

# Crime data integrity

## Inspection of Gwent Police

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## Introduction

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

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

Accurate crime recording underlines the police service's commitment to public accountability, ensures that local policing bodies<sup>2</sup> can match resources to the risks identified in communities and enables the police to provide a proper service to victims of crime.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

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

## The scope and structure of the report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

## Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations

### Leadership and governance

Within Gwent Police there is strong chief officer leadership for crime data integrity. The chief constable is the national policing lead for crime statistics. The assistant chief constable is the lead officer for crime data integrity for the force.

The force has an established governance structure and carried out an internal review in 2013 on how the force was recording crime; themes from the crime review have recently been published force-wide to raise awareness of how performance in crime recording can be improved.

The professional standards department (PSD) and chief constable's blogs offer routes by which staff can voice concerns; in the former case we found an issue of concern among staff about the confidentiality of making comments on policing or management issues. The PSD also delivers presentations on police ethics and integrity to new staff and to those on management development courses.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should communicate the availability of the confidential reporting line to staff again, emphasising that it is indeed confidential and can be used for all matters of concern, including those relating to crime data integrity.

The force crime recording policy provides guidance in line with the HOCR. We found that the level of information recorded for most incidents was proportionate to the crimes but that an absence of detailed guidance for officers means they are relying on others, experience and colleague's advice. As the force has recently undertaken a major change in recording processes, with direct-inputting of crime records by officers, this reliance on colleagues' experience (as opposed to clear and accessible guidance) is a potential risk to crime data integrity.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should review and amend its crime recording policy and guidance to ensure it provides clear direction to staff which reflects an ethical approach to crime recording, including when and how a crime should be recorded and where advice can be sought. This guidance should then be provided to all staff who have a responsibility for making crime recording decisions.

The force has analysed and assessed risks in relation to the integrity of crime recording at an organisational level, and has carried out action to mitigate identified risks. The force has recently introduced a new crime-recording system

(NICHE), this has caused delays in incidents waiting to be finalised, and there is a backlog of crimes awaiting validation.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take steps to review its backlog of crime records that are awaiting validation. It should take the appropriate action to deal with the backlog and secure timely validation of records in the future.

The force has an established audit regime that is flexible, but this flexibility has been at the expense of the regular audit regime with planned audits placed on hold. Between June and December 2013, the force had a limited audit capability owing to staff shortages and focused audits mainly on the NCRS audit guide which didn't necessarily highlight areas of greatest risk for of crime recording.

Although results from audits have featured in some local area performance reviews (last circulated in 2012), the force does not currently have a process in place systematically to identify, capture and share good practice or failures in NCRS.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should introduce a process by which findings from crime audits are shared with relevant staff across the force, and introduce a system for implementing any changes that are needed as a result of audit findings.

The force uses a telephone investigation unit to handle a large proportion of the crimes reported to the force. This enables dedicated staff to provide a consistent and effective crime recording approach, although we found that rostering issues are affecting the consistency of staffing levels which are sometimes below that required, consequently a backlog is created which places pressure on incoming shifts.

To improve crime data accuracy, the force has increased the number of designated decision-makers (DDM)<sup>6</sup> from two to four. We noted that once a crime is recorded, the crime management unit can be quick and effective in noting crime recording errors; putting them right and informing the police officer responsible for the error.

The force has one central referral unit for all reported crime. Our unannounced visit to the unit to check recent incoming referrals revealed that the relevant crimes had been recorded in accordance with NCRS on every occasion.

The force does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types; this can limit the effectiveness of audits.

<sup>6</sup> The DDM role is to provide practical advice, guidance and act as arbiter at a local level to ensure the accurate recording of crime and crime-related incidents in accordance with national standards.

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

## Systems and processes

### Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 89 incident records<sup>7</sup> and found that 67 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 67 crimes that should have been recorded, 58 were. Of the 58, three were wrongly classified and three were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. There is a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime-recording decisions.

We examined 50 reports that had been referred from other agencies directly to the force's public protection unit (PPU). Of the 24 crimes that should have been recorded, 7 had been recorded.

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

The force has processes in place to quality assure crime recording; nonetheless, more effective supervision is required to improve the accuracy of incident and crime records; within the control room we found there were too few call-handler incident records reviewed regularly by supervisors, and that call-takers received feedback only occasionally on NCRS.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should ensure that it has effective supervision and a structured, proportionate, quality assurance process in place within the force control room to check on compliance with the NCRS.

The force has experienced teething problems with the new crime recording system (NICHE) in that the quality of data being inputted directly from the scene by police officers is often insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the HOCR.

<sup>7</sup> An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

We were concerned at the way in which the force records offences of making off without payment (MOWP)<sup>8</sup>. We examined 20 MOWP incidents and found that 17 should have been recorded as a crime and were not.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take steps to review its policy and practice for dealing with reports of making off without payment, ensuring that it is compliant with the HOCR and the NCRS and that staff responsible for making crime-recording decisions in respect of these offences are aware of the requirements to work within these policy guidelines.

It is apparent that the practice in Gwent is one of not recording a MOWP crime unless the circumstances are unequivocal. One petrol station had 2 out of 26 complaints recorded as crimes. This conflicts with the principles of NCRS and HOCR.

The force does not have a procedure for detailing how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area, nor does it lay out how to manage the transfer of documentation. Our audit showed the force had transferred crimes effectively and managed the crime-recording issues appropriately.

### **Out-of-court disposals**

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, penalty notices for disorder (PND),<sup>9</sup> cannabis warnings<sup>10</sup> and community resolutions.<sup>11</sup> The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Making off without payment is mostly used to refer to the offence of driving away from petrol stations without paying for fuel taken, but it can also refer to non payment of services and other property, such as taxi fares, and restaurant meals.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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

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



**Cautions** – Of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, in 8 cases we found a record of the offender being made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. In 19 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, 12 cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

**Penalty notices for disorder** – We dip-sampled 20 PND disposals, and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 15 cases. In all 20 cases, we could find no record that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning. Out of the 9 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that 2 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 18 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 of 20 community resolutions and found that, in 16 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 17 cases where there was a victim, we found none with evidence that the wishes and personal circumstances of that victim had been properly considered. 14 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate<sup>13</sup>.

It is evident from our inspection that out-of-court disposals are being used on some occasions when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use. The views of victims are not always being considered and the information which should be provided to the offender regarding the future implications of accepting the disposal does not appear to be given.

The appropriateness of out-of-court disposals has not been monitored by force auditors since June 2013 when the regular NCRS auditing was placed on hold.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should take steps to improve the supervision of its use of out-of-court disposals to ensure that they are only used in appropriate circumstances and the views of the victim are taken into account. In particular they should not be used when the offending history of the offender precludes their use. This should be

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

supported by the immediate introduction of an effective mechanism for the monitoring of the use of out-of-court disposals to ensure the decisions being taken to use the disposals are appropriate.

### **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 police verifiable information. We reviewed 63 no-crime records and found all 63 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. Approval to no-crime a record is undertaken by the four dedicated DDM; this ensures consistency and appropriate application of the NCRS.

### **Victim-centred approach**

The force has been explicit in its message to staff about the importance of a victim-centred approach and is working to ensure this extends across all crime types. The Gwent police and crime commissioner has published his own document called '*The Victims Charter*', which sets out the minimum standards victims of crime should expect from Gwent Police.

The force engages with victims of domestic abuse to learn their experiences of police contacts and outcomes. The force also surveys about 2,000 victims per year, including victims of anti-social behaviour and victims of crime from minority groups. Those surveyed who are dissatisfied with the levels of police service are re-contacted to try to better understand their needs.

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

### **Rape**

The force has a comprehensive policy and procedure which describes how to deal with reports of rapes through all reporting routes. Most officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy.

Auditing of rape records is highly effective. We found that reports of rape are recorded accurately and all 27 rape no-crime reports we reviewed complied with the NCRS and HOCR. The force crime registrar<sup>14</sup> (FCR) monitors every rape no-crime.

The force does not have a policy to deal with reports of rape where the victim has reported the Gwent crime in another force area. When this happens, the

<sup>14</sup> The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HOCR provide that he is ultimately responsible for all decisions to record a crime or to make a no-crime decision, as the final arbiter. The force crime registrar's responsibilities include training staff in the crime-recording process and carrying out audits to check that the force is complying with all applicable rules.

public protection unit would normally assume responsibility for the victim and attendant considerations while referring to the other force for recording and management purposes.

## **IT systems**

The force uses a single system for each of the incident (ORIS) and crime (NICHE) recording functions; these systems are linked.

The force has recently introduced NICHE, and we note that the force is making better use of technology to record and audit crime. Policy since 2012 makes it clear that officers and staff must use only the dedicated systems, reducing the risk of crime records being held on unauthorised systems.

## **People and skills**

The force has sufficient staff and supervisors responsible for recording and reviewing incidents and crimes and most of these are trained on, and demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of, force policies, HOCR, NCRS and the NSIR. However, recent training on the subject delivered to control room staff only included police officers and not police staff.

Every constable and sergeant has received an intensive, three-hour session of training on the HOCR/NCRS. The training was well-received and most who had attended said they had retained an understanding of NCRS.

**Recommendation:** Within three months, the force should further develop its training on NCRS and HOCR by introducing an initial training package for all new police recruits and for those police staff who are directly involved in recording crime, quality assuring or auditing crime records.

Within the telephone investigation unit there is an imbalance of staff across teams which affects service delivery. On the smaller teams, backlogs occur which means the level of service to victims may be reduced.

**Recommendation:** Immediately, the force should review the balance of staff across the teams within the telephone investigation unit to ensure that staffing levels consistently provide the capability and capacity to secure crime recording accuracy, and a good and consistent level of service to all victims.

There is clearly a developing culture among officers and staff within the force to secure crime data accuracy. The vast majority of staff understood chief officer messages and understand expected standards of behaviour and conduct with regards to crime recording. Non-adherence to the HOCR is considered unacceptable. In this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

## **Force crime registrar**

Gwent Police's FCR is active in his oversight of crime recording systems and processes within the force. The FCR is well known by senior managers in the force. He deals mainly with the managers within the force while his team within the crime management unit has daily interaction with operational officers.

The FCR has not always had the resources to carry out the role to full effect. The depletion of the audit team from June to December 2013 significantly reduced audit capacity. Although work was prioritised, incident-to-crime audits were placed on hold. This left the force unsighted on an area where crimes can easily be missed or hidden, such as within incident logs.

The FCR is seen to be, and operates as, the final arbiter of any disputes occurring within the crime recording process. He has regular and unrestricted access to the assistant chief constable lead for data integrity. The FCR also meets with and supports the chief constable in his work as the national crime lead for crime statistics.

## **Recommendations**

### **Immediately**

1. The force should take steps to review its backlog of crime records that are awaiting validation. It should take the appropriate action to deal with the backlog and secure timely validation of records in the future.
2. The force should take steps to ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g. those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes with particular attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.
3. The force should take steps to review its policy and practice for dealing with reports of making off without payment, ensuring that it is compliant with the HOCR and the NCRS and that staff responsible for making crime-recording decisions in respect of these offences are aware of the requirements to work within these policy guidelines.
4. The force should take steps to improve the supervision of its use of out-of-court disposals to ensure that they are only used in appropriate circumstances and the views of the victim are taken into account. In particular they should not be used when the offending history of the offender precludes their use. This should be supported by the immediate introduction of an effective mechanism for the monitoring of the use of

out-of-court disposals to ensure the decisions being taken to use the disposals are appropriate.

5. The force should review the balance of staff across the teams within the telephone investigation unit to ensure that staffing levels consistently provide the capability and capacity to secure crime recording accuracy and a good and consistent level of service to all victims.

### **Within three months**

6. The force should communicate the availability of the confidential reporting line to staff again, emphasising that it is indeed confidential and can be used for all matters of concern, including those relating to crime data integrity.
7. The force should review and amend its crime recording policy and guidance to ensure it provides clear direction to staff which reflects an ethical approach to crime recording, including when and how a crime should be recorded and where advice can be sought. This guidance should then be provided to all staff who have a responsibility for making crime-recording decisions.
8. The force should introduce a process by which findings from crime audits are shared with relevant staff across the force, and introduce a system for implementing any changes that are needed as a result of audit findings.
9. The force should expand its suite of incident opening and closing codes to enable a proportionate, efficient and effective audit of crime-recording.
10. The force should ensure that it has effective supervision and a structured, proportionate, quality assurance process in place within the force control room to check on compliance with the NCRS.
11. The force should further develop its training on NCRS and HOCR by introducing an initial training package for all new police recruits and for those police staff who are directly involved in recording crime, quality assuring or auditing crime records.

## Part B: Audit findings in numbers

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

<b>Crimes reported as part of an incident record</b>		
<b>Incidents reviewed</b>	<b>Crimes identified</b>	<b>Crimes recorded</b>
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Gwent 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 Gwent Police recorded the following number of crimes.
<b>89</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Crimes referred from other agencies directly to the Gwent Police Public Protection Unit (PPU)</b>		
<b>Referrals</b>	<b>Crimes identified</b>	<b>Crimes recorded</b>
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Gwent Police PPU from other agencies which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals to specialist departments HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Gwent Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Gwent Police recorded the following number of crimes.
<b>50</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>No-crimes</b>		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Gwent Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>	

## Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings

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

### Leadership and governance

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

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

Within Gwent Police there is strong chief officer leadership for crime data integrity, with chief officers fully engaged in providing top level guidance in crime data recording to force staff. The chief constable is the national policing lead for crime statistics and the assistant chief constable takes responsibility for crime data integrity and chairs the data quality assurance board (DQAB), introduced in 2012.

In 2013 Gwent carried out a review into how the force was recording crime and found no areas showing deliberate under-recording for unethical reasons, although it found some crimes had been under-recorded. Some themes from the 2013 crime review have recently been published force-wide to raise awareness of how performance in crime recording can be improved.

The professional standards department (PSD) and the chief constable's blogs both offer routes by which staff can voice concerns; however in the former case we found an issue of concern among staff about the confidentiality of making comments about policing or management issues. The PSD also delivers presentations on police ethics and integrity to new staff and to those on management development courses.

The force crime recording policy does not contain particular reference to an ethical approach to recording crime but does provide guidance in line with the HOCR. We found that the level of information recorded for most incidents was proportionate to the crimes but that the absence of detailed guidance for officers means they are relying on others' experience and colleagues' advice. As the force has recently undertaken a major change in recording processes, with direct-inputting of crime records by officers, this reliance on colleagues' experience as (opposed to clear and accessible guidance) is a potential risk to crime data integrity.

The police and crime plan makes no reference to data integrity.

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

Gwent Police has analysed and assessed risks in relation to inaccurate crime recording at an organisational level; this is primarily managed through the DQAB which has carried out its role in mitigating risks appropriately (examples being the crime review in 2013 and the introduction of force-wide NCRS training for officers and staff).

The force also manages risks around crime recording through daily meetings, chaired by a chief officer, to monitor the progress of the new crime recording system (NICHE). The recent introduction of this system has doubled the number of incidents waiting to be finalised, compared to the numbers waiting before NICHE was adopted. There is also a backlog of crimes awaiting validation. This is a risk to the force and backlogs need to be dealt with and preventative measures introduced to minimise delays in service to victims, and to ensure accurate crime recording.

The force has assessed its main crime categories to understand their recording risks. However, between June and December 2013 the force had a limited audit capability owing to staff shortages and focused audits mainly on the NCRS audit guide which did not necessarily highlight areas of greatest risk in respect of crime recording.

To improve crime data accuracy the force has increased the number of designated decision-makers (DDM) from two to four. Despite a reduced level of DDM auditing since June 2013, audits have been undertaken of all sexual offence incidents raised and recorded by the control room since November 2013. This is good practice, demonstrating a focus on crimes of a serious nature.

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

The force has shown that the audit regime has been flexible enough to respond to emerging issues. For example, changes have been made to create space for the 2013 crime review and for the review of the force's approach to reports of making off without payment (MOWP). This has been at the expense of the regular audit regime with planned audits placed on hold. The inspectors noted that once a crime is recorded, the crime management unit can be quick and effective in noting crime-recording errors, putting them right and informing the police officer responsible for the error.

The force has mapped the various channels through which crime is reported and understands the proportion of crime reported through each; measures are



in place to check the quality of crime recording through these channels. Reports of serious crime often reach the force via referrals from other agencies, such as social services. The force has one central referral unit (CRU) and a NICHE record is created for every referral received. Our unannounced visit to the Gwent CRU to check recent incoming referrals revealed that associated crimes had been recorded in accordance with NCRS on every occasion.

Gwent has been working hard to ensure crimes are recorded in accordance with the HOCR, NCRS and NSIR but still has further work to do. It does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types and this includes rapes. More effective auditing would be possible if there were specific crime opening and closing codes for rapes when creating an incident record.

The force uses a telephone investigation unit to handle a large proportion of the crimes reported to the force. This enables dedicated staff to provide a consistent and effective crime recording approach, although we found that rostering issues are affecting the consistency of staffing levels which are sometimes below that required; consequently a backlog is created which places pressure on incoming shifts.

Although results from audits have featured in some local area performance reviews (last circulated in 2012) the force does not currently have a process in place to systematically identify, capture and share common good practice or failures in NCRS.

The force does not have an incident opening or closing code for all crime types; this can limit the effectiveness of audits.

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

We examined 89 incident records<sup>15</sup> and found that 67 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 67 crimes that should have been recorded, 58 were. Of the 58,

<sup>15</sup> An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police; recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

three were wrongly classified and three were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. There is a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime-recording decisions.

We examined 50 reports that had been referred from other agencies directly to the force's public protection unit (PPU). Of the 24 crimes that should have been recorded, 7 had been recorded.

The force has processes in place to quality assure crime recording; nonetheless, more effective supervision is required to improve the accuracy of incident and crime records. Within the control room we found there were limited numbers of incident records being reviewed by supervisors, and that call-takers only occasionally received feedback on NCRS.

Staff reported that there has been a cultural shift in the last 12 to 18 months which gave them confidence to report crime as they should. There are systems in place to assure this, including the incident management closure team which monitors and closes all incident logs captured on the incident management system (ORIS) with the opening and closing categories of crime, anti-social behaviour and public safety – the logs are also assessed for compliance with NCRS and HOCR.

The force has experienced teething problems with the new crime recording system (NICHE) in that the quality of data being inputted directly from the scene by police officers is often insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the HOCR.

The force does not have a procedure explaining how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area, nor does it layout how to manage the transfer of documentation. Although this poses a potential risk in terms of crime recording, our audit showed the force had transferred crimes effectively and no-crime reclassifications included accounts of discussions with the receiving force before transfer. This demonstrates good practice and assists victims.

## **2.2 How does Gwent 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, in 8 cases we found a record of the offender being made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. In 19 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, 12 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

**Penalty notices for disorder** – We dip-sampled 20 PND disposals, and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 15 cases. In all 20

cases, we could find no record that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning. 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 18 cases we found evidence 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 16 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 17 cases where there was a victim, we found none where there was evidence that the wishes and personal circumstances of that victim had been properly considered. 14 cases showed that the agreed result was meaningful and appropriate.

It is evident from our inspection that out-of-court disposals are being used on some occasions when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use, the views of victims are not always being considered and the information which should be provided to the offender regarding the future implications of accepting the disposal does not appear to be given.

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

The force has strong processes in place to ensure that incidents recorded as crimes are only reclassified as no-crimes when it is correct to do this. From our examination of no-crime records concerning robbery, violence and rape, we found that all 63 assessed complied with HOCR and NCRS in every case. Approval to no-crime a record is undertaken by the four dedicated DDM; this ensures consistency and appropriate application of the NCRS.

Some officers interviewed did not fully understand the no-crime procedure but accepted that the DDM had the final say. We noticed occasions of wrong terminology used by officers when referring to no-crimes even after they had attended an intensive training session on the NCRS.

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

The force has been explicit in its message to staff about the importance of a victim-centred approach and is working to ensure this extends across all crime types. The Gwent police and crime commissioner has published his own document called *The Victim's Charter*, which sets out the minimum standards victims of crime should expect from Gwent Police. The force actively engages

with victims of domestic abuse to learn their experiences of police contacts and results.

The force also surveys about 2,000 victims per year, including victims of crime against minority groups and also those who experience anti-social behaviour<sup>16</sup>. Those surveyed who are dissatisfied with the levels of police service are contacted directly by either a CMU or local policing unit supervisor to gain better understanding of the victim needs.

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

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

The force has a comprehensive policy and procedure which describes how to deal with reports of rapes through all reporting routes. The procedure is accessible via the force intranet and clearly states that rape should be recorded as soon as possible. Most officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy; however control room staff do not have a template similar to those used for anti-social behaviour and vulnerable callers; they would find this helpful as the force procedure is too detailed to be used as a simple prompt.

Auditing of rape records is highly effective. We found that reports of rape are recorded accurately and all no-crime reclassifications of crimes alleging rape were correct; all 27 rape no-crime complied with the NCRS and HOCR. The force crime registrar (FCR) monitors every rape no-crime; we were advised that he adds a written note to each such record stating his review and endorsement.

The force does not have a policy to deal with reports of rape where the victim has reported the Gwent crime in another force area. When this happens, the public protection unit (PPU) would normally assume responsibility for the victim and attendant considerations, while referring to the other force for recording and management purposes.

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

Looking particularly at the force IT systems for recording purposes, with the recent introduction of NICHE we note the force is making better use of technology to record and audit crime. The force also has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses which may contain reports of crime. Policy since 2012 makes it clear that officers and staff must use only the dedicated systems, reducing the risk of crime records being held on unauthorised systems.

<sup>16</sup> There is no feedback which shows a notable level of concern about crime recording.

IT systems which contain reports of crime are now linked so that information can be shared between systems. A direct link exists between ORIS and NICHE so that crime can be associated immediately with an incident and vice versa. The force also has the benefit of an extranet facility which allows document sharing with partner agencies, and this feeds back directly into ORIS.

All of the force's IT systems which contain reports of crime are capable of being audited – each record can be isolated and checked. A named person is responsible for all IT systems which contain reports of crime, and these reports are weeded, controlled and subject to review adopting the management of police information (MOPI) process.<sup>17</sup>

## **People and skills**

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

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

The force has sufficient staff and supervisors responsible for recording and reviewing incidents and crimes and most of these are trained in, and demonstrate, an appropriate knowledge of force policies, HOCR, NCRS and the NSIR. However, recent training on the subject delivered to control room staff only included police officers and not police staff. Because police staff receive calls direct from the public and make an initial assessment as to whether a crime has been committed, it is important they also receive training in NCRS.

Within the telephone investigation unit there is an imbalance of staff across teams which impacts upon service delivery. On the smaller teams, backlogs occur which means the level of service to victims may be reduced.

Every constable and sergeant has received an intensive, three-hour session of training on the HOCR and NCRS. Feedback from them ranged from 'extremely good and very helpful' to being a 'bit full on and hard going'. The overall message was the training was a good idea and most who had attended retained an understanding of NCRS. Specialist staff who make crime-recording decisions also have an appropriate level of knowledge of the NCRS and HOCR and consult with the FCR or his team when they need any clarification.

<sup>17</sup> The code of practice for the Management of Police Information (MOPI) is provided for forces by parliament and sets out the principles governing the management of information (including personal information) which the Police Service may need to manage.

Although our audit identified deficiencies, the staff and supervisors we interviewed who were responsible for applying out-of-court disposals and no-crimes had an appropriate knowledge of HOCR and national guidance.

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

There is a developing culture among officers and staff within Gwent Police to secure crime data accuracy. The vast majority of staff understood chief officer messages and understand expected standards of behaviour and conduct around crime recording. Non-adherence to the HOCR is considered unacceptable. Several staff we spoke to felt empowered by the new chief constable to make the right decisions and in this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

Despite encouraging findings in general about the culture surrounding recording practice, we were concerned with the way in which the force records offences of making off without payment (MOWP). Following correspondence in November 2013 to all forces from the national crime registrar, the force decided to audit MOWP incidents. CMU auditors reviewed more than a hundred incidents covering a two-month period and decided that six were non-compliant with NCRS. We examined 20 of the incidents that had been audited by the force and found 17 where the crime recording decision was incorrect and that a crime should have been recorded.

It is apparent that the practice in Gwent Police is one of not recording a MOWP crime unless the circumstances are unequivocal. One petrol station had only 2 out of 26 complaints recorded as crimes. This conflicts with the principles of the NCRS and HOCR and is at odds with what we found elsewhere in the force for other crime types where ethical practice was evident. The force needs to address this issue and introduce new procedures which are compliant with the NCRS and HOCR.

Training for some staff reinforces the requirement for accurate crime recording. Telephone investigation unit staff receive mentoring on systems and processes when they arrive. The force intranet also has a link direct to HOCR and to the national police e-learning package on NCRS and other training aids.

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

Gwent Police's FCR is active in his oversight of crime recording systems and processes within the force.

The FCR is well-known by senior managers in the force. He deals mainly with the managers within the force while his team within the crime management unit has daily interaction with operational officers.

The FCR has not always had the resources to carry out the role to full effect. The depletion of the audit team from June to December 2013 significantly reduced audit capacity. Although work was prioritised, incident-to-crime audits were placed on hold. This left the force unsighted on an area where crimes can easily be missed or hidden, such as within incident logs.

The FCR shows objectivity and impartiality in managing the current audit programme. The full compliance with no-crimes is a good example. He is seen to be, and operates as, the final arbiter of any disputes occurring within the crime recording process. He also has regular and unrestricted access to the assistant chief constable lead for data integrity with whom he discusses crime recording and data issues. The FCR also meets with and supports the chief constable in his work as the national crime lead for crime statistics.