

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Cheshire 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

Chief officers in Cheshire Constabulary promote the importance of data integrity throughout the force. The assistant chief constable is the named officer responsible for crime data integrity. The officer has introduced a local rule of recording a crime as soon as possible and, in any event, within 24 hours.

The force has a well-established governance structure with which to monitor performance including crime data integrity. We found some evidence of a performance review of crime data integrity at a local command level. This is good practice, which could be introduced formally across all local command teams.

The force has an internal reporting route to the professional standards department that officers can use to raise concerns over any unethical practices; however there has been no specific encouragement for members of staff to report crime-recording concerns via this or any other route.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure all police officers and police staff have unimpeded and reliable knowledge of and access to an adequate system for the confidential reporting and effective handling of concerns in relation to crime-recording.

The force has no policies or strategies to direct and inform crime recording, relying instead on officers to comply with the NCRS and HOCR. This absence of policy is significant as the force has moved towards a decentralised approach to crime recording, and relies on local supervisors to monitor and manage compliance with NCRS and HOCR.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should introduce crime-recording policies and procedures that are compliant with the NCRS and HOCR to underpin ethical crime recording and reflect the working practices recently introduced by the force.

Crime is reported to the force from a variety of routes, including telephone calls, those reported directly by the public at police station front counters and officers on patrol, and those reported to the force by other agencies. Whilst the force has a good understanding of the routes through which crime is reported there is no evidence that a strategic assessment of any associated risk has been completed, and crime data integrity does not feature on the force strategic risk register.

The force has identified issues with the accuracy of records created and updated directly by officers, and the absence of effective safeguards to protect the accuracy of crime recorded through this route.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should put in place safeguards to protect the accuracy of crime, which is recorded directly by officers onto the crime-recording system, and ensure this route for crime recording features in the audit regime.

The force maintains a flexible audit plan that can take into account emerging issues. The assistant chief constable steers any additional audit activity. Actions to address identified crime data integrity issues are managed by specific officers who check records each day and ensure compliance and adherence to allocated tasks. We found an example where the results of a review of burglary in an area were fed back to the supervisor concerned; this resulted in improved understanding, and application of NCRS.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 96 incident records⁶ and found that 90 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 90 crimes that should have been recorded, 62 were recorded. Of the 62, four were wrongly classified and 19 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There is a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime-recording decisions.

The force has a centralised crime-recording facility through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 22 percent of the total of their recorded crime. This facility involves operators within the force control centre who are trained to record reports of crime directly from members of the public, which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this function (a review of 18 calls from the public) found that of the 20 crimes that should have been recorded, 18 were, of which two were classified wrongly but all 18 were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

We examined nine incidents that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments. Of the nine crimes (from these incidents) that should have been recorded, six had been recorded. Of these one was recorded

⁶ 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.

outside of the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. As some of these records related to reports of domestic violence, this is a significant cause for concern.

The quality of call handling is crucial for accurate crime recording, we found that call monitoring by force control room supervisors is ad hoc. The force has a defined quality assurance standard and call-handling supervisors are required to sample one emergency and one non-emergency call type per shift. However, realistically, this does not always happen, due to capacity issues within the force control room.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should introduce a consistent and structured approach to call-handling quality assurance processes, ensuring that compliance with NCRS is at its core.

The force does not have a policy or procedure for how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area and how they should manage the transfer of documentation. This is an area of potential risk in terms of crime recording and victim service.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),⁷ cannabis warnings⁸ and community resolutions.⁹ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹⁰.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in all 20 cases the offender's previous history made it suitable for them to receive a caution. In 15 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 13 cases where

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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

there was a victim to consult, 6 cases showed that the victim's views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In all 20 cases we found evidence that showed the offender had been made aware of the future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 14 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found 4 where the victim's 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 16 cases. We found no evidence in any of the samples, which showed that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 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 18 resolutions where there was a victim, 15 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Seventeen cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹¹.

The appropriateness of out-of-court disposals is monitored and managed at force or local level but not in all cases. We found no evidence of the supervision of any PND or cannabis warnings, whilst conversely we found supervision and approval for the use of community resolutions rests at chief inspector level, and therefore there is a degree of consistency. Chief inspectors are also responsible for ensuring that standards are maintained in relation to the outcomes of domestic violence and hate crime investigations. However, whilst this is good practice, there is a clear need for improvement in the consideration of the victims' views when considering the use of cautions and PND for victim based offences.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that the oversight of the decision to use out-of-court disposals is sufficiently robust so that where the offence has a victim, the views of the victim in respect of the use of the disposal are considered properly and adequately.

¹¹ 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, 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 subsequently has been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We reviewed 71 no-crime records and found 42 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. As the records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence this is a significant cause for concern and is a matter of material and urgent importance.

We found that responsibility for most no-crime decisions rested with designated officers called crime reviewers. Rape no-crime decisions were managed within the dedicated rape investigation unit. Given the amount of no-crime decisions that we found to have failed our audit the force has taken the decision that to ensure the consistent application of additional verifiable information, and the accuracy of no-crime decisions, they will in future be overseen by the force crime registrar (FCR)¹².

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure guidance is provided to officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should begin the operation of an adequate system for the auditing by the FCR of no-crimes to ensure they are compliant with the HOCR and NCRS, and the results of this audit should be reported into the force performance meetings.

Victim-centred approach

Cheshire Constabulary's transforming policing programme promotes a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crime decisions. Our inspection found that frontline members of staff, including call-takers, understand the victim-centred approach. Call-handling operators were found to be polite, sympathetic, professional and treated people with respect leading to targeted questioning and good initial investigations.

The force routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents and crime. The force makes use of some of the customer satisfaction data, feedback and complaints to help improve crime-recording processes. The force also uses a scheme where people who have had experience of contacting the constabulary are invited to come into the force and give feedback on their customer experience

¹² 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.

Rape offences

The force does not have a policy to describe how to deal with the recording of reports of rape. There is a force procedure, which relates to the investigation of serious sexual offences and victim aftercare, published in August 2009, which clearly incorporates procedures for dealing with offences of rape; however there is no reference to recording a crime.

Our audit and fieldwork revealed that officers within the dedicated rape unit had a general understanding of crime-recording requirements; this was not reflected within public protection units where the level of knowledge of NCRS and HOCR was found to be low.

HMIC found examples where rape crimes had been recorded late, and an example where a report of rape had not been recorded as a crime but closed as a crime-related incident. This is a serious issue which precludes the force from having a clear picture of all offending that is occurring in the force area, more importantly the service and support made available to the victim may not always be what it should be.

The force also has no policy to deal with reports of rape, which occur in other force areas. When these are reported the dedicated rape unit normally will assume responsibility, and discharge all requirements including the transfer of documents and videos personally or via a courier.

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

Our inspection found that the no-crime criteria were not widely understood. Out of 30 rape no-crime decisions reviewed, 14 were found to have been no-crime incorrectly. Reality testing revealed inconsistencies, and the use of opinion rather than additional verifiable information within the decision-making. There is some evidence that issues such as mental health and alcohol dependency can influence the investigative process negatively, and in some instances delay or even stop the recording of a crime. This is not acceptable.

The dedicated rape unit provides a monthly overview of rape reporting, investigations, classification and no-crime decisions for the chief officer group. However, our findings suggest that while the data is provided, this does not amount to effective oversight of this critical area of business.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should establish the terms of reference for a review of the management of reports of rape, and of the use of no-criming of recorded reports of rape from the last 18 months and; without undue delay commence this review, to ensure all such

reports have been recorded as crimes in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS, that any incorrect no-crime decisions are re-recorded, the victim provided with the level of service they should expect and where possible offenders brought to justice.

IT systems

Cheshire Constabulary uses a single computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions these systems are linked. Both of these systems are well managed, with regular system audits and weeding out information. The force retains a standalone computer system for the management of serious sexual offences.

People and skills

Staff and supervisors who review incidents, crimes, out-of-court disposals, and no-crimes have been trained on, and demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of force policies, HOCR, NCRS and the National Standard of Incident Recording. However there is limited capacity available to conducting this work, which has an impact upon the effectiveness of the quality assurance process.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should assess its capacity to supervise and review crimes, out-of-court disposals, and no-crimes, and, to the greatest extent economically feasible, enhance this capacity to provide effective oversight.

HMIC found that there is a low level of knowledge of the NCRS and HOCR among frontline officers and staff including those in specialist areas. The force did deliver mandatory training to all operational staff when direct crime recording by officers was introduced, however this training was focused on how to record a crime onto the force computer systems, and not on the NCRS and HOCR compliance. The force is delivering further training on supervision of crimes and investigation at present, which provides the opportunity to provide guidance on NCRS and HOCR compliance to supervisors.

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 have responsibility for making crime recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

Some, but not all, officers and staff have heard chief officer messages and have a clear understanding of the expected standards of behaviour and conduct with regard to crime recording. Senior managers are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and in this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

Force crime registrar

We found that the Cheshire Constabulary's FCR is able to act objectively and impartially to seek to ensure the force records crime correctly and is involved in audit programmes that are aimed at securing high standards of data integrity, but not the development, implementation and monitoring of crime recording and outcome policies.

The decentralised nature of crime-recording in the force makes it difficult for the FCR to implement effective on-going monitoring and oversight of crime-recording accuracy. This difficulty is exacerbated by insufficient numbers of staff provided to carry out the quality assurance monitoring.

The FCR has the full support of, and access to, the assistant chief constable with lead responsibility for crime data quality. Most crime-recording disputes are appropriately referred to the FCR who was seen as the final arbiter.

Recommendations

For immediate attention

1. The force should ensure all police officers and police staff have unimpeded and reliable knowledge of and access to an adequate system for the confidential reporting and effective handling of concerns in relation to crime-recording.
2. The force should introduce crime-recording policies and procedures that are compliant with the NCRS and HOCR to underpin ethical crime recording and reflect the working practices recently introduced by the force.
3. The force should introduce a consistent and structured approach to call-handling quality assurance processes, ensuring that compliance with NCRS is at its core.
4. The force should take steps to ensure that the oversight of the decision to use out-of-court disposals is sufficiently robust so that where the offence has a victim, the views of the victim in respect of the use of the disposal are considered properly and adequately.
5. The force should ensure guidance is provided to officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS.
6. The force should begin the operation of an adequate system for the auditing by the FCR of no-crimes to ensure they are compliant with the HOCR and NCRS, and the results of this audit should be reported into the force performance meetings.

7. The force should establish the terms of reference for a review of the management of reports of rape, and of the use of no-criming of recorded reports of rape from the last 18 months and; without undue delay commence this review, to ensure all such reports have been recorded as crimes in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS, that any incorrect no-crime decisions are re-recorded, the victim provided with the level of service they should expect and where possible offenders brought to justice.

Within three months

8. The force should put in place safeguards to protect the accuracy of crime which is recorded directly by officers onto the crime recording system, and ensure this route for crime recording features in the audit regime.
9. The force should introduce guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime-recording is to be effected in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.
10. The force should assess its capacity to supervise and review crimes, out-of-court disposals, and no-crimes, and, to the greatest extent economically feasible, enhance this capacity to provide effective oversight.

Within six months

11. The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime-recording for all police officers and police staff who have responsibility 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 Cheshire 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 Cheshire Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes.
96	90	62
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Cheshire Constabulary 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 Cheshire Constabulary should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Cheshire Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes.
18	20	18
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of other reports recorded by Cheshire Constabulary and held on systems other than their crime system.	From these reports HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Cheshire Constabulary should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Cheshire Constabulary recorded the following number of crimes.
9	9	6
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Cheshire Constabulary had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
71	42	

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

Within Cheshire Constabulary we found the assistant chief constable (ACC) to be responsible for crime performance, recording and management but not incident recording, which is held by another chief officer. The ACC has detailed knowledge of the NICHE crime recording system and carries out regular thematic reviews of performance in conjunction with an examination of recording standards. We found that the ACC was driving home the message of performance with integrity and has introduced a local rule of recording crime as soon as possible and in any event within 24 hours.

The primary forum for dissemination of messages on integrity is the crime investigators' group meetings chaired by the ACC and attended by superintendents and detective chief inspectors. Also, the ACC has organised workshops on recording accuracy, holds meetings on the issue and spends time with operational officers where she also communicates messages about ethical recording. Inspectors found that local police command performance reviews include an element on crime data integrity.

There is no specific encouragement for members of staff to report crime-recording concerns; there is however, a well-publicised, dedicated hot-line set up by the force through Crimestoppers for reporting any integrity issues, and a professional standards department reporting line. However officers commented that local managers deal with most concerns with the occasional referral to the force crime registrar (FCR).

There are no specific policies or strategies that cover crime recording; rather the stated approach of the force is one of compliance with the NCRS and HOCR. This is a significant gap when the force has moved towards a decentralised approach to crime recording. Within the force structure there is a reliance on local supervisors to manage recording standards supported by area crime and

intelligence hubs; however, standards of monitoring and supervision of recording standards are variable across the force.

Whilst there is limited reference to the need for accurate crime data in the police and crime plan, there are several references to priorities on reducing crime and protecting vulnerable people. reference is made to the need for accurate information in measuring performance.

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

The ACC has an overview of risk which is informed by the generic audit programme, specifically commissioned audits, additional dip-sampling and weekly reports on relevant crime types. We found that risk assessments of inaccurate crime recording are driven by the current performance focus and that data is used to identify different recording behaviours and shifting patterns around charging and the use of alternative disposals.

The force does not have a policy regarding a proportionate approach to the level of detail included in crime records, nor are there defined recording standards for particular crime categories. Significant or priority incidents and crime records tend to have more detail recorded as more resources are deployed, more tasks are allocated and more results are recorded. As a result, more serious offences tend to involve more detailed recording.

Crime is reported to Cheshire Constabulary from a variety of routes, including telephone calls into the force, those reported directly by the public at police station front counters and to officers on patrol, and those reported to the force by other agencies. Whilst the force has a good understanding of the routes by which crime is reported, there is no evidence that a strategic assessment of any associated risk has been completed, and crime data integrity does not feature on the force strategic risk register.

The force has identified issues with the accuracy of records created and updated directly by officers, and the absence of effective safeguards to protect the accuracy of crime recorded through this route.

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

The force maintains a flexible audit plan, which can take into account emerging issues; the ACC oversees this work. Within the previous 12 months, audits have included sexual offences and rape, and no-crime decisions. We found that whilst these audits are conducted ostensibly to assess crime-recording accuracy they are concerned mainly with the investigative process. The limitation of these audits is demonstrated by the result of our inspection, in

particular the recording and no-criming of rape reports which show some significant areas of concern.

Following an internal audit by the police and crime commissioner, audit results now are escalated to the strategic delivery board chaired by the deputy chief constable, and they feature at the crime investigation board. Audit results are usually taken into account during local police command crime performance management and review processes.

The force has moved to a decentralised model of crime recording. Training has been given to people who have crime-recording responsibilities and additional training is given when risks are identified such as refresher training on the use of NICHE. Inspectors found an example where the results of a review of burglary in an area were fed back to the supervisor concerned; this resulted in an improved understanding, and application of NCRS. However, relying on local supervisors to ensure remedial action and learning takes place leads to inconsistency and there is no ongoing monitoring of crime input or classification.

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

We examined 96 incident records and found that 90 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 90 crimes that should have been recorded, 62 were recorded. Of the 62, four were wrongly classified and 19 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There is a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime-recording decisions.

The force also has a centralised crime recording facility through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 22 percent of the total of their recorded crime. This facility involves operators within the force control centre who are trained to record reports of crime directly from members of the public, which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this function (a review of 18 calls from the public) of the 20 crimes that should have been recorded, 18 were, of which two were wrongly classified but all 18 were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

We examined nine incidents that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments. Of the nine crimes (from these incidents) that should have been recorded, six had been recorded. Of these one was recorded

outside of the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. As some of these records related to reports of domestic violence, this is a significant cause of concern.

Call monitoring by force control room supervisors is ad hoc and there are questions around the capacity to do this consistently. The force has a defined quality assurance standard and call-handling supervisors are required to sample one of each call type per shift. However, this does not always happen.

The force does not have a policy or procedure for detailing how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime, which have occurred in another force area and how to manage the transfer of documentation. This is an area of potential risk in terms of crime recording and victim service.

2.2 How does Cheshire 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 20 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in all 20 cases the offender's previous history made it suitable for them to receive a caution. In all 15 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 13 cases where there was a victim to consult, 6 cases showed that the victim's views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In all 20 cases we found evidence that showed the offender had been made aware of the future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 14 cases where there was a victim to consult we found 4 where the victim's 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 16 cases. We found no evidence in any of the samples which showed that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 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 18 resolutions where there was a victim, 15 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Seventeen cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

The appropriateness of out-of-court disposals is monitored and managed at force or local level but not in all cases. We found no evidence of the supervision of any PND or cannabis warnings, whilst conversely we found supervision and approval for the use of community resolutions rests at chief inspector level, and therefore there is a degree of consistency. Chief inspectors are also responsible for ensuring that standards are maintained in relation to the outcomes of domestic violence and hate crime investigations. However, whilst this is good practice, there is a clear need for improvement in the consideration of the victims' views when considering the use of cautions and PND for victim-based offences.

The force uses specific officers within the local crime and intelligence departments to monitor out-of-court disposals and any issues are referred to the criminal justice department.

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

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but subsequently has been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We reviewed 71 no-crime records and found 42 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. As the records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence this is a significant cause for concern and is a matter of material and urgent importance.

We found that responsibility for most no-crime decisions rested with designated officers called crime reviewers rape no-crime decisions were managed within the dedicated rape investigation unit. Following our audit and inspection, and very poor performance in this area, the force has taken the decision that to ensure the consistent application of additional verifiable information, and the accuracy of no-crime decisions; they will in future be overseen by the FCR.

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

Cheshire Constabulary's transforming policing programme, promotes a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crime decisions. Our inspection found that frontline members of staff, including call-takers, understand the victim-centred approach. Call-handling operators were found to be polite, sympathetic, professional and treated people with respect leading to targeted questioning and good initial investigations.

The force has recently introduced a software system that identifies and allows improved management of repeat and vulnerable victims. This system is linked to those other computer systems in use by the force for crime management this is a positive step.

Cheshire Constabulary routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents and crime; in addition some surveys are carried out by the office of the police and crime commissioner, most recently into business crime and also among young people. The force makes use of some of the customer satisfaction data, feedback and complaints to help improve crime-recording processes. The force uses a scheme where people who have had experience of contacting the constabulary are invited to come into the force and give feedback on their customer experience.

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

The force does not have a policy to describe how to deal with the recording of reports of rape. There is a force procedure, which relates to the investigation of serious sexual offences and victim aftercare, published in August 2009, which clearly incorporates procedures for dealing with offences of rape; however there is no reference to recording a crime.

The force points to its ethos of recording crime within 24-hours stating that recording standards for offences of rape are high and that as a result, the no-crime rate for these offences is also high. However our audit and fieldwork revealed that more work needs to be done, as while officers within the dedicated rape unit officers had a general understanding of crime-recording requirements, this was not reflected within public protection units where the level of knowledge of the NCRS and HOCR was found to be low.

We found examples where rape crimes had been recorded late, and an example where a report of rape had not been recorded as a crime but wrongly closed as a crime-related incident. This is a serious issue which precludes the force from having a clear picture of all offending that is occurring in the force area. More importantly, the service and support made available to the victim may not always be what it should be.

The force does not have a policy to deal with reports of rape which occur in other force areas. When these are reported the dedicated rape unit normally will assume responsibility, and discharge all requirements including the transfer of documents and videos personally or via a courier.

HMIC inspection found that the no-crime criteria were not widely understood. Out of 30 rape no-crime decisions reviewed, 14 were found to have been no-crimes incorrectly. Reality testing revealed inconsistencies and the use of opinion rather than additional verifiable information within the decision-making. There is some evidence that issues such as mental health and alcohol dependency can influence the investigative process negatively, and in some instances delay or even stop the recording of a crime. This is not acceptable.

Until recently, monitoring of rape no-crimes was conducted by the detective inspector in charge of the dedicated rape unit, with only occasional independent

review by the FCR. The failure rate noted above came about as a result of this governance structure.

The force does monitor crimes of rape through a monthly overview of rape reporting, investigations, classification and no-crime decisions which is provided by the dedicated rape unit to the chief officer group. However, our findings suggest that while the data is provided, this does not amount to effective oversight of this critical area of business.

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

Cheshire Constabulary utilises a single computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions, these systems are linked. Both of these systems are well managed, with regular system audits and information weeding. The force also retains a standalone computer system for the management of serious sexual offences. This system contains details of names, addresses and telephone numbers and a summary of individual records, allowing officers and dispatchers within the force control room to see what information is held on the system, thereby assisting risk assessments.

An older standalone computer system for the management of historical serious sexual offences has been mothballed, and is now used for searching only historical records.

People and skills

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

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

The force has limited capacity available to take responsibility for reviewing incidents and crimes. However, those that do undertake this role are trained on, and demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of, force policies, the HOCR, NCRS and NSIR. We found that most staff and supervisors responsible for applying out-of-court disposals and no-crimes have an appropriate knowledge of HOCR and national guidance and are trained accordingly.

Approval to use the community resolution process sits at chief inspector level and therefore there is a degree of consistency, which is less apparent with cautions, cannabis warnings and PND where decisions are taken by crime reviewers in the local crime and intelligence hubs.

Some 18 months ago the force introduced direct officer crime recording. This was supported by a mandatory two day course for every operational person. The decision to move to officers inputting crime records directly coincided with

the removal of the crime recording bureau, in its place, crime and intelligence hubs were set up in each of the three local policing commands. We note that the crime reviewers who are the designated decision makers¹³ have moved recently to a centralised team to work alongside the FCR, however there are still insufficient members of staff to provide effective on-going quality assurance monitoring.

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

Some, but not all officers and staff have heard chief officer messages and have a clear understanding of the expected standards of behaviour and conduct with regard to crime recording. Senior managers are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and in this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

The strategic message about accurate recording is clear, however at the operational level of the organisation there is a lack of expertise and knowledge, and this provides a more likely explanation for errors, rather than any desire to enhance inappropriately force performance.

The force has delivered some training and development to reinforce the requirement for accurate crime recording. However, this training has been about how to use new and replacement IT systems, with the NCRS and HOCR considerations added on and not central to the training. The force is undergoing further training on supervision of crimes and investigation at present, which should provide further guidance. It is notable that some operational supervisors are reported not to have logged into the NICHE crime-management system for more than 12 months.

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

The force crime registrar has the pivotal role in ensuring the adherence to the NCRS and HOCR. We found that the Cheshire Constabulary's FCR is able to act objectively and impartially to seek to ensure the force records crime correctly and is involved in the audit programmes aimed at securing high standards of data integrity, but not the development, implementation and monitoring of crime-recording and outcome policies.

¹³ The designated decision maker role is to provide practical advice, guidance and act as arbitrator at a local level to ensure the accurate recording of crime and crime-related incidents in accordance with national standards.

The decentralised nature of crime recording in the force makes it difficult for the FCR to implement effective on-going monitoring and oversight of crime recording accuracy. This difficulty is exacerbated by the insufficient number of staff provided to carry out the quality assurance monitoring.

The FCR has the full support of, and access to, the assistant chief constable with lead responsibility for crime data quality. Most crime recording disputes are referred appropriately to the FCR who was seen as the final arbiter.