Crime data integrity

Inspection of Northamptonshire Police

Contents

Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme[1], 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 will be 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 bodies[2] 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.hmic.gov.uk.

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].

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[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.

The scope and structure of the report

This report is divided into the following sections:

1. Part A: A summary of our findings, and recommendations;

2. Part B: Our findings in numbers;

3. 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 recently have begun to promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force. The deputy chief constable is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality.

The deputy chief constable's recent (early 2014) messages underlining the importance of correct practice when recording crime have caused some confusion among frontline officers and managers. The confusion is caused by the previously published 'investigate-to-record' policy[6] regarding crime recording. This policy explicitly supported by the chief officer team, advised officers and staff that there were times that crimes were being recorded that with a little investigation should not be recorded as crime. This has now changed to the current position of HOCR and NCRS compliance. However, the confusion is compounded by the failure of the force to remove reference to 'investigate-to-record' from several force guidance booklets that are still in use.

> **Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should ensure that its crime-recording policy is fully compliant with HOCR and NCRS. References to the practice of 'investigate-to-record' should be removed from all policy documents. In addition there should be clear communication to officers and staff:
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> - to inform them of the revised crime-recording policy and the expectation that they adhere to it; and
>
> - to reinforce the unequivocal message that ethical crime recording and compliance with the NCRS is required irrespective of the effect this might have on force performance.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes into the professional standards department (PSD). There is also a strong link between the crime management unit (CMU), which is the specialist team responsible for checking crimes, and the PSD. They liaise regularly on any problems they come across to ensure any such concerns are properly handled and are fully investigated. This is good practice.

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[6] This means that the police do not record the incident as a crime at first, but instead investigate the matter in order to establish whether a crime has been committed

The force has introduced a new crime-recording policy however a number of managers, who had vital roles in dealing with crime reports, told us they had not seen this document nor were they aware of its existence.

The force has sought external reviews of its crime-recording processes, including a review by the College of Policing. The report makes specific comment about the need to guard against a loss of integrity in the way crime is recorded. Despite this, the central focus of the force is on achieving reductions in crime rather than looking at the harm to victims and communities which inaccurate recording could bring.

> **Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should include the force crime registrar[7] (FCR) in force-level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

We found little evidence that the force was monitoring any risks that could come from inaccurate crime recording, and crime data accuracy does not feature in the force risk register.

> **Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and the apparent under-recording of crime, taking the necessary steps to improve the accuracy of crime recording. Risks should be included in, and monitored through, the force risk register.

The force maintains an audit regime which is of limited range and flexibility, the results of which, due to capacity issues, are not always taken into account at executive meetings or used to inform decision making and improvements in processes.

Much audit work is in the form of regular searches of systems to check that policing problems of the past do not re-occur. This means that the audit schedule appears reactive rather than linked to current issues and essentially proactive in style.

Austerity measures have meant that the audit team has been reduced significantly. We noted that the newly appointed auditor for control room activity is devising an approach to audit work that does not appear to be part of a structured strategic audit plan.

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[7] The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HOCR 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.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should introduce a structured, regular audit plan and ensure the FCR has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime recording.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

When a member of the public telephones the police this contact is recorded as an incident report on a command and control computer system. This may subsequently be recorded as a crime when a decision has been made that on the balance of probability a notifiable offence has occurred. Approximately 85 percent of crimes recorded by the Northamptonshire Police are reported in this way.

HMIC examined 106 incident records[8] and found that 82 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 82 crimes that should have been recorded, 65 were recorded. Of the 65, four were wrongly classified and five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of material concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (because, for example, certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

The force also has a centralised crime-recording unit through which we have estimated that the force record approximately 15 percent of the total of their recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 23 calls from the public) found that of the 23 crimes that should have been recorded, all 23 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 105 reports which were recorded separately on other force systems. We found that of those 105 reports, 28 crimes should have been recorded, only 1 crime was recorded. It is extremely concerning that the reports reviewed on this system had not been recorded properly as a crime – including serious sexual offences, domestic abuse and offences against children committed by adults. This is a matter that should be rectified by the force urgently.

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[8] 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.

> **Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

We did find that when members of the public contacted the force control room, there was accurate and precise transfer of information from the member of the public to the incident management system (STORM) log. Similarly, the operators who took reports of crime directly from the public did this with a high degree of accuracy. We found, however, that on occasions when an officer attended an incident, there was often a lack of detail entered in the log as to why a crime had not been recorded. In addition, there was often a lack of challenge in the control room and the phrase, 'not as reported', was accepted as sufficient explanation.

Force restructuring to meet budgetary pressures had removed safeguards within the force control room for identifying incidents where crime-recording decisions were incorrect; this safeguard was in the form of snapshot audits by the FCR and direct feedback to the reporting officer from the CMU staff. The removal of these safeguards has resulted in significant under-recording of crimes from officers attending incidents, which is the primary crime-reporting route for the force. The safeguards have now been reinstated and include feedback to the officer attending and highlighting incidents closed as a crime-related incident[9] with a direction that all such incidents are recorded as a crime automatically within the 72- hour period allowed under the HOCR.

The force does not have a procedure for detailing how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime, which are reported in Northamptonshire but which have occurred elsewhere. During the inspection, we saw the control room handling such calls and appropriately passing matters on to another force.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),[10] cannabis warnings[11] and community resolutions.[12] The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed[13].

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[9] A crime related incident is an incident which on the balance of probabilities would amount to a crime but it has not been recorded as the alleged victim can't be found or won't confirm a crime, it is being dealt with by another force, or it is under another HOCR rule where no crime needs to be recorded.

[10] 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.

[11] 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.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 16 cases where there was a victim to consult, 13 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 14 cases. In 18 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 12 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that four victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 20 cases. In all 20 cases we found evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 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 18 resolutions where there was a victim, all 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Nine cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.[14]

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[12] 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.

[13] 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 www.xact.org.uk

- *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

[14] 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 force monitors out-of-court disposals, numbers and relative percentages by offence type with the FCR reporting audit findings to the chief officer team. Administration staff within the CMU conduct quality assurance checks on all out-of-court disposals. Where national guidance has not been followed, there is a strict procedure whereby the crime is reopened and referred back to the officer and their supervisor for any necessary action.

The force has an external scrutiny panel reviewing out-of-court disposals however this group has yet to develop a fully effective way to feed back reviews as a result of differing views within the group members on the merits of out-of-court disposals and their suitability for different levels of offending.

No-crimes

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 90 no-crime records and found 55 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. As the no-crime records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence this is matter of serious concern.

Seven individuals are authorised to make no-criming decisions across the force area. We found that they have often failed to match the requirements of HOCR and NCRS and that oversight had not been as strong as it should have been. In many cases the balance of probabilities test was used rather than the more demanding approach set out in the national standard which requires additional verifiable information. In some cases the decision maker accepted an oral rather than a written account of the reasons for the no-crime request from the officer in the case; this is poor practice.

Frequently, we found that information about a victim or their lifestyle was used to undermine the credibility of the report of crime. In some cases the version of events described by the offender was used to contradict the victim's account and justify a no-crime decision. Without additional verifiable information this demonstrates a lack of regard for the victim.

The FCR personally reviews every rape crime, which is to be no-crimed. Despite this we found that some of the explanations placed on rape crime reports, used to support the no-criming of those reports, contained extremely concerning comments and language which was used to justify highly questionable decisions. Examples included a case where the victim was described as "could be a compulsive liar" which was deemed sufficient to submit for consideration for a no-crime, and cases where the account of the suspect was used to discredit the victim and support a no-crime decision.

We urgently brought this to the force's attention and chief officers instructed that a new approach should be adopted immediately, especially to crimes of rape, but also other categories of crime. We provided guidance from the National Crime Registrar to the force to assist this change of practice.

Recommendation: The force should ensure that the steps it took immediately after HMIC's inspection to address the inaccuracy of its no-criming decisions are effective. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.

Victim-centred approach

Our visit to the control room showed the staff taking calls from the public, and those directing police officers to calls for service, were very aware of the importance of a victim-centred approach. Supervisors and quality development officers, whose role it is to dip-sample calls and interactions with the public in the control room, and who feedback their findings to staff members were also victim-focused.

Unfortunately this strong emphasis on the needs of victims is not matched in other operational areas beyond some specialist investigations. While the force collects satisfaction data from surveys, there appears to be little active use of it to make real time changes to the way policing services are delivered. We found that managers dealing with crime recording do not readily access feedback from victims. Managers commented to us that officers do not understand the need to keep victims regularly updated. They also said that there is little or no contact with victims when out-of-court methods are being considered to deal with a crime. These are widely regarded as a quick way of removing crimes from officer workloads.

Our findings match the concerns of the local police and crime commissioner, who is leading an initiative to improve the response to the victim's voice. An action plan specifically for Northamptonshire Police currently is addressing supervision issues in this area and the need to shift the force culture to be more strongly victim-focused.

Rape offences

The force does not have a policy for rape offences but there is a locally-produced guidance booklet. This guidance does not provide much direction to officers about recording a crime beyond the requirement to record it within 72 hours of the victim providing details of an allegation of rape, or when a forensic examination takes place and samples subsequently are sent for analysis. There is no reinforcement of the need for ethical crime recording or a victim-centred approach in the guidance.

We found that officers attending reports of rape correctly record such crimes on almost every occasion. The FCR conducts thorough searches of force systems

to identify any misclassifications of a rape crime or where a crime has not been recorded.

The force has no policy or guidance on how officers should manage reports of rape from outside the force. Specialist investigators stated that victims were always supported locally in such cases and believed there were no problems with the transfer of files.

> **Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should amend its guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime-recording is to be carried out in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.

IT systems

The force maintains a single system for each of its incident (STORM) and crime (CIS) recording systems; there are few links between these two systems.

The force is trialling direct recording of crime by officers using the officer crime-inputting system (OCIS). More investment in both officer training and a new generation of mobile data terminals will be needed to bring out all the advantages from this initiative. Longer term plans involving a move to a new crime recording system in partnership with other regional forces offer further opportunity for greater accuracy in crime data recording.

People and skills

As a result of austerity measures, the force removed the auditing function from the control room and relies on the supervisors to complete quality assurance checks. Our inspectors heard concerns that this was not a successful approach. Control room managers stated that much valuable experience was lost as a result and there are real concerns about how further staff reductions could compromise crime recording accuracy even more.

Officers currently are required to telephone the control room when recording a serious crime. As a result of a shortage of staff in the control room answering these calls, officers currently are classifying crimes wrongly in order to get them recorded automatically using an electronic form, this is because this form should only be used to record less serious crimes. During the inspection we were told of robbery crimes being recorded, by officers using this system, as a less serious matter of theft from person to achieve swifter recording of the details.

We found that managers and staff in the CMU have high levels of understanding of crime recording standards and are fully committed to improving knowledge and awareness of these across the force area. However

capacity issues due to limited resources are evident within the unit. As a result, telephone calls from officers seeking crime recording advice go unanswered as staff struggle to meet the demands of crime recording backlogs.

> **Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should ensure that there is sufficient capability and capacity within the CMU to enable effective and efficient crime recording.

Frontline staff do not have a clear understanding of the standards of behaviour and conduct expected to make sure crime recording is compliant with the HOCR. This is directly as a result of the forces 'investigate-to-record' policy, which has been widely interpreted by officers as a signal that discretion can be used in deciding whether a crime should be recorded.

Concerns were expressed at many levels of management that performance pressures exist in the force, influencing both whether a crime should be recorded and what the classification of a crime should be. We were advised that superintendents and senior officers regularly pressurise those making crime-recording decisions to record only the minimum number of crimes where multiple victims are involved. This is a serious issue which affects the force's understanding of the totality of crime in communities and therefore the effectiveness of decision making as to how it uses its resources; the service received by victims of crime; and its effectiveness in bringing offenders to justice.

As a result of external review of the force's crime recording and investigation processes, the force has introduced some training for officers and staff; however, there was little consultation in the planning of these courses with those managing crime reports or with staff who hold expert knowledge of crime standards.

> **Recommendation:** Within six months, the force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime-recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

Force crime registrar

The inspection coincided with the retirement of the previous long-serving FCR and the appointment of a new person to the post. The chief officer lead recently had started regular meetings with the outgoing FCR, which are set to continue with the new post holder.

The previous FCR gave examples of numerous occasions when the chief officer lead for crime data integrity had supported his decision-making.

The appointment of a new FCR offers an opportunity for the force to review the way the role is used to ensure crime-recording data integrity. The new FCR

could align both crime and incident auditing under their direction for more consistency of approach and team resilience.

A discussed earlier in this report, there has been a reduction in the capacity of the FCR auditing team which has affected their ability to complete their work in an effective manner. It is important, with the introduction of a new FCR, that they are enabled to succeed in their professional role and contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of Northamptonshire Police.

> **Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should ensure that officers and staff understand the independence of the FCR and his role as the final arbiter in respect of crime-recording decisions.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should ensure that its crime-recording policy is fully compliant with HOCR and NCRS. References to the practice of 'investigate-to-record' should be removed from all policy documents. In addition there should be clear communication to officers and staff:

    *   to inform them of the revised crime-recording policy and the expectation that they adhere to it; and

    *   to reinforce the unequivocal message that ethical crime recording and compliance with the NCRS is required irrespective of the effect this might have on force performance.

2. The force should ensure that the steps it took immediately after HMIC's inspection to address the inaccuracy of its no-criming decisions are effective. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.

3. The force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

4. The force should ensure that officers and staff understand the independence of the FCR and his role as the final arbiter in respect of crime-recording decisions.

Within three months

5. The force should ensure that there is sufficient capability and capacity within the CMU to enable effective and efficient crime recording.

6. The force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and the apparent under-recording of crime, taking the necessary steps to improve the accuracy of crime recording. Risks should be included in, and monitored through, the force risk register.

7. The force should amend its guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime-recording is to be carried out in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.

8. The force should introduce a structured, regular audit plan and ensure the force crime registrar (FCR) has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime recording.

9. The force should include the FCR in force-level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime-recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

Within six months

10. The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime-recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

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 judgments only.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	**Crimes identified**	**Crimes recorded**
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Northamptonshire Police. 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 Northamptonshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
106	**82**	**65**
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Northamptonshire Police centralised crime recording unit. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these reports received directly by telephone from the victim by the centralised crime recording unit HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Northamptonshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Northamptonshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
23	**23**	**23**
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	**Crimes identified**	**Crimes recorded**
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Northamptonshire Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Northamptonshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Northamptonshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
105	**28**	**1**
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Northamptonshire Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.		From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.
90		**55**

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   Does the force have arrangements at a senior level to ensure there is confidence in recorded crime figures and all aspects of the HOCR?

1.1   How is Northamptonshire Police ensuring that leadership responsibilities and expectations for crime data integrity are clearly defined and unambiguously communicated to staff?

In 2013 Northamptonshire Police reintroduced a strategic NCRS steering group to guide the force's actions in regard to improving crime data recording chaired by the assistant chief constable. In early 2014, responsibility for this business area was realigned following guidance from the national policing lead, to the deputy chief constable (DCC). In April 2014, the DCC sent out a number of messages underlining the importance of correct practice when recording crime, using the force's intranet and his blog.

Frontline officers and managers reported that these messages have generated a large amount of confusion given previous directions sent out in January 2013. These earlier messages related to a policy called 'investigate-to-record'. This was sent to all staff, and advised officers that the chief officer lead felt *"there are times we record things that with a little investigation should not be recorded as crime"*.

We found that almost universally the impact of this comment was that officers thought they were being encouraged or given discretion to record crime only once an investigation confirmed that a crime had been committed. This has had the effect of causing many officers not to record crimes when they should have done so.

We found that despite the recent move from the chief officer team to supporting an ethical crime recording approach, 'investigate-to-record' has not been fully withdrawn and is referred to in several force guidance booklets. Officers see this being in stark contrast to the more recent messages, which follow NCRS and suggest that a crime should be recorded when reported by a victim and there is no evidence to contradict their comments. The clear majority of officers' interpretation of 'investigate-to-record' remains the dominant factor influencing decisions on whether a crime should be recorded.

In addition, the recent change of leadership of this area of business in the force has led to widespread uncertainty as to who has full ownership of the subject. The assistant chief constable is still seen by many staff as being the lead despite the DCC now being the lead officer.

The chief officer team have clearly expressed a recognition that a number of improvements need to be made to secure accurate crime recording. We found a strong desire to make the most of the opportunities stemming from the current HMIC inspection and make swift changes where they are needed. The force has introduced a number of new approaches since our audit and inspection.

Confidential reporting systems for bringing concerns over crime reporting standards to the organisation's attention are well-known and established. There is an anonymous email reporting method for staff to use. There is also a strong link between the crime management unit (CMU), which is the specialist team responsible for checking crimes and the professional standards department (PSD). They liaise regularly about any problems they come across to ensure any such concerns are properly handled and are fully investigated.

During our inspection, we were shown a new force crime-recording policy, which had been introduced in January 2014 to guide all staff on how to manage local crime reporting. A number of managers, who had vital roles in dealing with crime reports, told us they had not seen this document nor were aware of its existence. They also did not agree with much of its content. We discovered that the usual way for agreeing a new policy had not been followed and thus officers who should have been aware and engaged were not. The force recognises the need for this policy and therefore should ensure swiftly that it is properly agreed, that it is fully compliant with the HOCR and NCRS, and that it has a commitment to a victim-centred and ethical approach to recording crime.

1.2 How does Northamptonshire Police ensure they have a proportionate approach to managing the strategic and organisational risk of recording crime data?

We found little evidence that the force were monitoring any risks that come from inaccurate information on crime or crime recording at an organisational level. Crime data integrity does not feature in the force risk register in any form. Throughout 2013, the chief officer team made a number of statements that the force regularly was over-recording crime by creating a crime record for reports that were not really crimes. This was not a view shared by the force crime registrar (FCR) or other managers responsible for checking crime reports. This view is also in contrast to our audit findings where we found no evidence of the over-recording of crime.

A number of reviews of the way the force deals with crime were carried out during 2013 and 2014 by other forces and also by the College of Policing. This latter most recent review made specific comment about the need to guard against a loss of integrity in the way crime is recorded. Despite this, the central

focus in the force appears to be on achieving reductions in crime figures rather than looking at the harm to victims and communities which inaccurate recording could bring.

1.3 How does Northamptonshire Police use HOCR, NCRS, and NSIR to ensure there is confidence that crime is recorded accurately?

The force audit schedule has been of a limited range and the results of these audits are not always taken into account in key force strategic meetings to inform decision-making. Much audit work is in the form of regular searches of systems to check that policing problems of the past do not re-occur. This means that the audit schedule is reactive rather than being linked to current issues and proactive in style.

The force NCRS steering group considers some audit results but stronger links could be forged with the performance board to energise actions resulting from the findings. Where important risks were identified through audit work, such as crimes being missed in child abuse case records, little effective problem-solving took place. When we dip-sampled the same type of records, we found that out of a sample of 55 cases, 15 crimes should have been recorded and only 1 was.

The chief officer responsible for crime recording is able to re-focus the work of the auditors onto a new or emerging problem if required but this would mean that the normal audit schedule would be put on hold. Force economies and changes to resources mean that the audit team has been reduced to a few people. Staff in the CMU are required to do some routine auditing such as cannabis-warning checks. The force has recently appointed an auditor for control room activity, who is devising an approach to audit work that does not appear to be part of a structured strategic audit plan. The force should re-evaluate its audit programme, checking both resourcing levels and what primary risks audit activity should address.

Systems and processes

2 Does the force 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 Northamptonshire Police effectively manage and supervise incidents, other reporting routes and crime records in order to ensure that crimes are correctly recorded?

HMIC examined 106 incident records and found that 82 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 82 crimes that should have been recorded, 65 were recorded. Of the 65, four were wrongly classified and five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There is a need for significant improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime recording decisions.

The force also has a centralised crime recording unit through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 15 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 23 calls from the public) found that of the 23 crimes that should have been recorded, all 23 were recorded correctly. This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 105 reports which were recorded separately on other force systems. We found that of those 105 reports, 28 crimes should have been recorded, only 1 crime was recorded. As some of these records related to domestic abuse and sexual offences on vulnerable adults and children, this is a significant cause of concern and is a matter of material and urgent importance.

We listened to calls taken by control room operators as part of the audit and found that the staff were very engaging and empathetic. We also found there is accurate and precise transfer of information from the member of the public to the incident management system (STORM) log. Similarly, the operators who took reports of crime directly from the public did this with a high degree of accuracy. We found, however, that on occasions when an officer attended an incident, there was often a lack of detail entered in the log as to why a crime had not been recorded, and that there was often a lack of challenge in the control room and the phrase, not as reported, was accepted as sufficient explanation.

Force restructuring to meet budgetary pressures had removed safeguards within the force control room for identifying incidents where crimes were being incorrectly recorded; this safeguard was in the form of snapshot audits by the FCR and direct feedback to the reporting officer from the CMU staff. The removal of these safeguards resulted in significant under-recording of crimes from officers attending incidents, which is the primary crime-reporting route for the force. The safeguards have now been reinstated and include feedback to the officer attending and highlighting incidents closed as a crime-related incident with a direction that all such incidents are recorded as a crime automatically within the 72-hour period allowed under the HOCR.

During the inspection we came across examples of where staff in the CMU and the new control room auditor were identifying crime-recording issues and were feeding back to supervisors as well as individuals about what they had found. The control room has recently brought in a procedure to highlight crime-related incidents where a crime has not been raised after 60 hours. This was brought in as a large number of officers had interpreted the 'investigate-to-record' message as guidance that they should use all of the 72-hour period referred to in the HOCR. They used this time to complete the investigation element, rather than recording the crime in a timely fashion as required.

The force does not have a procedure for detailing how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime, which are reported in Northamptonshire but which have happened elsewhere. Officers are expected to know how to deal with such crimes and sending any paperwork to where it needs to go. During the inspection, we saw the control room handling such calls and appropriately passing matters on to a nearby force.

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

When using out-of-court disposals the force needs to ensure it only uses them in line with appropriate guidance so that only offenders who are entitled to be offered an out-of-court disposal receive them.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in all 20 cases the offenders' previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all 20 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 16 cases where there was a victim to consult 13 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PNDs and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 14 cases. In 18 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 12 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that four victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 20 cases. In all 20 cases we found evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 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 18 resolutions where there was a victim, all 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Nine cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

The numbers and relative percentage of out-of-court disposals within the force is tracked at an executive level. The FCR reports on the exact percentage and number of such outcomes to allow chief officers to spot any inappropriate weighting or use of a particular way of resolving a crime and offending. Similarly there is a robust approach to quality assurance of such outcomes within the CMU. If administration staff see any crimes involving an out-of-court disposal

where national guidance has not been followed, there is a strict procedure whereby this crime is reopened and not considered to be finalised. The case is then referred back to the officer and their supervisor for any necessary action.

The force has an external scrutiny panel reviewing out-of-court disposals however this group has yet to develop a fully effective way to feed back as a result of differing views within the group members on the merits of out-of-court disposals and their suitability for different levels of offending.

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

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but subsequently has been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We examined 90 no-crime records and found 55 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS.

Seven individuals are authorised to make no-crime decisions across the force area. Decision-making in the area of no-criming has not matched the requirements of the HOCR and NCRS. In many cases the wrong type of test was used to judge if a crime was to be cancelled, (involving a simple 'balance of probabilities' test rather than the more demanding approach set out in the national standard). Dip-sampling of decision-making by those making no-crime decisions did not take place to pick up on such errors. In some cases an officer was allowed to give decision-makers an oral rather than a written account of the reasons for requesting a no-crime decision. This practice should cease immediately.

Frequently we found that information about a victim or their lifestyle was used to undermine the credibility of the report of crime. In some cases the version of events described by the offender was used to contradict the victim's account and justify a no-crime decision. Without additional verifiable information this demonstrates a lack of regard for the victim.

The FCR personally reviews every rape crime, which is to be no-crimed. The explanations placed on some rape crime reports used to support the no-criming of those crimes contained extremely concerning comments and language which was used to justify highly questionable decisions. Examples included a case where the victim *"could be a compulsive liar"* which was deemed sufficient to submit for consideration for a no-crime, and cases where the account of the suspect was used to discredit the victim and support a no-crime decision. In one case the decision to no-crime included the comment *"ensure the victim is told ... should not come as a surprise to her"*.

We urgently brought this to the force's attention and chief officers instructed that a new approach should be adopted immediately, especially to crimes of rape, but also other categories of crime. The appointment of a new FCR by the force

will assist the implementation of this new approach. We provided guidance from the National Crime Registrar to the force to assist this change of practice.

2.4 How does Northamptonshire Police promote a victim-centred approach to crime recording and associated outcomes?

Our visit to the control room showed the staff taking calls from the public and those directing police officers to calls for service were very aware of the importance of a victim-centred approach. Supervisors and quality development officers in the control room regularly check on the quality of these contacts with the public and feedback the results to staff members.

Unfortunately this strong emphasis on the needs of victims is not matched in other operational areas beyond some specialist investigations. While the force collects satisfaction data from surveys, there appears to be little active use of it to make real-time changes to the way policing services are delivered. We found that managers dealing with crime recording do not readily access feedback from victims. Managers commented to us that officers do not understand the need to keep victims regularly updated. They also said that there is little or no contact with victims when out of court methods are being considered to deal with a crime. These are widely regarded as a quick way of removing crimes from officer workloads.

Our findings match the concerns of the local police and crime commissioner, who is leading an initiative across criminal justice agencies to improve the response to the victim's voice. An action plan specifically for Northamptonshire Police is currently addressing better supervision in this area and the need to shift the force culture to be more strongly victim focused. Managers commented to us that officers do not understand the need to keep victims regularly updated. They also said that there is little or no contact with victims during out-of-court disposals, which are widely regarded as a quick way of removing crimes from officer workloads.

2.5 How does Northamptonshire Police ensure systems for receiving, recording and managing reported crimes of rape are robust?

An experienced supervisor specialising in sexual offences has produced a guidance booklet on the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences. In the absence of a force policy, this steers the actions of operational officers attending such crimes. However, the guidance booklet does not provide much direction to officers about the recording of a crime beyond the requirement to record a crime within 72-hours when the victim provides details of an allegation of rape or when a forensic examination takes place and samples are subsequently sent for analysis. There is no reinforcement of the need for ethical crime recording or a victim-centred approach.

We found that officers attending reports of rape correctly record such crimes on almost every occasion. The FCR conducts searches of force systems to identify

any misclassifications of a rape crime or where a crime has not been recorded. Checks with records kept by the local sexual assault referral centre (SARC) are undertaken to ensure all matters are properly recorded according to the views of the victim.

The force has no policy or guidance on how officers should manage reports of rape from outside the force. Specialist investigators stated that victims were always supported locally in such cases and believed there were no problems with the transfer of files.

2.6 How do Northamptonshire Police IT systems allow for efficient and effective management of crime recording?

The force is actively looking at ways of improving the IT systems used to record crime. At present there is a very limited linkage between the incident management system (STORM) and the crime management system (CIS), which leads to crime data being entered on systems twice. The officer crime inputting system (OCIS) is being trialled as a pilot programme exploring the potential for the more efficient and timely entry of crime reports by officers. This system will need investment in both officer training and a new generation of mobile data terminals to bring out all the advantages from this initiative. Longer term plans involving a move to a new crime recording system in partnership with other regional forces offer another opportunity for greater accuracy in crime data recording.

People and skills

3 Does the force have staff whose conduct and skills ensure accurate crime recording?

3.1 What arrangements does Northamptonshire Police have in place to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to ensure accurate crime recording?

When the force removed the auditing function from the control room, there was a conscious decision to rely on the control room supervisors to check the quality and consistency of crime recording practice. Our audit and the very recent appointment of an incident auditor have shown that this did not prove to be a successful way forward. Control room managers state that much valuable experience was lost as a result of restructuring and there are real concerns about how further staff losses could compromise crime-recording accuracy even more.

Officers currently are required to telephone the control room when reporting a serious crime. As a result of a shortage of staff in the control room answering these calls, officers currently are classifying crimes wrongly in order to get them recorded automatically using an electronic form. This form should only be used

to record less serious crimes. During the inspection we were told of robbery crimes being recorded, by officers using this system, as a less serious matter of theft from person to achieve swifter reporting of the details.

As well as the very small number of force auditors, there are very real pressures on the staff in the CMU. If a member of staff is absent, as witnessed during the inspection, the CMU then suffers a staff shortage which is not filled and causes pressure within the unit. Staff then have to quality check and allocate much more than the usual number of crimes. The CMU also acts as a primary focus for help and guidance to operational staff. When having to concentrate on crime backlogs, the telephones go unanswered and no help is available, normally leading to more mistakes, which then require putting right. Despite these significant operating pressures, managers and staff in the CMU have high levels of understanding of crime-recording standards and are fully committed to improving knowledge and awareness of these across the force area.

3.2 How do the behaviours of Northamptonshire Police staff reflect a culture of integrity for crime recording practice and decision-making?

Frontline staff do not have a clear understanding of the standards of behaviour and conduct expected in regard to crime recording following compliance with HOCR. This is directly as a result of messages on 'investigate-to-record', which have been widely interpreted by officers as a signal that discretion can be used in deciding whether a crime should be reported. Many officers told us that the organisation's position was that it was easier not to record a crime than get it removed from the crime figures.

Concerns were expressed at many levels of management that performance pressures exist in the force, influencing both whether a crime should be recorded and what the classification of a crime should be. Together with 'investigate-to-record', this forms a toxic combination, which acts to encourage officers not to record crime. One member of support staff with considerable experience of working in the control room told our inspectors *"it is all so target based, they are not thinking about victims."*

We were advised that superintendents and other officers of similar rank regularly pressurise those making crime-recording decisions to record only the minimum number of crimes where multiple victims are involved. While staff in the CMU remain vigilant against such influences, more proactive messaging about the vital importance of accurate crime recording is urgently needed.

A number of the reports completed by other forces looking into how Northamptonshire Police manage and investigate crime, recommended a stronger investment in training officers in basic investigatory skills and broadening their understanding of the NCRS and HOCR. The College of Policing in its 2014 review of violent crime, described this knowledge as

"generally weak and variable". Since these reports, the force has introduced a scenario-based risk and vulnerability training for all frontline officers. This is currently two-thirds of the way through the full programme. In addition, a two-day crime skills course for sergeants has been piloted and is being rolled out to first-line supervisors. This is intended to improve supervision on all crime investigations including supervising out-of-court disposals.

We found, however, that there had been little consultation in the planning of these courses with those managing crime reports or staff with expert knowledge of crime standards. An input from CMU staff on the NCRS and HOCR had been cancelled, as time was not available. This and a review of the training programme indicate that greater focus needs to be given to explaining crime-recording standards and the value of ethical reporting.

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

The inspection coincided with the retirement of the previous long-serving FCR and the appointment of a new person to the post. The chief officer lead had recently started regular meetings with the outgoing FCR, which are set to continue with the new post holder. The previous FCR gave examples of numerous occasions when the chief officer lead had supported his decision. The FCR opposed the introduction of 'investigate-to-record' as a he felt this would undermine accurate crime recording. He had also outlined a number of other factors affecting crime levels to higher management, which mirror the finding of our audit and inspection.

The appointment of a new FCR, offers an opportunity for the force to review the way the role is used to impact upon crime recording data integrity. The new FCR could align both crime and incident auditing under his direction for more consistency of approach and team resilience.