

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Northumbria Police

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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 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 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 <http://www.justiceinspectorates.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:

- An examination of crime records for the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013;
- 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;
- Visits to forces where inspectors assess local crime recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance; systems and processes; and people and skills; and
- 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:

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

In Northumbria Police the deputy chief constable (DCC) is the lead for crime data integrity and he promotes the need for ethical, accurate crime recording with the assistance of other members of the chief officer team. The force has a well-established governance structure extending from the strategic down to area and departmental levels. Crime data integrity features either as a fixed or 'one off' agenda item at all these meetings.

The message from the DCC and the rest of the senior team is clear and consistent on the need to record crime accurately and at the earliest opportunity. This is well understood by senior staff but less so by frontline officers. Each area command and crime department has an NCRS 'champion'.

There has been much work done to promote the code of ethics⁶ and the level of understanding of this issue is good. It is apparent from reality testing that officers and staff are not making the link between integrity in the code of ethics and the need for integrity for crime recording.

Recommendation: With immediate effect, the force should issue an explicit message regarding crime recording accuracy and data integrity, promulgated throughout the organisation by the most effective means with subsequent checks to ensure the message has been received and understood.

The force maintains a confidential reporting line for officers and staff to report any unethical practices. Those officers and staff we spoke to felt that the culture of the organisation was such that they could report matters of concern without fear of recrimination and would consider reporting matters through any one of a number of channels including their line managers and supervisors.

Although there is no specific crime recording policy, there is a procedure direction⁷ with specific reference to NCRS and the HOCR. This contains guidance on when to record a crime. The need to ensure crime recording is carried out with integrity is part of the delivery plan within the force's police and crime plan, 2013-18.

⁶ National College of Policing Code of Ethics: <http://www.college.police.uk/en/20972.htm>

⁷ Procedure direction - Northumbria intranet based guidance to officers on specific issues

The force understands the risk and impact that adverse publicity about crime recording can have on public confidence although the subject does not appear on the force risk register. The force is now undertaking more audits in areas of risk including the key crime categories such as rape, sexual offences and burglary.

Northumbria Police is aware of the routes by which crime can be reported and has an understanding of the volume or categories of crime reported through each route.

The force has a small, flexible, risk- based audit capability led by the force crime registrar (FCR⁸) which, due to its size, has limited capacity. Regular audits of compliance with HOCR and NCRS are undertaken together with other audits of areas of identified risk such as out-of-court disposals. The audit regime adopted in Northumbria would benefit from a more comprehensive methodology to give senior leaders a better understanding of compliance.

Recommendation: Within three months, the audit methodology to monitor incidents to crime compliance should be expanded to enable auditors to listen to calls and track incidents through to finalisation, including ringing back selected victims. The methodology for out-of-court disposals should also assess compliance against all the criteria in ACPO⁹ guidance.

Audit findings and reports are discussed at both strategic and local management meetings and we found evidence of action being taken at force, local and individual levels to rectify the issues identified, such as the mis-recording of theft of mobile phones as lost property.

⁸ 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.

⁹ ACPO - Association of Chief Police Officers

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 170 incident records¹⁰ and found that 115 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 115 crimes that should have been recorded, 83 were. Of the 83, four were wrongly classified, one was over recorded and five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of serious 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).

We found incidents that had been opened with a crime code but closed as 'suspicious circumstances SK1' and further examination revealed crimes that should have been recorded. We also found incident logs opened and closed as 'concern for safety' which also included crimes that should have been recorded. The force is aware of this issue and is putting measures in place. Nevertheless, this is an area of risk in terms of accurate crime recording and a rigorous audit should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity to establish the scale of the problem.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force crime registrar should undertake a rigorous audit of incident logs opened and closed as 'concern for safety' and those logs opened with a crime code but closed as 'suspicious circumstances' to establish that all crimes have been correctly recorded against NCRS and the HOCR.

There was active supervision of crime and incidents in both the communication centres and in local policing areas with evidence of call-backs to the victims being undertaken by supervisors. This level of supervision did not manifest itself in the audit. We found that 25 out of 170 incidents examined showed evidence of supervisory involvement but we were satisfied that the appropriate supervision was being undertaken, if not always evidenced on the crime record or incident log.

We examined 50 reports that were categorised as 'concern for safety' referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments and recorded separately on other force systems. We found that from those 50 reports, 11 crimes should have been recorded and only 2 crimes were recorded.

¹⁰ 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.

Protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) units have systems and processes that effectively manage the high volume of referrals. Many referrals are passed to children's services for further enquiry prior to a joint visit or case conference but the police should retain primacy for all crime investigations. It is essential that referrals sent to a partner agency are followed up to assess progress on the case and to identify if a crime should be recorded.

Recommendation: Within six months, the force should appoint or nominate a suitably accredited person to oversee the follow up of all referrals to partner agencies to ensure that crimes are identified in a timely manner and recorded appropriately against NCRS and the HOCR.

The crime recording 'procedure direction' contains no reference to how staff should deal with reports of crime that have occurred in another force area. Despite this, officers and staff we interviewed had a good practical knowledge of what needed to be done to both record the crime and support the victim.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),¹¹ cannabis warnings¹² and community resolutions.¹³ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹⁴.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 16 cases, the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 10 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 19 cases where there was a victim to consult, one case showed that the victims' views had been considered.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 16 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 11 cases where there was a victim to consult; we found that none had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice. The force is aware that the issue of making the offender aware of the implications of accepting a penalty notice can be quickly rectified by redesigning the PND form to include this information.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 23 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In 21 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 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 16 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Ten cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹⁵.

We found evidence that audits of out-of-court disposals had been undertaken in the past, but many of the failures apparent during our audit could have been identified had force audits been more comprehensive and considered all the essential criteria specified for each type of disposal.

It was also apparent that many failures were due to a lack of appropriate documentation that was required for the audit; this had an impact on audit results. It would therefore be beneficial for the force to improve its document retention for this area of business. It should also undertake more rigorous and regular audits of out-of-court disposals to reassure chief officers and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) that improvements have been made.

Recommendation: Within six months, the force should ensure that document retention and forms management for all out-of-court disposals are improved. It should also introduce more rigorous, regular audits of out-of-court disposals to ensure that each complies with the relevant ACPO guidance.

¹⁵ 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.

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 73 no-crime records and found 49 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. We found that 11 out of 13 no-crime decisions for robbery were correct, 21 out of 30 no-crimes for violent crime were correct, with 17 out of 30 no-crimes for rape correct.

The audit identified a lack of understanding of additional verifiable information (AVI), the use of the balance of probability to determine a no-crime and a number of inappropriate retraction statements. There is no accreditation of the 62 dedicated decision makers¹⁶ (DDM); they lack independence from local performance pressures and there is a lack of effective monitoring of their decisions.

Recommendation: With immediate effect the force should reduce the number of DDMs to a smaller number of accredited individuals whose decisions to no-crime offences, other than rape, are independent of local performance pressures and audited by the force crime registrar to ensure independent scrutiny.

The number of no-crime decisions in relation to rape that we deemed to be incorrect was a particular concern. The two DDMs responsible were from the unit investigating the offences and there was no independent assessment by the FCR. The seriousness of this offence warrants independent scrutiny by an individual not connected with the performance regime. The FCR should be the final arbiter for all decisions to no-crime an allegation of rape, albeit this could be in liaison with the head of the protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) unit.

Recommendation: With immediate effect, the force should ensure that the force crime registrar is the final arbiter for all decisions to no-crime an allegation of rape, having liaised with the head of the protecting vulnerable persons unit.

In relation to both recommendations 6 and 7 that concern no-crimes, the force has taken immediate action on the recommendations.

¹⁶ 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.

Victim-centred approach

The force promotes, through chief officer briefings, a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crimes. However, our audit sample for the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013 showed limited evidence of a victim-centred approach with few updates on the victim page of crime reports. Call-takers were polite and professional but it was felt they could have displayed more empathy with victims.

In April 2014, Northumbria Police launched a revised 'Quality of Service Commitment' that strengthened its victim-focused approach to crime investigation and no crime decisions. There are now 'victim contracts', which are monitored through supervisory checks and there was a good understanding among all staff, in both communications and frontline policing, of the reasons for the commitment and what was expected of them.

The corporate communications department undertakes monthly surveys of both victims and callers. It was as a result of feedback from this process that the force recognised shortcomings in its service to victims; this prompted the new initiative in April 2014.

Rape

The force has a detailed rape investigation procedure instruction that is available on the force intranet. Reality testing confirmed that there was a clear understanding among officers and staff regarding their roles and the expectation that reports of rape will be recorded as soon as possible, as well as the shared understanding that 'investigating to record' is not acceptable.

All incidents involving sexual offences or rape, including reports from third parties, are scrutinised each day by the PVP unit, chief officers, the crime senior management team (SMT) and area command SMTs to ensure they are captured and accurately recorded. The force now has a better understanding of the totality of rape allegations, all channels of reporting and works closely with partner agencies and voluntary groups in the third sector to encourage the reporting of rape. There was no evidence during our audit of any mis-recording of rape.

The recording of a no-crime for an allegation of rape was an area of concern. Neither the 'procedure direction' for rape, or that for no-crimes generally, makes specific reference to the no-crime decision-making process for rape, save for reference to the role of the detective chief inspector who "*should dip-sample no-crime decisions*". There is also no reference in either document to the role of the FCR in auditing decisions. No-crime decisions in this sensitive area can impact on public confidence and the PCC and Chief Constable (CC) have responded swiftly to this finding and have ordered re-investigations of the crimes concerned (see recommendation 7).

As with crime generally, there is no specific reference or advice on how to deal with allegations of rape occurring in other force areas when the victim resides in Northumbria, although there is a good practical understanding among staff of how to deal with these situations. This knowledge appears to be passed from one officer to another and it may be beneficial for the force to specify the correct procedure to be adopted for dealing with all crimes, but especially rape, that occur in another force area.

IT systems

Northumbria Police uses a bespoke crime recording, incident and intelligence management system called Northumbria Police Integrated Computer & Communications System (NPICCS). In addition a system called Clue II¹⁷ is used to log information relating to force operations. Searching within NPICCS is possible but separate software is being developed to enable searches to be made across Clue II at the same time. The information computer technology (ICT) department undertakes backups of all the IT systems with audits of records undertaken by system owners.

People and skills

The force has sufficient resources responsible for recording incidents and crime, and staff had an appropriate level of knowledge of force procedures, HOCR, NCRS and NSIR¹⁸ commensurate with their role. There was evidence that staff in specialist units such as PVP had received specific training in relation to HOCR and NCRS. Briefings have been provided to all staff and supervisors on the use of out-of-court disposals such as cautions, PND and cannabis warnings.

Messages on the need for ethical crime recording from chief officers have been communicated by the use of bulletins, face-to-face briefings and individual SMT meetings with the relevant assistant chief constable (ACC). There was a strong focus on the quality of victim care and investigation, especially during 2014. This has been particularly evident in cases of sexual offences, rape and domestic abuse.

We did find evidence of deeply entrenched habits in some parts of the force, linked to previous performance regimes, which could inhibit accurate crime recording. It is clear that the extensive efforts made by chief officers to change the culture and working practices have yet to fully permeate the organisation. We found examples of local targets linked to crime reduction, crime recording influenced by not believing the victim, investigating-to-crime instead of recording the crime to investigate.

¹⁷ Clue II - logs information relating to force operations

¹⁸ NSIR - National Standards for Incident Recording

Some intermediate and junior managers were still locked into a performance culture with competing policing areas or units and robust challenges were being made to the information assessment and response unit (IARU) to reduce the number of crimes or alter their classification.

The force should satisfy itself that accurate crime recording in accordance with HOCR and NCRS takes primacy over localised performance pressures. It is clear that chief officers are trying to move away from a rigid, competitive performance culture. Monitoring performance, in itself, is appropriate and necessary but it must not happen at the expense of integrity and the accuracy of crime data.

Recommendation: Within six months, chief officers should satisfy themselves using a series of reality tests, that accurate crime recording in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR takes primacy over localised performance pressure.

Force Crime Registrar

The role of the FCR in Northumbria not only covers crime recording but also includes responsibility for incident standards and audits. As such, he is responsible for ensuring compliance with HOCR, NCRS and NSIR.

The FCR is able to act impartially and objectively and is supported by the chief officer team, having direct access to the DCC whenever necessary. Crime recording disputes are referred to the FCR and he is seen as the final arbiter, such as when the IARU is challenged over crime recording decisions by local supervisors.

The capacity of the FCR is limited as a result of staff numbers but the force is planning to supplement the role with sergeants on short-term attachments.

There was evidence of some local initiatives to address specific crime-recording issues but these were not compliant with national standards. Crime recording accuracy is essential and new local procedures to tackle specific crime problems should first be validated by the FCR to ensure compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force must ensure that any local procedures or initiatives established to combat specific crime or anti-social behaviour problems are validated with the FCR prior to implementation to ensure compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should issue an explicit message regarding crime recording accuracy and data integrity, promulgated throughout the organisation by the most effective means with subsequent checks to ensure the message has been received and understood.
2. The force should reduce the number of DDMs to a smaller number of accredited individuals whose decisions to no-crime offences, other than rape, are independent of local performance pressures and audited by the force crime registrar to ensure independent scrutiny.
3. The force should ensure that the force crime registrar is the final arbiter for all decisions to no-crime an allegation of rape, having liaised with the head of the protecting vulnerable persons unit.

Within three months

4. The audit methodology to monitor incidents-to-crime compliance should be expanded to enable auditors to listen to calls and track the incident through to finalisation, including ringing back selected victims. The methodology for out-of-court disposals should also assess compliance against all the criteria in ACPO guidance.
5. The force crime registrar should undertake a rigorous audit of incident logs opened and closed as 'concern for safety' and those logs opened with a crime code but closed as 'suspicious circumstances' to establish that all crimes have been correctly recorded against NCRS and the HOCR.
6. The force must ensure that any local procedures or initiatives established to combat specific crime or anti-social behaviour problems are validated with the FCR prior to implementation to ensure compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

Within six months

7. The force should appoint or nominate a suitably accredited person to oversee the follow up of all referrals to partner agencies to ensure that crimes are identified in a timely manner and recorded appropriately against NCRS and the HOCR.
8. The force should ensure that document retention and forms management for all out-of-court disposals are improved. It should also introduce more rigorous, regular audits of out-of-court disposals to ensure that each complies with the relevant ACPO guidance.

9. Chief officers should satisfy themselves using a series of reality tests that accurate crime recording in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR takes primacy over localised performance pressure.

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 Northumbria. 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 Northumbria Police recorded the following number of crimes.
170	115	83
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Northumbria Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Northumbria Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Northumbria Police recorded the following number of crimes.
50	11	2
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Northumbria Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
73	49	

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 Northumbria Police ensuring that leadership responsibilities and expectations for crime data integrity are clearly defined and unambiguously communicated to staff?

The deputy chief constable (DCC), who has been in place since April 2013, is the lead for crime data integrity. He chairs the operational policing review (OPR) and, as such, has the lead for overall force performance but this is not viewed as a conflict. He promotes the need for ethical, accurate crime recording through the OPR but also through the strategic management board (SMB), which is chaired by the CC and on which he sits. This forum has a wider membership including the PCC. There is evidence that all members of the chief officer team and not just the DCC promote the need for integrity in crime recording.

The force has a well established governance structure which, in addition to the SMB and OPR, includes monthly performance meetings in each of the six area commands and relevant departments at which senior management are held to account for performance, including compliance with NCRS and the HOCR, by the relevant assistant chief constable (ACC).

The message from the DCC is clear and consistent on the need to record crime accurately and at the earliest opportunity. Knowledge of this requirement is well understood by senior staff. We found that the knowledge and understanding of this message is more problematic, with junior officers and staff dependant upon the department or area command to which they are posted. Each area command and crime department has an NCRS 'champion'.

There has been much work done to promote the code of ethics, and the level of understanding among staff is good. It is apparent that officers and staff are not making the link between integrity in the code of ethics and the need to record crime accurately (see recommendation 1).

The DCC, as well as promoting the need for accurate crime recording, has also instigated a series of audits in response to suggestions that crime recording in one part of the force was not compliant with NCRS and the HOCR. Over 2,500 incidents without a crime record were examined which highlighted concerns in

the recording of crime associated with the 'night-time economy'. Corrective action was instigated and the audit was repeated on two further occasions with similar volumes of incidents.

There is a confidential reporting line managed by the professional standards department (PSD) that can be used to report concerns on crime recording, although none has been reported in the last 12 months. Officers and staff interviewed were confident that they could raise any concerns with line managers or supervisors in the first instance. The perception that senior management will take reports seriously has been vindicated by the actions of the DCC in instigating the specific audits of 2,500 incidents.

There is no specific policy for crime recording but there is a three page procedure instruction. It contains broad guidance on when to record a crime and the need for specific audits. It refers to both NCRS and the HOCR.

One of the objectives in the police and crime plan 2013-18 is to reduce crime although there is no specific target. As part of this document, the Chief Constable's delivery plan details what the force will do to achieve the objectives. This includes the need to 'ensure that crime recording is carried out with integrity'. The focus of the PCC on victims, rape and domestic abuse is well understood and is positively influencing crime recording and its timeliness.

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

The force understands the risks associated with inaccurate recording of crime; as one interviewee said, "the business is flawed without accurate crime recording". There was a broad understanding of the impact on public confidence and satisfaction as well as the impact on victims. As resources come under additional pressure, the need to ensure the accurate deployment of staff is paramount and there was an acknowledgement that this can only be achieved with accurate data. The need to maintain public confidence using different media was well evidenced when the PCC and the CC publicised their actions in response to feedback given during the debrief from this inspection.

In 2013, the force recognised the need for more comprehensive auditing to identify and monitor the risks associated with crime recording and these were put in place. They have identified their key crime categories as violence against the person (especially domestic violence), sexual offences, burglary and anti-social behaviour. These are some of the key areas to be audited to mitigate the risk of inaccurate recording. While all crime requires similar information for recording purposes, there is a proportionate approach with more severe crimes, or those with high vulnerability, attracting the need for more information primarily through the investigation plan or a more detailed 'modus operandi'.

There is an understanding of the different channels through which crime is recorded including telephone (both 999 and 101), third party referrals such as social services, the internet, email and even survey work. Each report receives an incident number and is recorded on the incident and crime system, NPICCS.

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

The FCR oversees a small audit team with limited capacity, although regular audits are undertaken to ensure compliance with HOCR, NCRS and NSIR. Opening and closing codes are used to identify audit samples and are therefore instrumental to facilitating the risk-based audit approach. There are also monthly audits of a range of issues including out-of-court disposals and there is flexibility, with audits focused on areas of risk. One such example was an audit of lost property which identified that theft of mobile phones was being recorded as lost property.

Findings from crime recording audits are included in the force's performance management regime. They are monitored and managed through forums such as the SMB, OPR and monthly department or area command SMTs performance meetings with the relevant ACC. One example was the audit finding on the timeliness of recording sexual offences and rape crime which was poor. This was addressed with the relevant unit.

Since June 2013, the force has been looking at trends and analysing the information at both team and individual level. Any errors identified during audit are referred to the relevant area or departmental head who take up the issue with the officer concerned. There is a three-week follow-up period for these interventions to ensure that issues have been addressed. By adopting this approach, a number of themes are being identified such as the use of standard phrases to finalise incidents and not record them as crime.

The audit regime adopted in Northumbria would benefit from a more comprehensive methodology to give senior leaders a better picture of compliance for crime recording. The conversion of incidents to crime should include a process where the crime is tracked from receipt of call to finalisation which would include listening to the caller as well as a selection of victim call-backs to check if their reported crime was actually what was recorded. For out-of-court disposals, compliance with all the ACPO guidance should also be assessed (see recommendation 2).

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 Northumbria Police effectively manage and supervise incidents, other reporting routes and crime records in order to ensure that crimes are correctly recorded?

We examined 170 incident records and found that 115 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 115 crimes that should have been recorded, 83 were. Of the 83, four were wrongly classified, one was over-recorded and five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There are no crimes reported directly from members of the public to the crime management unit.

There is a daily audit of approximately 150–200 incidents opened with a crime code and closed with a non-crime code, which is undertaken by staff from the force's two communication centres. Incidents with insufficient detail are referred back to the relevant officer. It is estimated by the force that this sample of 150-200 amounts to 5 percent of the total volume of incidents each day. Despite these audits, we found incidents that had been opened with a crime code but closed as 'suspicious circumstances SK1' which revealed crimes that should have been recorded.

We also found incident logs opened and closed as 'concern for safety' which revealed crimes that should have been recorded. A dip-sample during the inspection of 10 such files from the PVP unit identified 12 crimes that should have been recorded and the force had recorded just 1. The force is aware of concerns in this area and is putting measures in place but it is an area of risk for accurate crime recording and a rigorous audit must be undertaken at the earliest opportunity to establish the scale of the problem (see recommendation 3).

Supervisors in the communication centres also check two anti-social behaviour and two non-emergency calls at random each day which supplement the three incidents per call-handler per day that are also checked. In the policing areas, supervisors in response and neighbourhood teams check all incidents and crimes dealt with by their staff during their tour of duty to ensure they have been dealt with appropriately and accurately recorded. There was also evidence from supervisors of frontline staff undertaking victim call-backs to monitor the accuracy of crime recording and the performance of staff. The results of these call-backs are fed directly back to staff and form part of the performance review system.

Of the 170 incidents examined during the audit, in 159 the call-handler was polite and professional although we were of the view that the majority of calls were dealt with in a functional manner with little empathy shown with victims.

We examined 50 reports that were categorised as 'concern for safety', referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments and recorded separately on other force systems. We found that from those 50 reports, 11 crimes should have been recorded and 2 crimes were recorded.

Reality testing in the PVP units revealed that their systems and processes effectively manage the high volume of referrals but, as part of joint working in the PVP areas of responsibility, many referrals are passed to children's services for further enquiry prior to a joint visit or case conference. The police should retain primacy for all crime investigations and it is essential that referrals sent to a partner agency are followed up to assess progress on the case and to identify if a crime should be recorded. Rape offences are recorded in a timely and appropriate way and there is no reason why other offences should not be recorded in a similar manner. PVP would benefit from a suitably accredited person to oversee the follow up of referrals to partner agencies and ensure that crimes are identified and recorded in a timely manner against NCRS and the HOCC (see recommendation 4).

There is no crime recording policy and the procedure direction does not contain any reference on how staff should deal with reports of crime that have occurred in another force area, including the management of evidence and the transfer of relevant documentation. Despite this, reality testing in both the communication centres and the policing areas did show a good working knowledge of the requirements among staff and it was not considered to be an area of risk.

2.2. How does Northumbria 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 16 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 10 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 19 cases where there was a victim to consult, one case showed that the victim's 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 16 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 11 cases where there was a victim to consult; we found that none had their views

considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice. The force is aware that the issue of making the offender aware of the implications of accepting a penalty notice can be quickly rectified by redesigning the PND form to include this information.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 23 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In 21 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 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 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 16 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Ten cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

The audit looked at samples from the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013 and it was apparent that there was little evidence in the majority of disposals that the victim had been contacted or their views considered. It was also apparent that the vast majority of disposals were undertaken in custody suites following arrest.

However, reality testing during the inspection confirmed that there has been significant work undertaken by the force since April 2014 in support of the 'Quality of Service Commitment', which has reinvigorated the relationship with the victim. Individual victim contracts are in place, call-backs to the victim are now common and supervisors are more intrusive in this area of business. The PCC has also set up an independent scrutiny panel to review out-of-court disposals.

There is also evidence that there have been force audits of out-of-court disposals in the past. However, many of the failures apparent during this audit could have been identified had force audits been more comprehensive and considered the essential criteria specified in ACPO guidance for each means of disposal. It was also apparent that many failures resulted from a lack of appropriate documentation that was required for the audit which impacts on the results. Given the work undertaken since April 2014, and with the advent of the scrutiny panel, it would be beneficial for the force to improve the documentation retention in this area of business and undertake more rigorous and regular audits of out-of-court disposals. This should reassure chief officers and the PCC that improvements have been made (see recommendation 5).

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

We examined 73 no-crime records and found 49 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. We found that 11 out of 13 no-crime decisions for robbery were correct, 21 out of 30 no-crimes for violent crime were correct but only 17 out of 30 no-crimes for rape were correct.

No crime decisions are taken by any one of 62 dedicated decision makers (DDM) in the force. This introduces more inconsistency in an area where decisions can be subjective dependent on the evidence available. The audit identified a lack of understanding of AVI, the use of the balance of probability to decide on no-crimes and a number of inappropriate retraction statements. There is no accreditation of DDMs, they lack independence from local performance pressures and there is a lack of any effective monitoring process for their decisions (see recommendation 6).

The number of no-crime decisions in relation to rape that were deemed to be incorrect was of particular concern. The decision-making rests with two detective inspectors in the unit investigating the offences. There was no independent assessment by the FCR. The seriousness of this offence warrants independent scrutiny by an individual unconnected with a performance regime. The FCR should be the final arbiter for all decisions to no-crime an allegation of rape, although this could take place in liaison with the head of the PVP unit (see recommendation 7).

The PCC and the force are currently examining the feasibility of developing an external scrutiny panel to oversee no-crime decisions for rape as recommended in a regional strategy to tackle violence against women and girls. We would encourage this initiative.

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

The audit sample for the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013 showed limited evidence of a victim-centred approach with few updates on the victim page of the crime report. Those that were completed often contained generic phrases, such as "victim does not want contact" even when it was apparent that the crime was being investigated and the victim consulted. There were also examples of officers trying to discredit the victim in order to no-crime an offence, especially in cases of sexual abuse. Call takers were polite and professional but it was felt they could have displayed more empathy with victims.

The force has realised that this area of business needs to improve and in April 2014, it launched a revised 'Quality of Service Commitment' to strengthen its victim-focused approach to crime investigations and no-crime decisions. There are now 'victim contracts' which are monitored through supervisory checks and there was a good understanding among all staff, in both communications and area policing, of the reasons for the commitment and what was expected of

them. Peer reviews of victim contact and quality of service have also been introduced and the force is confident that the high profile, Operation Sanctuary¹⁹, will give more confidence for victims to come forward and report sexual exploitation.

The corporate communications department undertakes monthly surveys of both victims and callers and it was as a result of feedback from this process that the force recognised the deficiencies in their service to victims; this prompted the new initiative in April 2014. In addition, and as part of the commitment, call-backs are undertaken and recorded on the crime record with feedback provided to individual officers.

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

The force has a detailed rape investigation procedure available on the force intranet which, in addition to identifying individual roles, also makes links to the HOCR in relation to the recording of rapes and how to deal with third party referrals. We found a clear understanding among officers and staff of their roles, the expectation that reports of rape will be recorded as soon as possible and that 'investigating-to-record' is not acceptable. We found no evidence that they felt under any pressure to not record or to mis-record allegations of rape.

All incidents involving sexual offences or rape, including reports from third parties, are scrutinised on a daily basis by PVP, chief officers, the crime SMT and area command SMTs to ensure they are captured and accurately recorded. This scrutiny has improved the focus on these crimes since the start of 2014. The force now has a better understanding of the totality of rapes occurring in its area, process around which has improved since the implementation of Operation Sanctuary thanks to improved links with third parties and other agencies.

The recording of 'no-crime' for an allegation of rape was an area of concern. Neither the procedure direction for rape nor for no-crimes generally makes specific reference to the no-crime decision making process for rape, save for reference to the role of the detective chief inspector who "*should dip-sample no-crime decisions*". There is no reference in either document to the audit role of the FCR. At the time, our inspection no-crime decisions were taken by two DDMs in the unit investigating rape and there was no monitoring of these decisions by any independent person. This was an area of weakness and the force has taken immediate steps to rectify the situation (see recommendation 7).

¹⁹ Operation Sanctuary - Forcewide operation to combat sexual exploitation of vulnerable children and adults.

As with crime generally, there is no specific reference or advice on how to deal with allegations of rape that occur in other force areas when the victim resides in Northumbria. There is a 'procedure direction' for external forces that refers to the steps to be taken when another force reports an offence that occurred in Northumbria. Reality testing did confirm that despite this, there was a good practical understanding among staff of how to deal with these incidents. This knowledge appears to be passed from one officer to another and it may be beneficial for the force to specify the correct procedure to be followed when dealing with all crimes that occur in another force area.

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

Northumbria Police uses a bespoke crime recording and incident management system called NPICCS. The system was independently reviewed in 2012 and received favourable reviews when compared to systems in use in other forces. All crimes in force are recorded on NPICCS and all third party referrals were found to receive a force-wide incident number (FWIN). Intelligence is recorded separately on a system called Clue II. While searching within NPICCS is possible, separate software is being developed to enable searches to be made across Clue II at the same time.

The only issue identified with NPICCS is that once a crime has been created, if the location is subsequently found to be wrong it has to be recorded as no-crime and a new report created. The force is aware of this issue which is an anomaly within NPICCS.

All the IT systems, which also have backups, are capable of being audited and this is undertaken regularly by the information computer technology (ICT) department. There are owners for all the systems.

The ICT department has undertaken a number of changes to the force crime recording system to improve the quality of service to victims. For example, a new 'victim contract' field has been added to NPICCS to allow officers to access a summary of the victim contract plan, body worn cameras are helping to support vulnerable victims and an automated process is in place for the identification of high risk victims which triggers an enhanced level of service. The force's 'street to strategic' programme of work aims is to increase the quality of service, productivity and efficiency across the force by making information more reliable, accessible and timely if it is relevant to the recording of crimes.

People and skills

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

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

The force has sufficient resources available for the recording of incidents and crime. Incidents are allocated and recorded within the communication centres while crime numbers are allocated through a central unit called the information assessment and response unit (IARU), commonly referred to as the crime recording bureau. All the staff in these units had an appropriate level of knowledge of force procedures, HOCR, NCRS and NSIR. Officers and staff confirmed that they will contact the IARU if necessary for advice on the correct classification.

Sergeants and inspectors confirmed that they review all incidents and crimes owned by their staff to ensure an appropriate investigation, compliance with the victim's contract and compliance with NCRS and the HOCR. There was evidence that staff in specialist units such as PVP had received specific training in relation to NCRS and the HOCR.

Briefings have been provided to all staff and supervisors about the use of out-of-court disposals such as cautions, PND and cannabis warnings. Most will be administered within the custody area following the arrest of an individual and under the supervision of a custody sergeant. This focus on custody means that knowledge of the correct procedures for out-of-court disposals was more limited as officers rely on advice from the custody sergeants.

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

We found that messages on the need for ethical crime recording from chief officers have been communicated using bulletins, face-to-face briefings and individual SMT meetings with the relevant ACC. There was a strong focus on the quality of victim care and investigation, especially during 2014. This has been particularly evident in the areas of sexual offences, rape and domestic abuse. Despite these efforts there is still a disconnect in the minds of some staff between integrity in relation to the code of ethics (which is widely understood) and the link with integrity for crime recording (see recommendation 1).

There was evidence of deeply entrenched habits in some parts of the force linked to previous performance regimes that could inhibit accurate crime recording. It is clear that the extensive efforts made by chief officers to change the culture and working practices have yet to permeate all parts of the organisation. We found examples of local targets linked to crime reduction, crime recording influenced by not believing the victim and investigating-to-

record instead of recording the crime to investigate. We found that some intermediate and junior managers were still locked into a performance culture with competing policing areas, and units with robust challenges being made to the IARU to reduce the number of crimes or alter their classification.

In some areas officers felt under subtle pressure from supervisors in relation to crime recording through the use of local reduction targets or maximum crime recording targets adopted on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The force should satisfy itself that accurate crime recording in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR takes primacy over localised performance pressures. It is clear that chief officers are trying to move away from a rigid, competitive performance culture. Monitoring performance in itself is appropriate and necessary but it must not be at the expense of the integrity and accuracy of crime data (see recommendation 8).

Training on NCRS and the HOCR, including the need for accurate crime recording, has featured in the last 18 months but there was no evidence of crime recording integrity featuring in force selection processes although general issues around integrity do feature.

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

The role of the FCR in Northumbria not only covers crime recording but also includes responsibility for incident standards and audits. As such, he is responsible for ensuring compliance with HOCR, NCRS and NSIR. There is one assistant registrar and consequently, capacity is limited, although the team will be supplemented in September 2014 by the transfer of four validators from the communication centres whose role is to quality-assure all crimes recorded.

The force has recognised that in order to undertake more in-depth risk-based audits, its audit capacity needs to be bolstered. This will be achieved by seconding up to four sergeants into the unit for specific audits; this will not only assist the FCR who has responsibility for all audits, but also raise the sergeants' awareness of the importance of accurate crime recording that is compliant with NCRS and the HOCR.

The FCR is able to act impartially and objectively and is supported by the chief officer team, having direct access to the DCC whenever necessary. Crime recording disputes are referred to the FCR and he is the final arbiter, such as when the IARU is challenged over crime recording decisions by local supervisors.

There was evidence of some local policies being developed to address specific local crime issues. An example of this occurred in November 2013 when numerous wheelie bins ended up on bonfires and one area asked the local authority to make a single report direct to the area and not to record them as individual crimes. Another case included instances of shoplifting where an individual had been identified as the offender on CCTV, but the crimes were not recorded until he was eventually arrested. Both these issues were addressed and rectified when the FCR was made aware.

Crime recording accuracy is vital and the examples above are isolated but it is essential that any local procedures to tackle specific crime problems are first validated by the FCR to ensure their compliance with NCRS and the HOCR (see recommendation 9).