

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Essex Police

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Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
The scope and structure of the report.....	4
Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations	5
Leadership and governance.....	5
Systems and processes.....	6
People and skills.....	10
Recommendations.....	11
Within six months.....	11
Part B: Audit findings in numbers	12
Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings	13
Leadership and governance.....	13
Systems and processes.....	15
People and skills.....	19

Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. All 43 forces will be inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

"To what extent can police-recorded crime information be trusted?"

Accurate crime recording underlines the police service's commitment to public accountability, ensures that local policing bodies² can match resources to the risks identified in communities and enables the police to provide a proper service to victims of crime.

Recent HMIC inspections have revealed weaknesses in police crime recording, particularly the under-recording of crimes. In our interim report of 1 May 2014 we said that *"we are seriously concerned at the picture which is emerging"*.³

We strongly recommend our findings in this report are read alongside the interim report, *Crime recording: A matter of fact - An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales*, available at www.hmic.gov.uk.

The interim report sets out the full context of this inspection programme including the rules and standards governing crime data integrity: the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)⁴ and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)⁵.

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

² Police and crime commissioners for police areas outside London: the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime for the Metropolitan Police Service; and the City of London Corporation for the City of London Police.

³ *Crime recording: A matter of fact – An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales*, paragraph 1.20.

⁴ NCRS is a standard of crime-recording introduced in 2002 and published as part of the Home Office Counting Rules; it has the twin objectives of ensuring the police focus more on victims of crime and ensuring consistency in crime-recording in all police forces.

⁵ HOCR are rules in accordance with which crime data – required to be submitted to the Home Secretary under sections 44 and 45 of the Police Act 1996 – must be collected. They set down how the police service in England and Wales must record crime, how crimes must be classified according to crime type and categories, whether and when to record crime, how many crimes to record in respect of a single incident and the regime for the re-classification of crimes as no-crimes.

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

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

The scope and structure of the report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations

Leadership and governance

Within Essex Police there is strong and committed chief officer leadership for crime data integrity with consistent and clear guidance. The assistant chief constable is the force lead for crime data.

The force has a process to enable staff to report any concerns they have about inappropriate actions inside the organisation. Officers and staff are able to use a confidential email system to alert the professional standards department. We found that staff have the confidence to raise any concerns they have about crime recording with their line manager or with the force crime registrar.

The force has a number of general and more specific policies on the management of crime. However, these policies have not been updated to reflect the many changes to practice brought in recently to aid more timely and accurate crime recording.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should review and update its policies on the management of crime to ensure that they are compliant with the NCRS and HOCR and that they reflect the changes in working practices recently introduced by the force.

Senior managers understand the importance of having a full picture of local demand from crime and of building up a clear picture of crime patterns and offending behaviour so as better to protect, and reduce harm to, communities. However, some of these officers remain focused on numerical crime-reduction measures. They are not confident that apparently rising levels of crime resulting from ethical recording practices would not adversely reflect on their personal performance. This could be a barrier to the force achieving the level of data accuracy to which it aspires.

The force has a flexible audit regime designed to focus on those crime types identified as being most at risk of inaccurate recording. Recent audits were undertaken in respect of criminal damage (owing to a recent fall in the number of recorded offences) and rape (owing to an increase in the number of recorded offences). Findings from all crime audits are circulated and used to improve performance.

The force has identified that the recording of some sexual offence and child abuse crimes by public protection teams can be poor. We found that this occurs because of a focus by officers on carrying out an investigation and taking any necessary steps to safeguard the victim. This results in the crime not always being recorded in compliance with NCRS and HOCR. Monitoring of compliance

is also hindered as the computer systems used within the public protection area do not link directly with the main force systems. This makes audit and compliance checks difficult.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams, or for the management of anti-social behaviour (ASB)) are properly recorded as crimes. Assurance should be demonstrated through proportionate and effective audit arrangements. Special attention should be directed to those reports involving vulnerable adults and children.

The force is preparing for the introduction of a new crime recording system. This system depends upon a high standard of accurate data recording. The force has recognised this and has appointed a manager to lead the drive for improved data quality.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

HMIC examined 169 incident records⁶ and found that 132 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 132 crimes that should have been recorded, 121 were. Of the 121, two were wrongly classified and 14 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. Overall, this is a good result for the force and demonstrates the accuracy of the force's crime-recording practices. We examined 55 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments, and found 18 crimes that should have been recorded. Of the 18 crimes that should have been recorded, 14 were. Of the 14, all were classified correctly; six were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. The force is establishing new procedures for the recording of rape and serious sexual offences in an effort to improve the recording of these types of offences.

The force has a centralised crime recording unit – the crime bureau – which records all of the force's recorded crime. We have estimated that the unit records approximately 24 percent of the total of their recorded crime directly from members of the public in those cases which do not require the creation of an incident record.

⁶ 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 or auditable means.

Our inspection of this unit (a review of 27 calls from the public) found that of the 27 crimes that should have been recorded, 1 was classified incorrectly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We found that the force computer system used by officers for the investigation of anti-social behaviour and other non-crime incidents contained some reports of crime which should have been recorded but were not.

The crime bureau is also responsible for the quality assurance of crime reports, including classification, whether created following the attendance of an officer at the scene of a reported incident or whether reported by any other means, for example a victim attending a police station to report a crime. To do this we found that supervisors both in this team, and in the force control room, routinely monitor calls and incidents to ensure accurate crime recording standards and a focus on the victims' needs.

Force policies and procedure give direct guidance on how to deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area.

Out-of-court disposals

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

Cautions – Of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all 20 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 11 cases where there was a victim to consult, 10 showed that the victims' views had been considered.

⁷ A form of immediate financial punishment used by police to deal with low-level offending such as being drunk and disorderly, retail theft, and minor criminal damage.

⁸ A cannabis warning is a non-statutory disposal for cases of possession of cannabis for personal use. It constitutes a warning to the offender and confiscation of the cannabis.

⁹ Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example often involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹⁰ National guidance for the use of out-of-court disposals is detailed in a number of documents:

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

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 19 PND disposals and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 19 cases. In all 19 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 15 cases where there was a victim to consult; we found that all 15 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 23 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 23 cases. In one case we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

We found that the cannabis warning forms in use in the force omit to mention to the offender the full implications of accepting the disposal.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that forms used for out-of-court disposals, in particular the cannabis warning forms, are compliant with the national guidelines.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 21 community resolutions and found that in 20 cases the offender was suitable to receive the disposal. Out of the 21 resolutions where there was a victim, all 21 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 20 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim¹¹.

There is a strong culture of considering victims' views when applying these types of disposal. This is achieved through pre-set prompts within the crime management system which are designed to point officers always to consult victims in these cases. This is good practice which shows that the force places the victim at the heart of decision making in these circumstances.

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. We examined 73 no-crime records and found 68 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS.

Comprehensive monitoring and auditing takes place in most no-crime decisions, particularly those involving high-risk crimes. The number of staff authorised to

¹¹ National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence 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.

make no-crime decisions has been reduced from forty to just two; this helps to achieve a consistent approach when making decisions to no-crime a previously recorded crime.

Victim-centred approach

There is a strong drive from the leadership of the force actively to promote and display a victim-centred approach. These include *standards matter* and *getting it right first time* messages. We found that frontline staff, including call-takers, understood these messages and the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation.

The force surveys victims of burglary, robbery and crimes against minority groups to explore their experience of the police handling of their reports of crime. The force does not survey people who make contact to report a crime-related incident but for which no crime report is recorded. To do so would provide a wider understanding of how the public perceives the service they receive.

Rape

The force has itself identified that not all reports of rape have been recorded in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR. In response the force is in the process of implementing a new policy to reinforce the requirements and expectations around the recording of reports of rape. We found that some senior investigators and managers are uneasy regarding the consequences of the new approach, with concerns that this will lead to a likely rise in the number of recorded rapes and subsequent requests to no-crime these records post-investigation.

We found that a single officer is responsible for assessing requests of rape no-crime and the force crime registrar¹² (FCR) monitors the accuracy of these decisions. This ensures consistency in decision-making and appropriate oversight. Our audit found that of the 29 rape no-crime decisions taken, 27 complied with NCRS and HOCR. This is an effective approach for the force.

IT systems

The force uses separate computer systems for each of its incident and crime recording functions but the transfer of information between these systems is limited. The force is planning to introduce a new IT system which should further strengthen its current infrastructure and improve the effectiveness of the crime

¹² The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HOCR provide that he is ultimately responsible for all decisions to record a crime or to make a no-crime decision, as the final arbiter. The force crime registrar's responsibilities include training staff in the crime-recording process and carrying out audits to check that the force is complying with all applicable rules.

recording arrangements. The new system will also incorporate a number of existing standalone systems which the force currently maintains within its specialist areas. The current arrangements create the need to re-key information from one system to another, with the attendant risks of incidents not being recorded as crimes on the crime recording system. The new system will help mitigate these risks.

People and skills

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, were found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR. The force has selected a number of passionate and determined individuals, notably the head of crime, to drive forward the ethical crime-recording message of the chief officer team. The positive approach to crime recording found in the force relies very much on these individuals.

The force has delivered detailed and comprehensive training for those staff working in the centralised crime management bureau. Student officers and transferees receive crime recording training developed by the force crime registrar and delivered either directly by her, or by staff from the Essex Police College. However, there is little training provided for operational officers to reinforce accurate crime-recording requirements. We found that operational officers' understanding of the NCRS and HOCR is limited.

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

Individual officers and staff spoken to during our inspection fully understood the standards of behaviour and conduct expected and recognised the Chief Constable's commitment to accurate and ethical crime recording. We did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or mis-classification of crimes.

Force crime registrar

The FCR has extensive knowledge and experience in the management of crime data and the application of the NCRS and HOCR. We found that she is active in her oversight of the crime recording systems and processes within the force. Where appropriate, crime-recording queries are referred to the FCR, who is seen as the final arbiter in respect of the application of NCRS and HOCR.

Although the assistant chief constable has the lead for crime recording, the deputy chief constable is the force lead for all matters relating to integrity. As a result, the FCR has a scheduled quarterly meeting with the deputy chief

constable which focuses on issues such as data integrity, accuracy and any other emerging issues.

The FCR does not attend force-level meetings on policy or performance and thus her views and observations are normally only available to the full chief officer team through a chain of management.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should include the FCR in force-level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

Recommendations

Within three months

1. The force should review and update its policies on the management of crime to ensure that they are compliant with the NCRS and HOCR and that they reflect the changes in working practices recently introduced by the force.
2. The force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams, or for the management of ASB) are properly recorded as crimes. Assurance should be demonstrated through proportionate and effective audit arrangements. Special attention should be directed to those reports involving vulnerable adults and children.
3. The force should ensure that forms used for out-of-court disposals, in particular the cannabis warning forms, are compliant with the national guidelines.
4. The force should include the FCR in force level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

Within six months

5. The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime-recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

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

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Essex 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 Essex Police recorded the following number of crimes.
169	132	121
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Essex 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 Essex Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Essex Police recorded the following number of crimes.
27	27	27
Crimes referred from other agencies directly to Essex Police specialist departments		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Essex Police specialist departments from other agencies which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals to specialist departments HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Essex Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Essex Police recorded the following number of crimes.
55	18	14
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Essex Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
73	68	

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

Within Essex Police there is strong and committed chief officer leadership for crime data integrity with consistent and clear guidance and supporting actions. Essex Police responded to its own internal audit findings on compliance with the NCRS in April 2012 with a strong and sustained campaign to improve the accuracy of crime recording. The new Chief Constable has set a clear direction emphasising integrity, victim satisfaction and doing the right thing. These include the *standards matter* and *getting it right first time* messages.

The assistant chief constable (ACC), as the force lead for crime data integrity has, over a number of years, reinforced the commitment to constant improvement in this area. While the ACC is recognised within the force headquarters departments for driving change and improving standards, his role is less well known among those working within local policing areas.

The force has a number of general and more specific policies on the management of crime. We found that these policies have not been updated to reflect the many changes to practice brought in recently to aid more timely and more accurate crime recording.

Since July 2006, Essex Police has maintained a process to enable staff to report any concerns they have about inappropriate actions within the organisation. Officers and staff are able to use a confidential email system to alert the professional standards department. We found that staff have confidence to raise any concerns they have about crime recording with their line managers or with the force crime registrar.

The current police and crime plan reinforces the focus on crime reduction and the importance of supporting victims. Although the plan contains no numerical targets, there is an expectation of reducing overall crime. There is no reference to the need for accurate crime data in the police and crime plan.

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

Until recently the force's performance framework made crime reduction figures and detection rates the primary measure of success. Senior managers understand the importance of having a full picture of local demand from crime and of building up a clear picture of crime patterns and offending behaviour so as better to protect and reduce harm to communities. We found some resistance to this approach, mostly at inspector rank. Some of these officers remain focused on numerical crime reduction measures. They are not confident that apparently rising levels of crime resulting from ethical recording practices will not adversely reflect on their personal performance. This could be a barrier to the force achieving the level of data accuracy to which it aspires.

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

The force has undergone a peer review process in order to have a greater understanding of risks around crime data accuracy. The audit regime has been designed to focus on those crime types identified as being most at risk of inaccurate recording. We found that the force has, over the last year, established an understanding of the various ways in which crime gets reported to the force, and the proportions reported through each of these channels. The identified routes include crimes reported by telephone, those reported directly by the public at police station front counters and to police officers on patrol, and those reported to the force by other agencies.

The force has introduced measures to audit and dip-sample crimes reported through each of the main reporting routes, recognising that checking for compliance with agreed crime-recording practices is particularly difficult in some situations, such as direct approaches by the public to patrolling officers.

The force is preparing for the introduction of a new crime recording system called ATHENA. This system depends upon a high standard of accurate data recording. The force has recognised this and has an identified manager leading the drive for improved data quality.

The force has identified that the recording of some sexual offence and child abuse crimes by public protection teams can be poor. We found that this occurs because of a focus by officers on carrying out an investigation and taking any necessary steps to safeguard the victim. This results in the crime not always being recorded in compliance with NCRS and HOCR. Monitoring of compliance is hindered as the computer systems used within the public protection area do not link directly with the main force systems. This makes audit and compliance checks difficult and needs to be addressed.

Inspectors found a comprehensive and purposeful audit regime which reports routinely on the accuracy of crime recording throughout the year. The force consults widely before drawing up the force audit plan, which remains capable of being redirected to assess emerging needs. For example, the audit scheduled for July 2013 was re-aligned to help support a peer review of crime. The ACC has also requested short-notice work on both falling rates of recorded criminal damage offences and rising patterns in rape reports to check for accuracy of recording.

Within the current structure of performance meetings, the results of crime audits are used to re-direct operational activity and achieve changes of practice by individuals, teams or policing areas, with a detective superintendent as the nominated lead. A recent example of such a change was a move to improve the time taken to record a number of categories of serious crime such as robberies and serious sexual offences. These had been found not to be recorded within the 72-hour time limit for the recording of crime required by HOCR.

The force is currently designing its performance framework. We found that in making these changes the force is ensuring that potential changes in the control room do not adversely impact on the audit team's ability to carry out its work. The ACC is working with the relevant heads of departments to ensure that unforeseen barriers to accurate crime recording do not emerge from process changes in the future.

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

Almost all incidents are accurately recorded on the force's command and control computer system with most incidents being closed with the most appropriate type of coding for the nature of the incident.

We examined 169 incident records and found that 132 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 132 crimes that should have been recorded, 121 were. Of the 121, two were wrongly classified and 14 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR.

We examined 55 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments, and found 18 crimes that should have been recorded. Of the 18 crimes that should have been recorded, 14 were. Of the 14, six were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. The force is

establishing new procedures for the recording of rape and serious sexual offences in an effort to improve the recording of these types of offences.

The force has a centralised crime recording unit – the crime bureau – which records all of the force’s recorded crime. We have estimated that the unit records approximately 24 percent of the total of their recorded crime directly from members of the public in those cases which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 27 calls from the public) found that of the 27 crimes that should have been recorded, all 27 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We found that the force computer system used by officers for the investigation of anti-social behaviour and other non-crime incidents contained some crimes which should have been recorded but were not.

The crime bureau is also responsible for the quality assurance of crime reports, including classification, whether created following the attendance of an officer at the scene of a reported incident or reported by any other means, for example a victim attending a police station to report a crime. To do this, we found that supervisors in both this team and the force control room routinely monitor calls and incidents to ensure accurate crime recording standards and a focus on the victims’ needs. This is good practice.

A number of force policies, such as those regarding the recording of crimes of rape and child abuse, give direct guidance on how to deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area. This area is also comprehensively covered in a procedural document on the general transfer of crime reports between forces. However, we found a lack of detailed instruction on the management and forwarding of original notes and associated paperwork.

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

When using out-of-court disposals, the force needs to ensure it only uses them in line with appropriate guidance so that only offenders who are entitled to be offered an out-of-court disposal receive them.

Cautions – Of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all 20 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 11 cases where there was a victim to consult, 10 showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 19 PND disposals and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 19 cases. In all 19 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 15

cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that all 15 victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 23 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 23 cases. In one case we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

We found that the cannabis warning forms in use in the force omit to mention to the offender the full implications of accepting the disposal.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 21 community resolutions and found that in 20 cases the offender was suitable to receive the disposal. Out of the 21 resolutions where there was a victim, all 21 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 20 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim.

There is a strong culture around considering victims' views when applying these types of disposal. This is achieved through pre-set prompts within the crime management system which are designed to point officers always to consult victims in these cases.

Careful auditing of out-of-court disposals has produced effective monitoring at both a local and force level. The force has been encouraging supervisors and officers to ensure they only use this type of disposal in the correct circumstances. A campaign to improve the administration of cautions has been led by the ACC who monitors the proportion of out-of-court disposals to check that they are not being used inappropriately to boost force performance. The police and crime commissioner has shown considerable interest in this area, with his deputy holding a workshop on local practice which has drawn interest from other forces nationally.

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

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been reclassified on the basis of additional police-verifiable information. We examined 73 no-crime records and found 68 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS.

Since March 2013, the force has introduced a new procedure, which requires all requests for a recorded crime to be no-crimed to be routed through a supervisor. This is good practice, and as a consequence the number of requests to no-crime a record, and the number of errors, have reduced considerably.

Comprehensive monitoring and auditing of most no-crime decisions takes place, particularly those involving high-risk crimes. The force judges that these

show extremely high levels of compliance. The number of staff authorised to make no-crime decisions has been reduced from 40 to just 2.

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

There is a strong drive from the leadership of the force actively to promote and display a victim-centred approach. These include *standards matter* and *getting it right first time* messages. Frontline staff, including call-takers, understand and have responded to these messages. Some force policies have yet to be updated to reflect this ethos. For example, we found that the approach in relation to rape had historically placed emphasis on the need for investigation before a decision was made on whether to record a report as a crime. This has only recently moved to an emphasis on correct and timely recording as a crime on the basis of the first account of the victim which is in line with NCRS and HOCR.

There is an evident understanding of the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation. Call-handlers are polite, professional and helpful. Despite being extremely busy, crime recording managers insist that the call-handlers dealing with vulnerable victims, or those in distress, provide a suitable handover; victims are continually reassured on the telephone until officers arrive at the scene.

The force surveys victims of burglary, robbery and crimes against minority groups to explore their experience of the police handling of their report of crime. The ACC is keen to expand surveys to include victims of domestic abuse but is aware of the balance which needs to be struck between the safety of victims, who may be affected by such contact being made, and the benefit these surveys would bring. We found awareness among frontline staff of the survey work and of mystery shopper activity but the product of this work is less well known. No survey work is undertaken with those people who contact the force to report a crime-related incident but for which no crime report is recorded. Doing so would provide the force with a wider understanding of how the public perceives the service they receive.

The force is seeking to improve reporting routes, making it easier for the public to access neighbourhood officers and report crime to front enquiry offices and ultimately through the force website.

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

The force has itself identified that not all reports of rape have been recorded in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR; in response, the force is in the process of implementing a new policy to reinforce the requirements and expectations around the recording of reports of rape. While HMIC welcomes this improvement, we found that some senior investigators and managers are

uneasy about the consequences of the approach, with concerns that this would likely lead to a rise in the number of recorded rapes and subsequent requests to no-crime these records post investigation. The force needs to increase focus on ensuring prompt and accurate recording in all cases involving rape and sexual offences.

HMIC found that the centralised crime management unit monitors the classification of all reports of rape each day and that a single officer is responsible for assessing requests of rape no-crime; this ensures consistency in approach. The force crime registrar monitors the accuracy of these decisions. This provides an independent view outside of any immediate performance-driven pressures. Of the 29 rape no-crime decisions we reviewed, 27 complied with NCRS and HOOCR.

2.6 How do Essex Police's IT systems allow for efficient and effective management of crime recording?

Essex Police uses a single computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions; there is only limited linkage between the systems. The force is planning to introduce a new IT system which should further strengthen its current infrastructure and improve the effectiveness of the crime recording arrangements. The new system will also incorporate a number of existing standalone systems which the force currently maintains within its specialist areas. The current arrangements create the need to re-key information from one system to another with the attendant risks of incidents not being recorded as crimes on the crime recording system. The new system will help mitigate these risks. We note that the force has only recently started to audit the standalone systems to check for crime-recording compliance and quality.

People and skills

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

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

The force has selected a number of passionate and determined individuals, notably the head of crime, to carry out key tasks in the leadership and management of force crime recording systems. These individuals demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of force policies, HOOCR, NCRS and the National Standard for Incident Recording. The positive approach to crime recording found in Essex Police relies very much on these people.

The force has delivered detailed and comprehensive training for those staff working in the centralised crime management bureau. However, with the exception of student officers and transferees who receive crime recording training from the force crime registrar, there is little training provided for

operational officers to reinforce accurate crime recording requirements. Only 130 officers had completed the computer-based national NCRS and HOCR package at the time of our inspection. We found that operational officers' understanding of the NCRS and HOCR is limited, and officers are frequently guided by the Crown Prosecution Service charging standards when making relevant decisions regarding the recording of crimes. This standard has a different test from the HOCR and it can lead to incorrect crime recording.

The FCR has recently engaged with some of the detective inspectors working on child abuse investigations, as well as investigators in the professional standards department, to discuss their practices and to ensure compliance with the NCRS and HOCR.

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

Individual officers and staff spoken to during our inspection fully understood the standards of behaviour and conduct expected and recognised the Chief Constable's commitment to accurate and ethical crime recording. A number of recent challenges to the force on its application of HOCR have been thoroughly investigated by the professional standards department, and as a consequence the force had taken appropriate action in individual cases. Concerns about the under-recording of shoplifting within a policing operation was one example of this.

We did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

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

The FCR has extensive knowledge and experience in the management of crime data and the application of the NCRS and HOCR; we found that she is active in her oversight of crime recording systems and processes within the force.

Although the ACC has the lead for crime recording, the deputy chief constable is the force lead for all matters relating to integrity. As a result, the FCR has a scheduled quarterly meeting with the deputy chief constable which focuses on issues such as data integrity, accuracy and any other emerging issues.

The FCR does not attend force-level meetings on policy or performance and thus her views and observations are normally only available to the executive through a chain of management.

Where appropriate, crime-recording queries are referred to the FCR, who is seen as the final arbiter in respect of the application of NCRS and HOCR. Force policies which contain crime-recording requirements are routinely scrutinised by the FCR to ensure NCRS and HOCR compliance.