provide excellent, innovative forensic services to support justice in Scotland and keep our communities safe and protected

Forensic Services values

Our values are **Integrity, Professionalism and Impartiality**. We provide independent, impartial specialist forensic services to policing and the wider criminal justice system and our values form the foundation of our organisational ethos. All our people adhere to these values, which are part of the Forensic Services Code of Practice, and also adhere to the SPA's Code of Conduct.

We value **Integrity** so that we are a trusted organisation

- Acting with honesty at all times. Raising concerns
- Ethically responsible decision-making

We value **Professionalism** so we can deliver a quality scientific service

- Committed deployment of our skills, knowledge, new technology and experience
- Treating one another fairly and with respect

We value **Impartiality** so we can uphold the values of the criminal justice system

- Practising in an unbiased way without prejudice to the justice outcome
- Providing independent expert evidence and testimony

Strategic overview

This refreshed strategy seeks to build on the progress made through delivery of the Forensic 2026 Strategy. An assessment of the strategic environment in which forensic services are delivered, now and in the future, has been undertaken with a wide range of drivers considered, including political, economic, societal, environmental, technological, legal and organisational factors.

The strategy has also been informed by the knowledge, experience and insights of senior leaders and stakeholders within Forensic Services, SPA board members and a range of key external partners including Police Scotland, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), Scottish Government, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS), the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science.

Case for Change

 <p>Demand and capacity</p>	<p>Proactive and preventative work is required to better understand the demand facing Forensic Services and to build the capability and capacity required. This was prioritised in the 2026 Strategy and remains a priority for the organisation going forward.</p>
 <p>ICT infrastructure and systems</p>	<p>Existing ICT infrastructure and systems are challenging the desired shift to more efficient working practices and information sharing capabilities internally and with partners.</p> <p>Our shift to our enhanced Target Operating Model is a priority in this refreshed strategy.</p>
 <p>Research and Innovation</p>	<p>We need to have a sharp, strategic focus on Research and Innovation that brings real benefits to the service and wider justice sector, whilst acknowledging that our capacity and capability remain key areas of focus.</p> <p>Collaboration will be vital and Forensic Services will work more effectively with forensic science networks both in the UK and internationally.</p>
 <p>Partnership working / collaboration</p>	<p>The formation of a single forensic service provider, along with a single police force and prosecution service, has brought real benefits to Scotland and enabled close working relationships with our main criminal justice system partners: Police Scotland, COPFS and the PIRC.</p> <p>There needs to be a strategic approach to maintain, enhance and expand our approach, building on our existing strengths and further developing our engagement, communications and collaborative working arrangements.</p>



Ethics, legality and public confidence

It is vital that Forensic Services maintains the trust and confidence of the key justice partners, stakeholders and the public, delivering visible, high quality, compliant and well governed services which meet the needs of victims, the courts and the wider criminal justice system.

The appointment of the Scottish Biometric Commissioner and subsequent introduction of a Code of Conduct are welcome developments. There will need to be close joint working regarding the emergence and adoption of new technologies and forensic science techniques.

The maintenance and expansion of accredited methods will remain a key focus for Forensic Services to provide further assurance on the science through third party assessment.



Our people and leadership

Our people are our most important asset and demonstrate their professionalism and commitment to the provision of excellent forensic services on a daily basis. We need a continued focus on wellbeing and meaningful engagement with colleagues. A strategic approach to career development is required through strategic workforce planning. This will involve developing clear career pathways including access to leadership roles, and involve a focus on succession planning, recruitment and investment in our people.



Governance

We will build on the arrangements in place with the support of the Scottish Police Authority to ensure the model of forensic services continues to meet the needs of the public, the courts and the wider criminal justice system.



Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability is one of the most pressing issues being faced internationally at present. The UK Government was the first major economy to commit to reaching net zero emissions by 2050, and the Scottish Government has committed to reaching this target by 2045.

All public bodies have a role in reaching this target, and Forensic Services will be ambitious in the changes it makes to embed environmental sustainability into the service.



Customer service

Forensic Services needs to provide forensic services in an efficient manner that are fit for purpose, put the customer first and demonstrably provide value for money in a timely manner. This will involve building greater commercial awareness and an enhanced focus on service experience and relationships.



Digital Forensics

This is a rapidly evolving area of forensics cutting across all traditional crime types, as well as emerging trends.

Forensic Services and Police Scotland will work closely and collaboratively to monitor our joint approach in this area.

We will take a meaningful and collaborative approach to ensure we are engaged, informed and participating effectively.

Outcome I

Our people are supported through a positive working environment, enabling them to provide excellent forensic services

Challenges and opportunities

Forensic Services operates in an environment that is evolving at pace with a range of ongoing and significant advancements in both forensic science methods and technology. Our people want to deliver excellent services and sustained improvements. We need to invest in our people to continue to build on existing skills and develop the new skills and capabilities needed to enhance service provision and increase professional satisfaction. Through investment, we will equip our people with the skills, knowledge and technology to deliver excellent forensic services. We will focus on building flexible career pathways with effective succession planning, recruitment and access to leadership and specialist roles.

Wellbeing and engagement are critical areas for Forensic Services to ensure that our people are healthy, thriving and engaged. Our people need to feel valued and part of the organisational journey with visible, open leadership. We will foster a culture with a strong sense of belonging and commitment to Forensic Services' purpose, values, outcomes and objectives.

Today's challenges



Criminal investigations are becoming increasingly complex and the demands on forensic services are increasing. Our people are stretched and often exposed to traumatic environments



We continue to grow and evolve as an organisation and are working on ways to develop our people to realise their potential both as specialists and leaders



We have a developing organisational culture which reflects legacy foundations and builds towards collective improvement

Forensic Services in future

Wellbeing matters in an organisation where everyone is safe, supported and empowered, with appropriate support options available to our people.

Our people are confident leaders, innovators and influencers, who feel trusted, supported and valued for their contribution

We have a positive culture and our people identify with and demonstrate Forensic Services SPA values and have a strong sense of belonging.

To achieve this outcome, Forensic Services will:

1. Focus on wellbeing so that our people are safe, supported and empowered
2. Support our people to be confident leaders, innovative active contributors and influencers
3. Support our people to identify with and demonstrate forensic services values and have a strong sense of belonging

1. We will focus on wellbeing so that our people are safe, supported and empowered

We recognise the significance of wellbeing and the importance of supporting and empowering our people so that they are safe, healthy and thriving.

We are aware that our people are exposed to traumatic incidents and that the emotional and mental wellbeing of our people is just as important as their physical wellbeing. We want our people to feel supported and empowered to seek help from colleagues and support services no matter the situation. There is a range of support available to our people. We will ensure that these support channels continue to be designed and developed with our people to most appropriately meet and support their needs. We will also ensure they are easily accessible and available to all at the right time.

We want to support our people to maintain a healthy work-life balance and will embed this in our leadership and service planning approaches.

2. We will support our people to be confident leaders, innovative active contributors and influencers

Our people are passionate about forensic science and want to provide the best possible service to the public and our partners. We will provide our people with the opportunity to grow in their chosen profession and to develop new skills and capabilities to ensure we stay at the forefront of changes and developments in forensic science.

This will be of great benefit to Forensic Services as it will enhance our level of service provision to the criminal justice system and wider public whilst providing professional satisfaction to our people. Our people will be enthusiastic and motivated, knowing that they are valued and being invested in by our organisation.

Our people work in high pressure, dynamic environments where they are required to demonstrate effective leadership. We must equip them to make the right decisions, ensuring they are trusted and empowered to do so. We will ensure that our leaders are visible and accessible. We will enable frequent engagement with and between our leaders and colleagues to support clear understanding of our strategic direction and the rationale behind decisions.

We will equip our leaders, ensuring they have access to the appropriate training and support, providing them with the knowledge and skills to carry out their duties. Our leaders will be empowered to lead, support and develop colleagues so the service can rely on high performing teams. This will include providing leaders with the tools to care for and support colleagues who have been exposed to traumatic incidents.

We will develop a leadership programme to ensure we are investing in and preparing the leaders of the future. We will support and encourage innovation and provide opportunities for all our people to contribute and develop their leadership skills.

We will develop a Strategic Workforce Plan to enable us to focus on and build the right environment for pro-active development, recruitment and succession planning. This will involve creating clear progression pathways for our people that will allow them to engage with our enhanced Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme, external training and continue to develop their leadership skills. We will take a collaborative approach to CPD with partners, providing opportunities for secondments, placements and apprenticeships.

3. We will support our people to identify with and demonstrate forensic services values and have a strong sense of belonging

We will continue to build on the foundations laid by the creation of a single forensic services provider for Scotland in 2007, subsequently brought under the newly established Scottish Police Authority in 2013. We are committed to our vision to provide scientific excellence for safer communities and we strive to fulfil our purpose to provide excellent, innovative forensic services to support justice in Scotland and keep our communities safe and protected. Our values of integrity, professionalism and impartiality are embedded in everything we do.

We will create the right environment for our people to be able to work effectively. We will promote a culture of inclusivity and equality of opportunity, where diversity of background and perspective is valued.

We will develop an engagement and communication framework that enables frequent, meaningful and interactive engagement with colleagues across all levels of the organisation. Engagement will be two-way with outcomes and results clearly communicated and explained. This will ensure that our people have a voice, are listened to, valued and contributing to the strategic direction of our services. This will continue to build an inclusive culture with a strong sense of belonging and commitment to our purpose and values.

We will support our people to develop in their careers through a combination of experience and training, in line with our commitment to provide wider career development opportunities.

Outcome 2

Forensic Services is sustainable, adaptable and prepared for future challenges

Challenges and opportunities

Forensic services must be continually evolving to meet constantly changing demands, challenges and new opportunities. Forensic Services will respond and adapt to ongoing technological, societal, political, legal, economic and environmental changes to ensure we are continuing to provide the best possible service. We will embed innovation and transform our operational capacity and capability and our support services to maximise the potential of our organisation.

We will invest in our infrastructure to enable our Target Operating Model and systems to be built around efficiency, high quality and best value and remove obstacles that impinge on the service we provide. Future thinking will be part of our operating model and systems by default so that we are prepared and equipped to adopt and implement new forensic methods and technologies so that we can continue to provide first class forensic services in Scotland.

Today's challenges

Forensic Services in future



An ageing ICT infrastructure and lack of system integration results in inefficiency, duplication of effort and frustration for our people and our partners

We will further integrate with our partners to share insight, intelligence and professional knowledge to enhance criminal investigations



We are limited in our ability to operate sustainably

We consider environmental sustainability by default in all parts of our organisation



Digital technology is developing at speed and we endeavour to keep up with the changes

We will embrace new ideas, innovation and technologies, learning from good practice

To achieve this outcome, Forensic Services will:

1. Use innovative approaches to build our capability and capacity to provide high quality forensic services
2. Commit to making a positive impact through an increased focus on environmental sustainability
3. Drive forward the implementation of digital and new technologies to enable forensic services for the future

1. We will use innovative approaches to build our capability and capacity to provide high quality forensic services

Societal, technological, political, legal and economic trends mean that we must continually review and adapt the services we provide. The demands we face are aligned to wider societal trends and their impacts and we will work closely with our criminal justice partners to meet the needs of the public.

We will integrate further with our partners, sharing access to data and resources in an efficient, legal and ethical manner, working within the boundaries of legislative and ethical standards. Our collaborative approach will create understanding and transparency on the true demand on forensic services throughout the crime scene to court process.

We will use insight, intelligence and our professional knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions to support criminal investigations and our criminal justice partners.

We will use data and performance analysis to create an accurate image of current demands and the true capacity of our organisation. Harnessing and analysing data will provide us foresight of future demands and challenges, allowing us to prioritise and best manage our resources proactively. We will introduce robust planning and foresight into our operating processes to support increased resilience.

2. We will commit to making a positive impact through an increased focus on environmental sustainability

We are committed to reducing the impact of our activity, estates and fleet on the environment. Forensic Services will support the Scottish Government's 2040 carbon neutral target and 2045 zero greenhouse gas emissions target.

We will collaborate with our partners to consider opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint and to deliver a sustainable future forensic services.

We will ensure all our approaches are environmentally sustainable by default and supported by digital and innovative solutions. We will engage our people to raise awareness, supporting and encouraging people to work more sustainably.

We will ensure that environmental sustainability is built into the design of our buildings and will invest in our current estate to make Forensic Services a modern and efficient place for our people to work.

3. We will drive forward the implementation of digital and new technologies to enable forensic services for the future

We will harness the opportunities provided by existing and emerging technology to ensure we continue to provide cutting edge forensic science in a digital age.

We will enhance our ICT infrastructure and explore delivery and partnership models to set out the most effective route to make significant improvements at pace. This will enable us to adopt new ICT systems, replace the need for multiple separate databases, and be compatible with partners' systems to streamline information sharing and virtual communication. We will equip our people by investing in the appropriate equipment and training to enable them to carry out their roles.

We will undertake comprehensive horizon scanning and futures work to anticipate better future technological changes and challenges. We will stay ahead of emerging disciplines such as digital forensics and will develop processes to support partnership working in these emerging fields to ensure Forensic Services are actively engaged and informed. We will align the delivery of digital forensic services with other forensic services to improve service delivery in the future.

We will enhance our operating model, embracing the opportunities provided by new digital technologies. We will invest in our use of data, digital tools, analysis and intelligence and make the case for the value and benefits of the right levels of investment in these areas.

Outcome 3

We deliver high quality, ethical services; and lead in order to advance forensic science

Challenges and opportunities

Forensic Services has established itself as a high quality forensic service provider to assist both criminal and non-criminal investigations in Scotland. This strategy continues to build our reputation and services to ensure we are able to provide the cutting edge evidential analysis that our customers rely upon.

Today's challenges



At times we rely on other forensic service providers to lead the direction for new technologies and research



Increasing levels of demand places additional strain on funding and limits our ability to pilot new forensic capabilities



Historical data collection and retention policies have created significant levels of information within our systems

Forensic Services in future

Our knowledge and expertise will support us to most effectively influence advancements in forensic science

Innovative partnerships will allow us to maximise opportunities to expand our capability

Working with the Scottish Biometric Commissioner will allow our systems to collect and retain only information we are legally required to

To achieve this outcome, Forensic Services will:

1. Influence and collaborate to enable the advancement of forensic capabilities
2. Promote exceptional customer service for our services and focus on best value
3. Embed ethical considerations into every aspect of our forensic services

1. We will influence and collaborate to enable the advancement of forensic capabilities

As a field of study, forensic science is in a constantly shifting landscape with new discoveries and methods of analysis being developed all the time. With these new, innovative techniques and capabilities there are opportunities to deliver new science to uncover insights and intelligence that can help to bring criminals to justice, eliminate innocent individuals and bring closure for families.

The ability to carry out this exploratory research and test new technology is a fundamental requirement to support the development of these new capabilities. This requires the right level of support and investment to facilitate the work required. We recognise the importance of financial sustainability and that both capital and revenue budgets for the service remain under pressure. This is evident as we continue to struggle with the added challenge of operating during the pandemic and the uncertainty of the current economic landscape. We will focus on investing in the right areas with a focus on both sustainability and wider service benefits.

We are committed to growing our influence to encourage innovation throughout the organisation and wider forensic community: this is vital to remain at the forefront of forensic science. With greater emphasis and focus on these areas for the future we will lead and have an influential role in enabling and guiding ongoing and future projects. Our extensive expertise and field experience will be well placed to support our academic partners and other forensic providers to explore topics and areas that will deliver real-world benefits to the public through enhanced investigative and analytical capabilities.

Through this collaboration, we will we work with our partners to highlight areas of research that will help to enhance our capability to extract vital information through innovative and ethical forensic techniques. We will also explore opportunities to provide students and researchers with the support and experience that is so vital to facilitating this work, whilst helping to ensure that the scope and direction of work and research in this space is aligned to the wider needs of the criminal justice system. By proactively engaging with partners and academia, we will pool our resources, knowledge and technology to support the advancement of excellent forensic services in Scotland.

2. We will promote exceptional customer service for our services and focus on best value

Our customer service principles represent the high standard of service that is expected of us by our partners and the people of Scotland. In order to provide the scientific and impartial information required to facilitate criminal investigations and prosecutions, we will carry out the following:

- deliver best value forensic services for Scotland;
- ensure we understand and consider customer requirements, engaging to ensure service levels meet appropriate requirements;
- consider, assess and advise on potential impact/value, cost and implications of service requests;
- be customer focused as we support effective value focused decision making during investigations to capture high quality evidence; and
- enable timely turnaround of vital analysis and provision of intelligence and evidence.

We will provide high quality forensic services to our customers that are reliable and represent value for money. Part of achieving this is having an understanding of the forensic landscape that exists in other parts of the UK and Northern Ireland. By increasing our engagement with and understanding of these partner agencies, we will ensure that the services we provide to our customers are at the forefront of forensic capabilities and deliver exceptional value.

Through greater collaboration with the wider forensic community, we will drive the development of new techniques and methods, using our wealth of knowledge and experience to support delivery of enhanced forensic capabilities.

3. We will embed ethical considerations into every aspect of our forensic services

We will continue to preserve the longstanding high levels of trust and confidence we receive from the public. As an impartial, independent organisation separate from Police Scotland and COPFS, there is a sterile corridor that supports an ethical, transparent and unbiased investigation process from the scene to the court. We will continue to provide the Scottish public with reassurance that forensic evidence is based on impartial and independent scientific analysis of evidential items. With this approach comes a significant responsibility for Forensic Services to ensure that quality, ethics, privacy and public trust are at the heart of the services we provide. Recognising this, we will continue to maintain and preserve this valuable relationship.

We welcome the appointment of the Scottish Biometric Commissioner and we are committed to integrating the new Code of Conduct and ethical and legal frameworks to the managing of biometric data and introduction of new forensic methods.

Our comprehensive accreditation and validation processes are one way we will do this. These extensive processes are applied to any new technology or forensic method that we are considering. Thorough systems allow us to fully test new capabilities, ensuring robust scientific scrutiny and assurance of fitness for purpose before the approval and implementation process can even begin. This approach ensures potential risks are considered at the outset of adopting new technologies, and has proved invaluable in highlighting appropriate considerations to be taken into account to provide the public, the courts, our customers and partners with reassurance that every tool we use has undergone extensive scrutiny and meets the required evidential quality standards.

It is clear from the current public and media profile of forensic science that there is significant interest in this field to support investigations and criminal proceedings. While this interest is welcome, it can at times create unrealistic expectations of what can be obtained through forensic analysis. Finding new ways to engage with and involve the public is vital to help create a better understanding of what can be achieved.

Outcome 4

We work collaboratively with partners to serve the needs of the public and criminal justice in Scotland

Challenges and opportunities

Forensic Services provides a vital service to our customers in the Scottish criminal justice system.

Since our inception in 2013, we have established ourselves as an integral element of the Scottish criminal justice system, providing high quality services and scientific analysis to support an ethical and evidence-based judicial system. Over the years this has led to the development of strong partnership working and good relationships with Police Scotland, the COPFS and PIRC. This enables the service to continue to develop efficient, collaborative working practices and continue to build on existing good relationships.

This focus will allow Forensic Services to continue providing high quality scientific analysis, and through the implementation of increased collaborative partnerships and enhanced communication, we will strive to continue providing the level of service that has come to be expected, and is deserved by the Scottish public.

Today's challenges



Our capability and capacity to tackle volume crime needs to be reviewed to explore new approaches to ensure we can effectively and efficiently meet our current and future demands



Information and knowledge sharing is not always clearly accessible to support ongoing casework



We have a predominantly reactive focus on managing our current levels of demand

Forensic Services in future

Our forensic services are flexible, agile and designed to meet all types of demand at present and in future

We will have clear points of contact to enhance collaboration between Forensic services and our Criminal Justice partners

We will take action to pro-actively assess and understand our demand to most effectively plan our work and focus on value

To achieve this outcome, Forensic Services will:

1. Collaborate and work effectively with criminal justice partners to develop strategies to maximise the value of forensic science particularly where there are increasing demands
2. Adopt a whole justice sector approach to design new future focused services with partners
3. Demonstrate and promote the value that forensic services provide to our customers, partners and the public

1. We will collaborate and work effectively with criminal justice partners to develop strategies to maximise the value of forensic science particularly where there are increasing demands

Being able to work effectively with our partners is fundamental to ensuring we are able to sustain an efficient crime scene to court model. This model's effectiveness, both to carry out investigations in a scientific and ethical manner and to support criminal proceedings that are unbiased and justified has been clearly established and has demonstrated its value. New demands and unexpected challenges are part of our operating environment that require strong relationships with our partners across the criminal justice sector and agility in how we work, now more than ever.

Our insights highlighted that demand prioritisation is an area with a significant need to be reviewed and adapted. In relation to volume crime, our current triage approach has proved to be an effective tool to help reduce the amount of unnecessary work that is created during the investigation and analysis process.

At the strategic level, and in relation to serious crime, our current working approaches are effective in communicating and collaborating with partners to manage complex situations. In these instances, priority is rightly given to pushing these services and analysis through the system as a priority to get the vital results needed to progress these investigations. This has the knock-on effect of pushing other ongoing work to the side-lines and contributes to creating backlogs of work.

We recognise that there are unique challenges associated with the demand experienced at the strategic, tactical and operational levels. It is therefore vital that we explore new ways to more efficiently manage this demand, ensuring where possible that we minimise any impact upon other ongoing work and areas of business. Through better prioritisation of serious crime analysis, and coordination with our partners, we can work to implement processes that provide accurate and insightful analysis, without excessive use of resources that provide little additional benefit or impacting upon our capabilities to progress volume crime workloads.

We are committed to exploring new ways to improve how we manage this demand, and support more effective management across the whole criminal justice system.

We will strive to create accessible and inclusive spaces for internal colleagues and external partners to share learning and insights to better understand our demand. One of the key components of this is to build a strong mutual understanding of the whole process of the crime scene to court model, and the work required throughout to keep things progressing effectively. By exploring opportunities to share the working reality of forensic services, and better understand those of our partners, we will be more informed to make decisions and adopt approaches that are of mutual benefit.

Only by encouraging and supporting more understanding and collaboration across Forensic Services, Police Scotland and COPFS, can we ensure that comprehensive improvement of the management and prioritisation of demand is delivered across the justice sector.

Despite being a single organisation, Police Scotland largely comprises three separate business areas:

- Local Policing
- Major Crime and Public Protection
- Organised Crime, Counter Terrorism and Intelligence

Each of these business areas are reliant on the provision of forensic services, and each have their own distinct needs and relationships. This adds additional complexity to the partnership working process and makes it difficult to prioritise our demand. In particular, our new Target Operating Model will transform the service that we provide to Local Policing, enhancing our response and the support that we provide.

While there are already strong links between our people and our colleagues in Police Scotland, high mobility is another issue that characterises senior operational policing roles, as it can at times be difficult to maintain these relationships effectively. Consequently, we can find it challenging maintaining the joint direction/agreements that were in place prior to these moves, resulting in duplication of time and effort to reach our way back to that consensus of understanding. These relationships are vital in enabling and sustaining effective partnership working, and as such are something that we must continue to focus on developing. We will commit to ensuring that steps are taken to provide greater support to work closely with policing during periods of high demand and transition, helping to retain the trusted working environment and approach.

2. We will adopt a whole justice sector approach to design new future-focused services with partners

As the sole provider for forensic services to the criminal justice system in Scotland, we have a responsibility to ensure we provide support and services that are vital to an ethical and evidence-based judicial system. By exploring opportunities to increase collaboration with our academic and criminal justice partners, we will maximise our ability to undertake reviews and gather insights into the complex challenges and demands that we currently face. With this information, we will be better equipped to trial and deploy new approaches and tools that support more effective and integrated working with our partners, and the provision of forensic services to our customers.

We are aware that in some instances there are service requests being made by our partners that will not provide a reasonable return of information for the required time and resources needed to carry them out. As experts in the field it is our responsibility to ensure that we make our partners aware of which services could offer the vital information required to support investigations, and which services will not be well suited. To achieve this we are committed to ensuring that our people are supported to have the right positive and proactive professional conversations to reach a consensus.

It is our ambition that we not only take steps to manage better the levels of demand we currently experience, but to understand likely future demand drivers and design our services to meet the upcoming opportunities and challenges.

We are committed to exploring opportunities with our criminal justice partners to design and implement new approaches and services that are better suited to tackle the challenges of evolving demands in Scotland. This will build upon our existing relationships to offer more flexibility in the manner in which we work together and share information, and provide accessible channels of communication to support closer collaboration and share learning e.g. the use of enhanced forensic strategy meetings. These meetings will provide valuable opportunities for Forensic Services and our partners to collaboratively review and consider innovative solutions to meet investigative demands and challenges.

It is our vision that that this and a wider, evolving whole justice sector service design approach will enable further positive change in how all services across the sector are supported and delivered for the people of Scotland.

3. We will demonstrate and promote the value that forensic services provide to our customers, partners and the public

We will embed a culture of continuous improvement within Forensic Services and the SPA. This drive is at the heart of every operational team and business area which empowers all our people to be innovative and improvement-focused in their day-to-day work.

We recognise the reputation Forensic Services has developed within the sector, the research community and internationally, and will share our expertise, knowledge and learning proactively.

We will highlight the results of our work, including with partners, to build greater understanding of the realities and possibilities of forensic science.

Our approach to governance is open and transparent and we will ensure the provision of adequate, timely and appropriate data and reporting. We welcome robust scrutiny from the SPA, HMICS, the Biometrics Commissioner, Scottish Government and other key stakeholders to maintain confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of our service.

Ultimately, the confidence of the public is most critical to a successful service. This relies on an impartial and scientific operating model, coupled with visibility and understanding of how what we do each and every day. We will actively promote how our service benefits and supports justice for victims, their families and loved ones, and keeps the people of Scotland safe from future harm.

Delivering change

This strategy sets the direction, scope and ambition for the delivery of forensic science in Scotland. It guides how the resources of Forensic Services are allocated to support the delivery of justice and help to keep Scotland's communities safe.

Forensic Services aims to continue to grow scientific excellence to prevent, detect and investigate crime – aligned with the Scottish Government's Justice Outcomes and the strategic aims of Police Scotland, COPFS, and the PIRC.

The direction and performance for Forensic Services ensures that the strategy is underpinned by plans, including a two-year Business Delivery Plan, which aligns with the Scottish Police Authority's Corporate Plan.

Forensic Services has established a Programme Management Office which is responsible for managing and delivering change through our transformative programmes and projects. This function includes programme and project management, controlling interdependencies and risks, monitoring benefits realisation, and works closely with and is supported by the Change Function in Police Scotland.

A new Target Operating Model has been designed to deliver a strategic improvement in the delivery of services by Forensic Services to partners and this sets out the organisational developments required to enable the effective delivery of our strategy.

The delivery of this strategy will be reviewed regularly and its progress and impact will be embedded in financial and productivity reporting as well as the performance. Progress will be reported to the Strategy Programme Board - chaired by the Director of Forensic Services - and then on to the SPA Forensic Committee, and full meetings of the Authority, as part of the formal reporting process.

The impact on our people and services of transformation is monitored in Forensic Services through progress reporting and review at the Forensic Services People, Performance, ICT and Change and Innovation Boards and at Senior Management Team meetings.

Oversight, scrutiny, and assurance are provided to the SPA through the governance structure at both full meetings of the Authority and committee meetings.

The Authority's Forensic Services Committee makes recommendations to the SPA on all Forensic Services related matters by providing advice and seeking assurance on the delivery of Forensic Services through constructive challenge as well as contributing to planning and future development of forensic services.

A culture of change is being embedded within Forensic Services and the SPA. There is a drive for continuous improvement to be at the heart of every operational team and business area which empowers all our people to be innovative and improvement-focused in their day-to-day work.

Implementation

A suite of plans supports the delivery of the Forensic Services strategic outcomes. These include:

- The SPA Corporate Plan which outlines how the delivery of forensic services is overseen by the Authority. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 states: “The Authority must provide forensic services to the Police Service, the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner and the Lord Advocate and procurators fiscal.”
- The SPA two-year Forensic Services Business Delivery Plan, which sets out the activities and actions to achieve the strategic outcomes and meet the key areas identified in the strategy.
- The Forensic Services People Plan, which seeks to ensure we have the right number of people in place who have the skills, training, and experience to deliver services in support of the Forensic Services strategy and objectives.
- The Forensic Services ICT Plan to manage the delivery of the ICT needs of the service.
- The Forensic Services Estate Plan to ensure Forensic Services has the appropriate estate to support the delivery of the strategy.
- The Forensic Services Capital Finance Plan to manage procurement and capital investment across the service.
- The Forensic Services overarching Business Plan which brings together, and highlights interdependencies and priorities from the above internal Forensic Services plans.

Sustainable service

Managing demand

The new Forensic Services Target Operating Model has at its core the drive to provide a sustainable service which provides a responsive provision of science from crime scene to court through effective demand management which maximises the value of the work Forensic Services delivers.

Forensic Services will deliver a Strategic Workforce plan which will provide the flexibility of staff to meet changing demands underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which will manage support the management of capacity. Through this improved partnership working Forensic Services will more easily be able to identify and to prioritise the work of staff to ensure the right person is doing the right job at the right time. While managing demand, we will seek to carry out work swiftly and efficiently to maximise forensic value and intelligence. The increased flexibility will allow Forensic Services to have the correct skills and resources to meet fluctuating demand and will be delivered by training and up-skilling of staff. The Joint National Forensic Gateway will ensure work is prioritised correctly and that capacity is managed efficiently and effectively.

The Forensic Services People Board ensures we will have the right number of people in place with the skills, training and experience to deliver this Strategic Workforce plan sustainably and this board is supported with sub groups on:

- Attendance Management
- Wellbeing
- Equality and Diversity

The People Board seeks to create a positive and vibrant workplace for all of our people who will be able to deploy cutting edge techniques in forensic science.

Finance

The Scottish Government's announcement of its 2021/22 budget confirmed additional recurring funding to SPA of £60m (plus £15m one-off COVID funding), removing the imperative for workforce reductions and allowing staffing numbers to be maintained into the future.

Sustaining a balanced budget over the long-term continues to depend on future years' revenue funding increases matching pay growth, and overall workforce costs managed within current levels. The fiscal legacy of COVID-19 on the Scottish Government's finances is uncertain at this point, therefore future years' funding is not yet clearly defined or guaranteed.

Measuring progress and assessing performance

Forensic Services provide quarterly performance reports to the SPA to enable review and oversight.

An annual performance report measuring progress against agreed outcomes is provided to the Director of Forensic Services and to the SPA.

The strategic outcomes set out for the public and stakeholders how Forensic Services will deliver improvements through the implementation of this strategy.

The outcomes are the basis for measuring the progress as part of the performance.

Performance assessment constitutes a critical component of the SPA's statutory functions, which includes overseeing the delivery of Forensic Services, while promoting and supporting continuous improvement.



Quarterly Performance Reporting to Scottish Police Authority

The performance reporting consists of a set of measures agreed between the Authority and Forensic Services, and an accompanying public reporting regime. These measures are developed in collaboration with partners within the criminal justice system and customers of the forensic services provided.

Progress against each of the measures is reported by Forensic Services to the Authority's Forensic Services Committee for initial consideration, and to the Authority's Board meeting for full review on a quarterly basis.

Scottish Police Authority's Annual Review

The Authority is required to assess and report on performance across the policing system on an annual basis. Each financial year, the Authority produces an Annual Report which is laid before Parliament.

The annual performance is an assessment of how Forensic Services has achieved against the outcomes in the Forensic Strategy, as well as an assessment of the SPA Corporate Performance against the SPA Corporate Plan.

The SPA draws on a range of publicly available information and data to produce its Annual Report, including material contained in the quarterly performance reports provided by Police Scotland and Forensic Services during the reporting year. The Authority also reaches out to each Scottish local authority, HMICS, and other partner organisations for their views on the impact of policing, in order to reflect a wide range of data and opinion sources.

Appendix A:

Insight and engagement

The development of this strategy was informed by a broad range of research and horizon scanning, in addition to reviewing the previous Forensics 2026 strategy and progress to date.

Forensic Services is grateful to colleagues, partners and stakeholders who also took part in a range of discussions and interviews for sharing their views, insight and perspectives on future opportunities and challenges in the forensic science, the broader criminal justice system and academic research and innovation.

We would like to thank our own people for sharing their experience and ambitions for the future of the service, as well as Scottish Police Authority Board members and staff, representatives of Police Scotland, Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Scotland, the Scottish Biometric Commissioner, the Forensic Service of Northern Ireland, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science, the Forensic Institute, and the James Hutton Institute for providing their time, input and support.

