

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Gloucestershire Constabulary

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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 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.

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

Within Gloucestershire Constabulary chief officers promote the importance of data integrity throughout the force. The assistant chief constable (operations) is the lead officer for crime data integrity.

The force does not provide policies or guidance on the administrative procedures to be followed for all crime recording. The force directs officers and staff to the force website, which provides direct links to the Home Office site where NCRS and HOCR are available to view. HMIC found that as a consequence of this approach and an associated lack of training in relation to NCRS and HOCR, officers record crime in accordance with custom and practice; this brings the risk of inconsistency in recording crime.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should establish a crime recording policy and procedure for the recording of crime in line with NCRS and the HOCR. This policy should align to the systems and processes in place within the force and clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the officers and staff involved in the crime recording decision-making process.

The professional standards department offers anonymous routes by which staff can voice concerns about any ethical issue; this includes any concerns regarding the ethical recording of crime.

The force risk register does not specifically include crime data integrity, although there is a link in relation to the risk of failing external scrutiny on compliance standards. However, this does not then describe the risks the force has identified or how they should be mitigated.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and ensure that any risks identified are included in, and monitored through, the force risk register; and that any necessary actions identified to mitigate against these risks are completed.

The force maintains a flexible audit regime led by the force crime registrar (FCR)⁶; however, a lack of resources reduces the capacity of the FCR to carry

⁶ 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.

out audits over and above core NCRS work. There is no mechanism to identify common themes found during audits to feed them back into the organisation as learning points, although some issues have been identified and action taken to improve performance against the NCRS. The force has however recently developed a crime investigative standards audit plan; this provides aspirational statements of how the force wants to develop its auditing function.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should 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. This includes the capacity to respond to emerging issues and to re-visit and test the effectiveness of changes made to respond to identified shortcomings.

The force does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types; this includes rape. The absence of such codes limits the scope and effectiveness of auditing.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should expand its suite of incident opening and closing codes to enable a proportionate, efficient and effective audit of crime-recording.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

HMIC examined 110 incident records⁷ and found that 85 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 85 crimes that should have been recorded, 76 were. Of these 76 crimes, 7 were wrongly classified and 3 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This indicates a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime recording decisions.

Reports of crime are received primarily by telephone calls into the force control room. Our inspection identified issues in relation to third party reporting to a central referral unit (CRU), reports from which, although recognised by the force, are not regularly checked or audited. Many of these third party reports are held on separate databases in the CRU, and relate to child abuse, domestic abuse and vulnerable adults cases. We reviewed 12 such reports and found that 12 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 12 that should have been recorded as crimes only 5 had actually been recorded. As some of these

⁷ 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.

records related to sexual offences and assaults on vulnerable adults, this is a significant cause for concern.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to 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 with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

Within the force control room we found there was limited supervisory oversight of incident records. Of the supervisor reviews that do take place, none involve assessing compliance with the NCRS; rather they focus on national call-handling standards which do not make reference to the correct identification and accurate recording of crime.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that it has effective supervision and a structured, yet proportionate, quality assurance process in place within the force control room to check on compliance with the NCRS.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, penalty notices for disorder (PND),⁸ cannabis warnings⁹ and community resolutions.¹⁰ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹¹.

Cautions – Out of the 25 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in 24 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 24

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example often involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹¹ 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

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 18 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 25 PND. We were able to check the history of 21 cases and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 14 of them. In two 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 16 cases, where there was a victim to consult we found that 3 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warning – We dip-sampled 25 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 25 cases. In all 25 cases we could find no record that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 25 community resolutions and found that in 23 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 23 resolutions where there was a victim, 22 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 22 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹².

All out-of-court disposals are examined by a central quality assurance team; however, the checking is confined to ensuring documents are complete with all relevant boxes filled in. Faults identified are brought directly to the attention of the officer and their supervisor.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should improve the supervision of its use of out-of-court disposals to ensure that they are only used in appropriate circumstances and the views of the victim are taken into account. In particular they should not be used when the offending history of the offender precludes their use.

¹² 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 information¹³. We reviewed 53 no-crime records and found 46 records to be compliant with the HOCR and NCRS.

The chief inspector and sergeant from the centralised quality assurance team authorise low level risk no-crimes. High-risk crimes, including rape, are subject to more comprehensive scrutiny and monitoring by the FCR.

There is limited recorded evidence of victims being informed or updated of the final no-crime disposal. In 8 out of the 13 rape no-crimes we reviewed, there was no record that the victim had been informed of the police decision.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that, as part of the rape no-crime decision-making process, the decision to no-crime the reported offence is explained to the victim. The decision, rationale and victim notification should be recorded; finalisation of such crimes should be subject to scrutiny and review to ensure these actions have been completed.

Victim-centred approach

The force promotes a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crimes. The centralised quality assurance team reviews every crime to establish if the victim code has been applied. This includes ensuring victims have been informed of the disposal of the crime. However, we found victims were not always informed of outcomes. The force has identified poor performance in keeping victims updated, and has formed a service delivery group, the work of which includes a focus on this issue.

Most frontline officers and staff, including call takers, understand the victim-centred approach, display it in practice and are polite, professional and helpful.

Surveys of people who report incidents and crimes are routinely carried out. The results and data from these are used to inform force-level performance meetings and to direct service recovery at a local policing team level.

Rape offences

The force has a policy for recording crimes of rape which states that all reports of rape should be recorded as incidents, and that where an incident suggests a relevant crime has been committed, it will be recorded in compliance with the

¹³ Information which can be verified by the police to show that a recorded crime did not occur, thereby enabling the police to reclassify a recorded crime as a no-crime (HOCR, General Rules Section C, No Crimes)

NCRS. Most officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy; however, we found that staff in the force control room lack guidance on what initial actions should be undertaken when a rape is recorded.

The force maintains a rape and serious sexual offences action plan. This plan contains actions linked to improving compliance with crime recording.

The force does not have a written policy or procedure to deal with no-criming of rape. Sexual offence no-crimes are reviewed by a detective chief inspector. If this officer considers the request to be compliant to the NCRS, the matter will be assessed by the FCR. All rape no-crimes are decided by the FCR. We found that of the 13 rape no-crime decisions reviewed, 12 complied with NCRS/HOCR.

The force does not have a procedure detailing how officers and staff should deal with reports of rape which have occurred in another force area and how to manage the transfer of documentation.

IT systems

The force maintains a single information technology (IT) system for each of its incident (Storm) and crime (UNIFI) recording requirements; these two systems are not linked. There are other systems in use such as the three separate access databases used by the force CRU. The force will be using the additional features available in an updated version of UNIFI, (the force crime recording system), due to be released in late 2014. This will ensure that the three standalone central referral unit databases link to, and use, UNIFI as a basis for crime recording. This should help to improve the effectiveness of the force IT in securing crime data accuracy.

Work is being carried out by the force with the IT supplier to minimise the risk of records being lost in the transition to the next UNIFI update. This risk features on the force strategic risk register.

People and skills

The force does not always have sufficient staff and supervisors available who have responsibility for the recording or reviewing of incidents and crimes, and recognises that this has led to a backlog in crime recording. As a consequence the force is working to increase the number of staff in the control room; this should help to reduce the backlogs of crimes waiting to be entered onto the crime system.

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR; this is despite not having had any formal or structured training on NCRS and HOCR.

Most staff recognised chief officer messages and have a good understanding of the expected standards of behaviour and conduct with regards to crime recording. Non-adherence to HOCR is considered unacceptable. Senior managers and staff are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording, and in this inspection we did not find evidence of performance pressure leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

This inspection identified concerns regarding how the force records making off without payment offences¹⁴. Force practice is not to record these offences as a crime but to treat them as a mistake or civil dispute. This conflicts with the principles of the NCRS and HOCR and is not victim-focused. We re-examined 24 incidents of making off without payment; of these 18 crimes were not recorded as a crime when they should have been.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to review its policy and practice for dealing with reports of making off without payment, ensuring that it is compliant with the HOCR and the NCRS and that staff responsible for making crime recording decisions in respect of these offences are aware of the requirements to work within these policy guidelines.

The force provides some training to reinforce the requirement for accurate crime recording. During initial training, student officers and police community support officers (PCSO) receive an NCRS input in relation to initial investigation, incident creation and crime recording. However, in many cases, other frontline officers and staff have not received any training on the HOCR and NCRS.

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 registrar¹⁵

The FCR does not have access to the resources necessary to carry out his role to full effect. As a result of budget cuts the establishment of four auditors has been reduced to one. This one remaining staff member spends the majority of time examining police national computer (PNC) transactions and data protection

¹⁴ Making off without payment is mostly used to refer to the offence of driving away from petrol stations without paying for fuel taken, but it can also refer to non payment of services and other property, such as taxi fares, and restaurant meals.

¹⁵ 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.

audits. Little time is devoted to the application of the HOCR or NCRS. This lack of capacity to complete crime audits effectively has a material effect on the ability of the force to understand the extent to which it is able to secure crime data integrity.

The FCR personally carries out the monthly NCRS audit of incidents but he does not have the capacity to listen to the calls linked with the incidents; his work is therefore limited to the text of the incident record.

The FCR is well known by senior managers in the force and has access, when required, to the chief officer lead on crime recording. There have not been regular scheduled meetings.

The FCR is the final arbiter for the crime recording process and interpretation of the NCRS and HOCR.

Recommendations

For immediate attention

1. The force should take steps to review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and ensure that any risks identified are included in, and monitored through, the force risk register, and that any necessary actions identified to mitigate against these risks are progressed.
2. The force should take steps to 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 with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.
3. The force should take steps to ensure that as part of the rape no-crime decision-making process, the decision to no-crime the reported offence is explained to the victim. The decision, rationale and victim notification should be recorded; finalisation of such crimes should be subject to scrutiny and review to ensure these actions have been completed.
4. The force should take steps to review its policy and practice for dealing with reports of making off without payment, ensuring that it is compliant with the HOCR and the NCRS and that staff responsible for making crime recording decisions in respect of these offences are aware of the requirements to work within these policy guidelines.

Within three months

5. The force should establish a crime recording policy and procedure for the recording of crime in line with NCRS and the HOCR. This policy should align to the systems and processes in place within the force and clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the officers and staff involved in the crime-recording decision-making process.
6. The force should 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. This includes the capacity to respond to emerging issues and to re-visit and test the effectiveness of changes made to respond to identified shortcomings.
7. The force should expand its suite of incident opening and closing codes to enable a proportionate, efficient and effective audit of crime-recording.
8. The force should ensure that it has effective supervision and a structured, yet proportionate, quality assurance process in place within the force control room to check on compliance with the NCRS.
9. The force should improve the supervision of its use of out-of-court disposals to ensure that they are only used in appropriate circumstances and the views of the victim are taken into account. In particular they should not be used when the offending history of the offender precludes their use.

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 Gloucestershire Constabulary. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes	From these identified crimes Gloucestershire Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes
110	85	76
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Gloucestershire Constabulary and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Gloucestershire Constabulary should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Gloucestershire Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes.
12	12	5
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Gloucestershire Constabulary had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
53	46	

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

Within Gloucestershire Constabulary chief officers communicate an approach to crime recording which ensures senior managers, frontline officers and staff understand the need for ethical crime recording. Many officers and staff were able to recall messages being published in force bulletins on the importance of ethical crime recording, although some could not recall the content. Some staff we spoke with had attended leadership seminars and briefings where the chief constable had emphasised the importance of integrity around crime recording. The assistant chief constable (operations) is the lead officer for crime data integrity.

The professional standards department offers routes by which staff can voice concerns anonymously by telephone, by email, or both – but more could be done by chief officers to encourage police officers and staff to speak out in the event of any concerns about the integrity of crime recording.

The force does not provide policies or guidance on the administrative procedures to be followed for all crime recording. The force directs officers and staff to its website, which provides direct links to the Home Office site where the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) are available to view. We found that as a consequence of this approach, and an associated lack of training in relation to NCRS and HOCR, officers record crime in accordance with custom and practice; this brings the risk of inconsistency in recording crime.

The policing and crime plan does not make reference for the need to record crime accurately.

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

The force risk register does not specifically include crime data integrity, although there is a link to the risk of failing external scrutiny on compliance standards. However, this does not then describe the risks the force has identified or how they should be mitigated.

The force crime registrar (FCR) has a risk-based audit plan, established on the seriousness of the offence type and the ratio from incident to crime and results from previous audits. A monthly audit of 400 incident logs, opened as crime, is carried out by the FCR; the results are fed back to the performance operations meeting. The usefulness of audits could be improved by calls being listened to; however the force crime registrar does not have the capacity to complete this work.

Reports of sexual offences are referred immediately to the force duty detective sergeant and reports of robberies demonstrate a good level of supervision and direction. This is not apparent on all other incidents.

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

The force audits incident and crime records to assess crime recording accuracy and the application of the HOCR, NCRS and National Standard of Incident Recording (NSIR). However a lack of resources reduces the capacity of the FCR to carry out audits over and above NCRS work. The audit process is flexible and takes some account of emerging issues, such as the assistant chief constable commissioning an audit of crimes associated with a policing operation related to the recent badger cull in the force area. The force has recently developed the crime investigative standards audit plan; this provides aspirational statements of how the force wants to develop its auditing function.

The force does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types, including offences of rape. The absence of such codes limits the scope and effectiveness of auditing.

While the force conducts a significant amount of auditing of incidents and crimes using supervisors, crime inputters, and staff from the local policing units, no mechanism exists to identify common themes including problems, and to feed them back into the organisation as learning points. The force does not have a process in place to ensure the same incidents and crimes are not examined more than once (the exception being no-crimes); this is inefficient.

The results of the monthly NCRS audits are provided to the assistant chief constable lead. A review of cannabis warnings in early 2013 identified a 40

percent compliance rate. The results were discussed at the service improvement board and remedial action, including increasing awareness of the rules around issuing them, was taken. This led subsequently to improved compliance.

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

We examined 110 incident records and found that 85 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 85 crimes that should have been recorded, 76 were actually recorded. Of these 76, 7 were wrongly classified and 3 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

Reports of crime are received primarily by telephone calls into the force control room. Our inspection identified issues in relation to third party reporting to a central referral unit (CRU), which although recognised by the force, are not regularly checked or audited. Many of these third party reports are held on separate databases in the CRU and relate to child abuse, domestic abuse and vulnerable adults cases. We reviewed 12 such reports and found that 12 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 12 that should have been recorded as crimes only 5 had actually been recorded. As some of these records related to sexual offences and assaults on vulnerable adults, this is a significant cause for concern.

Within the force control room we found there was limited supervisory oversight of incident records. Of the supervisor reviews that do take place, none involves assessing compliance with the NCRS; rather they focus on national call handling standards which do not make reference to the correct identification and accurate recording of crime.

2.2 How does the Gloucestershire Constabulary 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 25 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in 24 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 24

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, 18 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 25 PND. We were able to check the history of 21 cases and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 14 of them. In two 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 16 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that 3 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warning – We dip-sampled 25 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 25 cases. In all 25 cases we could find no record that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 25 community resolutions and found that in 23 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 23 resolutions where there was a victim, 22 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 22 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

All out-of-court disposals are examined by the centralised quality assurance team; however the checking is confined to ensuring documents are complete with all relevant boxes filled in. Faults identified are brought directly to the attention of the officer and their supervisor.

In September 2013 the force commenced using PentiP¹⁶ to record all cannabis warnings.

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

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been reclassified on the basis of additional police verifiable information. We reviewed 53 no-crime records and found 46 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS.

¹⁶ PentiP is the national system for recording the issuing and collection of penalty notices and the collection of related penalties.

HMIC found limited evidence of victims being informed or updated of the final no-crime disposal. Notably, in just under half of the rape no-crimes, there was no record that the victim had been informed of the police decision.

The chief inspector and sergeant from the centralised quality assurance team authorise low level risk no-crimes. High-risk crimes, including rape, are subject to more comprehensive scrutiny and monitoring by the FCR.

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

The force promotes a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crimes. The centralised quality assurance team reviews every crime to establish if the victim code has been applied. This includes ensuring victims have been informed as to the disposal of the crime. However, we found victims were not always informed of outcomes. The force has identified poor performance in keeping victims updated, and has formed a service delivery group, the work of which includes a focus on this issue.

Most frontline officers and staff, including call takers, understand the victim-centred approach, display it in practice and are polite, professional and helpful. We telephoned eight people who had called the force reporting incidents; all were positive about their encounters with Gloucestershire Constabulary.

Surveys of people who report incidents and crimes are routinely carried out. The results and data from these are used to inform force level performance meetings and to direct service recovery at a local policing team level.

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

The force has a rape policy which was last reviewed in June 2013 and is available via the force intranet. The policy describes how all reports of rape should be recorded as incidents. It also says 'Where a report of an incident suggests a relevant crime has been committed, it will be recorded in compliance with the National Crime Recording Standards'.

Most officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy for dealing with reports of rape. Although staff in the force control room know the importance of recording relevant information when a rape is reported, they lack guidance on what initial actions should be taken. The force is in the process of producing a booklet to provide guidance to staff in respect of serious sexual assaults. This will be circulated to patrol officers and staff within the force control room.

The force does not have a written policy or procedure to deal with no-criming of rape. We found that of the 13 rape no-crime decisions reviewed, 12 complied with NCRS/HOCR. Similarly the force does not have a procedure for detailing

how officers and staff should deal with reports of rape which have occurred in another force area and how to manage the transfer of documentation.

Sexual offence no-crimes are reviewed by a detective chief inspector in consultation with the requesting officer. If this officer considers the request to be within NCRS the matter will be assessed by the FCR. All rape no-crimes are decided by the FCR.

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

The force maintains a single information technology (IT) system for each of its incident (Storm) and crime (UNIFI) recording requirements; these two systems are not linked. There are other systems in use such as the three separate access databases used by the force central referral unit (CRU). The force will be using the additional features available in an updated version of UNIFI (the force crime recording system) due to be released in late 2014; this will ensure that the three standalone central referral unit databases link to, and use ,UNIFI as a basis for crime recording . This should help to improve the effectiveness of the force IT in securing crime data accuracy.

All IT systems are well managed and are capable of being audited - records which may contain reports of crime can be isolated and reviewed. The force is not up to date with reviewing and weeding records.

Work is being carried out by the force with the IT supplier to minimise the risk of records being lost in the transition to the next UNIFI update. This risk features on the strategic risk register.

People and skills

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

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

The force does not always have sufficient staff and supervisors available who have responsibility for the recording or reviewing of incidents and crimes; the force recognises that this has led to a backlog in crime recording. As a consequence, the force is working to increase the number of staff in the control room; this should help to reduce the backlog of crimes waiting to be entered onto the crime system.

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, were generally found to

have an appropriate knowledge of the NCRS and HOCR; this is despite not having had any formal or structured training in relation to NCRS and HOCR.

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

The majority of staff recognised chief officer messages and have a good understanding of the expected standards of behaviour and conduct with regards to crime recording. Non-adherence to the HOCR is considered unacceptable. Senior managers and staff are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording, and in this inspection we did not find evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

This inspection identified concerns regarding how the force records making off without payment offences, primarily from petrol stations. The practice in the force for making off without payment offences is of not recording a crime, and a tendency to treat making off without payment offences as a mistake or civil dispute. This conflicts with the principles of the NCRS and HOCR and is not victim focused. The practice has developed where some staff in the force control room will phone the registered owner of the offending vehicle and ask if they have forgotten to pay for the fuel. We re-examined 24 incidents of making off without payment; of these 18 crimes were not recorded as a crime when they should have been.

The force intranet has a link direct to the NCRS and HOCR and these standards are easy to access by officers and staff. There is some training provided to reinforce the requirement for accurate crime recording. During initial training, student officers and PCSO receive an NCRS input in relation to initial investigation, incident creation and crime recording. Areas covered relevant to the NCRS include the victim focused approach to crime recording. New recruits joining the control room also receive input on the NCRS. However, in many cases, other frontline officers and staff have not received any training on the HOCR and NCRS. Staff in the crime evaluation and validation unit have also not received any formal training on NCRS or HOCR. Induction into the unit consists of new joiners working with another member of staff and learning on the job until they are considered ready to work unsupervised.

While officers and staff were able to describe accurately when crimes should be recorded, our audit during this inspection, as well as the force's own audits, show crime is being under-recorded.

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

We found that the FCR is active in his oversight of crime recording systems and processes within the force. The FCR does not, however, have the resources necessary to carry out the role to full effect. As a result of budget cuts, the establishment of four auditors has been reduced to one. This one remaining staff member spends the majority of time examining police national computer (PNC) transactions and data protection audits. Little time is devoted to NCRS or HOOCR matters. Although the FCR personally carries out the monthly NCRS audits, he does not have the capacity to listen to the calls linked with incidents. Listening to such calls provides more information than the narrative recorded on incident logs. It therefore increases the reliability of incident-to-crime audits.

The FCR has demonstrated how he acts objectively and impartially in managing the current audit programme and he attends several force meetings where crime recording standards are considered.

All crime recording disputes, including no-crime decisions are referred to the FCR if they cannot be resolved by departmental managers or the crime evaluation and validation unit. The FCR is widely regarded as the final arbiter for the crime recording process and interpretation of the HOOCR.

The FCR is well-known by senior managers in the force and has had access, if required, to chief officer leads on crime recording. There have not been regular structured meetings. He has recently attended a meeting with the current assistant chief constable lead to discuss crime recording and data quality, especially in relation to the focus of HMIC inspection activity.