

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Bedfordshire Police

November 2014

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-533-1

www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic

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Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. 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.justiceinspectors.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

Chief officers promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force and this has been reinforced to staff mainly by messages published on the force intranet.

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality in Bedfordshire Police. Not all staff are aware that the DCC has this role. Although accountable for performance in a broader sense, the DCC does not chair the force performance board (FPB). This is chaired by an assistant chief constable.

Since commencing the role, the DCC has introduced a continuous improvement board, which he chairs. The board examines issues including the force's progress in the implementation of recommendations made by external organisations such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) or HMIC.

The chief constable's one and five year plans describe how the force wants to improve compliance with NCRS and the HOCR in the short term and move to a long-term position where compliance meets nationally expected levels. The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance. It maintains several policies and procedures on crime reporting, crime management and criminal investigations that generally meet the requirements of NCRS and the HOCR. The information management strategy group are well-established and monitor various aspects of crime recording and assurance. HMIC found evidence of where performance in respect of NCRS and the HOCR non-compliance has been addressed.

We also note that the force's own NCRS audits, untested by HMIC, have shown an improvement in compliance over the last six months.

The force crime policy makes clear that all incidents and crimes should be recorded in compliance with NCRS, HOCR and the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR). The force has been an early adopter of the police service Code of Ethics.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes. This includes a facility for anonymous reporting into the professional standards department (PSD).

While chief officers are clear about the ethical standards required, we did not find evidence that chief officers had actively encouraged officers or staff to report their concerns. It is important for officers and staff to know they will be supported if they identify and report activity which is contrary to the high standards set.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should remind officers and staff of their responsibilities to report unethical behaviour, including that relating to crime recording; of the ways in which this can be done; and should provide re-assurance that disclosures will be treated in confidence.

The force crime registrar⁶ (FCR) is also the force registrar for the national standard for incident recording (NSIR)⁷. He is supported by a deputy who leads the force information standards team (IST).

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 63 incident records⁸ and found that 55 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 55 crimes that should have been recorded, 45 were. Of the 45, three were wrongly classified and two were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (for example, because certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

The force also has a centralised crime recording bureau (CRB) through which it has estimated that it records approximately 42 percent of all the crimes that are reported to the force directly from the public. The CRB records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. We audited 29 calls from the public and found that of the 30 crimes that should have been recorded, 30 were recorded correctly. This element represents an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

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.

⁷ The national standard for incident recording (NSIR) is designed to ensure that all incidents, whether crime or non-crime, are recorded by police in a consistent and accurate manner. This allows resulting data to be used at a local and national level for management and performance information purposes.

⁸ An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police, recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

The public protection unit support team (PPUST) use the case administration and tracking system (CATS) database to track child protection, vulnerable adults and domestic abuse cases referred to the force. We examined 50 reports which were recorded separately on the CATS database. We found that from those 50 reports, 16 crimes should have been recorded and 11 crimes were recorded.

Referrals reported by partner organisations via email and direct to the PPUST do not feature within the force audit regime. Owing to the high risk nature of offences reported through this route and the level of crimes we found had gone unrecorded, the force should introduce a regular audit to satisfy itself crimes are being recorded correctly against NCRS and the HOCR.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should establish a proportionate and effective process for auditing (by the FCR) referrals by other organisations (public sector, voluntary sector and private sector) to the force of incidents and reports of crime, with special attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

Force control room supervisors monitor live calls taken by call takers and approximately 300 calls a month are formally assessed for compliance with NCRS and NSIR. This is good practice.

Out of court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),⁹ cannabis warnings¹⁰ and community resolutions.¹¹ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹².

⁹ A form of immediate financial penalty used by police to deal with low-level offending such as being drunk and disorderly, retail theft, and minor criminal damage.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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

Cautions – Out of the 19 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 17 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, all cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 18 cases. In all 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 11 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that nine victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that when a cannabis warning is issued the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning and that a record is made to confirm that this has been done. This should be supported by effective and proportionate oversight.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 17 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 19 resolutions where there was a victim, 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 resolutions, 16 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹³.

No-crimes

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We examined 74 no-crime records and found 55 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. As the no-crime records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence this is matter of serious concern.

¹³ 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.

In particular, of the 23 rape offences recorded as no-crime we found nine that should have remained as a recorded crime. The majority of failures had insufficient additional verifiable information (AVI) to justify the no-crime decision.

The force has four designated decision makers¹⁴ (DDMs) all of whom are detective chief inspectors. Only DDMs can authorise a no-crime and they should not have been directly involved in the investigation to which the no-crime application relates. Rape no-crimes can only be authorised by the DDM within the public protection unit (PPU). The force estimates that approximately 25 percent of all no-crime decisions are audited by the force's information standards team (IST) and some rape no-crimes are also checked by the IST.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure guidance is provided to staff who make no-crime decisions. This should clearly describe the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS and HOOCR, and be supported by the introduction of proportionate and effective oversight by the FCR.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that the dedicated decision makers for no-crime decisions are independent of the line management of investigators responsible for the cases concerned.

The overall number of applications for no-crime each year for the three categories we examined is quite low however the quality of decision making needs to improve.

We found no evidence that any of the incorrect no-crime decisions were made as a result of a deliberate intention to improve force performance data.

Victim-centred approach

The DCC has introduced a victim satisfaction gold group to oversee performance in this area and the group monitors victim satisfaction data.

We found frontline staff, including call-takers, understood the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation; they are consistently polite, professional and helpful. Many staff are able to describe how chief officers, especially the chief constable, had consistently highlighted the importance of good victim care.

The force routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents or crime. We did not find any results that directly involved feedback, positive or otherwise, on the force's crime recording process.

¹⁴ 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.

Rape offences

The force rape investigation policy and procedure sets out how specialist officers from the public protection unit (PPU) and the rape investigation unit (RIU) should lead and manage all rape investigations. However, it does not explain in explicit terms exactly who is responsible for recording a crime from a report of rape and HMIC found some uncertainty amongst officers as to who should do so.

The procedure does not explain how officers and staff should deal with reports of rape and other crime types that have occurred in other force areas and reported to Bedfordshire Police and vice versa. It also fails to provide the detail of managing the transfer of relevant documentation.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should update its rape investigation policy and procedural guidance to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The policy and guidance should also specify how a rape reported to the force but committed outside the force area, is to be recorded

Although there are incident closing codes for sexual offences and serious sexual offences, the force does not have a dedicated closing code for rape. To have such a code would greatly assist with the monitoring and auditing of this type of crime.

IT systems

The force has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses that may contain reports of crime. The main two systems used are STORM for incidents, command and control and CMS for crime recording. These systems are not fully linked.

The force has removed the facility for officers and staff to create a database on any of the IT systems. This reduces the risk of information, potentially relating to a crime, being held on unauthorised systems.

At Luton, the local authority owns a system called FLARE that is used to record high-risk anti-social behaviour (ASB). Although the system is helpful in making sure that every effort is taken to capture ASB, there is a risk that it may contain crimes that are not recorded on CMS by the force.

Recommendation: Within three months and with the agreement of Luton Borough Council, the force should ensure that the FLARE system is regularly audited as part of its NCRS and the HOCR compliance process.

People and skills

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and those working in specialist departments were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and the HOCR. However, we found that many officers and staff who are required to make crime recording decisions have not received any training on NCRS or the HOCR.

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 training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

The vast majority of staff understand the chief officer message on ethical crime recording and the standards that must be achieved. Non-adherence to NCRS and the HOCR is considered unacceptable at all levels of the force and we found no evidence that performance pressures have led to failures to record crime correctly.

Force crime registrar

The FCR and his deputy have extensive knowledge and experience in the crime recording procedures, the management of crime data and the application of the NCRS and the HOCR.

The FCR has unrestricted access to the DCC who is the force lead for crime data integrity. All crime recording disputes are appropriately referred to the FCR who is the final decision maker in any disputes arising from the crime recording process.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should take steps to ensure that when a cannabis warning is issued the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning and that a record is made to confirm that this has been done. This should be supported by effective and proportionate oversight.
2. The force should ensure guidance is provided to staff who make no-crime decisions. This should clearly describe the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR, and be supported by the introduction of proportionate and effective oversight by the FCR.

3. The force should update its rape investigation policy and procedural guidance to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The policy and guidance should also specify how a rape reported to the force but committed outside the force area, is to be recorded

Within three months

4. The force should remind officers and staff of their responsibilities to report unethical behaviour, including that relating to crime recording; of the ways in which this can be done; and should provide re-assurance that disclosures will be treated in confidence.
5. The force should establish a proportionate and effective process for auditing (by the FCR) referrals by other organisations (public sector, voluntary sector and private sector) to the force of incidents and reports of crime, with special attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.
6. The force should ensure that the dedicated decision makers for no-crime decisions are independent of the line management of investigators responsible for the cases concerned.
7. With the agreement of Luton Borough Council, the force should ensure that the FLARE system is regularly audited as part of its NCRS and the HOCR compliance process.

Within six months

8. 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 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 inspection 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 Bedfordshire. 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 Bedfordshire recorded the following number of crimes.
63	55	45
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Bedfordshire Police centralised crime recording unit. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these reports received directly by telephone from the victim by the centralised crime recording unit HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Bedfordshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Bedfordshire recorded the following number of crimes.
29	30	30

Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Bedfordshire Police and held on other systems that contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Bedfordshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Bedfordshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
50	16	11
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery that Bedfordshire Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
74	55	

Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings

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

Leadership and governance

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

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

Chief officers promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force and this has been reinforced to staff mainly by messages published on the force intranet.

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality. The current DCC, an external candidate, was appointed four weeks prior to our inspection. Not all staff are aware that the DCC has this role. Since taking up his role, the DCC has introduced a continuous improvement board, which he chairs and this examines issues including the progress made against recommendations made by external organisations such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) and HMIC.

Whilst ultimately accountable for performance in a broader sense, the DCC does not chair the force performance board (FPB), which is chaired by the assistant chief constable.

The chief constable's one and five year plans describe how the force wants to improve NCRS and HOCR compliance in the short term and also move to a long-term position where compliance meets nationally expected levels.

The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance. It maintains several policies and procedural guidance documents on crime reporting, crime management and criminal investigations that generally meet the requirements of NCRS and the HOCR.

The information management strategy group chaired by the DCC, and the crime management system group chaired by the head of crime, are well established and monitor various aspects of crime recording and assurance. HMIC found evidence of where performance in respect of the NCRS and the HOCR non-compliance had

been addressed. An example of such action is the removal of the non-crimes feature on the crime management system (CMS) for making off without payment offences¹⁵.

We also note the force's own NCRS audits, untested by HMIC, have shown an improvement in compliance over the last six months.

The force crime policy does not explicitly state the need for integrity when recording crime. It does, however, make clear that all incidents and crimes should be recorded in compliance with NCRS, HOCR and the NSIR. The force has been an early adopter of the police service Code of Ethics.

The professional standards department (PSD) is a three-force collaboration (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire) that delivers presentations on police ethics and integrity to new staff. The PSD has a number of confidential routes by which staff can voice concerns. Officers were aware that these routes could be used to report concerns of crime data integrity.

While chief officers are very clear about the ethical standards required in crime recording, we did not find evidence of where chief officers had actively encouraged officers or staff to report wrongdoing by colleagues. It is important for officers and staff to know they will be supported if they identify and report activity which is contrary to the high standards set.

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

Overall, the quality of the incident and crime reports we audited was found to be variable. The force's own NCRS audits have also found that more information needs to be entered onto incident reports by officers when explaining why a crime has not been committed.

The force has mapped the various channels through which crime is reported and understands the proportion of crime reported through each; measures are in place to check the quality of crime recording through most of these channels.

The force has engaged with a wide range of diverse communities and foreign nationals using a variety of methods. It has also carried out work to identify levels of ASB and domestic abuse against them. This has not extended to an analysis of the true extent of the scale of crime committed against those communities, especially against those people who either cannot speak English nor have it as their second language.

¹⁵ 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.

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

The force is working hard to ensure crimes and incidents are recorded in accordance with HOCR, NCRS and NSIR, but it still has further work to do.

The force crime registrar (FCR) is also the force registrar for National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR). He is supported by a deputy who also leads the force information standards team (IST). To ensure compliance with NCRS and NSIR, approximately 300 calls a month are formally assessed by control room supervisors.

Only crime recording bureau (CRB) staff can validate a crime and the IST is responsible for making decisions on the reclassification of crime. This is a strength within the force crime recording processes. Both teams play an important role in the provision of quality assurance and we found evidence where remedial action had taken place to ensure that crime was recorded and classified correctly against the NCRS and the HOCR.

The information management strategy group (IMSG) considers and approves the force audit plan that sets out the crime and themes to be examined for the forthcoming year.

A monthly NCRS audit is carried out by staff from the IST and is conducted as part of the force's risk-based audit programme. The audit examines crime-related incidents to ensure compliance with NCRS, HOCR and force policy as well as guidance on crime recording. Results from the audit are forwarded to the CMS user group along with analysis and recommendations. The findings are also provided to superintendents at the north and south territorial hubs and the PPU. In addition, a spreadsheet containing a detailed breakdown of compliant or non-compliant records by offence category is produced and a summary of failures is used to provide feedback to staff.

The CMS user group has also asked the IST to examine stand-alone issues connected with crime recording. These have included hate crimes, serious sexual offences and no-crimes.

The CRB has a process where a crime will be recorded as it reaches the 72-hour NCRS limit if an update confirming a crime has not been received. This robust approach to keeping within time limits could result in some over-recording but we did not find any examples of this during our audit.

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

We examined 63 incident records¹⁶ and found that 55 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 55 crimes that should have been recorded, 45 were. Of the 45, three were wrongly classified. This is of concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (for example, because certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

Two of the crimes audited were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under NCRS and the HOCR and both were due to the unavailability of the witness (as opposed to any unnecessary delay caused by the force recording process).

The force also has a centralised crime recording bureau (CRB) through which it has estimated that it records approximately 42 percent of the total of its recorded crime. The CRB records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. We audited 29 calls from the public and found that of the 30 crimes that should have been recorded, all 30 were recorded correctly. This element represents an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

The public protection unit support team (PPUST) uses the CATS database to track child protection, vulnerable adults and domestic abuse cases referred to the force. We examined 50 reports which were recorded separately on the CATS database. We found that from those 50 reports, 16 crimes should have been recorded and 11 crimes were recorded. During our reality testing we visited the PPUST and checked 10 email referrals from other agencies into the unit. Within the 10 referrals sampled, we identified eight crimes that should have been recorded of which only three were recorded by the force.

¹⁶ An incident is a report of events received by the police that require 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 on the force's incident-recording system.

Referrals reported by partner organisations via email and direct to the PPUST do not feature within the force audit regime. Owing to the high-risk nature of offences referred to the unit, the force should introduce a regular audit of the CATS database to satisfy itself that crime is being identified and correctly recorded against NCRS and the HOCR.

Force control room supervisors monitor live calls taken by call takers and approximately 300 calls a month are formally assessed for compliance with NCRS and NSIR. A useful feature has been introduced on STORM whereby an incident raised with a crime code is shown in blue. This advises officers and staff that they can reasonably expect to see a crime recorded, and only a supervisor can close these incidents.

We found a backlog of incidents and crimes in the force control room and in the CMU, finding examples of incidents that were up to three weeks old but had yet to be recorded as a crime. This has been a long-term issue for the force.

2.2. How does Bedfordshire 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 19 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 17 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, all cases showed that the victims' views had been considered. Those cases that did not meet the criteria ranged from the offender being unsuitable to receive a caution to papers not being available for the audit team to review.

Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND) – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 18 cases. Four had an incorrect penalty code and in two the papers were not available for auditors. In all 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 11 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that nine victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In none of the cases did we find 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 17 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 19 resolutions where there was a victim, 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 resolutions, 16 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

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

We examined 74 no-crime records and found 55 records to be compliant with NCRS and the HOCR. As the no-crime records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence this is a matter of serious concern. In particular, of the 23 rape offences recorded as no-crime that we found 9 should have remained as a recorded crime. The majority of failures had insufficient additional verifiable information to justify the no-crime decision.

If an officer intends to convert a crime to a no-crime the officer will submit the rationale to their supervisor. This is then forwarded to the CRB who will then allocate it to a designated decision maker (DDM). DDMs are the detective chief inspectors in the north and south hubs, the PPU and in the CRB. In the event of the DDM not being available, a detective inspector will make the decision. The DDM cannot have been directly involved in the investigation relating to the no-crime but will usually be the line manager of the investigators concerned. Rape no-crimes can only be authorised by the DDM from the PPU.

Approximately 25 percent of all no-crime decisions are audited by the IST. It is not established practice for the FCR or the IST to examine every rape no-crime application. Taking into account the low number of rape no-crimes each year (about 30), we consider it appropriate for either the FCR or his deputy to quality assure every rape no-crime.

The overall number of no-crimes applied for each year in the three categories HMIC audited is quite low however the quality of decision making needs to improve.

We found no evidence that any of the incorrect no-crime decisions were made as a result of a deliberate intention to improve force performance data.

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

The DCC has introduced a victim satisfaction gold group to oversee performance in this area and the group monitors victim satisfaction data. Another recent development is where superintendents and above phone two victims, randomly selected, to establish their perception of the service they received.

The CARE card left with victims of crime contains a useful checklist for officers, their contact details and an agreement as to how often the victim will be updated, as well as entitlements under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Where applicable, a supervisor reviews the contracts at 28 and 60 days.

We found that frontline staff, including call-takers, understood the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation; they are polite, professional and helpful. We found many staff are able to describe how chief officers, especially the chief constable, had consistently highlighted the importance of good victim care. An example was provided where audits had directly led to disciplinary action against a member of staff for not dealing properly with victims' calls.

During reality testing we spoke with a new recruit who, without prompting, was able to recall the NCRS input he had received, as well as explain the need to care for victims and what this would involve in practice.

The force routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents or crime. We did not find any results that directly involved feedback, positive or otherwise, on the force's crime recording processes.

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

All reports of rape are included within the force daily log, which is monitored by chief officers and highlights critical incidents, incidents of note and serious crime.

The rape investigation policy and procedural guidance sets out how specialist officers from the PPU and the rape investigation unit (RIU) will lead on and manage all rape investigations. However, it does not explain in explicit terms exactly who is responsible for recording a crime from a report of rape and HMIC found some uncertainty amongst officers as to who should do so.

The procedure does not explain how officers and staff should deal with reports of rape, and other crime types that have occurred in other force areas but reported to Bedfordshire Police and vice versa, or the detail of managing the transfer of relevant documentation.

Whilst there are incident closing codes for sexual offences and serious sexual offences, the force does not have a dedicated closing code for rape. To have one would assist with monitoring and auditing this crime type.

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

The force has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses that may contain reports of crime: these are the incident management system, STORM; the crime management system, CMS; the intelligence system, Patriarch and the CATS database for referrals from other agencies. These systems are not fully integrated or linked.

Some limited use is made of mobile data devices to record crime and the force is currently exploring ways in which to make more use of the latest technology under Programme METIS, this includes the use of mobile data tablets.

The force has removed the facility for officers and staff to create a database on any of the IT systems. This reduces the risk of information, potentially relating to a crime, being held on unauthorised systems.

At Luton the local authority owns a system called FLARE, which is used to record high-risk anti-social behaviour (ASB). Whilst the system is useful in terms of making sure that every effort is taken to capture ASB, this is a system where information on crime could be stored and potentially not recorded on CMS by police as required by NCRS and the HOCR.

People and skills

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

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

The force does not currently have sufficient staff and supervisors responsible for the recording and reviewing of incidents and crime. The force control room is currently 11 staff short of its establishment of 120 full-time equivalents (FTE). A new intake of 11 new starters was planned for August 2014.

The CRB is currently just under establishment with 27 staff in place out of a total of 30 FTE positions. We were informed that staff in the CRB are able to process about 50 crimes a day but this had reduced over time to between 25-30 owing to additional information being required for each crime. This in turn has led to backlogs.

The force control room place queued crime incidents into a facility known as queue 40. Control room staff cannot record a crime so any incidents that await action and that may contain a crime, wait on this queue for allocation. The crime is therefore unrecorded until it is forwarded either to an officer or to the CRB. We found 44 incidents on this system with 14 being over the 72 hour NCRS time limit. The force daily management meeting, chaired by the assistant chief constable, includes

actions, incidents, crime numbers and a focus on trying to reduce incidents residing on queue 40. This is unlikely to be resolved until the replacement staff are trained and fully operational.

Although our audit identified some deficiencies, the staff and supervisors responsible for applying out-of-court disposals and no-crimes were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS, HOCR and national guidance.

Some officers had received training on the use of restorative justice. Although supervisors within the force control room have received some training on NCRS, HOCR and AVI, other staff such as call takers have not received any training. Some longer serving officers and staff have not received any training on NCRS or the HOCR.

The deputy FCR has recently delivered training on NCRS and the HOCR to newly recruited police officers and outcomes training to supervisors. The IST has helpfully produced pocket-sized guidance for officers explaining the detail, differences and key points to prove for malicious communications, harassment and stalking offences.

We examined NCRS related guidance on the intranet and found some to contain out-of-date information, included guidance for dealing with hate crime. Several documents were out-of-date by at least two years and did not reflect the more robust approach taken by the force when recording crime. Despite this, we did find useful and relevant information on the intranet, although the site is not easy to navigate.

The force has five (four full-time and one part-time) auditors working on weekly and monthly audits whilst the FCR and his deputy carry out quality control. The force FCR is also the operational lead for monitoring compliance against National Standards for Incident Recording. A summary of audit failures is published following each NCRS audit. An opportunity exists for the force to collate this information by theme, introduce the themes into training and provide a succinct guide on the intranet to officers highlighting regular NCRS failures.

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

The majority of staff have heard and understand the chief officers' messages on the required standards of behaviour and conduct with regards to crime recording. Overall we found the culture to be one of integrity in crime recording practice. We did, however, find an example in Luton where authorisation is still required from a supervisor before an officer can record crimes of burglary and robbery. This is an outdated practice and officers should have the authority to record what they find and in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR. Permission is not required from a higher-ranking officer.

We found no recent evidence of pressure to under-record or mis-record crime. Non-adherence to NCRS and the HOCR is considered unacceptable by those with whom we spoke. Above all, it is clear that there is no longer pressure, explicit or implied, to under-record or mis-record crime or in any way work outside NCRS, HOCR or national guidelines in terms of outcomes.

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

We found the FCR and his deputy to be active in their oversight of crime recording systems and supporting processes in the force. They have specific responsibility for ensuring that NCRS and the HOCR are consistently applied. They are well known to senior managers and by many officers and staff. Both show objectivity, impartiality and considerable professionalism in managing the current force audit programme.

They are known to be and operate as the final decision-maker for any disputes that arise from the crime recording process. Both currently have access to the deputy chief constable lead for crime data integrity, with whom they discuss crime recording and data issues.