

***'DIGITAL FORENSICS: AN INSPECTION INTO HOW WELL THE POLICE AND OTHER AGENCIES
USE DIGITAL FORENSICS IN THEIR INVESTIGATIONS'***
PUBLISHED BY HMICFRS ON 1ST DECEMBER 2022
AVON & SOMERSET PCC REPONSE DATED 26TH JANUARY 2023

The importance of digital forensics cannot be underestimated. When you consider that most people have a mobile phone – which in many cases are effectively mini personal computers – the implications for policing are significant. Digital devices can provide a wealth of information which may provide evidence of a crime or, indeed, provide exculpatory information. Digital devices, and the information they contain, need to be considered by the police when conducting their reasonable lines of enquiry.

The expertise needed to access, retrieve and use this information in a reliable and legal way is the field of digital forensics. Forensic services in Avon and Somerset are provided by South-West Forensics (SWF), this is a collaboration of four regional forces: Avon & Somerset, Devon & Cornwall, Dorset and Wiltshire.

Although the potential for digital forensics has grown exponentially, the investment in the policing resource to service this has not. I support recommendation 5 which asks the Home Office to review the budgets relating to digital forensics.

This report contains three recommendations for Chief Constables.

Recommendation 2

By December 2023, each force in England and Wales should develop a governance and oversight framework to better understand the local demand for digital forensic services.

Recommendation 4

By September 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council and all forces within England and Wales need to include the management of digital forensic kiosks in their governance and oversight frameworks.

Recommendation 8

By November 2024, chief constables should integrate digital forensic services under their existing forensic science structure.

In response to the recommendations from this report, I can confirm the following.

Recommendation 2

The first recommendation in the report is for a governance and oversight framework to be developed by the National Police Chiefs' Council. Once this national model has been developed, the Constabulary will work with the other forces in SWF to adapt their own framework to align with this.

Regional governance will continue to be maintained through the Senior Detective Officers Board and the South-West Police Operations Board which meet regularly, and include the Director of SWF. In addition to this a new regional Performance Board, chaired by the regional Assistant Chief Constable, will help oversee forensics demand and performance.

Demand modelling is also being developed across South-West Digital Forensics through analytical work as well the implementation of a new case management system to support this.

Recommendation 4

Governance of digital forensic kiosks and other front-line tools is being reviewed through SWF. The Senior Detective Officers Board will have oversight of this including funding, accreditation requirements, adherence to procedures, resourcing and performance.

Each force will also have a nominated Senior Responsible Officer to support the line management and oversight of front-line officers deploying forensic tools in accordance with legal and quality requirements.

Recommendation 8

SWF already includes digital forensics within its existing structure.

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