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Dear Colleague

### **SPSA Forensic Services Modernisation – Update on Progress and Outline of Next Steps**

As you will be aware we last wrote to you in November on the progress of the SPSA Forensic Services Modernisation Project. This update provides emerging findings from the review of the services currently being provided, those services required (type, volume, standard and time) now and in the future, and the human, financial and technical resources required to meet those needs. Over the last eight months, supported by our customers, we have undertaken the review and analysis phase of the Forensic Services Modernisation project, the aim of which was to establish a clear set of customer requirements that could then be converted into a fit for purpose service design.

Between May 2009 and December 2009 SPSA Forensic Services have reviewed forensic service delivery through four main work streams; Stakeholders, Human Resources, Quality, Capacity and Capability.

Data gathering, based on full and extensive engagement with customers, staff and external peers, has concluded against each of the work streams set out above. The output is extensive and a brief summary of activity and key points are set out below.

#### **Strand 1 – Stakeholders**

##### POLICE FORCES

Structured information gathering sessions were held with each of the police forces and focussed on establishing current and future service needs.

The main themes emerging from the customer group included:

##### 1) Services

The need to maintain the portfolio of services available was highlighted and to develop into new areas, for example in providing specialist support in cases involving sexual offences.

##### 2) Accessibility

Police require a simple and unobtrusive channel into forensic services, with access to appropriately skilled people, advice and support throughout the investigative process.

### 3) Flexibility

Priorities associated with cases can and do change sometimes at short notice and we need to retain sufficient flexibility to respond to these changes.

It is essential that the setting of rigid performance standards does not constrain flexibility of service delivery – in particular local variation of need and emphasis needs to be considered in this context.

### 4) Consistency

Customers recognise that there is a variation in the levels of service being provided across Scotland, which in some way reflects the nature of crime across the country. An objective for SPSA Forensic Services must be to provide the most appropriate level in all cases regardless of location.

Consistency over time was also an issue, for example where a serious crime occurs and completely consumes the capacity for other work or creates delays in processing less serious cases.

### 5) Efficiency & Effectiveness

Customers require a service that is responsive to the needs of serious or complex investigations, but with a consistent level of output maintained in those less serious cases.

### WIDER CUSTOMER GROUP

A national workshop was held for COPFS in October 2009 covering broadly the same topics as those with police forces. It was evident that the requirements set out in the existing protocol and in existing or planned legislation have not changed.

Discussions around turnaround times, communication, efficiency and effectiveness, and consistency were extremely useful and broadly consistent with the feedback and views from forces. SCDEA and Ministry of Defence Police, as customers of SPSA Forensic Services also participated in the process and their input was also broadly consistent with that provided by the main customer group.

### **Strand 2 - Human Resources (Employee)**

SPSA employees have made it clear that there is a high level of personal commitment from them to deliver an effective forensic service but that the current organisation of SPSA Forensic Services needs to be reviewed. In particular staff wished to see a move towards a more functional structure based on scientific discipline and better use of existing resources to ensure that current capacity is maximised.

To address this we are exploring some proposed options and consulting further with key personnel to focus on a functional delivery model. However, these proposals are independent of the outcome of the modernisation project.

The staff consulted also challenged SPSA for what had been seen as a lack of decisiveness in setting out clear plans for the future and welcomed participation in this new approach. They also welcomed their role in working with the customer group in the first work strand.

There are a number of wider staff related issues that will need to be considered by SPSA but it was clear that there was emerging consistency between customer and staff assessment and between staff and executive thought processes.

### **Strand 3 - Quality**

Our quality management approach provides formalised and accredited systems that document the structure, responsibilities and procedures required to achieve effective delivery of services. The benefit to those receiving services from this QA approach is the necessary assurance around the quality of output and the integrity of the processes used to reach any forensic conclusion.

The main objective for the review of our approach was to deliver a 'road map' for introduction of a single quality management system which would provide fit for purpose quality standards and deliver a high degree of reliability and confidence in the service being provided. This report has

been received and is being considered by the senior management team within SPSA Forensic Services.

The introduction of a single system for quality management will bring with it greater flexibility within SPSA FS - for example to move work around the system to utilise spare capacity or deal with pressures such as our recent fire in Edinburgh - without sacrificing the quality or integrity of the results and reports provided by SPSA staff. This is a benefit that is consistent with the requirements of the users of the service.

#### **Strand 4 - Capacity and Capability**

This work stream was conducted with the use of external consultants to look at the current capacity of SPSA Forensic Services, and future configuration options to deliver an improved service.

External benchmarking of cost and spend on Forensic Services was undertaken on a per capita and per case basis. While there are some elements of the data that are not entirely robust the general trend was for Scotland to have the lowest level of investment and spend for Forensic Services across the group of countries we were compared against.

The main element of this strand included a review of information at each service centre, the numbers of cases being handled, the resources invested to handle these cases and the relative performance of each of the SPSA service centres. This review provided substantial data and analysis that will be extremely useful in the development of the new service. In brief the work gives evidence of significant variation in practice, standards, process and productivity and suggests a higher level efficiency is possible through identification and adoption of best practice and standardisation of process.

Alongside the review of capacity and capability a number of future operating models have been defined. Each has specific cost and service implications and these are being evaluated alongside the output from the other strands of work to establish the most appropriate operating model and configuration of resources. This evaluation is being undertaken with the team of forensic experts we have engaged as advisors and it is likely that the most appropriate solution will be a hybrid of the original models.

#### **Next Steps**

The Modernisation programme continues to the project plan and additional requirements that have emerged from the work to date have been incorporated within the work plan going forward.

We now have sufficient information to allow us to develop our proposal to meet the requirements identified, but recognise this will mean continued dialogue with the users of the service to refine these responses and ensure common understanding of both need and solution.

The next planned engagement milestones will be:

#### **March 2010**

Face to face presentation of broad findings of the Modernisation work streams and on the range of potential working models under consideration to the Forensic Services Advisory Group and Police Authority Conveners,

This will be supplemented by further written update communications to all stakeholders.

#### **March 2010**

Review responses and input from these presentations and develop a draft recommendation on a national model

#### **April 2010**

Presentation to customers, including to ACPOS and COPFS senior management, of the draft proposal for the national model for refinement and/or endorsement

**April 2010**

Face to Face questions and answer sessions with key stakeholders, as appropriate

**May 2010**

Endorsement of final proposal by SPSA Board

**June 2010**

Next stage approval as required (dependant upon final proposal)

As you can see work will continue on the modernisation project in the coming months. We will continue to provide updates to you throughout this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Nelson', written in a cursive style.

Tom Nelson  
Director