

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Dorset Police

November 2014

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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 were 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.justiceinspectorates.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 out how the police service in England and Wales must record crime, how crimes must be classified according to crime type and category, whether and when to record crime, how many crimes to record in respect of a single incident, and the regime for the re-classification of crimes as no-crimes.

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

- an examination of crime records for the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013;
- a dip-sample of out-of-court disposals (cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND), cannabis warnings, and community resolutions) and no-crime decisions for rape, robbery and violence;
- visits to forces where inspectors assess local crime-recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance; systems and processes; and people and skills; and
- a peer review of audit findings by an NCRS expert from outside HMIC.

The audit examined for compliance a small sample of crime records from each force. Taken together these samples are sufficient to provide a reliable national estimate, but are too small to produce a force estimate of compliance. Force compliance rates typically result in a margin of error of around +/- 10 percent and therefore a range of 20 percent. This range of uncertainty means that few, if any, conclusions can be drawn from individual force compliance rates or comparisons of rates between forces based on the data alone. (Samples large enough to make more reliable force judgments, while desirable, were not affordable.) Our conclusions and recommendations are, therefore, based upon the evidence drawn from our inspection of the individual force's crime-recording arrangements.

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

1. Part A: A summary of our findings and recommendations;
2. Part B: Our findings in numbers;
3. Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings.

This report, undertaken at a force level, allows a qualitative assessment of the force's crime-recording arrangements and to make recommendations for improvement.

Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The chief officer team provides clear direction, creating a 'one team' culture that focuses on delivering an excellent service to local communities. Building on this approach, the chief constable has personally led a series of roadshows, to reach every member of staff, focusing on the Code of Ethics⁶ and the importance of accurate crime recording.

A specific focus on raising crime-recording standards has been led by the deputy chief constable (DCC). There has been a revision of the reporting structures, intranet messages have been displayed reinforcing the rules and staff responsibilities for accurate recording, and personal letters have been written to officers where crime-recording standards have not been met, outlining the DCC's expectations. Compliance with National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) is an organisational objective supported by an action plan to achieve it.

Throughout the inspection process, we found senior officers and staff demonstrated a high level of understanding of the rules, and a genuine commitment to raising standards, with good examples of visible leadership at a local level.

The DCC and police and crime commissioner (PCC) conduct a monthly strategic performance group (SPG) where the results of crime recording audits are considered and business leads, including the force crime and incident registrar (FCIR)⁷, are held to account.

The force has a good understanding of the reporting routes for crimes and the proportion recorded, including reports of serious crime that often reach the force by referrals from other agencies. The auditing of crime and incident records is focused on the relevant risks and is integrated with the current performance regime.

As a result of this increased scrutiny, action and improvement plans have been commissioned and produced, identifying the responsibility and accountability for particular actions in high-risk areas of business. Most notable is the domestic

⁶ *Code of Ethics: A code of practice for the principles and standards of professional behaviour for the policing profession of England and Wales*. College of Policing, July 2014. Available from www.college.police.uk

⁷ The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime recording rules. The Home Office Counting Rules 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 and incident 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.

abuse action plan and public protection NCRS improvement plan, which has resulted in new processes and improved compliance with the NCRS. While this shows an improvement, the focus at a departmental and senior level must be sustained if this current momentum is to be maintained.

Building on the revised performance arrangements, there is an opportunity to develop a professional and consistent approach to highlighting issues identified from audit to ensure that matters are co-ordinated, communicated and cascaded through the organisation in order to raise awareness, improve standards, and hold officers and staff to account at a local level.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should develop its performance management arrangements and integrate the findings from crime data integrity audits within the wider force performance framework, promoting consistency, local accountability and good practice throughout the organisation.

The chief officer team has increased the visibility of audit activity, with results presented at the force ethics and audit committee attended by independent lay members from the police and crime panel. Similarly, thematic audits (most recently on hate crime) have been discussed at the people, confidence and equality board.

The force has recently launched Operation Advance, a force-wide initiative led by a chief inspector with the strategic aim of increasing positive outcomes for victims of crime. This initiative emphasises the importance of accurate crime recording to improve victims' experiences.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 87 incident records⁸ and found that 87 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 87 crimes that should have been, 61 were recorded. Of the 61, five were wrongly classified and none was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of serious concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (for example, because certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

The force has a centralised crime recording unit, which we estimated to have recorded approximately 32 percent of the total of the force's recorded crime. This unit recorded reports of crime directly from members of the public that did

⁸ An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police and 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 and auditable means.

not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 20 calls from the public) found that of the 20 crimes that should have been recorded, all 20 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 55 reports that were recorded separately on other force systems. We found of those 55 reports, 14 crimes should have been recorded but only 1 was actually recorded. As some of these records related to sexual offences and assaults on children and 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 FCIR, to ensure that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

In addition to our audit, which covered a 12 month period to the end of October 2013, we also sampled recent incident logs created by the control room to assess the latest position regarding crime recording. The interventions by the public protection units (PPU) have clearly had a positive impact on compliance in respect of the recording of crimes related to domestic abuse, but wider issues have not been resolved satisfactorily. There is a lack of supervisory oversight of NCRS compliance and a persistent use of non-crime classifications to close logs when a crime should have been recorded. This issue is of material concern and should be addressed by the force, not least to ensure the best possible service to victims.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that quality assurance processes within the control room include checks for compliance with the NCRS, ensuring particular attention is given to those incidents resulted as non-crimes or crime-related incidents.

We listened to calls where incidents were generated to assess the quality of service and compared the content of the call with the details contained on the incident log. In all cases examined, operators and call takers were very polite and helpful but in terms of detail, greater accuracy was required when transcribing information from callers. Similarly there were examples where no clear rationale, and/or insufficient detail, was set out in incident logs to justify a decision not to record a crime.

This approach may stem from some confusion over the use of officer discretion and/or a culture where control room staff do not challenge updates or decisions communicated to them by officers attending crime scenes. To avoid confusion, chief officers should address this issue and clearly communicate their

expectations for updating and resulting incident logs, reinforcing the necessity for accurate records to be maintained.

This approach must be accompanied by a clear rationale for NCRS decisions, identifying the responsibility and accountability of control room staff in the closure of incident logs.

Recommendation: Immediately, chief officers should clarify the use of discretion and clearly communicate their expectations to staff responsible for updating and finalising incident logs, reinforcing the need for accuracy and compliance with NCRS, and emphasising the importance of providing a clear rationale when closing incidents to justify why a crime is not being recorded.

Inspectors were concerned about the circulation of guidance regarding the theft of mobile telephones which advised that victims must report these incidents in person at a police station and that a crime reference number would only be issued if the device's unique identification number (IMEI) was provided. The NCRS does not require that certain crimes will only be recorded if reported in person at a police station, nor does the NCRS place pre-conditions on the recording of a victim's report of a crime, such as the need to be able to supply the unique identification number of stolen property. This approach is in breach of NCRS.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure that all staff are aware of the need to treat reports of mobile telephone theft in the same way as any other report of crime and in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR and remove their guidance on the subject.

Daily and monthly crime audits are now conducted by the crime management unit (CMU). The system is sufficiently flexible to respond to areas of concern, although not all reported crime is examined. The daily audit also covers reports not finalised as a crime (non-crimes) over 24-hours old to assess whether a crime should have been recorded. In cases of domestic abuse, all crime related incidents are reviewed within a maximum period of 48 hours. This is good practice.

Officers and staff were aware of their responsibilities in relation to crimes reported to them that had occurred in another force area. These are recorded locally and not filed until a crime reference number from the affected force has been received. Staff consulted the officer in the force dealing with the case to agree the most appropriate means of transferring documentation and exhibits.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),⁹ cannabis warnings¹⁰ and community resolutions.¹¹ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed.¹²

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions that we dip-sampled, we found that in 18 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 17 cases, we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 18 cases where there was a victim to consult, 14 cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. None of these cases contained evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the nine cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that two victims had their views considered.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 18 cases. In eight cases, we found evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 14 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ A cannabis warning is a non-statutory disposal for cases of possession of cannabis for personal use. It constitutes a warning to the offender and confiscation of the cannabis.

¹¹ Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹² National guidance for the use of out-of-court disposals is detailed in a number of documents:

- *Home Office Circular 016/2008: Simple Cautioning – Adult Offenders*. Available from http://www.xact.org.uk/information/downloads/Pace/HOC_16-2008.pdf
- *Simple Cautions For Adult Offenders*, 14 November 2013. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *Code of Practice for Adult Conditional Cautions*, 8 April 2000. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *Home Office Police Operational Guidance for penalty Notices for Disorder*, March 2005. Available from www.justice.gov.uk
- *ACPO Guidance on Cannabis Possession for Personal Use*, 28 January 2009. Available from www.acpo.police.uk

Seven cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.¹³

In February 2013, the force identified a number of compliance issues for out-of-court disposals. As a consequence, quarterly reviews of the use of out-of-court disposals are undertaken, with failures reported at the strategic performance group. However, we found that opportunities exist to engage better with victims in the process for cautions and PND, and to ensure that offenders are made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the disposal.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that when the use of an out-of-court disposal is being considered, the views of the victim are always taken into account, the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the outcome, and that this is recorded as having been done.

To engage partners in the process, the force has introduced a multi-agency out-of-court scrutiny panel with representatives from partner agencies; including probation, Crown Prosecution Service and the magistrates' courts. The panel undertakes reviews of cases and while it cannot change the outcomes, it provides feedback to improve working practices. This is a positive step towards increasing public understanding and building confidence in these disposal methods.

While the force has introduced governance and scrutiny to out-of-court processes, the standard of submission, supervision and accessibility of records is mixed, with some examples of poor completion of forms and a lack of meaningful scrutiny. The introduction of the new crime outcomes framework provides an opportunity to improve further the appropriate use of out-of-court disposals, promoting greater consistency in the use of all such disposals.

No-crimes

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information.

We examined 68 no-crime records and found 61 records to be compliant with HOCA and NCRS. No-crime decisions were tightly managed and of a high standard, with authority for all decisions restricted to the FCIR and the designated decision makers (DDM) who are independent from investigations.

¹³ National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered, an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence and explain the process to the offender – including how the offender will make good the harm caused. The implications of receiving a community resolution need to be explained to the offender – it does not form part of a criminal record but may be disclosed as part of an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check. The community resolution is to be recorded appropriately, in accordance with the NCRS and HOCA.

In cases of rape, every victim was consulted prior to the investigation being closed. The FCIR is the final arbiter in all cases. There is a strong victim-focus evident with the majority of victims contacted where this decision has been reached. We found that there was a good understanding of this process and proper scrutiny from those responsible for no-crime decisions.

No-crime compliance is tested every six months and led by the FCIR with a review of 200 cases. The results are presented at the strategic performance group and subject to examination by the DCC and police and crime commissioner (PCC) at their monthly meetings.

Victim-centred approach

Victim satisfaction is a fundamental part of the force's 'one team' culture and it is clearly embedded in the organisation. Staff understood that crime recording was victim-focused and that if a victim considered that a crime had occurred, it should be recorded unless there is credible evidence to the contrary.

The detective chief superintendent, head of the crime and justice department, is the force strategic lead for victim satisfaction. He has a clear focus and grasp of relevant issues that are managed through the joint command crime performance plan. A chief inspector takes responsibility for the victim satisfaction delivery plan and ensures appropriate links between departments and wider-force initiatives, such as Operation Advance, are maintained.

An initiative aimed at gaining a greater understanding of victims' needs and improving delivery has resulted in the force engaging external consultants to survey the victims' experiences. The force has also introduced a victims' bureau, funded by the PCC, that comprises a dedicated team keeping victims informed on the progress of investigations in accordance with The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime¹⁴.

There has been comprehensive scrutiny of victim satisfaction at the strategic performance group, which considers trends and a range of criteria that have an impact on victims, categorised by crime type. Other activity includes a review of academic studies examining the drivers for victim satisfaction.

Rape offences

Almost every rape report receives an incident log entry on the command and control system. Our audit of rape and serious sexual offence reports found that the vast majority had been accurately recorded on the system and correctly classified. In addition to the audit, we sampled more recent records. It was clear that the revised policy to improve daily supervision by the public protection unit had improved the recording of these crimes in accordance with the NCRS.

¹⁴ A code, established under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, which places obligations on organisations providing services within the criminal justice system (including the police) to provide a minimum level of service to victims of criminal conduct.

In February 2014, a detailed review of rape investigation was conducted by the head of crime and justice. The review was in response to the HMIC rape monitoring group¹⁵ and included areas of compliance with HOOCR, policy and procedure, investigation, victim care and safeguarding arrangements.

Force policy and procedure for rape and serious sexual offences clearly articulates ownership of investigations. These roles and responsibilities were well understood by operational staff and officers alongside the routes of reporting. The force has a good understanding of the totality of its reported rapes.

The procedures for responding to reports of rape that occur outside of the force area are clearly documented within force policy. Victim care is the priority and full consideration is given to the recovery of evidence. We found that all personnel were in no doubt about their roles and responsibilities when responding to reports of rape, irrespective of where the crime had occurred.

IT systems

All incidents and crimes are recorded on a single bespoke system which enables accessibility and tight control of records, alongside regular and accurate auditing. There are no other standalone systems in operation that contain reports of crime.

The force has issued frontline staff with BlackBerry devices which are technically capable of updating incident logs but do not allow the inputting of crime reports. Plans are being developed to upgrade the force crime and incident recording systems as part of a wider collaboration arrangement. The implementation of the system should enable the deployment of additional mobile hand-held devices planned for operational staff. This should secure significant business benefits and provide the opportunity for direct officer input of crime recording that could, with the right procedures and controls, help to improve overall recording standards.

These ongoing developments provide real opportunities to raise standards. It is important that any interdependencies across these projects are understood and managed, so that the force is able to achieve the greatest business benefits from their investments.

The force information manager is responsible for weeding and compliance with the criminal justice service IT system.

¹⁵ The rape monitoring group (RMG) is chaired by HMIC and brings together criminal justice agencies, inspectorates, the voluntary sector and local policing bodies with an interest in promoting the effective management of rape in England and Wales.

People and skills

Crime management unit staff have previously received training in NCRS, delivered by the FCIR, and have the requisite knowledge to audit crime records. Guidance on NCRS compliance has recently been issued to supervisors working in the public protection safeguarding unit. We found that specialists within public protection and domestic abuse units demonstrated a good understanding of the crime-recording rules and standards.

We also identified a number of training initiatives being planned and developed by a range of commands and departments that focused on raising crime-recording standards. However, at the time of our inspection the only planned force training on NCRS was being delivered to transferees and student officers.

Enhanced training provision on crime-recording standards is fully supported by the force but it requires central co-ordination and professional input from the FCIR. A training needs analysis is required to reduce duplication of effort and ensure the delivery is consistent, coherent and prioritised.

Recommendation: Within six months, the force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime recording, which is consistent in its content, 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.

There has been increased supervision from line managers and we found that frontline officers and staff understood the importance of ethical crime-recording practices and the significance of victim focus. The frequent and consistent messages being communicated by the chief constable, deputy chief constable and Operation Advance had reached the front line, leaving staff in no doubt that their responsibility to victims of crime was the priority.

We did not find evidence that performance pressure unduly influenced crime-recording decisions in the force and many staff were clear that they would record ethically in accordance with the facts presented.

Force crime and incident registrar

There is a permanent FCIR who supervises a full-time compliance auditor. Responsibilities include management of the comprehensive crime audit regime and force compliance with NCRS and National Standard of Incident Recording (NSIR). While the range of audits is detailed in content, they are not conducted in real time and, therefore, errors found during the audit process are already somewhat dated. This demonstrates the need for a proactive resource deployed within the control room to mitigate this issue.

The FCIR has ready access to, and meets with, the deputy chief constable each month to discuss crime-recording issues. The FCIR is the final arbiter on all crime-recording issues.

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 FCIR, to ensure that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes, with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.
2. Chief officers should clarify the use of discretion and clearly communicate their expectations to staff in the updating and finalising of incident logs, reinforcing the need for accuracy, compliance with NCRS, and clear rationale in the closure of incidents to justify why a crime is not being recorded.
3. The force should ensure that all staff are aware of the need to treat reports of mobile telephone theft in the same way as any other report of crime and in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR and remove their guidance on the subject.
4. The force should take steps to ensure that when the use of an out-of-court disposal is being considered, the views of the victim are always taken into account, the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the outcome, and that this is recorded as having been done.

Within three months

5. The force should develop its performance management arrangements and integrate the findings from crime data integrity audits within the wider force performance framework, promoting consistency, local accountability and good practice throughout the organisation.
6. The force should ensure that quality assurance processes within the control room include checks for compliance with the NCRS, ensuring particular attention is given to those incidents finalised as non-crimes or crime-related incidents.

Within six months

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

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

Our examination of records will be used as part of a statistically robust national audit to allow HMIC to report a figure for national crime recording accuracy across the 43 Home Office forces within our final report to be published in autumn 2014. The audit undertaken at a force level is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside our fieldwork interviews to form qualitative judgments only.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Dorset 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 Dorset Police recorded the following number of crimes.
87	87	61
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Dorset 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 Dorset Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Dorset Police recorded the following number of crimes.
20	20	20
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Dorset Police and held on other systems that contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Dorset Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Dorset Police recorded the following number of crimes.
55	14	1

No-crimes

HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery that Dorset Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.

68

From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.

61

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

The chief officer team provides clear direction, creating a 'one team' culture that focuses on delivering an excellent service to local communities. Building on this approach, the chief constable has personally led a series of roadshows, to reach every member of staff, focusing on the Code of Ethics and the importance of accurate crime recording.

A specific focus on raising crime-recording standards has been led by the deputy chief constable (DCC) through a variety of means. There has been a revision of the reporting structures, intranet messages have been displayed reinforcing the rules and staff responsibilities for accurate recording, and personal letters have been written to officers where crime-recording standards have not been met, outlining his future expectations.

Throughout the inspection process, we found senior officers and staff demonstrated a high level of understanding of, and a genuine commitment to, raising standards with good examples of visible leadership at a local level. There was further evidence in the recent production of a joint command crime performance plan that highlighted ethical crime-recording practices and compliance with NCRS as an organisational objective supported by appropriate actions to achieve it.

The force has recently launched Operation Advance, a force-wide initiative led by a chief inspector. The operation has the strategic aim of increasing positive outcomes for victims of crime, which emphasises the importance of accurate crime recording in terms of meeting this objective. Considering the high profile nature of the project, there is the opportunity to link in to the internal communications strategy and to highlight continually the importance of accurate and ethical crime recording, which is fundamental to the success of the operation.

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

As a result of this increased scrutiny of crime-recording processes, action and improvement plans have been commissioned and produced, with clear responsibility and accountability in high-risk areas of business. Most notable is the domestic abuse action plan and public protection NCRS improvement plan, which has resulted in new processes and improved compliance. While this is a positive step, the focus, at a departmental and senior level, must be sustained if this current momentum is to be maintained.

The force has a good understanding of the reporting routes for crime and the proportion recorded, including reports of serious crime that often reach the force by referrals from other agencies. The auditing of crime and incident records is focused upon the most serious risks and is integrated within the performance regime. The audits are broken down and scored against three compliance elements of victim focus, timeliness of investigation and classification.

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

The DCC and police and crime commissioner (PCC) jointly chair the monthly strategic performance group (SPG) attended by the FCIR and heads of the relevant departments. The results of crime recording audits are a standing agenda item and business leads are held to account for their findings. The meeting considers progress on existing actions and raises further work when necessary.

The chief officer team has increased the visibility of audit activity, with results presented at the force ethics and audit committee attended by independent lay members from the police and crime panel. Similarly, thematic audits (most recently one on hate crime) have been discussed at the people, confidence and equality board.

Building on the revised performance arrangements, there is an opportunity to develop a professional and consistent approach to highlight issues identified from audit in order to ensure that matters are co-ordinated, communicated and cascaded through the organisation to raise awareness, improve standards and hold officers to account at a local level.

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

We examined 87 incident records and found that 87 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 87 crimes that should have been recorded, 61 were. Of the 61, five were wrongly classified and none was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of serious concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (for example, because certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

The force also has a centralised crime recording unit through which we have estimated the force records approximately 32 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public that do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 20 calls from the public) found that of the 20 crimes that should have been recorded, all 20 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 55 reports that were recorded separately on other force systems. We found that of those 55 reports, 14 crimes should have been recorded, only 1 crime was recorded.

In addition to our audit, which covered a 12-month period to the end of October 2013, we also sampled recent incident logs created by the control room to assess the latest position regarding crime recording. The interventions by the public protection units (PPU) have clearly had a positive impact on compliance in respect of the recording of crimes related to domestic abuse, but wider issues have not been resolved satisfactorily. There is a lack of supervisory oversight in respect of NCRS compliance and a persistent use of non-crime classifications to close logs when a crime should have been recorded. This issue is of material concern and should be addressed by the force, not least to ensure the best possible service to victims.

We listened to calls where incidents were generated to assess the quality of service and compare the content of the call with the details contained in the log. In all cases examined, operators and call takers were very polite and helpful but greater accuracy is required when transcribing information from callers so as to make clear how the decision on finalisation had been reached. Similarly there were examples where no clear rationale and/or insufficient detail contained within the results field of incident logs to justify a decision not to record a crime.

This approach may stem from some confusion over the use of officer discretion and has led to a culture where control room staff do not challenge updates or decisions communicated to them by officers attending crime scenes.

To avoid confusion, chief officers should address this issue and communicate clearly their expectations for the updating and finalising of incident logs, reinforcing the necessity for accurate records to be maintained, accompanied by a clear rationale for NCRS decisions including the responsibility and accountabilities of control room staff in the closure of incident logs.

Of concern was the circulation of guidance regarding the theft of mobile telephones, which advised that victims must report these incidents in person at a police station and that a crime reference number would only be issued if the device's unique identification number (IMEI) was provided. The NCRS does not require that certain crimes will only be recorded if reported in person at a police station, nor does the NCRS place pre-conditions on the recording of a victim's report of a crime, such as the need to be able to supply the unique identification number of stolen property. This approach is in breach of NCRS.

Daily and monthly crime audits are now conducted by the CMU and are sufficiently flexible to respond to areas of concern although not all reported crime is examined. This daily function also covers reports not finalising as a crime (non-crimes) over 24-hours old to assess whether a crime should have been recorded. In cases of domestic abuse, all crime-related incidents are reviewed within a maximum period of 48 hours.

The two sergeants within the CMU perform the role of DDM with responsibility for making decisions on NCRS compliance including that for most no-crime decisions (see below). Within revised working practices, it is the responsibility of supervisors within PPU to conduct NCRS checks of report logs on a daily basis.

2.2. How does Dorset Police ensure that out-of-court disposals suit the needs of victims, offenders and the criminal justice system?

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions that we dip-sampled, we found that in 18 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 17 cases, we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 18 cases where there was a victim to consult, 14 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. None of these cases contained evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the nine cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that two victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 18 cases. In eight cases we found evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 14 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 18 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Seven cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

The majority of out-of-court disposals conformed to the requirements of the NCRS with national guidance being appropriately applied to low-risk, low level cases. However, there remained opportunities to engage victims more in the process for cautions and PND.

In February 2013, the force conducted an internal audit of 50 cases concentrating on victim focus, timeliness and compliance with HOCR . This identified a number of compliance issues for out-of-court disposals and the issue is now subject to quarterly review with failures reported at the strategic performance group. However, we found opportunities remain to engage victims better in the process for cautions and PND, and to ensure that offenders are made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the disposal.

PND audits are conducted once a year and an inspector has been appointed as the force lead. Work is underway to develop the force's approach to community resolution, with activity including the incorporation of areas for development and good practice into training sessions. In addition, the CMU conducts a daily review of all community resolutions to check the validity of the disposal.

To engage partners in the process, the force has introduced a multi-agency out-of-court scrutiny panel with representatives from partner agencies including probation, Crown Prosecution Service and the magistrates' courts. The panel undertakes reviews of cases and while it cannot change the outcome, provides feedback to improve working practices. This is a positive step towards increasing public understanding and building confidence in these disposal methods.

While the force has introduced governance and scrutiny to out-of-court processes, the standard of submission, supervision and accessibility of records is mixed, with some examples of poor completion of forms and a lack of meaningful scrutiny. The introduction of the new crime outcomes framework means there is an opportunity to improve the appropriate use of out-of-court disposals and the quality of their completion still further, promoting greater consistency in the use of all such disposals.

Officers and staff were aware of their responsibilities for crimes reported to them that had occurred in another force area. These are recorded locally and not filed until a crime reference number from the affected force has been received. Staff consulted with the officer in charge of the case to agree the most appropriate means of transferring documentation and exhibits.

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

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information.

We examined 68 no-crime records and found 61 records to be compliant with HOCA and NCRS. No-crime decisions were tightly managed and of a high standard, with authority for all decisions restricted to the FCIR and the DDM who are all independent from investigations. In cases of rape, every victim was consulted prior to the investigation being closed. The FCIR is the final arbiter in all cases. There is a strong victim focus evident with the majority of victims contacted where this decision has been reached. We found that there is a good understanding of this process and good scrutiny from those responsible for no-crime decisions.

No-crime compliance is tested every six months and led by the FCIR with a review of 200 cases. The results are presented at the strategic performance group and are the subject of examination by the DCC and PCC through their monthly meetings.

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

Victim satisfaction is a fundamental part of the force's 'one team' culture and is clearly embedded throughout the organisation. Staff understood clearly that crime recording was victim focused and that if a victim considered that a crime had occurred, it should be recorded unless there was credible evidence to the contrary.

The detective chief superintendent, head of the crime and justice department, is force strategic lead for satisfaction. He has a clear focus on and responsibility for key issues that are managed through the joint command crime performance plan. A chief inspector takes responsibility for the satisfaction delivery plan and ensures appropriate links between departments and wider force initiatives, such as Operation Advance, are maintained.

An initiative aimed at gaining a greater understanding of victims' needs and improving delivery has resulted in the force engaging external consultants to survey the victims' experience. Another excellent example is the recent introduction of a victims' bureau, funded by the PCC, that comprises a dedicated team to keep victims informed on the progress of their investigation in accordance with The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.

There has been comprehensive scrutiny of victim satisfaction at the strategic performance group which considers trends and a range of criteria that impact on victims; this is further categorised by crime type. Other activity includes a review of academic studies examining the drivers for satisfaction.

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

The vast majority of rape reports are subject to an incident log entry on the command and control system. Our audit of rape and serious sexual offence reports found that the vast majority had been accurately recorded on the system and correctly classified. In addition to the audit, we sampled more recent records; it was clear that the revised policy to improve daily supervision by the PPU had improved the recording of these crimes against NCRS.

In February 2014, a detailed review of rape investigation was conducted by the head of crime and justice. The review was in response to the HMIC rape monitoring group and included areas of compliance with HOCR, policy and procedure, investigation, victim care and safeguarding arrangements.

Force policy and procedure for rape and serious sexual offences clearly articulates responsibility for investigations. These roles and responsibilities were well understood by operational staff alongside the routes of reporting. The force has a good understanding of the totality of its reported rapes.

Reviews of serious incidents are conducted through a force daily management meeting at which senior officers from all relevant departments review serious offences for action, allocation and ownership, including all rape and sexual offence reports. A further meeting is held during the afternoon to check on progress and assign actions accordingly.

The procedures for responding to reports of rape that occur outside of the force area are clearly documented within force policy. Victim care is the priority and full consideration is given to the recovery of evidence. Detective inspectors for the area in which the report has been recorded take responsibility for early

liaison with the force to establish who will lead the investigation and to provide ongoing support to the victim. We found that all staff and officers were in no doubt about their roles and responsibilities in responding to reports of rape irrespective of where the crime had occurred.

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

All incidents and crimes are recorded on a single bespoke system which enables accessibility and tight control of records alongside regular and accurate auditing. There are no other databases in operation that contain reports of crime. The system provides the transfer of location, date, officer dealing details and unique reference numbers information automatically between the incident and crime components. There are no other standalone systems in operation that contain reports of crime.

The force has issued frontline staff with BlackBerry devices which have the technical capability to update incident logs but do not allow the inputting of crime reports. Plans are being developed to upgrade the force crime and incident recording systems as part of a wider collaboration arrangement. The implementation of the system should enable the deployment of additional mobile hand-held devices planned for operational staff. This should secure significant business benefits and provide the opportunity for direct officer input of crimes that could, with the right procedures and controls, help to improve overall recording standards.

These significant ongoing developments provide real opportunities to raise standards. Nevertheless, the force should consolidate these major projects to ensure co-ordination is managed effectively, interdependencies recognised and business benefits realised.

The force information manager has responsibility for weeding and compliance of the criminal justice service IT system.

People and skills

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

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

Crime management unit staff have previously received training in NCRS delivered by the FCIR and have the requisite knowledge to audit crime records. Guidance on NCRS compliance has recently been issued to supervisors working in the public protection safeguarding unit. A training package on crime recording is being developed in consultation with the FCIR to standardise practice and enhance understanding. We found that specialists within public protection and domestic abuse units demonstrated a good understanding of the crime-recording rules and standards.

We also identified a significant number of training initiatives being planned and developed by a range of commands and departments that had a specific focus on raising crime-recording standards. However, at the time of our inspection the only planned force training on NCRS was being delivered to transferees and student officers.

Enhanced training provision on crime-recording standards is fully supported by the force but it requires central co-ordination and professional input from the FCIR. A training needs analysis is required to reduce duplication of effort and ensure the delivery is consistent, coherent and prioritised. For example, with the development of the single site command centre structure, the introduction of multi-functional roles and an ongoing recruitment drive, there is an immediate risk to the quality and timeliness of crime recording as well as victim focus and public satisfaction.

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

There has been increased supervision from line managers and we found that frontline staff understood the importance of ethical crime-recording practices and the significance of victim focus. The frequent and consistent messages being communicated by the chief constable, deputy chief constable and Operation Advance had reached frontline staff leaving them in no doubt that their responsibility to victims of crime was their priority.

We did not find evidence that performance pressure unduly influenced crime-recording decisions in the force. Many staff were clear that they would record ethically in accordance with the facts presented.

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

There is a permanent FCIR who supervises a full-time compliance auditor. Their responsibilities include management of the comprehensive crime audit regime and force compliance with NCRS and the NSIR. While the audits are detailed in content, they are not conducted in real-time and, therefore, errors found during the audit process are already somewhat dated. This demonstrates the need for a proactive resource deployed within the control room to resolve this issue.

The FCIR has ready access to, and meets with, the deputy chief constable once a month to discuss crime-recording issues. The FCIR is the final arbiter on all crime-recording issues.