

Edinburgh Forensic Lab given reprieve

Forensic laboratories in Edinburgh and Aberdeen are to remain open under plans to modernise forensic services across the country.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill told the Scottish Parliament that the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) forensic laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh would retain expertise in the cities to enable urgent DNA, fingerprint and drug analysis to continue locally.

After close consultation with the SPSA, unions and local MSPs, Mr MacAskill announced a set of reforms that will improve efficiency and consistency, particularly in the analysis of volume crimes. The proposal will also deliver savings to enable vital support services for the police to be maintained.

At the heart of the reforms will be a restructuring of the service that will see two high volume processing units established in Glasgow and Dundee to support four local satellite laboratories, ensuring that existing labs remain in service.

The modernisation will be underpinned by a £600,000 investment in an evidence management system that will improve efficiency and enable SPSA to deliver the levels of forensic services agreed with Scottish policing earlier this year.

The Justice Secretary also announced that a review of the changes announced on Thursday will take place in 18 months, to ensure that the intended improvements are being realised and to take account of any potential changes in the structure of policing.

In a statement to the Parliament , Mr MacAskill said:

“This model will enable the SPSA to deliver a more efficient and consistent service – while ensuring that the existing laboratories remain open.

“I am confident that this structure will deliver the best possible service for Scottish policing and the criminal justice community, and I look forward to working with SPSA on its implementation over the coming months.”

SPSA Convener Vic Emery said:

“Our customers were clear they wanted greater consistency and resilience to provide faster results in day to day crimes as well as expert support on serious and violent crimes. I am pleased that the Cabinet Secretary has recognised and agreed the fundamental importance of the SPSA Board’s recommendation – a greater separation between serious and volume crime processing.

“Cost has been a factor but not at the expense of service or customer confidence. This revised model will not generate the biggest financial benefits in the long term. However, for the first time since we were created we now have the ability to operate as a responsive national service provider, re-design the flow of work around our service centres, and address inconsistencies in our processes and service standards.”