

# FORENSIC SERVICES STRATEGY

## 2016 - 2019

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### FOREWARD

Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI), an agency of the Department of Justice (DOJ), provides high quality, United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredited scientific analysis and reporting for the majority of forensic services. The Scientific Support Branch (SSB) of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) also undertakes forensic services and engages private sector providers to deal with surges in demand. The quality of scientific expertise at our disposal is exceptional however, overall service provision continues to present some challenges in the context of a changing environment.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken throughout the criminal justice system to realise the Minister of Justice's vision for a faster, fairer justice system in which the general public have confidence. The vision will ultimately be achieved with all elements of the justice system working collaboratively to identify efficiencies and enhance effectiveness. Forensic services play a very important part in the criminal justice system through the provision of objective and impartial scientific analysis. This strategy is concerned with maximising the contribution of forensic services to the operation of the criminal justice system, within a very challenging economic environment.

Globally forensic services have encountered enormous challenges over recent years. Forensic laboratories are able to extract more information from less material than ever before. E-crime presents a completely new area of investigation that is evolving and increasingly specialised. Forensic services have responded to the changing environment by enhancing the value of the service provided, for example, playing an important role in live investigations and providing reliable information quickly. The expectations and demands of customers are changing as a consequence. More information is required in shorter timeframes and at lower cost.

Jurisdictions have responded to the challenges in very different ways. Scotland and the Republic of Ireland have retained the provision of core forensic services within the public sector. In England and Wales the Forensic Science Service was closed in March 2012 and the market opened up to the private sector.

The approach in Northern Ireland has also been to retain core forensic services within the public sector. However, the very significant challenges forensic services has faced to date and the opportunities presented by technological advances of the future must be addressed. This strategy acknowledges the excellent work undertaken to date in meeting new and persistent pressures and sets out a new course aimed at capitalising on that progress and maximising the potential contribution of the expert scientific resources within forensic services.

## **VISION FOR FORENSIC SERVICES**

*To ensure the Northern Ireland justice system has access to timely, good quality and cost-effective forensic services which support the delivery of faster, fairer justice from crime scene to court and in which customers and the general public have confidence.*

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

### **1. Delivery**

Ensure the optimum delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland.

### **2. Impartiality**

Impartiality and objectivity remain fundamental to service delivery.

### **3. Quality**

Ensure the proportionate adherence to quality assurance from crime scene to court.

### **4. Relationships**

Build and maintain effective working relationships among stakeholders.

## **CONTEXT**

Forensic evidence has a vital role to play within the criminal justice system. However it is facing significant challenges:

- The increasing importance of forensics due to advances in technology facilitating greater forensic capacity and consequently investigative opportunity;
- The unpredictability of demand;
- The changing nature of crime;
- Customer expectations for more from less, faster and cheaper;
- The very challenging economic climate.

The challenges set out above became manifest in operational inefficiencies, leading to backlogs and delays in the production of reports, the management of strategic customer relationships and

performance improvement, as Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) adjusted to meet the demand for its services.

Excellent progress has been made in addressing these challenges, particularly with regard to key outcomes of the Inter Agency Plan on forensic submissions, the potential of the Indictable Cases Pilot and the FSNI Transformation Programme. This strategy is concerned with building on the progress made to date and addressing ongoing challenges in order to maximise the efficiency in service provision over the next three year period.

## **THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

There have been significant developments in the provision of forensic services over the past number of years. Advances in technology, automated techniques in particular, combined with traditional scientific skills challenge us to provide more meaningful output with more diverse exhibits at lower cost and in a shorter period of time. The demand for forensic expertise is increasing through all stages of crime investigation, including intelligence gathering and crime prevention.

At the same time the nature of crime is changing. Traditional crime is decreasing year on year and the demands placed on forensic services is also changing. Crime is now more likely to be committed online or facilitated with an online presence. Analytical expertise in digital electronics is therefore increasingly sought after.

## **IMPACT ON SERVICE PROVISION**

In order to meet the challenges presented in an increasingly dynamic environment, forensic services must continue to develop the capacity to anticipate and predict and then respond and adapt. This will often mean identifying different ways of working and adopting new and creative approaches. More than ever before there will be an emphasis on how forensic services are provided; how scientists communicate and facilitate understanding; and how the service develops and evolves.

## **DELIVERY**

### ***Ensure optimum delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland***

- Continually assess the most appropriate forensic services to be retained within the core service; those services which may be outsourced; and services to be rationalised
- Develop the potential of forensic science networks to achieve critical mass in service provision and in research
- Remove duplication in service provision between FSNI and PSNI; complete a process map for the provision of services, critically assessing efficiency and overall effectiveness
- Ensure an integrated approach to the delivery of forensic services from crime scene to

- court, ensuring value for money in service provision
- Develop the role of the PSNI Authorisation Unit as the main operational interface with the FSNI, to include FSNI personnel and prosecution expertise
  - Implement learning from the Indicatable Cases Project
  - Develop a joint approach to priority setting and business planning with resources focused on priorities
  - Service Level Agreements will ensure customer requirements for the service are clearly specified and thereafter delivered
  - Develop a culture of innovation in the provision of forensic science services
  - Remove barriers to effective co-operation, collaboration and communication

## **IMPARTIALITY**

### ***Impartiality and objectivity remain fundamental to service delivery***

- Forensic science services must be objective and be seen to act impartially
- Forensic service provision must not be undermined by perceived failures in the boundary between investigator and scientist
- Excellent communication in the interests of the criminal justice system will support impartiality

## **QUALITY**

### ***Ensure the proportionate adherence to quality assurance from crime scene to court***

- All forensic service providers will co-operate fully with the Forensic Science Regulator guidance on quality accreditation
- The integrity, quality and effectiveness of forensic services from crime scene to court will not be compromised in the interests of speed and efficiency

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### ***Build and maintain effective working relationships among stakeholders***

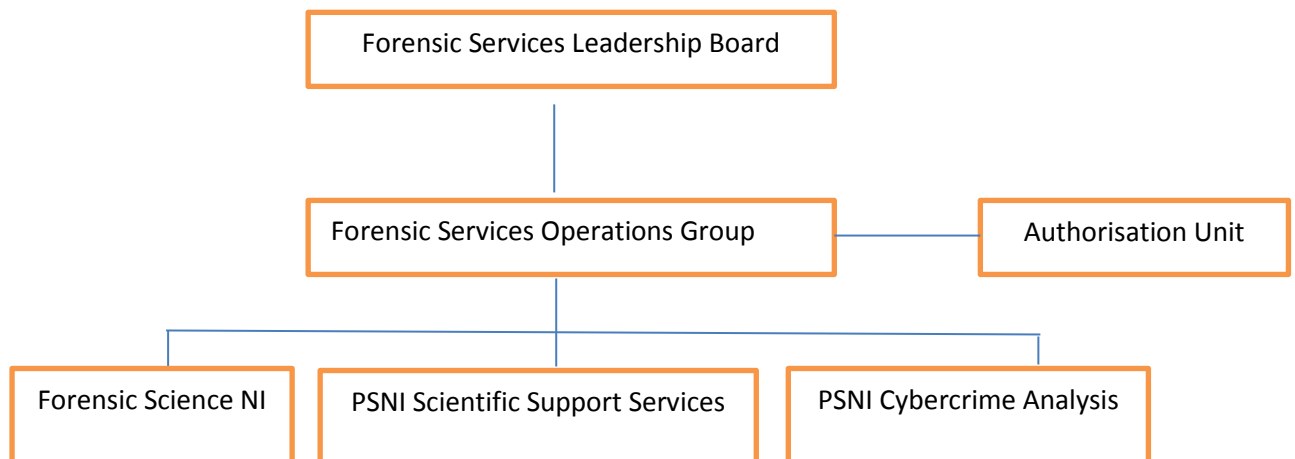
- FSNI will have an unambiguous customer focused approach

- FSNI performance indicators will be outcome focused and structured around measuring the value of forensic science to the wider criminal justice system
- FSNI and PSNI Scientific Services Branch should as far as practical be co-located
- FSNI, PSNI and the PPS will work in partnership to achieve improvements in service provision and build understanding and empathy
- All stakeholders will co-operate and work collaboratively to deliver faster, fairer, justice
- All stakeholders will agree a set of common values, including:
  - ✚ Agree to work together in the interests of the criminal justice system;
  - ✚ Establish relationships built on mutual co-operation, respect and tolerance;
  - ✚ To ensure that communication is effective, consistent with the Attorney General’s Guidance<sup>1</sup>, facilitates understanding and acknowledges the potential for differing expectations and different levels of expertise/knowledge.

## GOVERNANCE

### Forensic Services Leadership Board

The Forensic Services Leadership Board will provide strategic leadership of all forensic services delivered by both the FSNI and PSNI and consider the potential for progress for the ongoing integration and rationalization of services.



<sup>1</sup> Guidance issued by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland pursuant to section 8 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004, 2012 No. 1.

### **Forensic Services Operations Group**

The Forensic Services Operations Group is a joint operations group which will give practical effect to the 'crime scene to court model', under the current arrangements. It will comprise of operational leads from each service and representation from the Authorisation Unit, including the PPS.

The Operations Group will be independently chaired and will be supported by a small project team led by a project manager and comprising dedicated resource with knowledge of policing, forensic services and the prosecution service.

The Chair and the project group will be funded by the PSNI's forensic science budget.

PRINCIPLE	STRATEGIES	OBJECTIVES	ENABLERS	STRATEGIC OUTCOME
Delivery	Ensure the optimum delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland	To provide an efficient, sustainable, agile service with strong governance, delivering high quality performance and cognizant of its overall contribution to criminal justice outcomes.	Exploit developments in technology and develop governance arrangements to achieve optimum performance and facilitate interaction	<p><i>To ensure the Northern Ireland justice system has access to timely, good quality and cost-effective forensic services which supports the delivery of faster, fairer justice from crime scene to court and in which customers and the general public have confidence.</i></p>
Impartiality	Impartiality and objectivity remain fundamental to service delivery	To assure public confidence regarding objectivity and impartiality in the provision of forensic services	New governance arrangements to assert the distinctive roles of the scientist and investigator but working together in collaboration	
Quality	Ensure the proportionate adherence to quality assurance from crime scene to court	To meet the imperative of quality assuring forensic services proportionately and consistent with the Regulator's guidance	Follow the Forensic Science Regulator guidance	
Relationships	Build and maintain effective working relationships among stakeholders	To develop and nurture successful partnership arrangements which will yield innovations, realise efficiencies and become demonstrably more effective in the service of the criminal justice system	Maximise the impact of greater co-operation and collaboration to improve communication and enhance service delivery and the building of trust and confidence	

# PART 1

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

The majority of forensic services in Northern Ireland are provided by Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and the Scientific Services Branch of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). FSNI is an executive agency of the Department of Justice employing approximately 211 administrative and scientific staff (staffing numbers are anticipated to fall to about 166 at 31 March 2016). FSNI provides expertise in a range of scientific disciplines:

- Biology
- DNA
- Electronics
- Explosives
- Fires
- Firearms
- Alcohol, Drugs & Toxicology
- Microchemistry (trace gunshot and explosives residues)
- Physical Methods (paint, glass, tool marks, foot marks)
- Questioned Documents
- Road Traffic Collisions
- Special Fingerprint Unit (joint/sequential recovery of latent marks)

Within the PSNI, Scientific Services Branch provides expertise and technical support across a range of disciplines, which include:

- Crime Scene Investigators
- Management of serious crime scenes
- Fingerprint bureau
- DNA (administrative unit)
- Specialist Photography
- Mapping Services
- CCTV download and enhancement
- Facial ID services

PSNI also provide forensic services in relation to cybercrime.

The total cost of forensic services to the justice system provided by both FSNI and the PSNI was approximately £21m in 2014/15. The budget for FSNI was £12.1m, of which £10.0m came from the PSNI. The PSNI accounts for 94% of FSNI's business with further income generated from the Office of



the Police Ombudsman, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Public Prosecution Service and the State Pathologist's Department.

Forensic evidence has a vital role to play within the criminal justice system. However it is facing significant challenges:

- The increasing importance of forensics due to advances in technology facilitating greater forensic capacity and consequently investigatory opportunity;
- The unpredictability of demand;
- The changing nature of crime;
- Customer expectations for more from less, faster and cheaper;
- The very challenging economic climate.

This strategy has been prepared in the context of meeting these challenges. It sets out strategic priorities for forensic services for the next three year period.

This section provides some of the background to the preparation of this strategy, through previous reviews of forensic services. It is acknowledged that there has been a concerted effort to address critical issues arising and significant improvements have been secured, but there is more to do, particularly as new challenges emerge.

**Part 2** outlines the future of forensic services, the challenges and opportunities that may arise and how forensic service providers will be required to respond.

**Part 3** sets out the four guiding principles, which informed the programme of work undertaken by FSNI and PSNI and from which strategic priorities have been identified.

**Part 4** sets out the new governance arrangements which will facilitate the preparation of an operational plan to realise the aims of this strategy.

## **2.0 DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN FORENSIC SERVICES**

The Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) has completed two inspections of FSNI in 2009 and 2014. In both reports CJINI highlight the quality of the scientific analysis provided by FSNI and acknowledge the accreditation of its services by UKAS. However, the challenges set out above have become manifest in some operational inefficiencies, in particular backlogs and delays in the production of reports, the management of customer relationships and performance improvement.

CJINI found that the service was being undermined by backlogs and delays in the production of reports, as FSNI struggled to meet the demand for its services. The CJINI report made several recommendations, primarily for FSNI but also for the DOJ and the PSNI.

In response to the CJINI report the DOJ produced a Forensic Services Strategy, which was agreed by the Minister in April 2014. As a consequence a significant amount of work has been undertaken through different work streams and related organisational strategic objectives. A number of projects are being progressed by FSNI, particularly in respect of the FSNI Transformation Programme. The PSNI too is undertaking a review of the services it undertakes in the Scientific Support Branch,

through the organisation wide Service First Programme. Closely aligned to these projects is the work of the Inter Agency Plan, part of the Speeding up Justice Programme to which FSNi makes a significant contribution.

The process map attached at Annex A attempts to capture the various work streams ongoing.

Excellent progress is recorded against many of the projects, particularly with regard to key outcomes of the Inter Agency Plan on forensic submissions and the progress and potential for the Indictable Cases Pilot.

### **3.0 FOCUS FOR A NEW FORENSIC SERVICE STRATEGY**

The purpose of this strategy is to underpin the progress made to date, provide renewed emphasis in areas where greater progress is required, particularly in the context of significant budget reductions and ultimately to ensure forensic services deliver the vision:

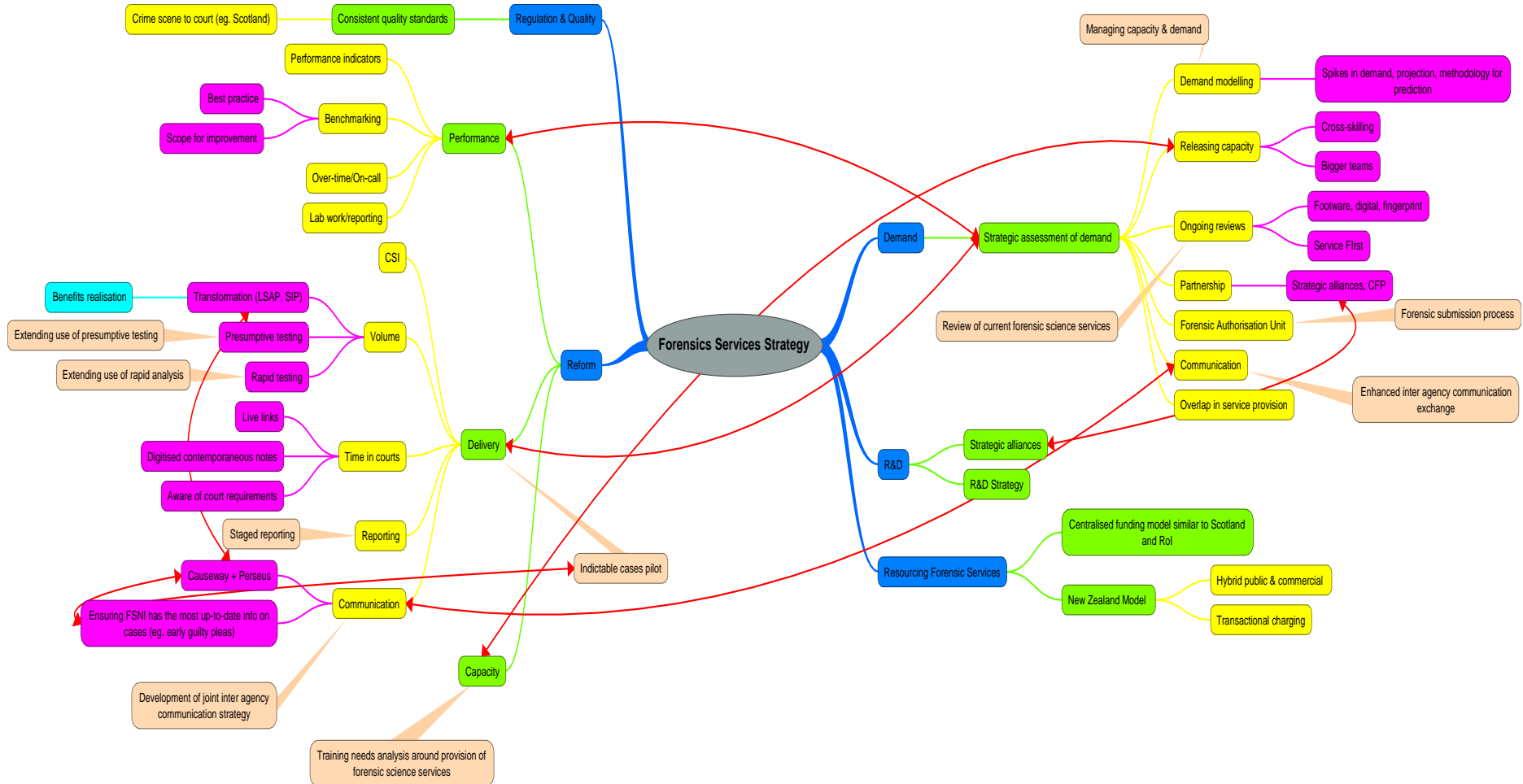
*To ensure the Northern Ireland justice system has access to timely, good quality and cost-effective forensic services which support the delivery of faster, fairer justice from crime scene to court and in which customers and the general public have confidence.*

The CJINI strongly advocates a more collaborative criminal justice approach to the development of forensic services. Service provision has been characterised as disjointed and not in pursuit of a common aim.

The SWOT and PESTLE analysis presented in Annex B have been prepared to capture the considerable strengths of current forensic service provision but also to elucidate where weaknesses need to be addressed and the challenging context in which all of this work is undertaken.

Building on the progress of the DOJ's 2014 Forensic Service Strategy, this revised strategy will provide for more integrated service provision with partners working collaboratively, delivering the value adding characteristics of the crime scene to court model advocated by the CJINI.

The strategy must also reflect the ever changing environment forensic services operate within. Advances in technology offer great opportunities to push the boundaries of the science and service provision, which will in time have a great effect on the way forensic services are delivered. The next section considers some of the future challenges and opportunities for forensic services.



## SWOT ANALYSIS

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FSNI confirmed as first choice provider of services for PSNI</li> <li>• Local service provider and state-of-the-art laboratory</li> <li>• Most forensic services within FSNI accredited by UKAS; other services within PSNI working towards accreditation</li> <li>• Assurance from customers, peers and courts that quality of FSNI science is very good</li> <li>• Sustaining these standards and levels of satisfaction has been a notable achievement</li> <li>• The FSNI laboratory has produced a good service in terms of priority 1 cases (ie. serious crime)</li> <li>• Successful transformation project in final stages. Work on lean management as part of the wider business transformation programme has produced 20% extra capacity in drugs and led to a significant improvement in performance. This work is ongoing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSNI management of demand and prioritisation of service required; there must be monitoring and continuous improvement</li> <li>• Successive service level agreements have struggled to align demands with the ability of the laboratory to deliver the required level of service</li> <li>• FSNI performance on various workstreams associated with volume crime could be improved especially when squeezed by high demand levels</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase productivity</li> <li>• Create additional capacity through rationalisation and cross-skilling</li> <li>• FSNI performance indicators, as agreed with customers, need to be more outcome focused and structured around measuring the value and impact of forensic science to wider criminal justice system</li> <li>• Consider optimum funding arrangements</li> <li>• Better projection and management of demand for forensic services by customers such as PSNI</li> <li>• Improved capacity within the labs to undertake a greater volume of work and produce faster laboratory analysis and reporting in line with customer requirements</li> <li>• Review the operation of PSNI Authorisation Unit</li> <li>• Increase in volume of outputs and flexibility to better respond to the needs of the justice system, eg proportionate reporting</li> <li>• Plan for longer-term funding with new CSR</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more collaborative criminal justice approach is essential if the objective of this strategy is to be met</li> <li>• An ongoing commitment by management to monitor areas such as the authorisation and use of overtime and on-call arrangements is necessary to impact VFM performance</li> <li>• FSNI must continue to review its organisational structures to ensure continued effective decision making and potential reduction of overheads</li> <li>• To deal with an increased workload whilst retaining the flexibility to deal more effectively with spikes in demand, it is imperative that FSNI continue to seek ways to release capacity.</li> </ul>

PESTLE ANALYSIS

<p><b>Political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FSNI/PSNI relationship with the DOJ and Home Office</li> <li>• North/South partnership arrangements</li> <li>• Managing demand for legacy</li> <li>• EU developments on information sharing</li> <li>• Developments in the programme for government.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial pressures will continue to increase year on year in context of rising demand</li> <li>• Imperative to deliver more, faster at lower cost</li> <li>• Ongoing pressure to deliver value for money</li> <li>• New CSR 2017/18</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sociological</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence of forensic science</li> <li>• Imperative for collaboration and co-operation</li> <li>• Programme of educational outreach</li> <li>• Understand the fundamental importance of good communication as a basis of realising collaborative opportunities, facilitating co-operation and explaining the science</li> <li>• Embedding a culture of innovation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Technological</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant technological advances will necessitate a dynamic response from forensic service providers</li> <li>• Must build capacity to anticipate and capitalise on technological developments</li> <li>• Develop capacity for R&amp;D</li> </ul>
<p><b>Legal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the contribution of forensic science to the criminal justice system is understood</li> <li>• Preparing for emerging legislation</li> <li>• Contribute to the development of legislation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with Forensic Science Regulator Code of Practice and standards.</li> <li>• Supporting bespoke arrangements for the delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Monitoring trends and patterns in crime</li> <li>• Co-location of forensic services to facilitate collaboration</li> </ul>

# PART 2

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## THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

There have been significant developments in the provision of forensic services over the past number of years. Advances in technology, automated techniques in particular, combined with traditional scientific skills challenge us to provide more meaningful output with increasingly diverse exhibits at lower cost and in a shorter period of time. The demand for forensic expertise is increasing through all stages of crime investigation, including intelligence gathering and crime prevention.

### 2.0 CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE PROVISION OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

#### 2.1 Funding of Forensic Services

Forensic services have a vital role to play within the Criminal Justice System however the economic climate for all agencies will continue to present enormous challenges. Demand for forensic services to deliver more from less will increase. There will be an increasing focus on value for money outcomes and an ongoing expectation to realise efficiency savings.

#### 2.2 Advances in Technology

One of the key challenges will be to maintain availability of established forensic science skills (e.g. fibre analysis) alongside scientific and technological advances. Such advances include for example<sup>2</sup>:

- Advances in technology that allow the human genome to be mapped in hours rather than weeks will accelerate the availability of genetic information.
- Miniaturisation and innovations such as rapid DNA units that provide one-stop analysis of samples at the scene in less than two hours and portable hand held gas chromatography-mass spectrometry equipment for rapid analysis of drugs. These will evolve into more portable units that deliver real time information to investigations through immediate on-site analysis.
- Forensic investigators will gather much larger amounts of data with far more complex analytical techniques (often referred to as 'big data'). This data will be gathered from the Internet of Things (a vision to connect physical devices and objects to a network that allows

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<sup>2</sup> Future Approaches in Analytical Sciences, McCoy et al. Forensic Science and Beyond, Annual Report of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser.

remote monitoring to gather information) and different databases, using algorithms to give advance warning of events.

- In the future we may even be able to identify a person's activity or where they have been by studying microbial communities in their bodies, known as the microbiome.

### **2.3 From the laboratory to crime scene**

The provision of forensic services must continue to exploit technological developments and changing crime patterns. The necessity for more information, faster will move some aspects of the demand for forensic expertise from the laboratory to the scene of the crime. This will be facilitated by the development of rapid analysis techniques and the increasing mobility of equipment. Forensic science will therefore continue to play an increasing role in the support of investigations, the gathering of intelligence and contributing to the prevention of crime.

### **2.4 Field Testing**

Field testing (sometimes referred to as presumptive testing) is already being trialled in Northern Ireland. Subject to the outcome of an evaluation process, it should be introduced more widely as a relatively simple and inexpensive means of performing presumptive analysis of cannabis materials. The test kit for cannabis would have a role to play in support of an early admission of guilt for possession only cases.

Forensic services must continue to explore the potential for presumptive tests and support the trial and implementation of testing consistent with the initiatives of the Speeding Up Justice Programme.

### **2.5 Proportionate Forensic Evidence**

A suite of bespoke staged reports has been developed as part of the Indictable Cases Project<sup>3</sup>. It has been agreed that staged reporting should be introduced across the criminal justice system, with work commencing to introduce staged reports in summary cases. In parallel work to introduce staged reporting across all forensic disciplines is underway.

In the interests of delivering the most efficient and effective forensic service, and speeding up the justice system, it is critical that the opportunity to maximise the potential of proportionate forensic reporting is realised. Proportionate forensic reporting has the potential to significantly impact on forensic service delivery.

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<sup>3</sup> The Indictable Cases Project was initiated in response to delay in Crown Court cases. The pilot was designed to improve the quality and timeliness of the investigative and case preparation stages of cases.

## **2.6 Prioritisation**

The capacity for forensic science to provide evidence at the earliest opportunity and the flexibility in service provision to prioritise and manage changing demands is critical in securing early guilty pleas<sup>4</sup> and informing bail strategies, for example.

In part this will be facilitated by the technological developments that will continue to secure year on year reductions in turnaround times. However, it is also essential that forensic services are sufficiently flexible and dynamic to best inform emerging police priorities.

## **3.0 THE CHANGING NATURE OF CRIME**

At the same time the nature of crime is changing. Traditional crime is decreasing with an overall downwards trend over the last twelve years. Recorded crime reached a peak of 142,496 in 2002/03 before falling to 100,389 in 2012/13, the lowest recorded crime since 1998/99<sup>5</sup>. Crime has since risen over the last two years to 102,746 in 2013/14 and again to 105,072 in 2014/15.

However, these figures do not include crime that is committed online or facilitated with an online presence. There has been an increase in crime with a digital element, such as child sexual abuse and indecent imagery. The shift to digital not only enables new types of crime, but also means that traditional volume crimes can be committed in ways that leave a digital as well as a physical trail<sup>6</sup>. Analytical expertise in digital electronics is therefore increasingly sought after.

## **4.0 CHANGE IN APPROACH TO SERVICE PROVISION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In order to meet the challenges presented in an increasingly dynamic environment, forensic services must continue to develop the capacity to anticipate and predict and then respond and adapt. This will often mean identifying different ways of working and adopting new and creative approaches. More than ever before there will be an emphasis on how forensic services are provided; how scientists communicate and facilitate understanding; and how the service develops and evolves. The change in emphasis and the key strategic priorities arising are set out below.

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<sup>4</sup> Enacted in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 as part of the Department's Speeding Up Justice Programme.

<sup>5</sup> 'Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2014/15'. PSNI Annual Bulletin published 06 August 2015.

<sup>6</sup> 'Forensic Science Strategy – A National Approach to Forensic Science Delivery in the Criminal Justice System'. Home Office, March 2016.



## 4.2 Anticipate and Predict

### 4.2.1 Culture of innovation

Forensic science and the demands on forensic services are constantly changing. Inherently therefore innovation is a constant; seeking to respond to changing circumstances and to anticipate and predict future trends. Innovative activity is not a distinct task or function, it is the essence of scientific advance and should be ingrained within all operations. A constant challenge must be to examine the ways things are done and consider how they may be done more effectively and efficiently or how they may contribute to a more efficient and effective outcome.

Innovation must therefore become a characteristic of the future provision of forensic services with the development and implementation of an innovation strategy across all forensic services.

#### Strategic issue

**Innovation must become a characteristic of the future provision of forensic services with the development and implementation of an innovation strategy across all forensic services which anticipates the needs of the criminal justice system.**

### 4.2.2 Research and Development

Experience has shown the principle of collaboration and co-operation is critical in the development of research and development strategies for forensic services. Research and Development (R&D) cannot be undertaken in isolation. The sharing of knowledge, resources and ideas should continue to be facilitated and provision must also be made for the sharing of forensic data.

Forensic science often capitalises on advances in other disciplines such as medicine, food and defence. For example, forensics should harness advances in DNA technology to allow the determination of information such as physical characteristics, susceptibility to medical conditions and perhaps even behaviours (phenotypic profiling)<sup>7</sup>.

An ambitious R&D strategy should include continued collaboration with forensic services partners in academia, with other forensic service providers, across scientific disciplines and should include a broad range of European partners.

Resourcing of an R&D strategy may be achieved through exploring potential new revenue streams but in any case must be addressed through negotiations with primary funding providers.

#### Strategic issue

**A research and development strategy should capture the potential to exploit a range of collaboration opportunities.**

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<sup>7</sup> Future Approaches in Analytical Sciences, McCoy et al. Forensic Science and Beyond, Annual Report of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser.

## 4.3 Respond and Adapt

### 4.3.1 Co-operation

Many crimes and in particular digital crime transcend national borders therefore the need for co-operation between European Union Member States to exchange forensic evidence will continue to increase. It was for this reason Member States were encouraged to consider the potential for the creation of a European Forensic Science Area. Such a structure would make provision for better co-ordination of forensic service procedures and standardisation in the quality of investigations.

The extent of co-operation between Member States is a reserved matter but the debate does serve to bring some focus on the efficacy of co-operation between agencies in the criminal justice system, particularly in the context of unprecedented budgetary pressures aligned with increased demand. Agencies must ensure that any barriers to effective co-operation are removed and that synergies in relationships between agencies are realised. The continued availability of specialised and less frequently used forensic science skills may also depend on such synergies.

#### Strategic issue

**Agencies must ensure that any barriers to effective co-operation are removed and that synergies in relationships between agencies are realised.**

### 4.3.2 Quality Accreditation

Although quality accreditation for forensics science is well established, all forensic services will benefit from and will be required to achieve a common quality accreditation. The Forensic Science Regulator's office, through its Codes of Practice and Conduct, has identified accreditation as the means to demonstrate appropriate quality standards. Accreditation is also a key tool in implementing continuous improvement in a systematic manner.

In her first annual report<sup>8</sup> the Forensic Science Regulator<sup>9</sup> has set out three primary objectives:

- a) Appropriate quality standards should be in place for all forensic science disciplines, whomever the service provider;
- b) There is full compliance with the quality standards requirements across all forensic science disciplines from crime scene to court and in all sectors;
- c) There is a shared understanding of quality and standards by all stakeholders.

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<sup>8</sup> Annual Report November 2014 – 2015, Forensic Science Regulator, Dr Gill Tully December 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The post of Forensic Science Regulator is specifically for England and Wales. The devolved administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland have joined the advisory groups of the Regulator and adopted, with some exceptions due to differences in practice, the standards produced. The standards produced by the Regulator are therefore expected to apply to Northern Ireland also.

Timescales for achieving accreditation have been set at:

- 2017 for digital forensics;
- 2018 for fingerprint comparison; and
- 2020 for crime scene examination.

Achieving uniformity in quality accreditation will facilitate greater co-operation in the sharing of forensic evidence, as envisaged in the European Forensic Science Area, but it also acknowledges the fundamental principle that exhibits at the scene should be treated in a similar way to exhibits in the laboratory. With an increasing forensic science presence on site this principle will take on greater significance.

#### Strategic issue

**Forensic services will be required to achieve a common quality accreditation, consistent with guidelines of the Forensic Science Regulator.**

#### 4.3.3 Collaboration

A common quality accreditation standard from crime scene to court will also facilitate and be driven by the imperative for greater collaboration in the provision of forensic services. Discussions about the European Forensic Science Area are principally concerned with the potential to share forensic evidence across national borders but it also raises the potential in the longer term for forensic services to be shared between Member States.

The extent of collaboration between Member States is a reserved matter however, the debate does focus attention on the necessity to explore different and innovative ways of working in order to meet the challenge of increasing demand with lower budget provision. Greater collaboration between forensic service providers within and outwith Member States, in order to achieve economies of scale, will take on greater significance.

Forensic Services providers will be required to explore the potential for collaborative partnerships and realise opportunities to work in partnership to achieve efficiencies.

#### Strategic issue

**Forensic service providers will be required to explore the potential for collaborative partnerships and realise opportunities to work in partnership to achieve efficiencies.**

#### 4.3.4 Education

Forensic science is most often undertaken in support of a police investigation, to facilitate a prosecutorial decision and ultimately in the service of the court as the final arbiter of justice.

However, it is apparent that the science is poorly understood by protagonists in the court room, with the result that, at the very least, valuable court time is wasted pursuing futile lines of enquiry in respect of forensic evidence. There is also a more serious scenario that evidence could be undermined by the adversarial nature of our legal system.

In his annual report the Government Chief Scientific Adviser makes reference to the barriers between the different actors in the justice system, caused by their differing language and communication about the meaning and significance of forensic evidence and of the measures of uncertainty associated with different types of result.

As forensic science becomes more complex and our reliance on the science increases, consideration must be given to enhancing knowledge and improving understanding.

The presentation of evidence to the courtroom is critically important, as is the knowledge of the adversaries and the presiding judge. In England and Wales Court Rules of Practice Directions have been introduced to assist with the presentation of forensic evidence and may be considered applicable also in this jurisdiction. Presentation may be enhanced through the development of procedures to establish areas of agreement and elucidate clearly areas of contention in the presentation of expert evidence.

There is also a requirement to develop a comprehensive educational outreach strategy. It is incumbent on forensic scientists to explain the extent of their role, the services they offer and most importantly how forensic evidence can be interpreted. This outreach programme should be CPD<sup>10</sup> accredited and extend to all those who may be required to interpret forensic evidence in the justice system.

#### Strategic issues

**Forensic services must develop a comprehensive educational outreach strategy.**

**Careful consideration must be given to the development of procedures to establish areas of agreement and elucidate clearly areas of contention in the presentation of expert evidence.**

#### 4.3.5 Communication

It may be stating the obvious that good communication is inextricably linked to effective co-operation, collaboration and education, however it is important to emphasise, strong and effective channels of communication are central to the realisation of this strategy.

It is incumbent on all parties to ensure that poor communication does not become a barrier to effective co-operation and collaboration in the provision of forensic services and in the service of the criminal justice system.

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<sup>10</sup> Continuing Professional Development

Experienced forensic scientists are often good communicators especially to their peers. It is essential that forensic scientists' skills are extended to carefully consider how they best communicate with other agencies and assume responsibility for supporting an appropriate level of understanding amongst non-scientists.

Strategic issue

**New governance arrangements will embed strong and effective channels of communication, which are central to the realisation of this strategy.**

# PART 3

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FORENSIC SERVICES STRATEGY

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Forensic Services Strategy Group<sup>11</sup> (FSSG) is responsible for resolving strategic issues impacting on the efficient and effective delivery of forensic services. In July 2015 the FSSG agreed that its priority must be the development of a revised forensic services strategy in order to deliver a more collaborative criminal justice approach to the provision of forensic services, as advocated by CJINI.

At that time FSSG also agreed a series of guiding principles, following consultation with key stakeholders. These principles helped to establish common ground between key stakeholders and reaffirm the goals that all stakeholders must work together to achieve. The principles also informed the development of a programme of work to identify issues of strategic importance.

Six projects were subsequently taken forward by the PSNI and FSNI. A one day Workshop, which included key contributions from the Scottish Forensic Services, the Netherlands Forensic Institute and the Forensic Science Regulator supported the development of the projects and facilitated learning from practice elsewhere.

The following section sets out the guiding principles agreed by FSSG, the issues considered within the project groups and the Workshop and elucidates the strategic priorities arising.

### 2.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles form a 'systems approach' wherein no part can be considered in isolation and 'cherry picking' of the principles will not deliver what is required. The sub principles supporting each principle are set out in Annex A.

- Principle 1**      **Retain delivery and governance of core forensic science within the public sector**
- Principle 2**      **Forensic science is objective, impartial and fit for purpose**
- Principle 3**      **There must be consistency in quality accreditation from crime scene to court, however quality accreditation must be proportionate balancing cost with outcome**

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<sup>11</sup> FSSG includes representatives of Forensic Science Northern Ireland, Police Service Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service, the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service

**Principle 4     The relationships between all stakeholders must be transparent, professional and collaborative**

**3.0     THE PROJECT GROUPS**

Each project group was made up of representatives from FSNI, PSNI and PPS and worked to agreed Terms of Reference. The key strategic issues arising from this work are highlighted below.

**3.1     Core Services**

**3.1.1     Observations and Findings**

Principle 1 asserts that Northern Ireland is too small to sustain a forensic service providing a comprehensive suite of services. At the macro level consideration is being given to the creation of a European Forensic Science Area in order to streamline the exchange of forensic evidence between Member States, better co-ordinate procedures across Europe and enable the mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise. The creation of a European Forensic Science Area also raises the potential in the longer term, for forensic services to be shared between Member States. It is proposed that the creation of centres of expertise across Europe will have the additional advantage of providing the critical mass to undertake an ambitious programme of research and development.

The merits or otherwise of a European Forensic Science Area is a reserved matter, outwith the remit of this strategy. The debate does however signpost the direction of travel for service provision. The ongoing budgetary pressures are forcing forensic service providers to explore more radical options for the delivery of services through increasing specialisation and outsourcing of non-core disciplines. FSNI currently provides services across 16 disciplines. This may not be sustainable in the longer term.

The project group was established to critically evaluate the services to be retained and those potentially to be outsourced to other providers and to identify and address the potential for rationalisation in the current provision of forensics services.

In its findings the project group identified a number of disciplines to be retained as cores services of FSNI. Forensic services where there is possible duplication are to be more closely examined and the potential to outsource some services is currently being explored. Discussion within the project group also identified the need to consider the potential of rapid site analysis and local recovery techniques to provide a graduated but proportionate analytical capacity for scenes of crime. This work will continue through a newly established project team as set out in Part 4.

### 3.1.2 Strategic Issues

**Examine the potential for rationalisation and removal of duplication in the provision of forensics services .**

**Progress discussions with key strategic partners to identify which services might be shared between organisations to identify efficiencies.**

**Develop the potential of rapid site analysis and local recovery techniques to provide a graduated but proportionate analytical capacity for scenes of crime.**

## 3.2 **Costing Analysis**

### 3.2.1 Observations and Findings

The project group was established to: (i) assess forensic service costs and address the apparent disparity in forensic spend with most similar services; and (ii) elucidate the added value a local service provider brings to its customer.

Figures provided by HMIC<sup>12</sup> Value for Money Profile (2013) suggested significant disparities in the cost of forensic services provided by FSNI to PSNI compared to the cost of forensic services to similar sized police services in England and Wales.

A customised suite of forensic products and reporting has been developed across the forensic sector that makes comparative costing exercises very challenging to interpret. However, the group did undertake a significant amount of work and examined this issue very closely, making a number of recommendations to the Forensic Services Strategy Group.

The group was able to establish from an analysis of the total costs for 2013/14 that total PSNI forensic costs at 2.5% of annual expenditure compare with the average for the most similar police services in England & Wales. However, at the category/section level these profiles are less reliable because of a lack of confidence that the profiles are based on a like-for-like basis.

It was possible to carry out a limited benchmarking exercise in respect of a number of FSNI products in comparison to similar products provided by forensic service providers in England and Wales. While the conclusions of this exercise were qualified, it does indicate that PSNI is receiving a Value for Money service from FSNI at the present time. However a number of forensic products provided by FSNI must be closely examined for apparent inefficiencies.

PSNI should consider adopting a full cost recovery approach for each of its forensic sections in order to ensure that data submitted to the Police Objective Analysis<sup>13</sup> is in line with CIPFA<sup>14</sup> guidelines.

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<sup>12</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

<sup>13</sup> The Police Objective Analysis (POA) is a management tool to facilitate comparisons and identify areas for analysis. It has been developed to allow for clear trend analysis over the seven year life of the POA survey. The POA collects data in 12 areas of policing including, for example: Local Policing; Dealing with the Public; Criminal Justice Arrangements; Roads Policing; Operational Support; Investigations; Investigative Support; National Policing; and Support Functions.



This would involve the fair allocation of all overheads including estate costs and allow for meaningful comparison with FSNI costs.

In the Netherlands and Scotland costing analysis and benchmarking have been resisted, as they have not been convinced of the value of the exercise. It is believed comparisons are rarely fair, especially against the private sector and that meaningful cost-benefit analysis is only feasible if it is possible to accurately measure cost across different disciplines and across different organisations to provide for comparison. Despite this view, there may be some merit in using analysis to examine areas of apparent inefficiency.

The main focus should be on the development of a robust longer-term Service Level Agreement (SLA), based on total spend against services to be provided with intelligent performance indicators that accurately capture customer requirements (see 4.4).

### PSNI Submissions

PSNI Scientific Support Branch has undergone a significant review within the PSNI Service First Programme and will be reviewed further within the Priority Based Resourcing programme. This exercise is designed to ensure the appropriate resourcing of the branch.

As part of the project it was intended to establish how the volume of submissions and the nature of reports derived from them, taking account of differences in the policing and justice environment, compares to most similar police services in England and Wales. The purpose of the exercise was to determine if there is a pattern of over-submissions and also if there is any correlation between submission levels and costs which warrants further investigation at a later stage.

However, it has been determined that comparative data with other police services is unreliable because of significant differences in processes followed. The PSNI is undertaking a detailed exercise on its own submissions. It is critical that PSNI use this exercise to develop as an intelligent customer, aware of the potential, limitations, cost, and time needed for forensic science investigations, as well as the value that they bring to policing and the wider criminal justice system. The proposed role of the Authorisations Unit, discussed below, will be critical in supporting this development.

### Funding model

FSNI is funded through the PSNI, from whom approximately 94% of the organisation's work originates. The FSNI also receives funding from the Department of Justice and other criminal justice organisations for whom it provides forensic services, namely: the State Pathology Department, the Office of the Police Ombudsman, the Northern Ireland Court and Tribunal Service and the Public Prosecution Service. A small amount of revenue also comes from private customers, such as solicitors. The appropriateness of the funding model should be considered.

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<sup>14</sup> Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

### Approach to budget cuts

Efficiency measures can be realised to a point but increasingly there will be diminishing returns year-on-year. There is therefore also a need to consider different ways of working.

The Netherlands Forensic Institute (NFI) seek other income generating opportunities through, for example, the sale of services and the licensing of intellectual property; and the provision of education and training programmes. This approach of generating new funding streams has helped improve economies of scale but may require some initial financial support.

The NFI has also closed a number of services in response to ongoing budget cuts. Advances in technology necessitate an ongoing assessment of the viability of continued service provision in some areas. The NFI has recently relinquished handwriting, paint and hair analysis. To reach decisions on optimum service provision requires a collaborative approach and ongoing assessment between service provider and police service.

### 3.2.2 Strategic Issues

**The value of local forensic service provision compares favourably to accessing forensic services in England and Wales**

**The potential for comparative costing exercises to highlight areas of inefficiency must be examined further**

**Some forensic services provided by FSNI must be examined closely to identify apparent inefficiencies**

**It is critical that PSNI use the analysis of submissions exercise to develop as an intelligent customer, aware of the potential, limitations, cost, time needed and benefits for forensic science investigations and subsequent prosecutorial processes.**

**PSNI should adopt a full cost approach for each of its forensic sections in order to ensure that data submitted to the Police Objective Analysis is in line with CIPFA guidelines**

## **3.3 The Authorisation Unit**

### 3.3.1 Observations and Findings

Principle 4 calls for the relationships between all stakeholders to be transparent, professional and collaborative. In support of this principle it is agreed that the PSNI should develop the role of the Authorisation Unit<sup>15</sup> as the main interface with FSNI and that the Authorisation Unit should include personnel from FSNI and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

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<sup>15</sup> The development of the Authorisation Unit has been informed by the work of the Forensic Science Gateway in Scotland and discussions with Police Scotland and Scottish Forensic Services and participation in the Forensic Services/ Police Scotland Gateway Workshop, September 2015

This project has considered the role of the Authorisation Unit in demand modelling and how demand and submissions may better be anticipated and accommodated within the Service Level Agreement.

The Authorisation Unit will act as the central point for the collation and consideration of performance data across the forensic system, including qualitative data for the value of examinations.

The development of the role of Forensic Case Manager and the expansion of that role has been acknowledged as a significant development, ensuring that cases and proposed submissions are now reviewed and approved by experienced Crime Scene Investigators for non-Major and Serious Crime cases.

The work of the Authorisations Unit has led to a more conscious management of volume by PSNI and FSNI and has allowed for the volumes of submissions in a number of disciplines to closely match the agreed SLA targets.

Similar processes also exist for the Fingerprints Branch, Cyber Crime and the District E-Crime Support Units (DESU) but, as yet, they are not integrated.

The authorisation of submissions for Serious and Major Crime (homicide and counter-terrorism) is overseen by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and generally managed by the PSNI Serious Crime Major Scene Forensic Advisors (MCFA). Consideration should be given to the relationship between the MCFA and the FSNI duty scientist role to ensure there is no duplication and cognisance of the learning from the Indictable Cases Pilot (see section 4.5.1).

FSNI also apply a prioritisation process post-submission, taking into consideration the Attorney General's Guidance and the PSNI Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TTCG) priorities.

### Imminent Developments

PSNI Scientific Support Branch will shortly move from Knocknagoney to facilities in Seapark, adjacent to the FSNI laboratory and alongside the PSNI Fingerprints Branch. This will allow for a more collaborative approach to authorisation, particularly between the Forensic Case Managers and Fingerprints Branch.

Ongoing work in respect of the value of forensics may also allow for the development of an evidential basis for decisions by the Forensic Case Managers, based on the success of examinations at trial. This can be enhanced through Public Prosecution Service (PPS) input to the formulation of rules.

The application of the Indictable Cases Pilot model of joint case management and the formation of the new Serious Crime Unit (SCU) within the PPS has seen the development of Key Evidence Conferences between PSNI, PPS and FSNI to agree submissions and scheduling of reports. These occur at the earliest possible stage and it is anticipated that this can link more effectively to the Authorisations Unit, from the perspective of volume management.

Finally, research is underway in respect of the identification of an assessment and prioritisation matrix or tool which could be used by Forensic Case Managers to support their decision making when considering submissions.

### Future Developments

There is a need for a focused project to deliver a dedicated Central Authorisations Unit, including dedicated police, forensic and prosecutorial resource, which is able to review cases in their entirety and manage submissions and demand effectively to support investigative and prosecutorial priorities as well as capacity within forensic services.

Such a Unit should also act as the central point for the collation and consideration of performance data across the forensic system, including qualitative data for the value of examinations. This data will then drive forensics strategies for investigators and prosecutors, as well as the Research and Development work of FSNI and others.

#### 3.3.2 Strategic Issues

**Consider the relationship between the MCFA and the FSNI duty scientist role to ensure there is no duplication and cognisant of the learning from the Indictable Cases Pilot (see section 4.5.1).**

**Establish a dedicated Central Authorisations Unit to review cases in their entirety and manage submissions and demand effectively to support investigative and prosecutorial priorities as well as capacity within forensic services.**

**There is an imperative to develop a prioritisation scheme in collaboration with the police service, always revising priorities to ensure optimum service provision through the Authorisation Unit.**

### **3.4 Service Level Agreement**

#### 3.4.1 Observations and Findings

The Service Level Agreement should be revised to ensure customer requirements for the service are clearly specified and subsequently delivered. PSNI requirement will be informed by embedding a culture of prioritisation and building knowledge of evidential yield from forensic analysis. Delivery by the FSNI will be measured against revised key performance indicators, which must be developed in an annual PSNI/FSNI workshop to be completed before April each year and which should include high level strategic engagement from both the PSNI and FSNI. A mechanism for regular assessment with the CEO of FSNI must also be incorporated.

To achieve this change, FSNI must be supported in adhering strictly to the terms of the Service Level Agreement. This discipline will bring an important focus within the PSNI on ensuring that the most appropriate performance indicators are identified and that appropriate forensic analysis is requested.

The Service Level Agreement for 2017/18 will reflect revised programme targets and seek to agree funding for a number of years. The one year CSR settlement will not allow this in the coming year.

### Customer Charter

Principle 4 states that FSNI must have an unambiguous customer focused approach. To give effect to this principle FSNI has prepared a customer charter in consultation with the PSNI. The science is a considerable and important component of the quality equation, but it is not the only component. Other important elements of quality of service provision include: integrity; openness and transparency; timeliness and communication to facilitate understanding.

The Customer Charter will be incorporated within a revised Service Level Agreement, to be reviewed annually.

### 3.4.2 Strategic Issues

**The Service Level Agreement should be revised to ensure KPI's and standards of service are clearly articulated and a monitoring mechanism is incorporated at the most senior level.**

**The PSNI must ensure that the most appropriate performance indicators are identified and that appropriate forensic analysis is requested.**

**Build knowledge of evidential yield from forensic analysis.**

**An annual PSNI/FSNI SLA workshop to be completed before April each year.**

## 3.5 'Crime Scene to Court'

### 3.5.1 Observations and Findings

The CJINI report of February 2014 made a specific recommendation to introduce a 'crime scene to court model', citing as their reference the Scottish model for the provision of forensic services. In Scotland all forensic services are provided by the Scottish Forensic Service. The service is highly regarded for its scientific expertise and the excellent working relationship with Police Scotland, built on strong communication and a high degree of trust.

While conscious of addressing the recommendation made by the CJINI, it is also important to clarify the meaning of 'crime scene to court' as it applies to Northern Ireland. The model for the most efficient delivery of forensic services must reflect the Northern Ireland context and for that reason the term 'crime scene to court' cannot be interpreted necessarily as meaning the Scottish model for forensic service delivery.

The project group was established to consider the application of the crime scene to court model in Northern Ireland and, in common with all the projects, it was the focus for discussion at the Workshop in November 2015.

#### Lessons learned from Scottish experience

In 2007 Scotland agreed a vision that provided the impetus for a change in approach to forensic services. The vision was based on the fundamental belief that science begins at the crime scene and therefore forensic science had a greater role to play at the scene. In Northern Ireland the Indictable Cases Pilot demonstrated the value of the right science in the right place at the right time.

The driver for the introduction of a crime scene to court model in Scotland was efficiency savings. With advances in technology and the potential for mobile laboratories to be available at the scene, there is also an imperative to ensure consistency in the treatment of exhibits and samples end-to-end. The laboratory will become not just a building but an organic whole that will start at the crime scene and then move to the laboratory.

In the Indictable Cases Pilot, early contact with the duty scientist has been an important element in the process and one which determines, in conjunction with the PSNI and PPS, what examinations and analyses are required for the particular cases. This close and ongoing engagement has developed good working relationships and an appreciation of each other's business area.

#### Different perspectives and the need for trust

The different perspectives of the scientist and police officer must also be accommodated in this context. Success is not just measured in terms of judicial outcome but also on evidential outcome.

The need therefore for police control reflects the pressures faced by policing in responding to and investigating crime. Fear of losing control is directly related to trust. The new arrangements for the provision of forensic services must facilitate the building of trust and provide for an appropriate level of control.

There should also be a good understanding of the capacity within each organisation for delivering on priorities. There should be a joint approach to priority setting and business planning with resources focused on priorities.

To achieve this approach requires a strong working relationship, understanding and empathy. The tripartite relationship with the prosecution service is also critical.

#### Growth of Forensic Services

In addition it is necessary to take cognisance of the growth in forensic services. With advances in science and technology, forensic science is becoming more powerful, providing more from less, faster. As a result forensic science can significantly develop its contribution to the investigation process and intelligence gathering – moving from a supporting role to a more mission critical role.

A monitoring and feedback process must be established which provides information on the role that forensic science has played in completed criminal cases. This would facilitate the planning and targeting of resources.

### Crime Scene to Court Model for Northern Ireland

To reach an informed decision on what a crime scene to court model means for the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System, a broad criminal justice evidence base is required, which may take a number of years to establish.

However, whether provision of forensic services is through a single organisation, as in Scotland, or through two organisations, optimum performance is most dependent on governance and interaction.

What is necessary at this stage is to define the generic characteristics of the crime scene to court model as it would apply to Northern Ireland and use that definition as a vision and guide for realizing the model that facilitates good governance and optimizes interaction.

The crime scene to court model for Northern Ireland must include the following features to ensure the optimum delivery of forensic services:

- Reduced delay, removing nugatory work, improving decision making processes;
- Robust criminal justice wide targets (KPIs) as applicable to forensic processes;
- Meaningful information on the value that forensic intelligence and evidence brings to the investigatory and prosecutorial outputs to enable strategic decisions to be progressed as to the optimum level of resourcing balanced against other 'competing' criminal justice processes;
- Meaningful collaboration and co-operation;
- Excellent communication, openness and transparency;
- Achieve and maintain quality accreditation of services, consistent with the Regulator's guidelines;
- Maintain the integrity, quality and effectiveness of the science;
- Demonstrable focus on efficiency and effectiveness, speeding up services and value for money;
- Understanding and optimisation of available capacity;
- Maximise the role of the Forensic Authorisation Unit to enable better understanding and build processes to deliver timely output to the PSNI, PPS and the Courts;
- Innovation that will increase efficiency and effectiveness in the model;

- Flexibility and adaptability to adapt to future changes in the criminal justice system.

### 3.5.2 Strategic Issues

**Adopt the learning from the Indictable Cases Pilot in respect of role of the duty scientist within the tripartite Authorisation Unit.**

**The new arrangements for the provision of forensic services must facilitate the building of trust and provide for an appropriate level of police control.**

**There should be a joint approach to priority setting and business planning with resources focused on priorities.**

**Forensic services will be characterised by strong working relationship, understanding and empathy.**

**Forensic science can significantly develop its contribution to the investigation process and intelligence gathering with advances in technology .**

**Establish a monitoring and feedback process which provides information on the role that forensic science has played in completed criminal cases.**

**Ensure that the governance arrangements for forensic services capture the generic characteristics outlined.**

**Complete a process map on the movement of items for examination through the system and the provision of forensic services across FSNI and PSNI and critically assess efficiencies and overall effectiveness, without compromise to quality and integrity.**

## 3.5 Quality Accreditation

### 3.5.1 Observations and Findings

The science undertaken at the scene of a crime is as important as the science undertaken in the laboratory. It is the case that high profile criminal cases have been critically undermined because of forensic failings at crime scenes.

To secure a crime scene to court model it is logical that quality accreditation should be consistent throughout. It is the case that courts here have not commented on the necessity for quality accreditation for all forensic services. However, the Forensic Science Regulator<sup>16</sup> has prioritised the introduction of appropriate quality standards for all forensic science disciplines, whoever the service provider.

Principle 3 confirmed that all stakeholders agreed that there should be a clear and consistent approach to quality from incident to court. The current ISO17025 accreditation held by FSNI is for

<sup>16</sup> Annual Report November 2014 – 2015, Forensic Science Regulator, Dr Gill Tully December 2015.



the agency as a whole as well as the majority of its scope of services. PSNI hold ISO17025 accreditation for fingerprint enhancement and footwear screening. PSNI also hold certification to ISO9001 for CSI, Fingerprint Bureau and eCrime (through ISOQAR<sup>17</sup>), which form a good basis for enhancement to ISO17025 and 17020. Both organisations will maintain current accreditation, adapt to changing circumstances, for example the move by FSNI to the Locard building, and share learning on any efficiencies of current quality and technical processes.

### 3.5.2 Strategic Issues

**Forensic services will adapt to changing circumstances and share learning on any efficiencies of current quality and technical processes.**

**Forensic Services will abide by the Forensic Science Regulator Code of Practice and quality accreditation schedule.**



## 4.0 SUMMARY TABLE

The principles set out in Part 3 of this document have been incorporated as the four key strategic areas within a summary table (section 2.0 below). This table captures the issues identified as of strategic importance in Parts 2 and 3 as priorities for forensic service provision. The strategic enabler for the priorities flowing from the four key strategic areas reflect the future challenges for forensic service and the associated objectives arising are also set out.

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<sup>17</sup> ISOQAR is a leading certification body. ISOQAR is accredited by UKAS.

<b>FORENSIC SERVICE STRATEGY</b>			
<b>DELIVERY</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<i>Ensure the optimum delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland</i>	<b>Objective</b>
	<b>Priorities</b>	Retention of core service provision within public sector represents value for money	To provide an efficient, sustainable, agile service with strong governance, delivering high quality performance and cognizant of its overall contribution to criminal justice outcomes.
		Continually assess the most appropriate forensic services to be retained within the core service; those services which may be outsourced; and services to be rationalised	
		Remove duplication in service provision between FSNI and PSNI; complete a process map for the provision of services, critically assessing efficiency and overall effectiveness and ensure an integrated approach in service delivery	
		Build knowledge of evidential yield from forensic analysis	
		Develop the potential of forensic science networks to achieve critical mass in service provision and in support of research and development	
		The PSNI Authorisation Unit should develop it's role as the main operational interface with the FSNI, to include FSNI personnel and prosecution expertise	
		Learning from the Indicatable Cases Project should be implemented	
		There should be a joint approach to priority setting and business planning with resources focused on priorities	
		Service Level Agreements should ensure customer and stakeholder requirements for the service are clearly specified and thereafter delivered and monitored	
		PSNI to develop as an intelligent customer, familiar with potential of forensic services	
		Develop a culture of innovation in the provision of forensic science services	
	Remove barriers to effective co-operation, collaboration and communication		
<b>Enabler</b>	Exploit developments in technology and develop governance arrangements to achieve optimum performance and facilitate interaction		
<b>IMPARTIALITY</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<i>Impartiality and objectivity remain fundamental to service delivery</i>	<b>Objective</b>
	<b>Priorities</b>	Forensic science services must be objective and be seen to act impartially	To assure public confidence regarding objectivity and impartiality in the provision of forensic services
		Forensic service provision must not be undermined by perceived failures in the boundary between investigator and scientist	
		Excellent communication in the interests of the criminal justice system will support impartiality	
<b>Enabler</b>	New governance arrangements to assert the distinctive roles of the scientist and investigator but working together in collaboration		

<b>QUALITY</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<i>Ensure the proportionate adherence to quality assurance from crime scene to court</i>	<b>Objective</b> To meet the imperative of quality assuring forensic services proportionately and consistent with the Regulator's guidance
	<b>Priorities</b>	All forensic service providers should co-operate fully with the Forensic Science Regulator guidance on quality accreditation	
		The integrity, quality and effectiveness of forensic services from crime scene to court should not be compromised in the interests of speed and efficiency	
<b>Enabler</b>	Forensic Science Regulator guidance should be followed		
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<i>Build and maintain effective working relationships among stakeholders</i>	<b>Objective</b> To develop and nurture successful partnership arrangements which will yield innovations, realise efficiencies and become demonstrably more effective in the service of the criminal justice system
	<b>Priorities</b>	FSNI will have an unambiguous customer focused approach, without prejudice to its impartiality	
		Forensic services to develop a comprehensive educational outreach strategy; to include the development of procedures for the presentation of expert evidence	
		FSNI performance indicators will be outcome focused and structured around measuring and enhancing the value of forensic science to the wider criminal justice system	
		FSNI and PSNI Scientific Services Branch should as far as practical be co-located	
		FSNI, PSNI and the PPS will work in partnership to achieve improvements in service provision and build understanding and empathy	
		All stakeholders will co-operate and work collaboratively to deliver faster, fairer, justice	
All stakeholders will agree a set of common values, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Establish relationships built on mutual co-operation, respect and tolerance;</li> <li> To ensure that communication is effective, consistent with the Attorney General's Guidance<sup>18</sup>, facilitates understanding and acknowledges the potential for differing expectations and different levels of expertise/knowledge.</li> </ul>			
<b>Enabler</b>	Maximise the impact of greater co-operation and collaboration to improve communication and enhance service delivery and the building of trust and confidence		

<sup>18</sup> Guidance issued by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland pursuant to section 8 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004, 2012 No. 1.

# PART 4

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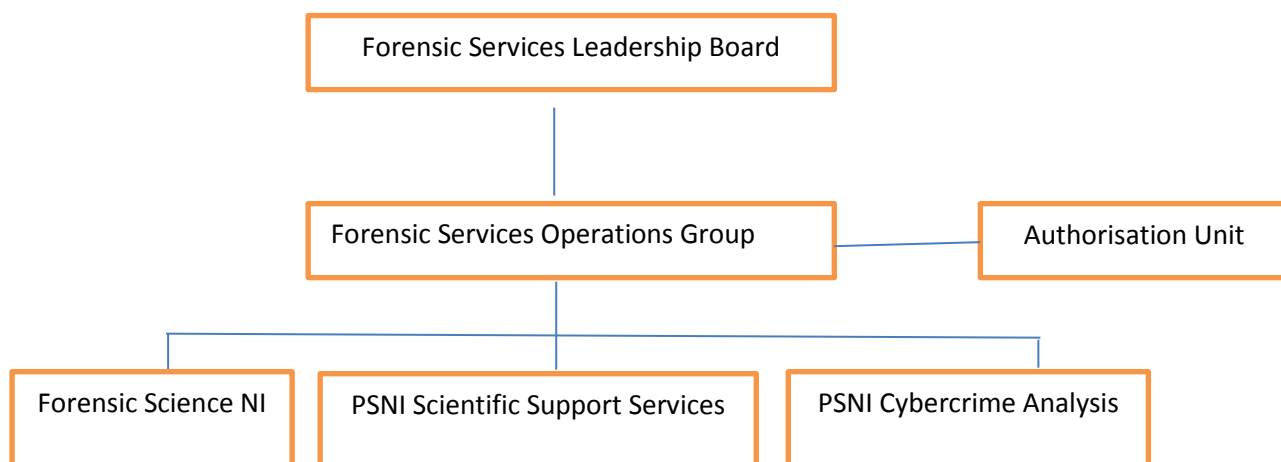
## IMPLEMENTATION

### 1.0 FUTURE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Delivering the strategy requires consideration of the optimum governance arrangements to best facilitate interaction of the providers of forensic services. It is imperative that PSNI, FSNI and the PPS work more closely together to provide an integrated forensic service. The new governance arrangements are considered to offer the best means of progressing, within a three year period, the strategic priorities elucidated in Parts 2 and 3 of this paper.

#### 1.1 Forensic Services Leadership Board

It is proposed that on completion of the remit of FSSG, representation may transfer to a Forensic Services Leadership Board. The Forensic Services Leadership Board will provide strategic leadership of all forensic science services delivered by both FSNI and PSNI and consider the potential for progress for the ongoing integration and rationalization of services.



#### 1.2 Forensic Services Operations Group

The Forensic Services Operations Group is a joint operations group to be established to give practical effect to the ‘crime scene to court model’, under the current arrangements. It will comprise of operational leads from each service and representation from the Authorisation Unit, including the PPS.

It is proposed that the Forensic Services Operations Group will be independently chaired by an individual with knowledge of the criminal justice system and capable of assisting to bridge the distinct organisational challenges facing both the PSNI and FSNI.

The Chair of the Group will be supported by a small project team led by a project manager and comprising dedicated resource with knowledge of policing, forensic services and the prosecution service.

The Chair and the project group will be funded by the PSNI's forensic science budget.

### **1.3 Role of the Group Chair**

The project Chair will be required to oversee the development of the crime scene to court model, consistent with the generic characteristics identified by the crime scene to court project group. The Chair will ensure arrangements are in place in order to:

- Prioritise and manage demand;
- Ensure the most efficient use of resources;
- Provide for service excellence and innovation;
- Enhance communication and collaboration; and
- Support quality assurance in service delivery from scene to court.

### **1.4 Role of the Project Team**

Reporting to the Group Chair, the project team will be established initially for an eighteen month period. The team is required to prepare a project plan capturing the strategic issues identified through the FSSG project groups which require dedicated time and attention:

- Prepare a project plan capturing the strategic issues identified in Parts 2 and 3;
- Complete a process map on the movement of items for examination through the system and the provision of forensic services across FSNI and PSNI and critically assess efficiencies and overall effectiveness applying lean six sigma methodology;
- Ensure the efficient roll out of evidential reform;
- Provide support for the development of the Authorisation Unit;
- Monitor the progress of the management of submissions and the development of a prioritisation matrix;
- Work closely with FSNI and PSNI on core forensic service provision and remove duplication in the provision of forensic services from crime scene to court;
- To facilitate the development of the Service Level Agreement based on total spend against services provided and performance indicators;
- Ensure that all forensic services from crime scene to court achieve quality accreditation in line with the Forensic Science Regulator's timeframe;
- Conduct an evaluation of the governance arrangements at the conclusion of the project to ensure the optimum arrangements to facilitate interaction of the providers of forensic services in the context of:
  - the CJINI recommendation for a 'crime scene to court model'; and
  - the requirement to achieve quality accreditation for all forensic services.

The arrangements for funding of forensic services should also be considered.