

# Crime data integrity

## Inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police

August 2014

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-486-0

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## Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme<sup>1</sup>, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. All 43 forces will be inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

*“To what extent can police-recorded crime information be trusted?”*

Accurate crime recording underlines the police service's commitment to public accountability, ensures that local policing bodies<sup>2</sup> 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”*.<sup>3</sup>

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](http://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)<sup>4</sup> and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The 2013/14 inspection programme was approved by the Home Secretary under section 54 of the Police Act 1996.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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 promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force. The assistant chief constable (Crime and Criminal Justice) is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality.

The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance which includes crime data integrity. The force maintains policies and procedures on crime reporting, crime management and criminal investigations nearly all of which meet the requirements of NCRS and HOCR.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes into the professional standards department (PSD). That department gives presentations on police ethics and integrity to all new staff.

An 18-month crime investigation review which was commissioned by chief officers has recently made a number of recommendations about crime management and highlighted risks associated with inaccurate crime recording. As a result, the force is looking to establish local crime units. These units, made up of small locally-based teams, will assume responsibility for quality assuring crime reports instigated at the scene of a crime.

One of the responsibilities of the force crime registrar<sup>6</sup> (FCR) is to ensure that the force complies with the NCRS and HOCR. Additionally, the FCR has responsibility for overseeing force compliance with the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR)<sup>7</sup>.

The FCR conducts a monthly audit and inspection of incidents and crime reports. The results are circulated to senior managers, but the force does not have an established process to identify and share good practice or lessons

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

learned. Additionally, the FCR undertakes specific audits where necessary, but we found that a lack of resources prevented a full range of audits during 2013.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should ensure the FCR has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime-recording. This includes the capacity to respond to emerging issues and to re-visit and test the effectiveness of changes made to respond to identified shortcomings.

We found the quality of incident and crime reports varied considerably. Some incident reports contained no more than basic information. More detailed information, however, was available in records of serious crime.

The force incident management computer system does not have incident opening or closing codes<sup>8</sup> for all crime types. This makes it difficult for the FCR to identify crime types from the incident record.

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

More effective auditing and the identification of risks and trends would be possible if there were more specific crime opening and closing codes.

## **Systems and processes**

### **Accuracy of crime recording**

We examined 120 incident records and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 98 were actually recorded. Of these 98, 1 was wrongly classified and three 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 unit through which crime is recorded, either as a consequence of an incident or recorded directly from the public without the need for an incident record. It is estimated that 53 percent of crime is recorded directly from the public without an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 60 calls from the public) found that of the 61 crimes that should have been recorded, all 61 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime-recording for the force.

<sup>8</sup> Opening and closing codes are descriptions for recorded incidents reported to the police. An opening code is used so that the police can easily see the nature of the incident. A closing code may be the same as an opening code but if, once the police have attended the incident the information changes, then the closing code will describe what the incident actually was.

We examined 54 reports which were recorded separately on the force non-crime system.<sup>9</sup> We found that of those 54 reports, 12 should have been recorded as crimes. The force had recorded 2 out of the 12 correctly. As some of these records related to sexual offences and assaults on vulnerable adults, this is a significant cause for concern.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g. those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

Supervisors currently monitor two calls from the public per call handler per month. This provides a general check on the quality of calls to ensure accurate crime recording and that a victim-centred approach is being used. These checks do not, however, assess compliance with the NCRS.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should ensure that quality assurance processes within the control room include compliance with NCRS.

<sup>9</sup> A non-crime is an incident which, in the first instance, has not been recorded as a crime as police are unsure as to whether it is a crime or not. A non-crime can eventually be recorded as a crime if the police find evidence that a crime has indeed occurred.

## Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, penalty notices for disorder (PND),<sup>10</sup> cannabis warnings<sup>11</sup> and community resolutions.<sup>12</sup> The HOCA (section H) states that national guidance must be followed<sup>13</sup>.

**Cautions** – Of the 35 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 31 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 34 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 20 cases where there was a victim to consult 11 showed that the victims' views had been considered.

It is of concern that the force has given some cautions to offenders in domestic abuse cases. The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) guidance, published in 2008 on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers, is that cautions are rarely appropriate in cases of domestic abuse and that it is always preferable for domestic abuse defendants to be charged and prosecuted where the case meets the evidential prosecution test and public interest test<sup>14</sup>.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure all police officers and police staff dealing with reports of domestic abuse understand and adhere to the relevant national guidance on crime recording and caution practices.

**Penalty Notices for Disorder** – We dip-sampled 35 PND disposals and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 35 cases. In all 35 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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](http://www.xact.org.uk)
- *Simple Cautions for Adult Offenders*, 14 November 2013. Available from [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)
- *Code of Practice for Adult Conditional Cautions*, 8 April 2000. Available from [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)
- *Home Office Police Operational Guidance for Penalty Notices for Disorder*, March 2005. Available from [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)
- *ACPO Guidance on Cannabis Possession for Personal Use*, 28 January 2009. Available from [www.acpo.police.uk](http://www.acpo.police.uk)

<sup>14</sup> NPIA on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers, 2008: *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse*. 5.3.3.



nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 20 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that 16 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

**Cannabis warnings** – We dip-sampled 35 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 32 cases. In all 35 cases we found evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

**Community resolutions** - We took a dip-sample of 32 community resolutions. We were able to check the background of 23 offenders and found that in 19 cases the offender was suitable to receive the disposal. Out of the 25 resolutions where the victims' wishes were recorded, all 25 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. All 32 community resolutions showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim<sup>15</sup>.

The force's hate crime scrutiny panel is involved in reviewing the use of community resolutions in cases of hate crime. This panel also undertakes a measure of quality assurance on the related crime record and investigation.

### **No-crime**

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information<sup>16</sup>. We examined 104 no-crime records and found 94 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. However, of the 35 robberies recorded as no-crime that we examined, we found 8 should have remained classified as crimes.

The decision to no-crime offences other than rape, violent crime and making off without payment<sup>17</sup> is made by officers who work in a crime standards unit.

### **Victim-centred approach**

Chief officers, through briefings and guidance, promote a victim-centred approach to crime recording. We found frontline officers and staff, including call-

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Information which can be verified by the police to show that a recorded crime did not occur, thereby enabling the police to reclassify a recorded crime as a no-crime (HOCR, General Rules Section C, No Crimes).

<sup>17</sup> Making off without payment is the offence of taking goods or services and then leaving without making payment. Most often this relates to people making off from petrol stations without paying for the petrol taken, but the offence can also apply to taxi fares and restaurant bills for example.

takers, understood the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation. We found that a victim-centred approach had been emphasised in recent local guidance in relation to offences of violence with injury and making off without payment. In contrast, a recent force document on public order offences could lead officers not to record certain public order crimes because the guidance failed to emphasise a victim-centred approach.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take immediate steps to change the content of the public order crime-recording guidance to ensure a clearer and more consistent message of victim-focused crime recording in accordance with NCRS.

The force regularly conducts surveys of people who report incidents and crime and those who call the non-emergency 101 number. The results of these surveys are taken into consideration by the force and used to improve its processes. An example is the force's response to vehicle crime where, as a consequence of falling satisfaction rates for vehicle crime, the force amended its investigation procedures for this type of offence. A full investigation is now undertaken, rather than just recording the majority of vehicle crimes over the telephone and then filing them without further investigation.

### **Rape offences**

Current force guidance fails to indicate at what point in time a rape should be recorded. Nevertheless, every month the FCR scrutinises all recorded sexual offences to ensure they have been correctly recorded and classified.

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

The FCR is the only person in the force able to authorise a submission of no-crime to a report of rape. We examined 34 rape no-crime records and found that 33 complied with NCRS.

The force guidance does not specify how to deal with rapes that have been reported to the force but were committed in another force area. However, we found such reports of rape and other sexual offences where officers had promptly taken responsibility and had ensured a crime was recorded, and that the victim received the appropriate care.

### **IT systems**

The force computer systems for the incident and crime recording functions are not linked. This could lead to duplication of effort or the loss of data. Both of the

systems are, however, well managed, with regular audits and information weeding. There are clear instructions to officers and staff to use only the systems prescribed by the force. Unauthorised databases have been removed.

A new crime management computer system is soon to be introduced in the force. Attention will need to be paid to maintaining full compliance with all crime recording requirements as this new system is implemented.

## **People and skills**

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR. However, frontline officers and staff have not received structured training in relation to NCRS, although guidance is accessible via the force intranet. The need for further training for officers on NCRS is acknowledged by the force.

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

The vast majority of staff understand chief officer messages and the standards that must be achieved in relation to crime recording. Non-adherence to NCRS and HOCR is considered unacceptable at all levels of the force, and we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures to record crime properly.

The FCR holds monthly meetings with senior detectives to discuss crime recording and this has led to improved relationships and a better understanding of NCRS and HOCR by the officers concerned.

### **Force crime registrar**

The FCR has extensive knowledge and experience in the management of crime data and the application of the NCRS and HOCR.

The FCR has unrestricted access to the assistant chief constable (Crime and Criminal Justice) who is the force lead for data integrity. All crime-recording disputes are appropriately referred to the FCR who is seen as the final arbiter in any disputes arising in the crime-recording process.

# Recommendations

## Immediately

1. The force should take steps to ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.
2. The force should take steps to ensure all police officers and police staff dealing with reports of domestic abuse understand and adhere to the relevant national guidance on crime recording and caution practices.
3. The force should take steps to change the content of the public order crime-recording guidance to ensure a clearer and more consistent message of victim-focused crime recording in accordance with NCRS.

## Within three months

4. The force should ensure the FCR has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime-recording. This includes the capacity to respond to emerging issues and to re-visit and test the effectiveness of changes made to respond to identified shortcomings.
5. The force should ensure that quality assurance processes within the control room include compliance with NCRS.
6. The force should expand its suite of incident opening and closing codes to enable a proportionate, efficient and effective audit of crime recording.
7. The force should amend its guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime recording is to be carried out in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.

## 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 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.

| <b>Crimes reported as part of an incident record</b>  |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Incidents reviewed</b>   | <b>Crimes identified</b>  | <b>Crimes recorded</b>  |
| HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Devon and Cornwall Police. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.  | From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes.  | From these identified crimes Devon and Cornwall Police recorded the following number of crimes. |
| <b>120</b>  | <b>117</b>  | <b>98</b>   |
| <b>Crimes reported directly from the victim</b>   |   |   |
| HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Devon and Cornwall 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 Devon and Cornwall Police should have recorded. | From these identified crimes Devon and Cornwall Police recorded the following number of crimes. |
| <b>60</b>   | <b>61</b>   | <b>61</b>   |
| <b>Crime reports held on other systems</b>  |   |   |
| <b>Referrals</b>  | <b>Crimes identified</b>  | <b>Crimes recorded</b>  |
| HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Devon and Cornwall Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.  | From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Devon and Cornwall Police should have recorded.  | From these identified crimes Devon and Cornwall Police recorded the following number of crimes. |
| <b>54</b>   | <b>12</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>No-crimes</b>  |   |   |
| HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Devon and Cornwall Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.  | From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.   |   |
| <b>104</b>  | <b>94</b>   |   |

## 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 the Devon and Cornwall Police ensuring that leadership responsibilities and expectations for crime data integrity are clearly defined and unambiguously communicated to staff?**

Chief officers promote crime data integrity to officers and staff, and are fully engaged in providing guidance on crime data recording. The assistant chief constable (Crime and Criminal Justice) takes responsibility for leading on crime data integrity in the force.

The chief constable has circulated a briefing on the importance of accurate crime recording to all staff. Chief officer visits to police stations have been used to reinforce the message by face-to-face briefings. Non-adherence to NCRS and HOCR is considered unacceptable. We found no evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether through under-reporting or misclassification of crimes.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes into the professional standards department (PSD). That department gives presentations on police ethics and integrity to all new staff.

The force policy and procedure on crime reporting, management and investigation standards reflects NCRS standards and an ethical approach to crime recording although the need for accurate crime data is not specifically reflected in the *Policing and Crime Plan 2013-17*.

##### **1.2 How does Devon and Cornwall Police ensure it has a proportionate approach to managing the strategic and organisational risk of recording crime data?**

The force has analysed and assessed risk in relation to inaccurate crime recording; this has primarily been identified as part of their internal crime investigation review. A recommendation from that review is a change to recording processes by establishing local crime units. This new approach will involve direct crime inputting by officers. The need for additional training for

officers on NCRS and NSIR has been identified by the force and should quickly be implemented.

The force review and inspection team has recently carried out an audit across the five local policing areas to examine the administration of cautions for domestic abuse cases. The main findings were that the force should re-consider whether cautions are an appropriate disposal and, if so, local guidance should be written explaining in more detail the rationale and procedure to be followed.

The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) guidance published in 2008 on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers, states that cautions are rarely appropriate in cases of domestic abuse and that it is always preferable for domestic abuse defendants to be charged and prosecuted where the case meets the evidential prosecution test and public interest test. Clearly any local guidance should reflect and complement the published national guidance.

The quality of the incident and crime reports we examined varied considerably. We found good examples, where incident records contained the detail necessary for the effective deployment of resources. We also saw crime reports where clear and well-ordered narratives explained the various stages of investigations. More detail was generally found on reports of serious crimes. However, we also found incidents which did not contain anything other than basic information and in some crime reports important information was missing, particularly on the level of injury sustained by victims of violence.

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 these channels. The results of monthly audits on NCRS and NSIR are forwarded to senior managers in the force.

### **1.3 How does Devon and Cornwall 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 the HOCR, NCRS and NSIR but has still got more work to do. The force uses the crime information system (CIS) to record non-crimes.

The force does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types and this includes offences of rape. More effective auditing and the identification of risks and trends would be possible if there were specific crime opening and closing codes for certain crime types, such as rape, when creating an incident record. The force should expand its suite of opening and closing codes to enable a more effective audit process.

There is some flexibility in the audit system, as demonstrated by a recent examination of the increase in public order offences, but the capacity to deal with emerging issues is limited.

Results from monthly audits are forwarded to the force head of performance, the senior management team on divisions and detective inspectors leading investigations. A quarterly report is also produced and provided to chief officers.

NCRS and NSIR audit failures are returned to the relevant units for action. However, the force does not currently have a process in place to systematically identify, capture and share good practice or common failures. Some guidance has recently been placed on the force intranet providing examples of the most common failures against NCRS. These include crime not being recorded within 72 hours (particularly for sexual offences) and insufficient detail on incident and crime reports.

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

Force control room supervisors conduct a dip-sampling process to ensure incident record quality.

We found the approach among a number of officers is to record a crime when in doubt. This behaviour is more evident in uniform officers with the comment made by one officer that “it’s easier to record a crime than to spend time debating whether it should be crimed or not”. While this could, potentially, lead to over-recording, our audit found this was not the case.

We examined 120 incident records and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 98 were. Of these 98, 1 was wrongly classified and three were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

The force has a centralised crime recording unit through which crime is recorded, either as a consequence of an incident or directly recorded from the public without the need for an incident record. It is estimated that 53 percent of crime is recorded directly from the public without an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 60 calls from the public) found that of the 61 crimes that should have been recorded, all 61 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 54 reports which were recorded separately on the force non-crime system. We found that of those 54 reports, 12 should have been recorded as crimes. The force had recorded 2 out of the 12 correctly. As some of these



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

Supervisors currently monitor two calls from the public per call-handler per month. While this involves general checking of the quality of the calls to ensure accurate crime recording and that a victim-centred approach is adopted, the reviews do not assess compliance with the NCRS

The force would benefit from a policy to deal with allegations occurring in another force area, including the crime transfer process and victim care.

A force audit was carried out in respect of public order offences in 2013. This identified both under-and over-recording of crimes and led to local guidance being issued to officers. A number of scenarios are provided to officers and we are concerned that some of the guidance is not victim-focused and could lead officers into not recording some public order crimes. This conflicts with the style and approach the force wants to take in relation to victim-based crime-recording as well as NCRS.

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

When using out-of-court disposal, 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. A recent decision to create a new post in the performance and analysis section will provide the capacity to begin the audit of out-of-court disposals within the force's audit regime.

**Cautions** – Of the 35 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 31 cases, the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 34 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 20 cases where there was a victim to consult, 11 showed that the victims' views had been considered.

It is of concern that the force has given cautions to some offenders in domestic abuse cases cautions. The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) guidance, published in 2008 on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers, states that cautions are rarely appropriate in cases of domestic abuse and that it is always preferable for domestic abuse defendants to be charged and prosecuted where the case meets the evidential prosecution test and public interest test.

**Penalty Notices for Disorder** – We dip-sampled 35 PND disposals and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 35 cases. In all 35 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 20

cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that 16 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

**Cannabis warnings** – We dip-sampled 35 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 32 cases. In all 35 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

**Community resolutions** - We took a dip-sample of 32 community resolutions. We were able to check the background of 23 offenders and found that in 19 cases, the offender was suitable to receive the disposal. Out of the 25 resolutions where the victims' wishes were recorded, all 25 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. All 32 community resolutions showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim.

The force's hate crime scrutiny panel is involved in reviewing the use of community resolutions in cases of hate crime. This panel also undertakes a measure of quality assurance on the related crime record and investigation.

Satisfaction surveys suggest that the force is working well in this area, especially around burglary. The focus group from the fieldwork inspection indicated a strong understanding of balancing the needs of the victim within the wider criminal justice system.

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

The force has processes in place, including the use of designated decision-makers (DDM) to ensure that incidents recorded as crimes are only reclassified as no-crimes when it is correct to do this. We examined 104 no-crime records and found 94 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. However, of the 35 robberies recorded as no-crime that we examined we found that 8 should have remained classified as crimes.

Decisions on no-crimes for offences other than rape, violent crime and making off without payment are made by staff within the crime standards unit.

The accuracy of no-crime decision-making is monitored by the FCR and he is the final decision-maker in those cases. The direct crime-recording approach used by the force creates some challenges owing to the number of no-crime submissions.

## **2.4 How does Devon and Cornwall Police promote a victim-centred approach to crime recording and associated outcomes?**

Chief officers advocate a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crimes. In recently prepared guidance to DDM on recording violence with injury, and making off without payment offences, the importance of a victim-focused approach is reinforced.

We found frontline staff, including call-takers, understand the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation – they are polite, professional and helpful.

The force routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents or crimes. This has recently included additional surveying of people calling the force non-emergency number following concerns expressed by the police and crime commissioner over quality of service issues.

As a consequence of falling satisfaction rates for vehicle crime, the force amended its investigation procedures for this type of offence. A full investigation is now undertaken, rather than just recording the majority of vehicle crimes over the telephone and then filing them without further investigation.

## **2.5 How does Devon and Cornwall Police ensure systems for receiving, recording and managing reported crimes of rape are robust?**

The force guidance, accessible via the intranet, provides advice on how rape crimes should be monitored and reviewed but does not indicate at what point a crime should be recorded. We found that officers and staff had a clear understanding of the rape policy and no-crime process.

The FCR scrutinises all sexual offences every month recorded via the STORM incident management system to ensure they have been correctly classified. There is the potential for missing this type of offence if the sexual assault has been opened under a different opening code such as assault.

All rape no-crime requests are forwarded to the FCR who is the only person in the force able to authorise a submission of no-crime to a report of rape. We found that auditing of rape records was particularly effective. We examined 34 rape no-crime records and found that 33 complied with NCRS.

The force guidance does not specify how to deal with rapes that have been reported to the force but were committed in another force area. However, we found such reports of rape and other sexual offences where officers had promptly taken responsibility and had ensured a crime was recorded and that the victim received the appropriate care.

## **2.6 How do Devon and Cornwall Police IT systems allow for efficient and effective management of crime recording?**

The force has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses which may contain reports of crime: these are the incident management system (STORM), and crime management system (CIS). These systems are well managed with regular system audits and information weeding but they are not linked. There is clear instruction for officers and staff only to use the dedicated force systems and any unauthorised databases have been removed.

The force is soon to migrate to a new crime management computer system which is called UNIFI. In advance of this migration, the force is working on a solution to clean up the current crime records. This is subject to review under the management of police information process. The force should consider whether audit capacity should be temporarily increased when the new system goes live to ensure any recording and compliance issues are immediately identified.

## **People and skills**

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

#### **3.1 What arrangements does Devon and Cornwall Police have in place to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to ensure accurate crime recording?**

The force has sufficient staff and supervisors responsible for the recording and reviewing of incidents and crimes although our audit identified some deficiencies. Staff and supervisors who are responsible for applying out-of-court disposals and no-crimes were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of HOCR and national guidance.

The sexual offences improvement group has examined a number of recording issues and provided guidance to specialist officers. Monthly meetings are held between the FCR, detective superintendents and the head of performance. This has led to improved relationships and a better understanding by senior detectives of NCRS and HOCR.

Staff within the crime data recording bureau have received training in relation to NCRS and in the crime standards unit; an experienced member of staff will provide input on NCRS to new staff. We did not find any patrol officers or detectives who had received formal training on NCRS or HOCR. The FCR has delivered an input to crime management unit training days, uniform supervisors training and also to DDM. Guidance on NCRS and HOCR is accessible via the force intranet.

The need for additional training for officers on NCRS and NSIR has been identified by the force. A training package for all police officers and staff who are directly involved in recording crime and quality assuring, or auditing, crime records is required.

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

The vast majority of staff understood chief officer messages and were aware of the required standards of behaviour and conduct around crime recording.

Senior managers described being given a clear mandate to record crime ethically. There was no evidence of pressure to under-record or mis-record crime. Non-adherence to HO CR is considered unacceptable by those to whom we spoke. Above all it is clear that there is no pressure, explicit or implied, to under-record or mis-record crimes or in any way work outside NCRS in terms of outcomes.

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

We found that the FCR is active in his oversight of crime recording systems and processes within the force. He has specific responsibility for ensuring NCRS and HO CR are consistently applied, and he is well known to senior managers in the force.

The FCR shows objectivity and impartiality in managing the current audit programme. The high compliance rate for rape no-crimes is a good example of his effectiveness. We found well-reasoned and complete judgments had been made on the rape no-crimes he had authorised.

Expanded capacity would allow the FCR to spend more time on quality assuring work on crime recording.

The FCR operates as the final arbiter on any disputes occurring within the crime-recording process and this is well known across the force. The FCR also has a designated deputy to authorise rape no-crimes in his absence. The FCR has ready access to the assistant chief constable lead for data integrity with whom he discusses crime recording and data issues.