



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

The Forensic Science Service: Government Response

Oral and written evidence

19 December 2011

James Brokenshire MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention,
Andrew Rennison, Forensic Science Regulator, and
Professor Bernard Silverman, Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office

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Science and Technology Committee

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Oral evidence

Taken before the Science and Technology Committee on Monday 19 December 2011

Members present:

Andrew Miller (Chair)

Stephen Metcalfe
David Morris

Stephen Mosley
Roger Williams

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **James Brokenshire MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention, **Andrew Rennison**, Forensic Science Regulator, and **Professor Bernard Silverman**, Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Thank you for coming, Minister, and thank you, Professor Silverman and Mr Rennison, for joining the Minister. As you know, we are trying to answer some of the questions that have been left hanging in the air following our inquiry into the closure of the FSS. We are aware, of course, that there have been some changes in the Government position. Some of the issues that we are going to cover this afternoon stem directly from your letter to us, Minister, and some relate to information that has come from outside, including as a result of FOI requests from police forces. I will start off at the simple end and ask: how many staff remain in the FSS as of today?

James Brokenshire: The number that I have been given by the FSS is that the closing balance at the end of December will be 510.

Q2 Chair: Can you estimate what percentage of its scientific staff who have left have stayed within forensic science in the UK? I appreciate that some of that will not be absolute, because some people will not want to tell you where they have gone, or you will not necessarily know, but can you give us a ballpark figure?

James Brokenshire: In all honesty, it is difficult to do so. That does not reflect a desire not to provide information to the Committee; it is more the fact that a number of staff may well have taken jobs in other fields. They may have taken jobs with forensic service providers. Although we have provided information in relation to the number of FSS staff who have taken voluntary redundancy, as per the terms of the letter, other staff will no doubt have accepted employment with other forensic providers. What we've said we will do is that, at the end of the process at the end of March, we will seek to obtain information from the relevant private companies—the forensic providers—to get as good an indication as we can of the number of FSS staff who have accepted employment with them as part of the transition. Obviously, a separate cadre of FSS employees have transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service as part of the separate arrangements that exist there. We know that 103 of those staff have transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service, as per, I think, the details that were provided in the letter to you.

Q3 Chair: In terms of the Met transfer, did TUPE apply to those people?

James Brokenshire: The Metropolitan police have a process of putting their work on DNA and those types of analytics through a contractual arrangement, but in essence, the casework and scene-of-crime work is a process they have adopted themselves, essentially extending some of the work that the Metropolitan Police Service had already been undertaking. It was that element that TUPE applied to. In relation to DNA and analytical testing, I am unaware whether TUPE applied to that specific aspect, although in those circumstances, TUPE is a matter of law, and if it did apply, it would have applied.

Q4 Chair: So of the 103 people that you said transferred to the Met, to how many of those did TUPE not apply?

James Brokenshire: My understanding is that of those 103, TUPE applied to all of them.

Q5 Chair: For the record, it is worth pointing out that people from the sexual offences team, incredibly skilled people, have been excluded from TUPE applications across to the Met. Is that correct?

James Brokenshire: I am unaware whether that is the case, but what I can say to you—

Q6 Chair: I understand that sexual offences will be outsourced by the Met.

James Brokenshire: The Metropolitan Police Service already undertakes certain services in-house, and this was an extension of the work they were already doing in relation to some of their analytics, for which they have accreditation. In looking at the TUPE transfer arrangements and the way in which the Metropolitan Police Service will be conducting their services moving forward, they obviously took into account TUPE alignment in relation to the services that were ongoing, and would have had to take that carefully into consideration as part of their obligations to comply with TUPE.

Q7 Chair: These scientists, who are extremely experienced people, have competencies in a wide range of applications: strategy setting, examination of items for body fluids, assessment and interpretation of

blood patterns, complex interpretation and court reporting. They can't be instantly replaced, can they? Who's going to be doing it?

James Brokenshire: The Metropolitan Police Service have undertaken very detailed due diligence in relation to their continuing requirements for forensics. They undertook that in consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service in London to ensure that they have the capability and capacity to provide ongoing forensic services. That is an issue they will have considered very carefully in conjunction with the CPS in relation to their continuing needs for forensics and their ability to provide the high-quality service that they and I would expect.

Q8 Chair: But how can continuity occur when there will, by definition, be this break in such an important area?

James Brokenshire: What I would say to that is that we have received assurance from both the Metropolitan Police Service and ACPO throughout this process that capability and capacity will be maintained. The Metropolitan Police Service obviously have significant existing expertise in the field of forensics, led by Gary Pugh, whom you took evidence from in relation to your initial inquiry. They have, throughout this process, given assurance in relation to these issues. You will no doubt make inquiries of the Metropolitan Police Service directly, but they have certainly stated clearly throughout this process and in conjunction with the Crown Prosecution Service that they will have the necessary capability, capacity and expertise to provide appropriate skilled forensic provision moving forward.

Q9 Chair: In your letter—you referred to it earlier—you used the phrase “voluntary redundancy”. What was voluntary about it? The Government decided to close the operation, so the fact that some people fell on their swords earlier than the final day doesn't turn into a voluntary redundancy exercise, does it?

James Brokenshire: We considered very carefully with the FSS the arrangements to manage transition. Therefore, a voluntary redundancy scheme was put in place. It was open to FSS members of staff to take part in it. I would certainly like to put on record during this Committee my recognition of the professionalism, dedication and commitment of all FSS staff throughout this process and the contribution that I believe they have made. It is important for me to state that explicitly and carefully. That scheme was put in place to assist and to ensure that continuity was maintained. We judged that it was appropriate to support the FSS, as the employer, in seeking to make those arrangements.

Q10 Stephen Metcalfe: Good afternoon. As I am sure you are aware, the Committee was fairly critical of the way the decision was taken to close the FSS. One of the areas we were particularly concerned about was the lack of scientific input into that decision. With hindsight—this is particularly to Professor Silverman and Mr Rennison—do you consider that the Government were right to exclude the scientific

dimension to the decision, such as the quality of standards and the R and D function of the FSS, from the decision-making process? Was that the right approach from the Government?

Andrew Rennison: I would much rather have been consulted—of course I would. It was made very clear to me afterwards that the issue was one of a commercial nature. As soon as the announcement was made, I made my presence fairly well felt and known on the issues that I think were important. Very early after the announcement, I wrote to the Home Office and Ministers and set out some clear views from my perspective. Yes, I would rather have been consulted, but I have been deeply involved from the moment it was announced.

Professor Silverman: You asked whether, with hindsight—I'm not going to say what I would or wouldn't have wished, but I think we should be clear that it is clear now that there probably was no alternative. In other words, the work that I did on looking at the R and D landscape was very important. In some ways, I am pleased that we had the opportunity to do that. I cannot see how one could have done that before the decision was taken. To set out on an inquiry of the sort that I did when this decision was hanging in the air would have been very difficult, and I don't think you could have done a fair review of research and development before taking the decision. If I had been consulted beforehand in more detail, I would have said, “Well, the thing we would have to do is to launch an inquiry”, of the sort that I did launch. I don't think you could have launched such an inquiry while there was a question mark over the legal and commercial issues.

Q11 Stephen Metcalfe: I think what you are saying, therefore, is that if a similar decision were to be taken again in the future, you wouldn't expect to be consulted on the scientific aspects of that, prior to that decision being taken. Is that right, or am I misunderstanding something?

Professor Silverman: Well, it is difficult to say, “If a similar decision were taken”, because every decision and situation is different—we don't have another organisation of this sort.

Stephen Metcalfe: All right. A significant decision affecting the forensic science service, then.

Professor Silverman: If we wound the clock back and did this again, I don't see what difference it could make if I had been involved in discussions earlier in the process. The only thing I could have done would have been to say, “As soon as the decision is made, we'll have to have an inquiry into the state of research and development.” As it was, we did it, more or less as soon as it was made.

Q12 Chair: You could, for example, have said to a Minister, “I don't think you're going to find that you'll make the kind of savings you're projecting.”

Professor Silverman: I don't think that making savings is a scientific matter. If I said, “You wouldn't have made the kind of savings,” that's immediately outside—

Chair: It immediately impacts on how many scientists you can employ.

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Professor Silverman: It is not a scientific question, how much of a saving you are going to make. It is a scientific question whether there is healthy research and development.

Q13 Chair: So the delivery of science has no bearing on the budget available?

Professor Silverman: The delivery of a scientific service like the Forensic Science Service is a commercial matter. It is not a scientific matter as such; it is an operational matter.

Q14 Chair: The quality and the volume of the science that is deliverable is a function of the money available, isn't it?

Professor Silverman: I beg your pardon, Chair. We are talking about a scientifically informed service. The amounts delivered depend on the demand, so if there is less demand, we get into a commercial discussion. I do not think it is the role of the Chief Scientific Adviser to be involved in that sort of commercial decision. The quality of the research is to do with the way the scientific community works, the way the different players in the community interact with one another and so on. It is not directly affected by the financial issues; it will be related to the organisational structure, and that is clearly important. I really cannot say that making a decision about having one structure or another on commercial grounds is within my remit. I realise that the Committee has already been through this with me, and I do not particularly think that I have changed my view on whether I am qualified or authorised to make comments about commercial matters.

Q15 Stephen Metcalfe: Mr Rennison, would you expect to be consulted if a significant decision were taken again in the future?

Andrew Rennison: Yes, I would. Something I have been pushing quite hard for is a strategic group from across all the key stakeholders in forensic science to have an overview of what is going on for the future. The Minister has agreed to that, and the group will be set up, I hope, in April next year. I will sit on it, along with the likes of the CPS, ACPO and other key players. There are some wider strategic decisions in the future. What do we mean by forensic science? There are many other areas we could look at that come under that label. So the answer to your question is yes, and I have been told a mechanism will be set up in April next year.

Q16 Stephen Metcalfe: The decision has been taken, and we are where we are. Are you both fully involved in the transition programme? Do you sit on the board and attend meetings?

Andrew Rennison: I am. I sit on the advisory board. There are two boards: the transition board, which the Minister chairs, and the advisory board, which Stephen Webb from the Home Office chairs. I sit on the advisory board, and I go to the main transition board as and when I am asked to and there are relevant issues. I attended the last one, and I will probably attend some more. I have been consulting

personally with the Minister and Home Office staff all the way through as well.

Professor Silverman: My main personal involvement is in pursuing the consequences of my review. As for the advisory board, the Home Office Director of Science, Engineering and Technology, who is my deputy, sits on it. The reason we do that is that I tend to work on the more external things, and he tends to work on the more internal things. Also, as the former Director and the person responsible for the Centre for Applied Science and Technology, he is closer to the operational aspects that the advisory board is looking at. So, the answer is that Home Office Science is fully involved in the advisory board going forward and in continuing to pursue the recommendations of my review.

Q17 David Morris: Good afternoon, gentlemen. Could you outline the specific plans for the FSS archive, including how much it will cost to maintain it? Could you give an accurate estimate of the cost?

James Brokenshire: Thank you, Mr Morris. We have considered the issue of the FSS archive. When I gave evidence to this Committee last time, I underlined the significance I attached to the retention of the archive moving forward for the benefit of the criminal justice system. We have determined that the archive will be operated by a residual part of the Forensic Science Service, operating from two sites in the west midlands that are currently owned by the FSS. We are developing the business plan around the work of the archive. Obviously, there is further consideration that we are giving to the archive. What I mean by that is whether it should become a central repository of all forensic records, from private service companies as well as the historical archive from the FSS, so there is a separate policy issue that we are considering around that in the context of the transition process. Which way we will go on that has yet to be finalised and determined, but it is something we are very much considering.

At this stage, the work around the costs of the archive is still very much ongoing. Clearly, there will be set-up costs in terms of the finalisation of the transfer. A number of the records have already transferred from existing FSS sites to the west midlands sites, and a sifting process has been ongoing in relation to that. It might be appropriate, so that I give the Committee a definitive position in relation to the archive costs—its projected future running costs and so on—for me to write to you in the spring, because a business plan is being worked up and finalised and my preference would be to give you definitive information, rather than our current estimates.

Q18 Chair: It would be helpful to have an order of magnitude.

James Brokenshire: Certainly. In terms of order of magnitude, the running costs we are anticipating will be in the region of £2 million a year. That is the sort of indication we are examining for the ongoing running costs, and obviously there will be initial set-up costs to establish this. That is currently being worked through.

Q19 David Morris: Thank you for your answer. You have probably answered something of what I am going to ask, but I am just trying to clarify the matter. Will the archive be kept under the guardianship of the Home Office, or will the FSS be employed to manage the archive? If not, what experts will support this archive? How will it be kept?

James Brokenshire: As I think I explained in my initial answer to your question, the archive will be operated by a residual part of the FSS, but we have stated that the Home Office will act as a guardian of the archive, and what that means is that the Home Office will be responsible for ensuring that the archive is properly maintained and continues to meet the requirements of the criminal justice system. There are ongoing discussions with the criminal justice system in terms of ensuring that the archive is available, moving forward, for cold cases and more generally in relation to the CJS's needs and requirements. Archivists will be attached to the continuing operation of the archive to facilitate that continuing access.

Q20 David Morris: If private FSPs do not contribute materials, does that mean that the archive will eventually become redundant? How will that affect future cold case reviews?

James Brokenshire: No, I don't think the archive will become redundant, because of the significant amount of material already attached to it. The forensic regulator himself may wish to comment further in relation to this. But equally, we are looking closely at the ongoing availability of case files and other materials to the criminal justice system, hence the reason why I stated that we were examining whether the archive might become a central receptacle for all case files and materials moving forward and examining how that contrasts with the availability of records from private service providers—recognising, though, that there are records and information that are currently retained by the commercial service providers in existence and that they, at the start of this process, had about 35% of the market in relation to forensics. I am not aware of particular problems being flagged up in terms of the ability to gain access to those historical records within the private providers, but clearly we want to look at this in the round, as part of the finalisation of the transition process, and consider what is the most appropriate way forward in securing the availability of records and materials, as part of forensic examination, to the police, the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service moving forward. Therefore, those discussions are continuing.

David Morris: Thank you for your answer, Minister.

Q21 Roger Williams: At the time of our first inquiry, we were concerned that some work that was done by the National Policing Improvement Agency on the size of the possible work for the Forensic Science Service was not known to the Service, thereby impeding its management. Private suppliers were not aware of that work either. We felt that that was a great difficulty. Do we know now what the present size of the forensic market is?

James Brokenshire: The market analysis that you referred to was informative. It sought to establish the

direction of travel of the market—whether it was declining or expanding. The analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which looked at the forensics market in 2009–10, stated that the market was worth around £160 million, but that it was forecast to decline towards to between £100 million and £110 million by 2014–15. In terms of the current market size, we anticipate that the previous assessments of the likely decline in market size are probably broadly correct. As I have said, PwC is predicting a fall in the market to around £100 million to £110 million by 2014–15. That is the trajectory of the market. We recognise some of the efficiencies that have been driven through the process. Forces are developing the efficient use of forensics, and there are obviously the new delivery models, such as the approach that is being taken by the Metropolitan Police Service.

Q22 Roger Williams: The size of the external market depends on how much work the police decide to in-source. How is that information shared between the police, the external providers and yourselves?

James Brokenshire: Obviously, the National Forensic Framework Agreement provides for the external procurement of services in the private market. We have seen no move suddenly to in-source great swathes of forensic services. What we have seen is the Metropolitan Police Service taking a different approach in relation to its specific procurement of services. We have seen police services seeking to triage and to consider more carefully the way in which forensics are procured and provided. It is that element that has been the focus of change rather than seeing lots of new laboratories being established by the police service to try to take this business in-house in that sort of manner. It has been more around the manner in which forensics has been operated and what that means in terms of the procurement of services. Mr Rennison, the regulator, may also have a view, as he has been very closely involved in the regulation of this whole process and obviously sees what is taking place in the market.

Q23 Roger Williams: I think the ball has been handed down.

Andrew Rennison: I think that it has. We did point out last time that a considerable amount of work has always been done in-house by the police. The police have always done all the fingerprints work. Fingerprint bureaux cost about £50 million a year. Police have always done all the crime scene investigations, and that is another £130 million a year. They spend another £5 million or £6 million on fingerprint enhancement labs, and their internal support costs about another £6 million. The police have always spent about £200 million on their internal forensic activities. Very rarely, if ever, have they done any of the analytical work. The concern should probably be around police in-sourcing of analytical work, which is the work that is done in the accredited laboratories. Setting aside the Met police and the model they are setting up, I know that Lancashire police has taken some analytical work in-house. They now do footwear and drugs analysis. They sought my

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advice before they did that, and I said that the work was to be accredited, so they held back on doing the work until it achieved the accreditation, which they have done in a fairly swift time. It has set a very good example. The bigger issue for me is not so much the in-sourcing as the changing shape of police forensics driven by the current financial circumstances. There are currently about—this is an approximate figure—60 police laboratories. If you take fingerprinting enhancement labs, every force has one of those. In fact, only two forces share them, so there are about 42 of those. Approximately 20 forces have some sort of evidence recovery facility, and they vary enormously in what they do or do not do. I predict that those 60 labs, through the various collaboration agreements that have sprung up since we last met in April—this is a fast-changing scene—will probably reduce to about 12 or 13 in total.

I am in deep discussions with the east midlands region, which is collaborating on fingerprints and all its forensic activities. I am working with the north-west region on the projects that it is running. The north-east region also has projects running. Across the country, I am about to go and meet the south-west region early in the new year. Some of that will lead to some further in-sourcing. I predict that it will also lead to further outsourcing of activities, because you will see a rationalisation of work. A good example is what is happening in Thames Valley at the moment. Thames Valley Police has opened an in-house laboratory for some evidence recovery, but it has brought LGC Forensics in to run that lab for it. So it is a partnership approach, which I think has enormous benefits.

The in-sourcing that has happened in the past 12 to 24 months has more to do with evidence recovery. Some of that has stopped because of evidence of poor practices, and the police have put a stop to that. I have published with the NPIA very clear guidance on what should and should not be done. I have also published a statement of expectations about what work should be done in-house and what has to be accredited. I am pleased to say now that ACPO has put in place, with UKAS on board—with my involvement—a very clear road map to have all those laboratories accredited. The first ones are now accredited. The next ones will roll off in about next April, and there is a rolling plan right the way through to 2015. At the moment, that plan involves some 60-odd laboratories, but that will shrink quite swiftly with these collaboration exercises.

Q24 Roger Williams: Could you tell us which is the largest forensic science provider at the moment?

James Brokenshire: If we look at the forensic procurement process that is being gone through, then LGC Forensics is the largest provider, followed by Orchid Cellmark. Key Forensics is the third provider in the market. Smaller, specialist providers of services would sit underneath that.

Q25 Roger Williams: Where is the new casework being sent now? Who is getting the major part of the new casework? Do we know?

James Brokenshire: That would be serviced through the procurement framework. Therefore, those

commercial services providers would be providing that service to the police, as I think they have done previously. I think that your Committee took evidence that confirmed that that end-to-end type of approach was already being provided within the private sector providers.

Q26 Chair: You mentioned one company in your response, Minister. I preface my remark by saying that I am not asking this question in any way to be critical of the company—far from it—but my understanding is that Cellmark Forensics won the tender to deliver gunshot residue work without having the facilities at the time to undertake the work. Isn't that putting justice at risk?

James Brokenshire: The forensic process undertaken by ACPO, in consultation with the National Policing Improvement Agency, had a very clear due diligence framework attached to it to satisfy both ACPO and the NPIA that those providers would be able to provide the relevant services to the relevant police forces. As I think you will know, this was broken down into different regions, and the regions themselves were then awarding the relevant contracts to the relevant providers in specific lots of different types of forensic provision. Certainly, the assurances that were given by ACPO were that it had detailed discussions with each of the providers, as part of the due diligence process, to satisfy itself that the appropriate facilities, processes and procedures would be in place. Separate UKAS accreditation sat alongside all that to ensure that that was at the appropriate standard. But I am certainly not aware that risks were taken, and the process was very clear in ensuring that high-quality forensics would be provided by those companies when they said that they would be providing them.

Q27 Chair: Mr Rennison, you were gaining inspiration from behind you while the Minister was talking. Have you got something to add?

Andrew Rennison: Yes, I am sorry for that.

Chair: That's okay.

Andrew Rennison: Just to endorse what the Minister has said, Chair, I made it very clear from the outset that work should only be moved from the accredited FFS environment to equally accredited environments. I went through a very detailed exercise with the NPIA to map out the FFS scope of accreditation, to see what all that work was and to see how that mapped across to all the other providers. My understanding is that the work has all been transitioned to accredited companies. My belief is that that work is Cellmark work; Orchid Cellmark is not accredited for that work—you are quite correct—but it has subcontracted to an accredited laboratory, while it has developed its own facility, which is now being accredited.

Q28 Chair: Are you happy with that, as a regulator?

Andrew Rennison: Subcontracting work is not uncommon and it is allowed for within the standards framework. The accountability for the quality of the work remains with the original organisation, which in these circumstances I believe subcontracted to a

suitability accredited lab. I am comfortable with that, yes.

Q29 Chair: It seems a bit of an odd thing to have the buck stopping at a point where accreditation does not exist.

Andrew Rennison: But it is accredited in other areas—it has good-quality management systems.

Q30 Chair: I am not criticising that. I said that in my opening remarks.

Turning to money, if we may, when we were undertaking our inquiry we came across some confusing information. The Minister, perhaps quite rightly, said that some of the financial matters we were raising were matters for police authorities—we were talking about capital spend by police authorities. ACPO could not answer the questions we posed to its official. Since then, a number of FOI requests have been put in, which have been forwarded to the Committee. We now have information from 21 of the police authorities; one we have discounted because it claims to be spending—you won't be happy with this, Minister—£474 million on forensics. We suspect a decimal point error—

James Brokenshire: We should definitely look at its budget.

Q31 Chair: Another one had some interesting factors. Because we cannot get to the bottom of what the total expenditure is—I think you are struggling yourself—would it be fair simply to add up revenue and capital and to count it as one sum of money?

James Brokenshire: That would potentially be confusing apples with pears, I would respectfully suggest. Obviously, we do not compile details of police expenditure, as it is up to—as I think I said last time—police authorities and chief constables to decide how best to spend their money. It would be open to the Committee to submit a request to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, CIPFA, and its working group that agrees the data collection questionnaires that go to the forces as to whether it were appropriate for police expenditure on internal forensic activities to be collected in the future, but in an age when we are seeking to be less bureaucratic, that is not something that we have been minded to consider at this point in time.

Q32 Chair: I agree with the first part of your remarks that the combining of revenue and capital would be confusing. In one response, a police force says, “The budgets for forensic science are revenue budgets and any expenditure incurred would have been through these revenue budgets. This includes any equipment purchases or building works.”

James Brokenshire: Obviously, I have not seen the FOI response that you were provided with, but from basic accountancy principles, I think that there are distinctions between what is capital and what is income.

Q33 Chair: It was the Met police that said that. It may be some junior bureaucrat is given the job of

answering FOIs from Members of Parliament and they give MPs the first thing that comes into their head just to shut them up, or something like that, or it may be a policy position. And I recognise the point about the Home Office not wanting to be overly bureaucratic. However, given the inconsistency of the information that is coming forward, do you not think that the Home Office ought to request to CIPFA that data on police forensics are collected and properly analysed in a consistent manner, so that we can all understand where taxpayers' money is being used, and to ensure that in the interests of justice—something that you and I, Minister, would absolutely hold as the highest priority in all of this—

James Brokenshire: Absolutely.

Chair: That in the interests of justice, money is being spent sensibly?

James Brokenshire: But I suppose that I would argue, Chair, that that sense of accountability and that sense of ensuring that public money is spent wisely and is directed in an appropriate fashion is a primary factor that elected police and crime commissioners will be taking on, as of next November; obviously in London, there are separate arrangements that are coming in more swiftly than that. Therefore, it is at that level that we judge that accountability resides very clearly, and I am quite sure that police and crime commissioners will be very robust in their scrutiny of accountancy practices and processes and precisely what the money is spent on, to ensure that the criminal justice system is properly serviced.

Q34 Chair: So the record says that the Home Office replied to the Chair's question by saying, “Not me, guv”?

James Brokenshire: Well, you have to consider quite carefully the level of granularity on information that is provided centrally, to ensure that decisions are taken on issues of accountability. I think that we have been very clear as a Government in saying that accountability resides most effectively at that force level, and that ensuring that you have directly elected individuals to fulfil that function will be the most robust way of ensuring value for money, that everything is focused appropriately and that a police force is delivering on the service that its local population expects.

Q35 Chair: So that's going to put Mr Rennison in a rather difficult position, because you could have demands for expenditure that will be influenced by the electoral process coming up in the next few years. You will have a police and crime commissioner pushing his police force very hard to spend money in ways that may not make sense in the gradual merging of the laboratories that Mr Rennison predicted.

James Brokenshire: I would argue, Mr Miller, that that is actually driving value for money and efficiencies, and that the framework that Mr Rennison and I have worked on in relation to regulation and standards, and equally the work that Mr Rennison has been engaged in with ACPO and police forces on accreditation, is intrinsic to maintaining the forensic capability, capacity and quality in the future, and that in many ways elected police and crime commissioners

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will be—I am sure—very focused on delivering value for money and appropriate standards, and that in many ways the framework that is being developed will aid that process.

Q36 Chair: Have you anything to add, Mr Rennison?

Andrew Rennison: I shall certainly be beating a path to their door to remind them of the importance of quality in forensic science, and that they have a clear role to maintain that quality. One of the clearest points that I am making through my codes of practice and conduct on forensic science is that the accountability for the quality of the work that is delivered sits at the very highest levels, and I will be holding them as accountable, as I hold chief constables for the quality of their work.

Q37 Chair: Well, I take the view that there is no higher level than Parliament, so perhaps we ought to put a request in to CIPFA to try to get to the bottom of all this. Would that make sense?

James Brokenshire: Obviously, it would be open to you as a Committee to contact CIPFA if that is what you, as a Committee, consider appropriate way forward.

Q38 Chair: But don't you think it would be helpful to get to the bottom of this mystery?

James Brokenshire: I think there is a balance to be struck on the detailed nature of information provided by individual police forces, and the extent to which the collection questionnaire goes into relevant detail, when, ultimately, the individual police and crime commissioner will have access to the relevant financial data and therefore will be able to hold to account at that local level in that way.

Q39 Chair: So the Mayor of London, or whoever is responsible in London, should not be mixing apples with pears.

James Brokenshire: That, obviously, is a matter for the Mayor of London, and I am sure that people will note with interest the FOI reply that you have received, sir.

Q40 Stephen Mosley: We have had a couple of discussions on quality standards, and particularly with Mr Williams. You will be aware that in our report we suggested that police forces should move towards ISO 17025 accreditation, and you have also developed the codes of conduct. Has any of the work that has been transferred from the FSS gone to organisations that have not been accredited as yet?

Andrew Rennison: Not that I am aware of. As I said earlier, the instruction I gave was that the work should move to accredited laboratories. The police force that did want to take work in-house was Lancashire. It has secured the accreditation and is doing the work. The answer is no, the work has transitioned, and the NPIA manages this for the Slingshot programme—the work's transition to suitably accredited laboratories. I liaised with the NPIA all the way through that, to assess risks as it went along—to make sure that the new laboratories could cope with the demand, were suitably accredited, and were speaking to the United

Kingdom Accreditation Service. I was comfortable that it was being managed.

Q41 Stephen Mosley: For the private sector providers.

Andrew Rennison: Yes.

Q42 Stephen Mosley: For the police providers you have got this time scale, which you outlined to Mr Williams previously. At the moment, then, you are moving it. Some of the labs that are bringing it in-house are not accredited, but they—

Andrew Rennison: They are doing some work now, such as screening activities, which are not accredited. The statement of requirements that I have put out says that that has to be accredited, if it is DNA-based, by October 2013. We have put out very clear guidance on what should and should not happen in the interim, to manage the risks. There is a very clear road map towards accreditation, which is a huge step forward since I was here in April, with an absolute commitment from ACPO that every police force will be part of that road map and that plan.

A joint letter has gone out from me and ACPO, to all police champions, to make that point absolutely clear.

Q43 Stephen Mosley: Is there any police authority or private provider that is actually applying for the entire range of accreditation, in the same way that the FSS did, or were they applying for different chunks?

Andrew Rennison: It is different chunks, and I think it will be interesting how that develops with the next generation framework, where the framework will be slightly differently organised to allow people to pitch in for just single pieces of work, rather than some of the more complete packages they have now. LGC Forensics has a very broad scope. Orchid Cellmark started very narrow but its scope is growing. Key Forensic Services' scope is growing as well. The FSS had one of the broadest scopes, but LGC Forensics was never far behind it.

Q44 Stephen Mosley: Is there any advantage in having a broad scope, or do you see the way forward as very much being specialists in individual pockets? Are there any disadvantages to that, or advantages?

Andrew Rennison: It is actually both. I think having both is very good for the market, so in some areas you have niche providers; it is quite good to have a narrow scope. In other areas you do want a fairly broad scope. Also, if you have a narrow scope, it does allow new entrants into the market as well, to start small and build up as they go along, as they achieve work.

Q45 Stephen Mosley: When we interviewed you in—was it March?

Andrew Rennison: April.

Stephen Mosley: In April, when we were doing the investigation, one of the things that you did talk about was yourself gaining statutory powers. It was—I will use the word—rejected by the Government, at the time. Was it a case of you looking at it, and—

James Brokenshire: The evidence I gave was that I kept a very open mind in relation to this, and that this would be subject to continuing consideration and

discussion with the regulator as we move through that process.

Q46 Stephen Mosley: So how is that consideration and discussion going?

Andrew Rennison: We are discussing it. I think it is fair to say—we talk privately about it—that the Minister supports me absolutely in my work. I am very grateful for that. He recognises my independence as well. I think he recognises that in the longer term we need to put that on some sort of clearer footing, but the priority for me was to get the strategy group up and running. That will meet in April. I will then take it, I think, as a more coherent argument through that group, having discussed it with the key stakeholders there, back to the Government. By then, I think the Protection of Freedoms Bill will have worked its way through, and my other role as the interim CCTV regulator might or might not be on a statutory footing, if I'm still involved—sorry, the role will be on a statutory footing, and whether I am still involved is another matter. There will be statutory underpinning for the role of the surveillance camera commissioner, which is a job I hold at the moment. I think I'd like to wait and see how that develops in April/May next year.

Q47 Stephen Mosley: In April, you said you wanted to see something statutory. Do you still think that, nine months down the line?

Andrew Rennison: There is an element of that, but I have taken full advantage of the statute that exists, which is a framework decision from Europe on 30 November 2009, which requires the accreditation of DNA and fingerprint laboratories, and I've used that as a lever. We've managed to use it quite effectively. Despite its imperfections, we've used it as best we can to lever particularly the police into accreditation. That is under review at the moment. A broad Government review of some 100 instruments was brought in under that treaty—I think it was the Lisbon treaty—pre-2009. My advice to the Government in the review of this is that if we opt out of that framework decision, that's a point when I'll absolutely be demanding some other statutory underpinning of my role to retain the levers that I need. There are a number of variables at the moment, and they are beginning to come together.

Q48 Chair: Let me get this clear: the responsibilities you have that emanate from the international treaties give you sufficient comfort at the moment.

Andrew Rennison: No. They provide me with a lever to achieve the standards that I want in the areas where I need levers.

Q49 Chair: That's another way of putting it. In the absence of that, you need something statutory.

Andrew Rennison: Yes. That's an absolute must, and it is part of the equation at the moment that I'm reviewing. In the longer term, I still maintain that my role should be on a statutory footing, but that is an ongoing discussion between myself and the Minister.

Q50 Roger Williams: Perhaps you could give us a snapshot of the next forensic service procurement

strategy, and perhaps you could tell us when we can expect to see it.

James Brokenshire: The National Forensic Framework Agreement, or the procurement framework, is the next phase of the work. ACPO, in conjunction currently with the NPIA, is developing that process and taking the lead. I am expecting to receive further details in relation to that shortly.

Q51 Roger Williams: When do you expect it to be published, or made public?

James Brokenshire: It is work that is actively being pursued by the Association of Chief Police Officers. It is led by Chris Eyre who is the ACPO lead in relation to forensic procurement. I know from discussions that I've had with him that that work is advancing, and I know that he has had discussions with the forensics regulator and others in relation to that work, so I would expect to see further clarity in the months ahead.

Q52 Roger Williams: The Government have said that the current strategy doesn't encourage fragmentation. Do you expect the next strategy to actively discourage fragmentation?

James Brokenshire: I know that this was a point that the Committee referred to in its report, and that you will be aware that evidence was provided to you that it isn't general police practice to fragment scenes from the same crime scenes to different providers, and that this was not something that was being seen practically at this point in time. Obviously, we will take on board any lessons from the current National Forensic Framework Agreement when developing the next procurement framework. Fragmentation of cases is not general police practice, and has not been encouraged by the current procurement strategy. I do not anticipate that it would be encouraged by the new strategy either, recognising the challenges that reside there.

Q53 Roger Williams: One of the great strengths of the FSS was that it provided a great range of expertise and services. If no service provider can provide that full range, what can be done to manage the risks or difficulties that might arise through that—that fragmentation may have to take place if no one provider provides the complete range of services the FSS did?

James Brokenshire: It is worth highlighting that around 35% of the forensics market was already being provided outside of the Forensic Science Service before the decision that was taken last December. Therefore, I would suggest that this is not a new issue, that police forces in their procurement of forensic services will look carefully, and that this is part of the sifting and the processes that are being developed by police forces in relation to the management of the forensics that are sent out into the private sector under the framework agreements. Therefore, I think there is a clear understanding of how this process works, and that is being enhanced as time moves on to ensure that the tie-up between police and the criminal justice system is working efficiently and effectively, such that

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cases can be presented at court in the manner that would be expected.

Q54 Roger Williams: I am sorry to go back to this again, but if a police force was presented with a very complex case that needed a number of different forensic approaches to it, the FSS was always there with a complete range of facilities. Are we sure that there will be a provider that will provide that complete range in the future?

James Brokenshire: As we have heard, we have forensic providers with broadly based approvals in relation to the services they are able to provide to police services. An end-to-end service is also provided within the private sector, so that would be my understanding as to how the police would continue to undertake this work, recognising that that end-to-end service is already being provided within the police service in relation to forensic needs and that that will continue into the future.

Q55 Stephen Metcalfe: Professor Silverman, it will come as no surprise to you that one of the main areas of concern, certainly for myself and the Committee, was about the future of research and development across forensic science. I think you have recognised that yourself in your report. One of the suggestions that has come up relates to discussions with the Research Councils and establishing forensic science as a strategic priority. Have you held any discussions with them, and what progress has been made?

Professor Silverman: Absolutely, yes. I have had discussions with the Higher Education Funding Council, Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board, if I can take them in that order. On HEFCE, I received an e-mail today that said that additional assessors will be appointed in 2012–13 in the research excellence framework, and that the sub-panel chairs are going to be explicitly reminded about judging the impact of research on forensic science practice. Also, I have asked HEFCE to add to its list of nominating bodies the Association of Forensic Science Providers, which, as you know, includes FSS, LGC and others, as well as the forensic science services of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I have said that that would be a good representative body to have as a nominator.

The process whereby assessors are appointed is somewhat byzantine. If you know your way through it, it can only be done at the request of the sub-panel chair. What HEFCE is going to do is to tell the panel chairs that they have to ask for such assessors to be appointed. The support of this Committee would be much appreciated, because the reason why all this is important is that it makes clear to university deans and so on that, if they support forensic science in their universities, that forensic science will be fairly judged in the impact calculations and, therefore, the universities will get money back for doing it.

I asked the Research Councils to consider making forensic science a strategic priority. Research Councils have something called strategic priorities, but they have other mechanisms as well. The response we have had is that they may not have it as a “Strategic

Priority,” but they are taking very seriously finding particular ways of stressing this.

Today, the Forensic Science Society held an education and industry forum at the Home Office—we arranged for it to have some rooms there. Both the Minister and I spoke. Did you speak, Andrew?

Andrew Rennison: No, but I was there.

Professor Silverman: Andrew was there. Both the Minister and I spoke. A representative from the Research Councils was there, who discussed with the community the way in which the Research Councils would take this matter forward.

Moving to the Technology Strategy Board, there have already been meetings about this issue, and we have been talking about it. The board is going to try to find ways of building forensic science into its Knowledge Transfer Network system. Again, I am encouraged that all the different funding agencies are taking this seriously. I would stress that anything your Committee could do, Chair, to encourage this would be really helpful. This is a really important area for British science and British industry, and it is an important area in which the application of science should go forward. So I would be very grateful for anything you could do.

Q56 Stephen Metcalfe: Thank you for that. It sounds, from what you say, that you consider that the Home Office has a duty to support forensic science.

Professor Silverman: I think I have a particular duty to encourage all the players to find the support that they do. The financial support will come from the Higher Education Funding Council, the Research Councils and so on. All those budgets come from BIS, not the Home Office, but I have a responsibility to encourage the various players to make sure they get their voices heard and get a fair share of the science budget.

Q57 Stephen Metcalfe: But you will not be putting any money in from the Home Office science budget?

Professor Silverman: I do not, myself, have money to put in. We will be putting in effort in certain areas. The Home Office already has about £1 million a year of research in areas such as drugs and explosives, so we will be doing our own work, but I, personally, do not have a budget to support, for example, university research—university research is not funded in that way.

Q58 Chair: Would you encourage HEFCE to liaise with Mr Rennison to ensure that the support is for the kind of skills he identifies as necessary for the next-generation part of this industry?

Professor Silverman: The point is that when research is assessed by HEFCE, expert assessors will be appointed to do that. The views of those assessors would naturally influence what is important. The way the assessors are appointed is that HEFCE will approach representative bodies such as the Forensic Science Society and the Association of Forensic Science Providers to ask them to nominate the assessors. The forensic science providers, in particular, will know who would have the opportunity to do these things. There is no reason why those

bodies should not come to talk to us or to ask Mr Rennison what areas are particularly important.

Q59 Stephen Metcalfe: Thank you for that. I have two final questions. First, has any of the research that the FSS was undertaking transferred to other Government laboratories so that it carries on? Secondly, in the light of the answer you have just given to the Chair, one of my concerns is who will oversee what research is being undertaken to make sure that no gaps open up and that no areas are not covered. I think you said Mr Rennison will do that, but perhaps you could expand on that.

Professor Silverman: While I see it as my role to make sure we have a good landscape, I cannot comment now on specific areas of research. If you wish, I will look into that and make sure we write to you about any specific areas of research we can say are being transferred.

Stephen Metcalfe: Please do.

Professor Silverman: On the matter of overseeing what research is undertaken, this is a more philosophical issue about the way you oversee research in any scientific area. The community itself has to be self-overseeing and has to see for itself what gaps there are. I don't think that anyone can sit there and say, "Why isn't any research being done in a particular area?" It's more important to say that where research is being done, we should find ways to nurture and support it.

In the end, we must leave it to the research community itself to find the areas in which work should be done. I think that that's a general principle about doing research, rather than saying that if there's a gap, it will be filled by the community. I am not in a position to say, "We need a little bit more work in that area." What will happen is that if there is an area where more work needs to be done, it is up to the community to spot that itself.

Q60 Stephen Metcalfe: But without it being a strategic priority within Research Councils—the community is slightly different in forensic science than in other disciplines—there is a danger that no one will take a strategic overview and say, "What are we missing here?"

Professor Silverman: I must say that I am a little disappointed that the Research Councils have not yet risen to the challenge. We gave strong encouragement that it should be a serious, specific strategic priority. Even if they don't give it "Strategic Priority" status, I would hope that the support that they give it will be almost as strong as that. Again, the support of your Committee would be very welcome there.

Q61 Stephen Metcalfe: Do you have anything to add to that? Do you see yourself as having a role in this?

Andrew Rennison: Most certainly I do, yes. I know this was a huge issue long before the announcements on the FSS were ever made. That's allowed us to shine a real light on some of the issues, and me to get more involved. We have had a very fruitful day today,

organised by the Forensic Science Society, with 14 or 15 universities, Research Councils, the FSS and other providers. They are talking about exactly this.

The discussions I have had with the NPIA and ACPO have been fascinating, because historically, parts of ACPO saw it as their role to direct what research was needed. They set out clearly what their requirements were and just expected others to get on with it. In the last discussions I had with Chris Syms, as the leader of all this, he was far more thoughtful and much clearer. He said, "No, no, it's not the police's role to direct what the research is; it's for the police to talk to the providers." There's this constant iteration that's going on. I describe it as a sort of conveyor belt push and a customer push around what the research is.

I had inklings of this before, but it was made much clearer to me today that in that constant iteration that's for ever going round, you include academia as well, and they have an input. You're constantly revising what your research needs are based on customer requirements—by the customer I mean the criminal justice system, although the police have a large say in that—what the universities are able to provide, what funding is available and what the commercial providers and labs, and Government labs, can provide. Out of all that, I remain convinced that we can come up with some much, much clearer research requirements and can then present a far more coherent argument to the Research Councils for the funding. That seems entirely logical to me.

Q62 Stephen Metcalfe: Yes. That is very useful. Thank you very much.

Professor Silverman: Can I add that the experience that I had at the workshop today, and previous activities that we have had, have really encouraged me and made me feel that in response to the review, we have built a much stronger research community in forensic science than there was before? Maybe it is not stronger in size, to come back to the question that the Chair asked earlier, but the feeling of different parts of the community working together is quite remarkable and has really, in my view, changed over the past few months. I am greatly encouraged by it.

Q63 Chair: I have a final question to tie it up, if I may, Minister. Listening to some of the answers, which are very positive about the direction of research and so on, clearly all these have public expenditure implications. Your response relating to the archive has public expenditure implications, the various bits that are not closed down inside the FSS have expenditure implications and, of course, all the police expenditure is significant.

Professor Silverman will correct me if I am wrong on this. This is not a scientific sample; it's a random sample. It is the 21 that responded, minus the one that has presumably got its decimal point in the wrong place—I think it would be unfair to you to include that one. In those cases, the overall expenditure by the police has gone from £127 million down to £105 million in the last accounting year, so there has been

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a drop of 17% over the five-year period in real terms. That's the trend that the Government would want you, Minister, to be continuing. Given the upheaval and all the costs involved in the process of change, will we see a large blip upwards, which is an unnecessary blip upwards, as a result of a decision that isn't so easy to deal with in accountancy terms as some other parts of Government?

James Brokenshire: When you talk about a blip upwards, what do you mean by that?

Q64 Chair: In terms of overall expenditure.

James Brokenshire: Obviously, there is a cost to the transition process, which we have been very clear on, and this was part and parcel of the decision that we took in relation to how to deal with the position the FSS was in in potentially going into administration in the early part of this year. But the feedback that we have received from police forces around the procurement process is that this has delivered efficiencies—we are hearing this in relation to some of the collaboration efforts that are taking place between police forces as well—that it is driving improvement but also savings at the same time. Therefore, although this has been a difficult process and this was a difficult decision to take, we still maintain that it was the right decision to take in relation to the future of forensics and that it will

provide efficiencies and an effective service moving forward.

Q65 Chair: You have said that the archive process will be completed in the spring or thereabouts. Is my understanding of that correct?

James Brokenshire: Yes. We are happy to provide further detailed information regarding the finalisation of the business plan in order to give you further detail in relation to the archive process moving forward in the spring.

Q66 Chair: We would welcome that and we would certainly welcome any further thoughts from you, Professor Silverman, about the relationships with the TSB, the Research Councils and HEFCE. We would be grateful if you, Mr Rennison, would flag up to us any concerns you have about the quality of the science that you see during this very difficult process, because the one thing that we can all agree on, despite all the arguments about whether this was right or wrong, is that the interests of justice have to come first in all of this.

James Brokenshire: That is a point of complete agreement. I would expect Mr Rennison to be flagging up the issues to me loud and clear if he had concerns, and I have every confidence that he will do so.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Written evidence

Letter to the Chair of the Committee from James Brokenshire MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention, 13 December 2011

THE FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

Thank you for your letter of 29 November, in which you requested a written update on the current situation with the FSS in advance of our oral evidence session on 19 December.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that the transition programme remains on schedule to complete by March 2012.

Since the publication of the Government's response to the Committee on 31 October, the transfer of evidence recovery, interpretation and reporting of forensic science examinations from FSS to the Metropolitan Police Service has been successfully completed, including the transfer of 103 staff. This has been a well managed transition that has involved close coordination with the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS).

I have been clear from the outset that any FSS work which is taken in-house by police forces must be carried out to the same high standards as accredited private sector laboratories. The MPS were accredited for their in-house evidence recovery laboratory before the FSS closure was announced and have subsequently achieved accreditation for their National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) facility.

As part of the transfer of work from FSS to MPS, the MPS's evidence recovery function has moved to the former FSS laboratory in Lambeth. In agreement with UKAS, MPS have voluntarily suspended their in-house laboratory accreditation while they work with UKAS to have the facility at Lambeth accredited. The same standards and working processes will continue to apply, but quality systems have been scaled up in order to manage the increase in work volumes. The Forensic Science Regulator has been involved in this process and is content with this approach.

As we set out in our response to the Committee, forensic services elsewhere in the country have been successfully transitioned from the FSS to alternative suppliers. All new and transferred forensics work is being carried out by accredited laboratories. The NPIA are monitoring progress closely and reporting to the Forensic Transition Board on quality standards, with no significant issues reported to date.

Separate arrangements are being made for the provision of forensic services to forces in the North East region and a decision is expected before the end of the year.

We are working closely with FSS to develop the structure to support the operation of the FSS archive, which will continue to serve the needs of the Criminal Justice System. I would be happy to update the Committee on the associated costs once this is fully developed at the end of the financial year.

As we previously reported to the Committee the likely total cost of closure (in cash terms) is around £100 million. £29 million of funding was provided in 2010–11, to cover operating losses and staff redundancies. Provision was also made for a further £70 million of costs.

A further £20 million was paid to FSS in October against this provision. The majority of this is associated with redundancy costs. Further funding will be required in 2012 to complete the wind-down and deal with further redundancies and site closures. Overall we are forecasting that this will be delivered within the £100 million cash total. We continue to work to minimise these costs where possible.

Following the decision of Government to support the managed closure, 661 staff at FSS have taken redundancy on voluntary terms. As mentioned above, 103 staff have now transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service. Further redundancies and transfers will take place in the coming months. As previously agreed I will provide the Committee with an update on this matter in June 2012.

As requested, I have attached a list of the organisations represented on the Forensic Transition Board and the past and forward timetable of all meetings. I have not provided the minutes of each meeting as this is an ongoing project with commercial sensitivities. I will of course be happy to answer any specific questions the Committee might have about the Forensic Transition Board.

James Brokenshire MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention

December 2011

DATES OF FORENSIC TRANSITION BOARD MEETINGS

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>
3 February 2011	10.45–12.15
8 March 2011	14.00–15.30
31 March 2011	14.30–16.00
7 April 2011	09.00–10.30
15 April 2011	11.30–13.30
10 May 2011	14.00–15.30
25 May 2011	13.00–14.30
15 June 2011	08.45–10.00
6 July 2011	10.30–12.00
7 September 2011	16.00–17.30
29 September 2011	14.15–15.45
3 November 2011	10.30–12.00
30 November 2011	14.00–15.30
10 January 2012	10.00–11.30

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED AT FORENSIC TRANSITION BOARD MEETINGS

APA	Association of Police Authorities
APACE	Association of Police Authority Chief Executives
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
AGO	Attorney General's Office
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
FSS	Forensic Science Service
HO	Home Office
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NPIA	National Police Improvement Agency
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
ShEx	Shareholder Executive (part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

Letter to the Chair of the Committee from James Brokenshire MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention, 16 January 2012

THE FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

Thank you for the opportunity to update the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on 19 December 2011 on progress to manage the wind-down of the Forensic Science Service.

Following my comments in that session, I am writing to confirm that we are working closely with FSS and with colleagues across the Criminal Justice System to develop the structure to support the ongoing operation of the FSS archive. As I advised at the oral evidence session, I will update the Committee on the associated costs at the end of the financial year once this work is complete.

As I confirmed in my letter to you on 13 December 2011, I will also provide the Committee with an update on the number of redundancies from the FSS and, where this information is available, the number of staff transfers to alternative forensic providers, by June 2012.

James Brokenshire MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention

January 2012

Letter to the Chair of the Committee from Professor Bernard Silverman, Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office, 16 January 2012

THE FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

Following my appearance on 19 December at your Committee's evidence session to discuss the Government's response to the Forensic Science Service inquiry, I agreed to write with additional evidence on two issues:

- discussions with the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), the Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), taking forward the recommendations of my report; and

- in response to a request by Mr Stephen Metcalfe, details of any transfer of research from the Forensic Science Service to Government laboratories.

HEFCE has confirmed that at the relevant point in the Research Excellence Framework process in 2012–13, panel and sub-panel chairs will be explicitly reminded of the need to appoint appropriate assessors to judge the impact of research on forensic science practice. HEFCE has also added the Association of Forensic Science Providers to their list of nominating bodies for assessors. The Engineering and Physical Science Research Council and the TSB are working together to develop a Special Interest Group on Forensic Science which will promote greater networking between the science community and providers. The Home Office has been invited to provide a representative to participate in these discussions and to join a planning group.

I have looked into the specific issued raised by Mr Metcalfe. As of this time none of the research being undertaken by the FSS has been transferred to a Government laboratory. It should be clarified that the FSS is not itself a Government laboratory; the FSS has been a Government owned company (GovCo) since 2005.

Professor Bernard Silverman
Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office

January 2012

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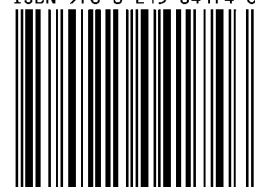
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