



KEY FACTS

INSPECTION OF FORENSIC SERVICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

FEBRUARY 2024



WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

- Quality forensic services are vital to the effective administration of criminal justice by using science to objectively gather, analyse and interpret evidence to support decisions on investigations, prosecutions and Court outcomes.
- This inspection examined how the Department of Justice (DoJ), Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Police Service) have been delivering their joint strategy on forensic services.
- The second Forensic Services Strategy (2021-26) advocated a stronger focus on the delivery of its priorities through developing collaborative and streamlined services, ensuring quality and objectivity, promoting innovation and an effective workforce.
- Inspectors looked at realising the benefits of significant investment in new laboratory buildings, scientific equipment and training of staff in FSNI and the Police Service.



HOW DID YOU CARRY OUT THIS INSPECTION?

- Inspectors conducted fieldwork in FSNI and in the Scientific Support Branch and Cyber Crime Centre in the Police Service. FSNI provide a wide range of services including biology, DNA, specialist fingerprints, alcohol, drugs, toxicology, footwear, road traffic collisions, explosives, fires and firearms. The Police Service has developed its own in-house services for fingerprints, mapping, photography, DNA extraction and submissions to FSNI and expanded its Cyber Crime Centre in response to digital related crime.
- Inspectors met customers and stakeholders including the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, the Law Society, The Bar Library, the Coroners Service, the Office of the Police Ombudsman, State Pathologist Department and members of the Judiciary.
- A former head of Forensic Services in the Scottish Police Authority supported the inspection with forensic science expertise. Inspectors also visited the Scottish Crime Campus in Gartcosh to compare forensic services and consider good practice and collaboration opportunities and separately met His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Scotland.



WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- The joint forensic services strategy provides a strategic vision and pathway for more integrated and higher quality services that meet the constantly changing demands of the criminal justice system.
- A new governance framework is in place with a new Programme Board chaired by the DoJ Director of Safer Communities with senior FSNI and Police Service members and wider stakeholder involvement.
- FSNI and the Police Service have worked closely together to match demand to scientific capacity including staffing skills, best use of technology and availability of suitable laboratories and office accommodation.
- The Police Service is both a customer and provider of forensic services – it is FSNI’s largest customer.
- While improvements between the Police Service and FSNI had improved at a strategic level since the last CJI inspection, there was still a need for greater collaboration and agreement on the optimum model of service delivery.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors made nine recommendations for improvement including:

At a strategic (leadership) level...

- The new Forensic Services Programme Board should develop an agreed strategic plan for the operational delivery of forensic services in line with the integrated crime scene to Court model.
- The DoJ should lead the development of a new funding model to enable and fit with the proposed service delivery model.
- The Forensic Services Programme Board should develop further options to promote co-operation with neighbouring jurisdictions.
- FSNI and the Police Service, in conjunction with the PPS, should work together and develop a plan about more proportionality in the collection of evidence, submissions to FSNI, analysis and interpretation of findings to ensure more effective use of scarce resources.
- The Forensic Services Programme Board should commission a joint workforce plan to progress shared staffing issues such as recruitment, retention, skills and career development.

At an operational (on the ground) level...

- The Police Service should maximise the benefits of forensic case conferences through consultation with FSNI and the PPS.
- The Forensic Services Programme Board should develop a joint approach to quality assurance and complete the implementation of the Value Project.
- The DoJ, FSNI and the Police Service should collectively promote research and development.



WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

- The Forensic Services Programme Board have an important role in driving the implementation of the Forensic Service Strategy and should take the lead on responding to these recommendations, particularly where everyone needs to work together well, to improve the delivery of forensic services.
- Sustaining and delivering change and performance improvement needs wider engagement and communication with the practitioners in and users of the criminal justice system as well as demonstrating the value of quality forensic services to the effective investigation and presentation of evidence in the Courts.
- Forensic services need to adapt to continuous scientific developments, the changing demands associated with crime and offending and the need to demonstrate value with competing public funding priorities.



If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

Block 1, Knockview Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SJ



www.cjini.org



info@cjini.org



028 90 765764