Executive Summary

2. The Transforming Forensics (TF) Programme vision is: to deliver high quality, specialist forensic capabilities in support of the Policing Vision 2025 to rapidly protect communities and the vulnerable, which are sustainable to meet future threats and demand. The Programme is police-led, overseen by the Police Reform & Transformation Board and funded by a Police Transformation Fund investment of £30.35m, running from April 2018 to March 2020.

3. The Programme helps to deliver the HO Forensic Science Strategy and to tackle longstanding weaknesses identified by the House of Commons Science & Technology Committee in 2013. TF also helps to address the Forensic Science Regulator’s concerns.

4. Working with police forces across England & Wales, TF will deliver a sustainable, consistent, integrated and quality assured service that:
   - operates within a governance framework provided by a Forensic Capability Network;
   - covers traditional and digital forensic services and provides appropriate access to digital technology;
   - ensures that all forensic capabilities are available to policing organisations by developing a viable forensic science marketplace and supply chain;
   - is flexible to respond to changing requirements;
   - accommodates individual forces’ needs and priorities;
   - inspires public confidence by enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of all forensic services, based on robust science;
   - is affordable and provides demonstrable value for money through improved efficiencies;
   - optimises quality management and accreditation processes, by helping forces to meet all their ISO17025 and ISO17020 standards by 2020;
   - aligns with wider police transformation programmes, particularly Home Office Biometrics and the Digital Policing Portfolio; and maximises the benefits to forensics from these programmes.

5. The highlighted topics are discussed further in the rest of this submission.

Overview of the current police forensics landscape

6. The Transforming Forensics Programme view is that the current arrangements for police forensics:
   - Will not deliver the Policing Vision 2025 and the Home Office’s Forensic Science Strategy, particularly the themes of specialist capabilities, digital policing, a professional workforce and joined up delivery; while retaining local capabilities and accountability;
- Are not sustainable for forces (and their commercial suppliers) given the demand now faced by policing and the financial constraints within which it is operating. This position will get worse if nothing is done;
- Are fragmented operationally and, without a priority on demonstrating compliance with the Forensic Science Regulator’s Code of Practice, present a real risk to police forensic service delivery within the next year;
- Cannot keep up with the challenges and opportunities of rapidly changing science and technology, especially in digital forensics and in DNA. Failure to keep up with digital technology will leave forces without the necessary capacity and capability;
- Need to be made ready to maximise the opportunities that will be presented by the Home Office Biometrics (HOB), Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) and Digital Policing programmes, while they are available.

7. These are the five major reasons why the current police forensic arrangements need to change; the Transforming Forensics (TF) Programme is policing’s strategic response to these issues.

**The Forensic Capability Network**

8. At the heart of the TF vision is a desire to work together nationally to deliver high quality, specialist forensic science and capabilities by networking existing services to share knowledge and improve resilience, efficiency, quality and effectiveness. This approach is called the Forensic Capability Network (FCN) and is based on aggregating and integrating common services and, where necessary, undertaken through appropriate legal arrangements.

9. The FCN in its broadest sense encompasses the whole police forensics community, but at the core is a small group of personnel, the FCN Core, and an ICT platform to enable sharing of services and capabilities, data and information.

10. The Core FCN team will be established in 2019 to lead, govern and manage the wider FCN. This organisation is currently being designed with the police forensics community and other stakeholders. It is expected that it will provide a range of services delivering;
- A centralised Standards & Accreditation (S&A) group to deliver a consistent and integrated service. This will include coordination of validation services and support to help forces/agencies meet their local accreditation targets. The S&A team will be the ‘voice’ of the service when managing key stakeholder relationships such as with the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS);
- A Digital Forensic Science Authority that will coordinate, orchestrate and direct a national response to Digital Forensic Science. This will ensure alignment with forensics digital programmes across policing and provide a focus on the underpinning knowledge and science;
• FCN technology enabling forces to connect their forensics services thereby allowing the sharing of work, using common processes and policies. With improved management information this will help to increase productivity, quality and resilience;
• A long-term capability and technology roadmap, providing direction and leadership in forensics research and innovation. This will help attract research and technology companies to forensics science and specifically digital forensic science;
• A coordinated approach to partnerships with academia and industry to improve blue sky research and development.

11. The FCN concept is supported by the NPCC, APCC and the Home Office. It will be in place and operational before April 2020. The TF Programme will work with and alongside the FCN until it is established and operational within a host policing organisation. The FCN will start small and grow over time with services switched-on by capability.

12. Communication and interaction with the forensics community will be focused through the FCN. This will provide a clear voice for police forensics and represent those interests. It will also help the Forensic Science Regulator and others to reach the police forensic community more efficiently and consistently.

13. On current plans, the Core FCN will have:
• A Core Team, as described above, which is expected to number about 30 – 40 staff by April 2020;
• A national technical platform that facilitates the FCN by enabling shared services and data;
• Agreement to be the contracting authority, able to provide shared forensic capabilities and services. This will improve value for money and be affordable to forces in the longer-term.

Digital Forensic Services

14. The TF Programme recognises that the biggest long-term challenge is – and will continue to be – responding to the digital revolution. This is a threat as devices proliferate and crime occurs on-line as well as in the physical world; but it is also an opportunity to use Artificial Intelligence and other emerging digital technologies, to streamline and automate many digital forensic processes.

15. The TF Programme has considered how best to respond to the challenge and concluded that the first step is to ascertain the current gap in digital forensics (DF) knowledge and help prepare for the future. The Programme will, therefore:
• Develop a DF Capability Maturity Model that will work alongside other assessment and diagnostic tools to provide the first ever strategic and tactical overview of current DF capability within forces. This will provide a robust baseline for the Programme;
• Create a strategic advisory board, as part of the wider FCN, providing the necessary DF governance to guide and develop the work necessary to plug the gaps, alongside the coordination and orchestration of best practice, providing a brand new holistic and coherent approach to future and emerging challenges;
• Undertake several forward thinking and cutting-edge DF projects, designed to develop the complex capabilities required to fight the modern tech-savvy criminal. These will be proof of concept projects to be shared across the policing community;
• Provide the ‘thought leadership’ and drive to improve DF capabilities, developing, augmenting and enhancing current good work, sharing best practice, doing it once for the benefit of many, thereby creating efficiencies as well as much needed standardisation. This will be part of the Digital Forensic Science Authority within the core FCN.

Marketplace and supply chain

16. The recent review of the provision of forensic science to the criminal justice system in England and Wales carried out by the Home Office, APCC and NPCC has made several recommendations to address the now familiar problems of the fragile forensics supply chain. The TF Programme’s plans for the FCN directly address these recommendations and recruitment is currently underway for a Forensic Market and Industry Engagement (FMIE) team.

17. The FMIE team will maintain national oversight, monitoring and management of the commercial marketplace including: monitoring suppliers’ performance; considering ongoing due diligence concerns; coordinating the response to short-term capacity issues e.g. toxicology casework; providing advice and support to the HO, NPCC and APCC around market impacts of policy decisions; and developing long-term plans to ensure the sustainability of individual forensic disciplines.

18. In addition, the FMIE will work closely with the Digital Forensic Science Authority to develop an understanding of demand forecasting and market requirements, so that clarity can be provided to the commercial marketplace around future requirements for forensic science (with an emphasis on digital forensic science).

19. The plan is to have this team fully established by the end of 2018 within the core FCN.

Quality

20. The TF Programme’s work with forces has highlighted the pressing challenges that forces are facing in achieving and maintaining accreditation for forensic services. The Capability Maturity Model and ongoing tracking of the accreditation status of forces have provided a clear baseline and the TF Programme is responding to the priorities.

21. The current fragmented approach is inefficient and ineffective, so the TF Programme is setting up a centralised Standards and Accreditation group within the FCN which will secure economies of scale by sharing best practice and developing standards once, nationally, rather than in every force or collaboration. This coordinated approach will also make the accreditation process more efficient for UKAS and other stakeholders.
22. The emphasis is on quick practical action and the TF Programme has already developed two 'Knowledgebases' (for fingerprint bureaux and for CSIs) so forces can access all the essential reference material for ISO 17020 and ISO 17025 in one place. TF is also helping to validate equipment once rather than in each force and has recently provided guidance for collision investigation.

23. The timing of the start of the TF Programme has been too late to shape the process of accrediting fingerprint bureaux, so the role is currently reactive, helping to clear the issues that have arisen. For CSI accreditation, however, the Programme is working with policing to avoid the problems, delays and costs of duplication and re-work that have occurred in the fingerprint bureaux accreditation process.

24. The FCN will also work with the College of Policing to support the police forensics workforce ensuring that training products and competence regimes are in line with the Policing Vision 2025. Training and development can thereby be coordinated and delivered more efficiently. TF will be working with forces to ensure that the right people are in place with the right skills and underpinned with the right culture. A consistent approach to training and Continual Professional Development will ultimately lead to a national head of the forensics profession.

Robust science

25. The Home Office Science and Technology Committee concluded in 2013 that "the UK risks falling behind on the exploitation of new research and technologies". This risk has materialised and there is clearly too little effort going into forensic science research and development (R&D).

26. One factor that inhibits investment in R&D is the fragmentation of the service, where individual forces cannot justify investment in R&D when it competes against other police priorities in an age of austerity. By creating the FCN and securing the economies of scale, the aim is to create headroom for investment in R&D. The FCN will aim to provide direction and leadership in forensics research and innovation, shaped by the priorities in policing and the wider CJS.

27. The first step for the FCN R&D role will be to develop a long-term capability and technology roadmap. This will be developed with partners in academia and industry as well as bodies like UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This should help research and technology companies to identify opportunities in forensics science and specifically digital forensics science, some of which are likely to have application in the wider economy.

14 September 2018