



Inspecting policing
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Crime data integrity

Inspection of Durham Constabulary

November 2014

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-538-6

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

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Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. All 43 forces were inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

"To what extent can police-recorded crime information be trusted?"

Accurate crime recording underlines the police service's commitment to public accountability, ensures that local policing bodies² can match resources to the risks identified in communities and enables the police to provide a proper service to victims of crime.

Recent HMIC inspections have revealed weaknesses in police crime recording, particularly the under-recording of crimes. In our interim report of 1 May 2014 we said that "we are seriously concerned at the picture which is emerging".³

We strongly recommend our findings in this report are read alongside the interim report, Crime recording: A matter of fact - An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales, available at www.justiceinspectortates.gov.uk/hmic

The interim report sets out the full context of this inspection programme including the rules and standards governing crime data integrity: the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)⁴ and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)⁵.

¹ The 2013/14 inspection programme was approved by the Home Secretary under section 54 of the Police Act 1996.

² Police and crime commissioners for police areas outside London: the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime for the Metropolitan Police Service; and the City of London Corporation for the City of London Police.

³ *Crime recording: A matter of fact – An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales*, paragraph 1.20.

⁴ NCRS is a standard of crime recording introduced in 2002 and published as part of the Home Office Counting Rules; it has the twin objectives of ensuring the police focus more on victims of crime and ensuring consistency in crime-recording in all police forces.

⁵ HOCR are rules in accordance with which crime data – required to be submitted to the Home Secretary under sections 44 and 45 of the Police Act 1996 – must be collected. They set down how the police service in England and Wales must record crime, how crimes must be classified according to crime type and categories, whether and when to record crime, how many crimes to record in respect of a single incident and the regime for the re-classification of crimes as no-crimes.

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

1. An examination of crime records for the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013;
2. A dip-sample of out-of-court disposals (cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND), cannabis warnings, community resolutions) and no-crime decisions for rape, robbery and violence;
3. Visits to forces where inspectors assess local crime recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance; systems and processes; and people and skills; and
4. A peer review of audit findings by an NCRS expert from outside HMIC.

The audit examined for compliance a small sample of crime records from each force. Taken together, these samples are sufficient to provide a reliable national estimate, but are too small to produce a force estimate of compliance. Force compliance rates typically result in a margin of error of around +/- 10 percent and therefore a range of 20 percent. This range of uncertainty means that few, if any, conclusions can be drawn from individual force compliance rates or comparisons of rates between forces based on the data alone. (Samples large enough to make more reliable force judgements, while desirable, were not affordable.) Our conclusions and recommendations are, therefore, based upon the evidence drawn from our inspection of the force's crime-recording arrangements.

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

5. Part A: A summary of our findings, and recommendations;
6. Part B: Our findings in numbers;
7. Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings.

This report, undertaken at a force level, allows a qualitative assessment of the force's crime recording arrangements and to make recommendations for improvement.

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

Chief officers show strong leadership and promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force. They consider accurate recording to be at the heart of their victim-centred approach to policing which makes extensive use of restorative justice (known in Durham as restorative approaches). The use of restorative justice in Durham is both widespread and innovative.

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the named officer responsible for crime data quality.

The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance that includes crime data integrity. The force does not have an overarching crime recording policy but there are clear procedures that are well understood by officers and staff. The need for ethical recording is well embedded, understood and repeatedly reinforced by chief officers.

Officers and staff can raise concerns over unethical practices of any kind through a confidential reporting line into the professional standards department (PSD). This process is referred to locally as 'bad apple' and is widely known, although the culture of the organisation is such that all officers and staff feel confident they can raise issues with their line managers that will be addressed. The DCC has given extensive presentations on crime recording to over 400 supervisory staff and is starting a similar series of presentations on police ethics.

The force fully understands the risks associated with inaccurate crime recording and the impact it can have on public confidence. There is an established bi-monthly crime practitioners working group (CPWG), chaired by the force crime registrar⁶ (FCR) that addresses all matters relating to crime recording and has the authority to take action in areas of concern.

The role of the FCR is to ensure that the force complies with the NCRS and HOGR. Additionally, the FCR has responsibility for overseeing force compliance with the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR)⁷.

⁶ The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HOGR provide that he is ultimately responsible for all decisions to record a crime or to make a no-crime decision, as the final arbiter. The force crime registrar's responsibilities include training staff in the crime-recording process and carrying out audits to check that the force is complying with all applicable rules.

⁷ The national standard for incident recording (NSIR) is designed to ensure that all incidents, whether crime or non-crime, are recorded by police in a consistent and accurate manner. This

The FCR heads a performance and analysis unit that undertakes a comprehensive series of programmed audits and inspections as specified in the annual audit plan as well as ad hoc audits when necessary. Crime data integrity is subject to an annual inspection as well as monthly checks on specific issues such as timeliness and no-crimes⁸. The results are circulated to senior managers and discussed widely at both a strategic and local level. The audit regime is comprehensive and appropriate for Durham Constabulary.

We found that the level of detail recorded for individual crime reports was appropriate to the seriousness of the crime with more detail, over and above the basic required, evident for more serious crimes such as rape.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 102 incident records⁹ and found that 104 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 104 crimes that should have been recorded, 88 were. Of the 88, five were wrongly classified and ten were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and that these victims are not receiving the service they deserve (because, for example, certain victim support services are only triggered once a crime is recorded).

Apart from 4 percent of crime dealt with over the telephone, all records of crime result from the deployment of officers who then record the crime directly onto the force system.

Incidents initially recorded as crime-related incidents or non-crimes¹⁰ are all recorded as crimes automatically within the 72-hour limit as part of the Sleuth IT system. Only inspectors (including those carrying out the role on a temporary basis) or above can delete crimes from what is called locally the 'staging database' prior to the 72-hour limit. These are audited centrally each week to ensure they comply with HOCR.

allows resulting data to be used at a local and national level for management and performance information purposes.

8 No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information.

9 An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police, recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

10 A non-crime is an incident which in the first instance has not been recorded as a crime as police are unsure as to whether it is a crime or not. A non-crime can eventually be recorded as a crime if the police find evidence that a crime has indeed occurred.

We found some evidence within the protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) units of incidents that had been recorded in the PVP folder on Sleuth or recorded under the 'suspicious/insecure' category on the force command and control system. Two of five incidents subject to a dip-sample from this file showed that there was sufficient evidence to record them as crimes. This was not widespread and we found no evidence that these incidents would not eventually be recorded as a crime but the force needs to audit this area of business more effectively and inform relevant staff of the correct approach they should adopt.

Recommendation: With immediate effect, the force should audit both the STORM system using appropriate word searches and the PVP folder in Sleuth, to ensure that reports in those areas do not contain crimes that should have been recorded under HOCR.

The specialist crime operations department (SCO), among other functions, undertakes undercover test purchase operations targeted at drug dealing. These operations are covert and require drugs to be purchased by undercover operatives from dealers. To gather sufficient evidence, a number of purchases have to be made and this would normally equate to one crime per purchase; however with the approval of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) a dispensation can be sought from the FCR to record a number of purchases as one crime. There was no evidence that the advice of the FCR had been sought on these operations in the last twelve months.

There is a major enquiry being undertaken into allegations of physical and sexual assaults with over 650 victims currently identified. The senior investigating officer (SIO) has started the process of identifying and recording crimes; however there is a concern that with numerous potential offenders per victim, the number of crimes that should be recorded will grow significantly.

Recommendation: The force should ensure the FCR is made aware of the implications for crime recording of any covert operation or major enquiry and that appropriate arrangements are put in place to record crimes in accordance with HOCR.

All crimes recorded on Sleuth pass automatically to supervisory officers. They are then submitted and recorded on the system. In only 9 cases out of the 102 incidents examined was there evidence of a supervisor having seen or examined the crime report. We are satisfied that these incidents have been viewed by a supervisor, but the audit trail is not apparent without extensive research and software adaptations. This was also the case for incidents resolved through restorative approaches.

Recommendation: Within three months, and to the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should ensure there is an appropriate supervisory audit trail for both crime recording and restorative approaches.

There was evidence of staff, in particular the designated decision maker¹¹ (DDM) and the staff in the public protection unit (PPU), dealing with reports of crime from another force in the correct manner; however this was not universal, with different approaches being adopted in different parts of the force area.

Recommendation: Within six months, and to ensure consistency of approach, the force should ensure there is corporate guidance for officers and staff dealing with reports of crime that have occurred in another force area including the transfer and handling of relevant documentation.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),¹² cannabis warnings¹³ and community resolutions.¹⁴ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹⁵.

Cautions – Out of the 21 cautions we dip-sampled, we found 20 cases where the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In nine cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 18 cases where there was a victim to consult, 16 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

¹¹ The DDM role is to provide practical advice, guidance and act as arbiter at a local level to ensure the accurate recording of crime and crime-related incidents in accordance with national standards.

¹² A form of immediate financial punishment used by police to deal with low-level offending such as being drunk and disorderly, retail theft, and minor criminal damage.

¹³ A cannabis warning is a non-statutory disposal for cases of possession of cannabis for personal use. It constitutes a warning to the offender and confiscation of the cannabis.

¹⁴ Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹⁵ National guidance for the use of out-of-court disposals is detailed in a number of documents:

- *Home Office Circular 016/2008: Simple Cautioning – Adult Offenders*. Available from http://www.xact.org.uk/information/downloads/Pace/HOC_16-2008.pdf
- *Simple Cautions For Adult Offenders*, 14 November 2013. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *Code of Practice for Adult Conditional Cautions*, 8 April 2000. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *Home Office Police Operational Guidance for penalty Notices for Disorder*, March 2005. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *ACPO Guidance on Cannabis Possession for Personal Use*, 28 January 2009. Available from www.acpo.police.uk

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 19 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In five cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that only one victim had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 25 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 23 cases. In 15 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 23 community resolutions and found that in 17 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 23 resolutions where there was a victim, 20 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. In 20 of the cases the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹⁶. In only two of the cases was there an auditable supervisory input. The force has used restorative approaches for the resolution of domestic disputes but, as a safeguard, they can only be issued with the approval of the chief superintendent responsible for response and crime.

There is a joint magistrates' steering group shared with Cleveland Constabulary that scrutinises restorative approaches to satisfy itself they are being used appropriately.

No-crime

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information.

We examined 41 no-crime records and found 29 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. All six no-crimes for rape that we examined were correct. Two of the five no-crimes for robbery were correct and 20 of the 30 no-crimes for violence were correct.

¹⁶ National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered, an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence and explain the process to the offender – including how the offender will make good the harm caused. The implications of receiving a community resolution need to be explained to the offender – it does not form part of a criminal record but may be disclosed as part of an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check. The community resolution is to be recorded appropriately, in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR.

The decision to no-crime offences is the responsibility of the DDM in the case of all offences except that of rape, which can only be signed off by the FCR. It was apparent that officers were using force guidance from 2010 which is no longer applicable and that the interpretation and knowledge of what constitutes additional verifiable information was not as comprehensive as it should have been.

Recommendation: The force should immediately issue new no-crime guidance to all officers and staff that clarifies what is required to no-crime an incident or record and also provide greater clarity on what constitutes additional verifiable information in accordance with HOGR guidance.

Victim-centred approach

A victim-centred approach lies at the heart of policing in Durham and is widely understood by staff. The Police and Crime Plan 2013–17 and the force vision are unequivocal that the victim must come first, and chief officers constantly reinforce this message, both orally and more formally through the ‘total victim care initiative’. There is a comprehensive understanding among officers and staff of this approach. An example includes, entering into a contract with the victim to confirm when they would like updates and supervisory callbacks for the offences of burglary dwelling, theft from motor vehicle, assault (not domestic violence related) and hate crime.

Consideration of the views of the victim when determining the most appropriate outcome is central to the restorative approaches adopted by the force and it is the innovative and extensive use of these restorative justice approaches that is key to Durham Constabulary’s victim-centred approach.

Surveys are used appropriately and effectively, and inform activity.

Rape offences

The force has made great strides over the last 18 months in the way that the offence of rape is both recorded and investigated. The recently revised force policy for the investigation of rape and other serious sexual offences provides details of how to deal with rapes, including those reported via a third party. It also details how rapes should be recorded on the force crime recording system. Following extensive communication, all officers and staff are aware of their roles in the recoding and investigation of rape. The FCR is the only person who can record an allegation of rape as no-crime. There is appropriate supervisory overview of all rape offences.

IT systems

The force computer systems (STORM for command and control and Sleuth for crime recording and intelligence) are linked. The Sleuth system supports crime recording through the use of the ‘staging database’ which ensures that supervisors, including the chief constable (CC) and DCC can and do check on the progress of crimes. It ensures that crime entered on the system are

recorded within the 72-hour limit. Both systems are well managed, with regular audits and information weeding. All crimes have to be recorded on Sleuth and there are no other systems.

People and skills

Appropriate training has been provided to all relevant officers and staff on relation to HOCR and NCRS as well as out-of-court disposals. More extensive training has been provided for inspectors and chief inspectors. The focal points for advice on all crime recording matters are the DDM and the crime management unit (CMU). The CMU is currently staffed by one detective sergeant and two police constables; however this should be one sergeant and four police constables. There is currently a backlog of 871 crimes awaiting finalisation and this figure is increasing.

Recommendation: Within three months, and to the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should consider succession planning for the one DDM role in the force and also examine the resilience of the CMU and the location of this unit in the organisational structure to promote independent decision making.

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes alongside those working in specialist departments were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR.

There is a culture of integrity around crime data with staff willingly accepting the need for accurate crime recording and understanding the organisational risks of not getting it right. We found no evidence that performance pressures, either implicit or explicit, are influencing the accurate recording of crime.

Force crime registrar

The FCR has extensive knowledge and experience in the management of crime data and the application of the NCRS and HOCR, and is well respected, supported and accepted. The FCR is the final arbiter for all crime-recording issues and she enjoys the full support of all chief officers.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should audit both the STORM system using appropriate word searches and the PVP folder in Sleuth to ensure that reports in those areas do not contain crimes that should have been recorded under HOCR.
2. The force should ensure the FCR is made aware of the implications for crime recording of any covert operation or major enquiry and that appropriate arrangements are put in place to record crimes in accordance with HOCR.
3. The force should issue new no-crime guidance to all officers and staff that clarifies what is required to no-crime an incident or record, and also provide greater clarity on what constitutes additional verifiable information in accordance with HOCR guidance.

Within three months

4. To the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should ensure there is an appropriate supervisory audit trail for both crime recording and restorative approaches.
5. To the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should consider succession planning for the one DDM role in the force and also examine the resilience of the CMU and the location of this unit in the organisational structure to promote independent decision-making.

Within six months

6. To ensure consistency of approach, the force should ensure there is corporate guidance for officers and staff dealing with reports of crime that have occurred in another force area including the transfer and handling of relevant documentation.

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

Our examination of records will be used as part of a statistically robust national audit to allow HMIC to report a figure for national crime recording accuracy across the 43 Home Office forces within our final report to be published in autumn 2014. The audit undertaken at a force level is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside our fieldwork interviews to form qualitative judgements only.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Durham Constabulary. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes	From these identified crimes Durham Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes
102	104	88
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery that Durham Constabulary had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
41	29	

There is no direct recording of crime in Durham Constabulary; all crimes are recorded on Sleuth

Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings

Our detailed findings are set out against three headings: leadership and governance, systems and processes, and people and skills.

Leadership and governance

- 1. The force has arrangements at a senior level to ensure there is confidence in recorded crime figures and all aspects of the HOCR.**
- 1.1. How is Durham Constabulary ensuring that leadership responsibilities and expectations for crime data integrity are clearly defined and unambiguously communicated to staff?**

Chief officers show strong leadership and promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force, and the DCC is the named officer responsible for crime data quality although the CC takes an active role in promoting ethical behaviour and crime data accuracy through the innovative use of webcasts.

The DCC is the lead for force performance and the force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance including crime data integrity. These meetings, such as interim performance and productivity meetings and the crime command's executive meeting, are chaired by the DCC. There is no evidence to suggest this creates a conflict given the nature of the performance regime now in place in the force which, in the absence of specific quantitative targets in The Police and Crime Plan 2013 - 2017, concentrates on qualitative issues and audit findings; this format is replicated at departmental and operational levels.

The DCC put in place an initiative over the last 18 months known as 'the Durham Constabulary timeline'; this identifies all the activity undertaken to address crime data issues. As a result of audits of the recording of sexual offences in the last two years, significant changes were made by chief officers to the way all sexual offences, but particularly rape, are recorded and investigated.

Chief officers communicate effectively and innovatively with both officers and staff raising awareness of messages about crime data accuracy and ethical policing in general. Indeed, staff confirmed that the CC has contacted officers directly to enquire about a particular crime that he has checked on the 'staging database' on the Sleuth system.

The anonymous reporting line to PSD is available to all staff and is known locally and publicised via posters and other means as 'bad apple'. There have been no reports relating to crime recording or performance pressures in the last 12 months but there is a process for chief officers to be made aware if there are issues of concern.

All staff interviewed mentioned that they would prefer to raise issues with their immediate line manager and there was confidence that if there was an issue, they could raise it in open forum and the organisation would support them.

There is no overarching crime recording policy; the need for accurate recording is mentioned on the ‘plan on a page’ and in specific policies such as the recently revised rape and sexual offences policy. The Police and Crime Plan 2013–17 makes no specific reference to accurate crime data apart from reference to the force ‘plan on a page’.

1.2. How does Durham Constabulary ensure it has a proportionate approach to managing the strategic and organisational risk of recording crime data?

The force is well aware of the risks associated with integrity and crime recording and the impact that failure in this area can have on public confidence and victim satisfaction. They are also aware of the impact that poor data quality can have on effective research and resource deployment; as one interviewee said, “it’s counter-productive”.

Concerns raised regarding crime-recording standards are appropriately considered and managed predominantly through the crime practitioners working group (CPWG) which meets bi-monthly and is chaired by the FCR. Attendees include the three detective chief inspectors responsible for local policing and safeguarding as well as the force DDM from the force crime management unit. As part of their work they review standards of crime recording and the quality of crime investigations. The group works to an action plan. For example, the findings from last year’s rape audit were examined by this group and they then monitored and managed the areas for improvement. The main issue was the unnecessary delay in recording allegations of rape as a crime and there have been significant improvements in the past year with recent force audits showing 92 percent of rape allegations are recorded as crimes within the 72-hour limit.

The force has identified its key crime categories as rape/serious sexual offences, violence and burglary, all based on threat, harm and risk. This structure influences where audits are targeted.

The crime recording system starts with the call-handlers who assess each call on its merits using the THRIVE acronym (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement) as a guide. Assessments also consider whether the caller has been a previous victim of crime. After deployment, officers complete both a case management entry (caseman) and a victim management entry (vicman) on the crime recording system, Sleuth. The system ensures that the level of detail required for crime recording is consistent across all crime records. More serious crimes have more detail but this is proportionate to the severity of the crime and vulnerability of the victim. Each record has to include a six-point investigation plan that differs depending on the crime under

investigation. The DDM challenges investigations if he feels they are not appropriate or if there is insufficient information.

The force understands the various channels through which crime can be reported and can assess them, especially in the public protection arena. For example, in Darlington protecting vulnerable people unit, an experienced detective sergeant works alongside a social services manager as a single point of contact (SPOC) for all third party referrals from other agencies.

1.3. How does Durham Constabulary use HOCR, NCRS, and NSIR to ensure there is confidence that crime is recorded accurately?

Chief officers are aware that messages can sometimes get ‘lost in translation’ which is why they place great importance on auditing to ensure the correct activity is being undertaken. Since January 2014, the force has applied a more robust audit regime managed by the FCR. All findings are reported to the CPWG where changes are instigated and managed to ensure issues are addressed effectively. The FCR and her team work to an annual audit plan, which is signed off by the DCC. There are timetabled audits as well as the flexibility to respond to emerging issues. They work on a ‘rule of thirds’ where a third of the audits are scheduled, a third are emerging issues and a third are statutory.

The application of the HOCR, NCRS and NSIR does not inhibit the effectiveness of any of the audits. The team is also prepared to adapt its audit processes when necessary to adopt different methodologies such as listening to all the initial calls, and it invites auditors in from outside bodies such as Durham County Council to audit certain areas of its business independently.

Audits on rapes over the last three years have shown an improvement and this is used as evidence of the value of the methodology. A comprehensive audit of approaches to restorative justice is currently being planned.

Audit results are reported to the chief officers through a regular (weekly) executive briefing note. The data is used at both the strategic level, for example in the force’s performance management regime, and at a local level such as in Darlington where the force audit data inform the monthly performance meetings at every level.

Systems and processes

2 Does the constabulary have systems and processes in place to ensure that crime is correctly recorded in accordance with HOCR and NCRS, standards of out-of-court disposals are maintained and no-crime decisions are correct?

2.1. How does Durham Constabulary effectively manage and supervise incidents, other reporting routes and crime records in order to ensure that crimes are correctly recorded?

The force does not record crime directly from public reports and there is no crime desk. Apart from 4 percent of crimes examined which were dealt with over the telephone, all other reports result from the deployment of officers who then record the crime directly onto the force system. For the period of the audit – October 2012 to October 2013 – the total number of incidents classified as crime was 29,563, the total number attended was 28,309 and those subject to a telephone resolution were 1,254 or 4 per cent. There was evidence within the sample of overt intervention by staff in the CMU to rectify issues relating to the HOCR and this highlights their crucial role in the overall process.

The Sleuth system ensures that all incidents entered onto it are recorded as crimes within the 72-hour limit. This is an effective use of IT supporting frontline staff and the ‘staging database’, where crimes are held until allocated a number, provides a useful checking mechanism for supervisors. Only officers of inspector rank (including those carrying out the role on a temporary basis) or above are allowed to remove incidents from the staging database before crime numbers are allocated, and the checks and balances are such that a percentage of these removals is audited to ensure compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

While Sleuth is an effective crime recording system, it will only work if staff enter crime-related incidents on to the system. There was evidence, in particular within the public protection arena, that some staff were contacting the call centres and creating a ‘holding incident’ under a general category such as ‘suspicious/insecure’ in order to allow themselves more time to carry out enquiries before a matter was crimed. This is the subject of a specific recommendation.

Neither staff on the enquiry desks nor police community support officers (PCSO) can enter crimes on the Sleuth system. Enquiry desk staff can take details or, in the case of a PCSO, they can assist with certain features of the investigation such as gathering CCTV evidence or undertaking house-to-house enquiries and provide reassurance, but they cannot record a crime. This leads to some duplication of effort and repeat visits to victims that may be unnecessary.

Supervisors in the force communication centre (FCC) dip-sample records handled by four call-handlers per day or per shift and record the evidence on an FCC database. A range of issues is examined (including compliance with NCRS) and an assessment is made of the use of the correct opening and closing codes. Automatic dip-sample questions are populated by the supervisors and feedback is provided to staff when necessary. For crime recording, supervisors do see each crime record on Sleuth but the audit trail to prove that this occurs is missing; this is subject of a separate recommendation.

Staff in specialist units, such as the CMU and PPU, deal with enquiries from other forces in an appropriate manner and to a high standard. The approach across the force was neither consistent nor widely known and this is the subject of a specific recommendation.

2.2. How does Durham Constabulary ensure that out-of-court disposals suit the needs of victims, offenders and the criminal justice system?

Cautions – Out of the 21 cautions we dip-sampled, we found 20 cases where the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In nine cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 18 cases where there was a victim to consult, 16 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 19 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In five cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that only 1 victim had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 25 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 23 cases. In 15 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 23 community resolutions and found that in 17 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 23 resolutions where there was a victim, 20 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. In 20 cases the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate. In only two of the cases was there an auditable supervisory input.

The absence of appropriate documentation is exacerbated, or may be caused, by the lack of a facility to scan documents onto the current Sleuth system. This means that the DDM and staff in the CMU are often not fully sighted on issues, resulting in time being wasted trying to find the appropriate evidence. The force

is aware of this deficiency and it is proposed that the new crime recording system called 'Red Sigma' (to replace Sleuth by the end of 2014) should incorporate this facility.

The lack of an audit trail for supervisory activity for restorative justice approaches on Sleuth is a matter of concern and the force should ensure that the new Red Sigma system has the functionality to identify easily that a supervisor has checked the file.

In relation to out-of-court disposals generally, the force needs to ensure that it is certain that the following activity has been undertaken:

- PNC/local systems checks have been carried out and there are no relevant previous convictions or disposals to prevent use of restorative approaches.
- The victim is satisfied with the outcome.
- The offender admits the offence and demonstrates remorse.
- The offender has been advised about the consequences of enhanced CRB checks.
- Details of the reparation (if any occurred) are recorded.

2.3. Are no-crime decisions for high-risk crime categories correct and is there is robust oversight and quality control in Durham Constabulary?

To no-crime a record requires additional verifiable information (AVI) and it is the interpretation of what constitutes AVI that is at the heart of the problem with no-crimes in Durham Constabulary. The force is using an outdated interpretation based on advice circulated via e-mail in 2010. Current guidance provided by the Home Office on this issue has greatly clarified the matter and, while the FCR and her team were aware of it, it is apparent that this is not the case elsewhere in the force. This is compounded, in a similar way to issues experienced with out-of-court disposals, by the lack of appropriate documentation and the lack of facility to scan documents effectively onto the Sleuth system.

We found no evidence that police officers felt under any pressure as a result of the current performance regime to no-crime records or mis-record crime.

The force is currently exploring a regional initiative to provide external scrutiny of the decisions to no-crime allegations of rape. The group would be run by Rape Crisis, and the police and crime commissioner has provided funding. The aim would be to enhance public confidence and satisfaction in this sensitive area.

2.4. How does Durham Constabulary promote a victim-centred approach to crime recording and associated outcomes?

A victim-centred approach lies at the heart of policing in Durham and the whole ethos of the force vision is built around the victim and problem-solving. Chief officers and staff are proud of the fact that they are usually in the top five forces nationally for customer satisfaction. Indeed, in 2013 Durham Constabulary won the national WOW¹⁷ award for customer satisfaction.

In addition to the call-backs undertaken by supervisors after seven days for all victims of burglary dwelling, theft of or from motor vehicles and hate crime, the force engages an outside company to undertake independent surveys of victims of crime each month. Results from all these forms of feedback and surveys are made known to senior officers and acted upon; for example they informed the decision to introduce victim contracts.

Officers gave a clear and consistent message that whoever owns the crime also ‘owns the victim’ and this approach promotes both clarity and responsibility.

The force tries to ensure that the victim is put first in everything it does, specifically around crime recording, notification of outcomes and no-crime decisions. This ethos is reinforced through its ‘total victim care initiative’ with an emphasis on the need for staff to agree with the victim a contract which includes how contact should be made and how frequently according to the victim’s wishes. These are recorded on Sleuth under the victim management screen and they are monitored regularly by supervisors to ensure appropriate and timely action is being taken.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC) has approved and funded a plan to use focus groups of victims of sexual offences and domestic abuse to find out what the force could do better to improve levels of satisfaction. Should this prove a success, there are similar plans to introduce focus groups for victims of violent crime with same overall aim.

Victim feedback is provided quarterly to the force by two groups: the independent sexual violence advisers and the independent domestic violence advisers, both via the sexual violence group chaired by the detective chief inspector responsible for safeguarding issues. The force has also engaged Durham University to undertake work with victims of domestic violence to improve the way the force deals with these matters and victims.

Results of surveys and feedback from whatever source can feature in monthly tasking and coordinating meetings at both force and local level.

¹⁷ WOW is a nationally accredited award for industry and services that provide outstanding customer service

2.5. How does Durham Constabulary ensure systems for receiving, recording and managing reported crimes of rape are robust?

The force policy on the investigation of rape and other serious sexual offences is clear and well understood by all staff including those in the contact centre, uniformed officers and specialists. There is also clarity about their roles and responsibilities. Referrals of allegations of rape from third parties or from the sexual advice referral centre (SARC) are low but the system now ensures the force is quickly informed. Any reports received other than through the communication centre must have a crime-related incident created. The detective sergeant in the PPU has responsibility for obtaining an incident number; this is monitored through the ‘staging database’. While there was no evidence that offences of rape were not being allocated a crime number or a crime-related incident number, there was evidence of this occurring for other offences in the PVP area of responsibility (see recommendation 1).

An audit using a key words search is undertaken for all incidents to ensure allegations of rape have not been missed and, as an extra level of scrutiny, every report of rape is reviewed by the detective chief inspector (safeguarding) to ensure appropriate action has been taken.

The force is keen to encourage the reporting of rape where it has occurred and has undertaken campaigns such as ‘love is many things’ which focused on a number of sexual offences including rape. It has worked closely with researchers at Durham University to try to understand better why people do or do not report sexual offences. The force has a language line facility to assist people who may not speak English as their first language.

Reports of rape can only be recorded as a no-crime by the FCR and the audit found that of six no-crimes examined, all were correctly recorded.

The policy provides clarity on how to deal with cross-border reports of rape and the level of victim care that should be provided. This is one area of criminality where there was total clarity about how to deal with reports from other forces.

2.6. How do Durham Constabulary IT systems allow for efficient and effective management of crime recording?

The force has a good crime recording system called Sleuth which links with the STORM command and control system, and its ‘staging database’ is particularly innovative. Sleuth is due to be upgraded by the end of 2014 to a new, but similar, product called Red Sigma that will address some of the current weaknesses identified in Sleuth, such as the inability to scan documents. Both systems are well managed with regular audits and information weeding. Durham Constabulary has systems that allow for the effective and efficient management of crime recording.

People and skills

- 3 Does the constabulary have staff whose conduct and skills ensure accurate crime recording?**
- 3.1. What arrangements does Durham Constabulary have in place to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to ensure accurate crime recording?**

The knowledge of HOGR and NCRS among officers and staff was good and commensurate with their roles. There was confirmation that training had been provided and there was no evidence of any lack of knowledge about crime recording. Officers and staff confirmed that if they required advice about any crime recording issue they would contact the CMU or the DDM. There were sufficient resources generally but there was a particular concern about the resilience of the CMU and the long term succession planning for the DDM role given the importance of these posts in the overall crime recording process. There was also the potential, although no evidence was adduced, for the DDM position to come under undue influence given that line management of this individual was not totally independent of performance pressures (see recommendation 6). One option to ensure total independence of the DDM would be to position the role and the CMU under the line management of the FCR.

There have been innovative techniques used to check police officers' knowledge of the HOGR and NCRS including the use of an intranet-based quiz.

- 3.2. How do the behaviours of Durham Constabulary staff reflect a culture of integrity for crime recording practice and decision-making?**

There were clear messages on crime recording and integrity from senior officers that are well understood by both police officers and staff. These included face-to-face briefings, podcasts and multi-tiered briefings. We found no evidence that any staff were being put under any pressure, implicitly or explicitly, in relation to crime recording. There was a drive to 'do the right thing' at all times; officers and staff were accepting of this and could fully understand the approach and why it was necessary.

We found evidence of the need for accurate crime recording being reinforced through objectives in performance development reviews (PDR) under the objective 'ensuring quality processes'.

3.3. How is the accuracy of crime recording in Durham Constabulary actively overseen and governed by the force crime registrar (FCR)?

The FCR is also head of the performance and analysis unit for the force but there was no evidence that her role as FCR was in any way affected by also being involved in strategic force performance issues for which she has responsibility but not accountability.

The decision of the FCR is final although she is prepared to listen to well-constructed arguments. She is well respected by chief officers and peers owing to her knowledge of both the HOGR and NCRS. The FCR attends all the major strategic boards and she is involved in policy making at the highest level. She has unfettered access to chief officers but retains total independence in her capacity as FCR. The force has effective communication channels which ensure that any proposed crime recording policy is compliant with HOGR or NCRS and these are addressed by the CPWG, chaired by the FCR.