



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

Improving Policing across Scotland

Tuesday, June 27, 2017

PRESS RELEASE

HMICS PUBLISHES Thematic Inspection of Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services

A report by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) into how forensic services are managed and delivered by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) has acknowledged that Scotland is recognised as a leader in using the latest forensic technologies to tackle crime and the quality of its services are assured through robust accreditation.

The quality of forensic analysis continues to be good despite Forensic Services experiencing a period of significant change and financial constraint.

The report found the continued delivery of quality forensic services will require ongoing investment, changes in governance and strengthened strategic leadership by the SPA.

HMICS has identified a lack of progress across a number of areas for improvement, which were previously highlighted to both the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and Police Scotland.

The report states that there has been no strategy in place for the delivery of forensic services in Scotland for over four years and the impact of demand for forensic services, geographical spread of staff and the current functional structures continue to present challenges.

All stakeholders are supportive of the service provided, but have a limited understanding of the actual performance currently being delivered.

Gill Imery, Assistant Inspector of Constabulary at HMICS, who led the review, said:

“Forensic Services play a key role in supporting the justice system in Scotland in the investigation, detection and prosecution of crime. The service has been subject to continual change over the past ten years and has done well to innovate and meet increasing demands from those who use its services.

“We found Forensic Services staff at all levels are dedicated and committed to delivering a high quality service.”

“However, it was concerning that our inspection found there has been a lack of progress across improvement areas which were previously highlighted to both the SPA and Police Scotland.

"Serious and major crime investigations receive an excellent level of forensic service, although those delivered to local policing at an investigative stage are often poorer. It is clear that demand for forensic services is ever-increasing and additional investment and better demand management will be needed to build a sustainable forensic service for the future."

"We should be proud of the Forensic Service which has developed in Scotland. It has many attributes which should be valued: its independence, its advanced science, its quality approach, and its staff"

The report highlights a number of areas of strength regarding the service currently provided and makes 23 recommendations for improvement.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Key Findings from the Report are listed below.

The HMICS Thematic Inspection of Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.org from 1100hrs, Tuesday, June 27, 2017.

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Key findings:

- Forensic Services has a proven track record in adopting cutting edge technology to support policing in Scotland.
- There has been no strategy in place for the delivery of forensic services in Scotland for over four years.
- There may be scope for the approach in Scotland to conform to the same standards as those in the rest of the UK (set out in the UK Home Office Forensic Strategy). This would facilitate greater interoperability.
- The SPA, as the governing body, has not provided strategic leadership over Forensic Services and has not put in place a clearly established strategy, investment plan and joint planning cycle. There have also been weaknesses in the strategic engagement with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.
- The decision by the SPA to create a Management Advisory Group for forensics does not take account of the views of partners nor the advice previously provided by HMICS. The HMICS Professional Advice Note highlighted a number of governance risks which remain unaddressed.
- Forensic Services staff do not identify themselves as being part of the SPA.
- The 2014 Memorandum of Understanding between the SPA, Police Scotland and the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service has not been changed following review. This has limited partners' ability to assess the effectiveness of governance and scrutiny arrangements on service delivery.
- The impact of demand for forensic services, geographical spread of staff and current functional structures continues to present major challenges in terms of leadership and management and is having a direct influence on staff morale.

- A number of service initiatives and improvements have been deferred due to a lack of capacity and programme/project management skills within the service.
- The quality of forensic work undertaken by Forensic Services is good.
- All stakeholders were both supportive of the service provided and generally aware of the resourcing issues which were being faced. However most had a limited understanding of the actual performance currently being delivered.
- Current forensic performance reporting to the SPA Board offers only high level information and does not cover many of the key functions of service delivery. These limitations are preventing the SPA Board from effectively holding the Chief Executive to account for the delivery of forensic services.
- Current performance reporting demonstrates that Forensic Services is consistently working above capacity. All its functions have a degree of backlog impacting on their performance with a consistent trend of increasing caseload in a number of areas.
- There are no issues with the provision of forensic services for major investigations, however the service delivered to local policing divisions at an investigative stage is often substantially poorer.
- There is no evidence to suggest concerns regarding the quality of evidence or operational independence of the current Police Scotland Cybercrime Unit delivery model and no imminent requirement to relocate elements of cybercrime to the SPA. However improved visibility could be provided through performance reporting and scrutiny at the SPA Policing Committee.
- There is no decision making framework, guidance or notional costing model in place to support the prioritisation of work through the forensic gateway system.
- There is a high degree of failure demand across the 'end to end' forensic process from requesting crime scene attendance to the delivery of results which is not being systematically addressed.
- There is major process variation across Forensic Services, Police Scotland and the forensic gateway portals largely due to legacy processes, ICT systems, culture and practice.
- Forensic Services is a leader in pursuing and retaining UKAS accreditation. Fingerprint services are the first such function in the UK to become ISO 17025 accredited and Scene Examination are currently pursuing ISO 17020 accreditation.
- The SPA and Police Scotland have failed to deliver on a number of improvement initiatives due to a lack of resource and cohesive approach to continuous improvement.
- The most contentious issue for staff was the ongoing harmonisation of their terms and conditions across Police Scotland, the SPA and Forensic Services with an approximate three year delay in delivery.
- The geographical spread and functional silos within Forensic Services are exacerbating weak communication and engagement between management, staff and unions.
- Opportunities for training, development and cross-functional working within Forensic Services are being restricted due to operational workload.
- Forensic Services had an operating budget of £27.7m in 2016-17. This constitutes only 2.6% of the overall SPA policing budget, which includes Police Scotland. Forensic Services has consistently faced challenging financial circumstances in its operating revenue budget.
- Forensic Services currently has no means to accurately cost its activities and limited financial support and expertise to develop effective costing and charging models.

- There are conflicting views on the effectiveness of the forensic Evidence Management ICT system as a business tool.
- The failure to deliver the i6 system, and a lack of a single national crime management system within Police Scotland linked to a production management system, presents major challenges in terms of productions handling, demand analysis, management reporting and process efficiency for Forensic Services.
- A number of corporate business support services provided by Police Scotland are not effectively supporting the business of Forensic Services.

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