



Science and Technology Committee

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From Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Chair

Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP
Minister for Crime and Policing
Home Office
(By e-mail)

02 March 2022

Dear Minister,

Biometrics Commissioner and Forensic Science Regulator: follow-up

Thank you for the updates you provided at the 20 January Westminster Hall debate on this important subject, and for your follow-up letter of 6 February. We appreciate your willingness to attend and to engage with the questions posed by myself and other Committee members.

As you will know, the Committee has previously expressed concerns about the lack of progress that has been made by the Government in the areas of forensic market sustainability, laboratory accreditation, biometrics governance, and custody image management. During the recent debate, you kindly agreed to keep us updated on several points, summarised below, together with a number of follow-up questions. I would be grateful if you could provide answers to the following questions to help keep the Committee informed.

Forensics capability network

1. You mentioned work being undertaken by the Forensic Capability Network, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the private sector "on a workforce strategy to plug exactly the capability and capacity holes that he identified". I would be grateful for further details about this work.

Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021

2. You answered "we will do it as fast as we can" when asked for a date for the new forensics regulator to commence the powers it was given under the Act. Are you now in a position to provide a specific date?
3. I would also be grateful for an update on discussions with UKRI "to identify options for future dedicated funding for forensic science needs."

Delivery of new systems

4. I would be grateful for an update on Government plans to deliver an automatic deletion system for custody images for individuals not charged with an offence but for whose images are held by law enforcement agencies during this Parliament.

Delivery of new guidance

5. You said guidance on enforcement agencies requesting information from phones and other electronic devices, in relation to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, would appear “quite soon”—could you please provide a date for this?

Future developments

6. Related to the above, you highlighted the importance of ensuring law enforcement has access to all the evidence it needs to conduct its investigations, and you said: “we will also look at the legal framework for suspects to make sure it stands the test of time, and enables timely, thorough and fair investigations.” I would be grateful for more detail about this work.

I would be grateful if you could provide us with this information by 15 March.
As is usual with the Committee’s correspondence, I will place this letter and your response in the public domain.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair