



Agenda Item 9

Meeting	Authority Meeting
Date	24 November 2022
Location	COSLA, Edinburgh
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 members on the recent key activities across Forensic Services.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is to update members on activities across Forensic Services.

2. UPDATES

Budget

- 2.1 I have held extensive meetings with the Authority Chief Executive and a number of members following the Scottish Government's Resource Spending indications of a flat-cash settlement for next year's budget.
- 2.2 While a budget for 2023-24 has yet to be agreed, the implications of a flat-cash settlement for Forensic Services would ultimately result in reduced Forensic Services capacity, reduced forensics capabilities and wider negative outcomes for the criminal justice system.
- 2.3 A significantly reduced forensics capacity would result in slower reporting and an enforced cap on the number of cases that could be managed. This would include not being able to accept as many toxicology, drugs and acquisitive cases. These cuts and limits to forensics services would be similar to cuts seen across England and Wales with negative consequential impacts on the wider justice system as well as conviction rates.

Forensic Services Change Programme

- 2.4 Forensic Services had previously reported that we were in the process of advertising 41 new posts to start the implementation of New Operating Model, following an agreement with Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC), extensive consultation with staff over the past few years and the approval of the Full Business Case by the SPA on 29 September 2021.
- 2.4 Given the current unclear budgetary position, Forensic Services have had to review taking some of these posts forward at the current time. These posts are being reviewed on a week-by-week basis but we will only move forward to recruitment when we are sure we have funding to do so. We are also looking at the further implications a flat-cash settlement would have on our implementation and benefits realisation plans for the whole of the change programme.

Performance

- 2.5 In spite of the pressures through consultation on change, Forensic Services staff have delivered significant improvements during the past year so we are now in as strong a position as possible as we move into the implementation phase of our New Operating Model.
- 2.6 The drugs caseload, for example, is the lowest for many years, at around one third of the level of a year ago and all business areas have had a reduction in demand during Q2 compared with the previous quarter. The only exception is the performance in Toxicology, where there is extensive work being undertaken on short and long-term improvements as is reported through the Authority's Forensic Toxicology Oversight Group.

Toxicology update

- 2.7 The continuing improvement in drug-driving cases has been reported to the Authority's Forensic Toxicology Oversight Group over the past few months. While there were 11 drug-driving cases unable to be progressed to prosecution because of delays in forensic testing and analysis in July, this had fallen to three in August; there were no such cases reported in either September or October.
- 2.8 A new outsourcing contract started in September - after funding of £370,000 was provided by the Scottish Government - and this will help relieve some of the pressures on the Forensic Services staff from the continued higher than predicted demand for drug-driving toxicology services in Scotland. Forensic Services continue to work closely with Police Scotland, COPFS and the Scottish Government to manage and minimise risks and to develop a sustainable system-wide solution that can meet future demand. The Long-term Sustainable Model and the Business Case that was submitted to Scottish Government in April 2022.
- 2.9 Staff in Forensic Services have been involved in extensive engagement with HMICS colleagues as they continue their review into the end-to-end process for obtaining, analysing and reporting drug driving blood sample results in order to support criminal proceedings. HMICS has now indicated it expects to publish the report and its findings in February 2023.

Project Weaver

- 2.10 Next week Post Mortem Toxicology services - previously delivered by the University of Glasgow - will transfer to Forensic Services on 1 December. This follows two years of detailed planning and a £6m

Scottish Government investment in a new laboratory site and equipment in Glasgow. This project has required extensive support from Police Scotland and the COPFS, as well as joint and flexible working with the University of Glasgow staff, to continue to deliver the current contract while setting up the new site.

- 2.11 There will be a formal opening for the new site in the New Year and this will be the fifth main Forensic Services laboratory site and the first since the opening of the Scottish Crime Campus in Gartcosh nearly a decade ago.

UKAS visits

- 2.12 The UKAS Surveillance assessment of Forensic Services started with visits to Aberdeen on the 11 October and continued in Dundee, Edinburgh and Scottish Crime Campus during the past few weeks. The 2021 UKAS accreditation assessment programme was completed on 10 August with renewal of the Forensic Services UKAS accreditation for another four years - the 24th consecutive year of accreditation in Forensic Services.

International and academic collaboration

- 2.13 Forensic Services have taken part in a joint project validating the use of Virtual Reality for recording fire scenes and demonstrate the competencies of Fire Investigators. This project was reported across several media outlets.
- 2.14 Forensic Services colleagues joined with teams from the Danish Police Fire Investigation Unit, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at Dundee University last month for a Collaborative Fire Investigation Exercise.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no personnel implications in this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

6. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no reputational implications in this report.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no social implications in this report.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

8.1 There are no community implications in this report.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality implications in this report.

10. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the contents of the report