

PCC and CC Force Inspection response record

Version:

Force	Staffordshire
Police and Crime Commissioner	Ben Adams
Chief Constable	Chris Noble
Title of inspection	An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations
Inspectorate	 <p>His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services</p>
Summary of inspection	In this inspection, we examined the provision of digital forensics in police forces and regional organised crime units. We considered whether they understood and could manage their demand, and whether victims of crime were receiving a quality service.
Grade	
Recommendations	<p>Recommendation 2 By December 2023, each force in England and Wales should develop a governance and oversight framework to better understand the local demand for digital forensic services.</p> <p>Recommendation 4 By September 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council and all forces within England and Wales need to include the management of digital forensic kiosks in their governance and oversight frameworks.</p> <p>Recommendation 8 By November 2024, chief constables should integrate digital forensic services under their existing forensic science structure.</p>
Areas for improvement	

Police Crime and Commissioner's initial response

I welcome this report into a complex area in which demand has grown exponentially over the last 10 years, demand outstrips capacity nationally and where ultimately victims are being failed. I will be seeking reassurance that the system of digital forensic examination here in Staffordshire is as effective and as professionally managed as other police forensic disciplines and that the police service have a coherent plan for improving the current situation.

There was a significant uplift in digital forensics capacity via the Staffordshire precept increase in 2019 but demand is still outstripping supply and digital resource remains a high priority through the current budget round. The function is already embedded in the forensics structure centrally and the Forensic Investigation function locally delivers kiosk examinations under centralised direction and control. The Forensics business

has a mature quality management system and holds UKAS accreditation in digital forensics against the Regulator's Code of Conduct.

This report offers a timely challenge to reconsider regional cost savings and I will revisit the force's current position that the unit is now large enough to be resilient locally and that any savings would be limited to management on-costs as the demand still needs to be met understanding that there are also different IT systems across the region which would add complexity.

Chief Constable's response

In recognition of the scale and priority of digital evidence and investigations, the Chief Constable has already established the force Digital Forensics (DF) Programme.

The programme is taking a whole system approach to improving a number of key areas utilising the design principles set out in the NPCC DF Science Strategy, i.e. improving operations, market development, data management, building trust, research and innovation, and workforce development.

The scope is to deliver a programme of work that ensures an effective and economically sustainable model for DF services to support investigations and prosecutions in Staffordshire.

There are 3 broad areas of focus

1. Digitally enabled local policing – Front line
2. Rapid Local DF Capture & Review – Networked capabilities and analytics
3. Accessible Advanced DF Capability – Niche services and new areas of service development

Priority workstreams include extending front line services, improving the technology infrastructure and work management systems (to support **Rec 2**), developing the overall catalogue of services, quality standards, longer term planning and improving the operating model.

That work is taking into consideration the learning from national projects such as CSE Automate and the Rape Review Response Project (RRRP). Furthermore, staying sighted and prepared for opportunities that arise through the NPCC DF Programme in areas such as Selective Examination, Automation, Validation and developing Enduring Capabilities.

A synchronised approach is preferred and existing investments are being optimised through the local use of kiosk technology, scene investigations and for example testing offender management capabilities. The force has also been successful in RRRP2 and will extend the examination of victim's devices to their preferred locations. Those local deployments are being enabled and controlled as highlighted in **Rec 4** and the ambition is to improve that further through accreditation of all relevant front-line services, due to be laid before parliament in the FSR Act this year. It is already the case that DF sits under the Forensics portfolio as recommended in **Rec 8**.

Key benefits such as improving safeguarding, victim's experience and meeting for example the 24-hour commitment to examine victim's devices are priority performance measures. In practice the force already uses appointments for victim's phone examinations and provides early findings in CSE cases. The Staffordshire OP Safenet triage findings were used to evidence the value of early DF intervention in the RRRP. These ways of working will be scaled through the DF Programme and extended to improve the accessibility, connectivity and integrity of these services.

We welcome the HMICFRS findings and recognition of wider cross HO and CJS investment in areas such as cloud and computer power, that require longer term sustained investment nationally. There is still much work to do in this area and those plans are being finalised and shared with the OPCC. Areas such as remote review/investigations and advanced analytics will be part of that forward planning.

The force will also be seeking to leverage both marketplace and partnership opportunities, for example through the Staffordshire Forensic Partnership, to ensure a longer term, coherent investment plan that seeks to improve and sustain service development and delivery.

Police Crime and Commissioner's overall comments

I am satisfied that the Force has short, medium and long-term responses in place to meet the demands being placed on digital forensic services. The force has long had a strong understanding of its demand profile in this area and its continued exponential growth. This has, therefore, been and will continue to be a priority for investment. I have recently approved a Capital Programme which includes investment in Digital Forensics IT infrastructure and a case management system. My office was party to the establishment of the Staffordshire Forensic Partnership and continues to support its work. I will continue to monitor progress in this area through the oversight my office places on the Force's change programme, performance management and IT programme.