

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Kent Police

November 2014

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Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. 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

Previous crime recording inspections in Kent

In February 2013, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection to determine whether the people of Kent can have confidence in the force's crime figures. HMIC reviewed key stages of Kent Police's crime recording process, from initial calls from the public through to the final resolution of the crime. HMIC also examined the extent to which the culture in Kent Police had an impact on crime recording practices.

Our key findings were that Kent Police was recording approximately 90 percent of crime correctly, that more than 25 percent of no-crime decisions were incorrect and that the force had a target-driven culture that led to some officers pursuing crimes based on how easy they were to solve rather than on their seriousness, or their impact on the victim. Out-of-court disposals were found to lack a focus on victims in the way in which some crimes were resolved.

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.

Our judgment was that “appreciably more needs to be done before the people of Kent can be confident that the crime and resolution figures published by the force are as accurate as they should be”⁴.

Our interim report published in January 2014, found that Kent Police was recording 96 percent of crime accurately, and that there was a high standard of decision making in relation to no-crimes. HMIC did not carry out a full audit of solved crimes during this follow-up inspection but did establish that the force had taken a number of steps to improve standards, including updating policies, providing training, and redesigning some forms. The force had also moved away from a target-driven approach to managing performance to one that is focused on outcomes and quality of service.

Our judgment was that the force had made significant improvements over the period but that these improvements would need to be sustained over a longer period of time before the people of Kent could be confident in the crime and resolution figures published by the force.

This inspection of crime data integrity is the third inspection of crime recording in Kent. Its purpose is to provide both HMIC and the police and crime commissioner for Kent with reassurance that improvements to crime recording in Kent Police have been sustained since our initial inspection published in June 2013 and our interim report published in January 2014.

As a consequence of the previous HMIC inspections of Kent Police, the inspection methodology for this inspection differs slightly from the other 42 forces in that the selection of the incident and crime records examined (the data) in Kent were taken from a period after which the force had changed its crime recording practices. This is explained in more detail below.

This inspection

Our findings from this inspection are that Kent Police is recording 96 percent of crime accurately and that the high standard of decision making on no-crimes has continued. The appropriate use and supervision of out-of-court disposals show a significant improvement. Importantly, we found no evidence to suggest any remaining pressure to meet numerical performance targets.

HMIC therefore concludes that the people of Kent can have confidence in Kent Police’s crime figures, although the force will need to continue to make improvements and maintain focus to ensure the continued accuracy of crime recording in Kent.

⁴ *Crime recording in Kent – A report commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent.* Published 17 June 2013.

Our findings for Kent Police should be read alongside our 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.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/

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)⁵ and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)⁶.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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

The Kent Police crime data inspection followed the same methodology for other forces apart from the period from which the data were analysed. Each force inspection involves:

- An examination of crime records taken from a set time period. For Kent Police, the period chosen was the 6 month period from November 2013 to April 2014. This differed from all other 42 force inspections in England and Wales where data were chosen from a 12 month time period from November 2012 to October 2013. Clearly, data chosen from that time period would not have been useful for this final inspection of crime recording in Kent Police as it would have been for a period prior to the force correcting its approach to crime recording.
- 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. Again, for Kent Police the samples were selected from a more recent time period than for other forces;
- Visits to forces where inspectors assess local crime recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance; systems and processes; and people and skills; and
- A peer review of our audit findings by an NCRS expert from outside HMIC.

Our conclusions and recommendations are based on the evidence drawn from our inspection of the force's crime recording arrangements as well as the audit of their crime data. However, the Kent Police crime recording data sample is large enough for a reasonably accurate compliance rate to be estimated. The margin of error for the crime recording data is within +/- 5%.

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The leadership of Kent Police has worked tirelessly to transform the force culture, management and procedures which determine the integrity of crime data recording.

Following recent crime recording HMIC inspections, we identified several areas which required improvement. These included a fundamental shift away from an approach in which performance management was based primarily on meeting numerical targets. This had tended to skew some aspects of crime recording. It is to the credit of the entire force that this significant change has been accomplished in a short period of time and has been strongly embedded across all areas.

The deputy chief constable is the named officer responsible for crime data quality but, before his promotion, the current chief constable held this responsibility and he retains a strong grasp of the issues and a commitment to help drive improvements.

At the time of our inspection the deputy chief constable, following extensive internal and external consultation, was planning to introduce a new performance regime which considers trends in crime recording and concentrates on checking the quality of policing services provided to the public. Staff have welcomed this and see it as further evidence signalling the shift to a victim-focused service and emphasising quality of policing rather than a concentration on crime figures.

Officers and staff are aware of the methods available to them for reporting unethical behaviour including improper crime recording. There is a confidential helpline and an untraceable email route for officers and staff to use. Most individuals spoken to thought it was extremely unlikely that they would ever have to resort to using these methods as the chief constable's message and emphasis on ethical crime recording was accepted without question across the force.

At the time of the inspection, the confidential wrongdoing telephone line was not working as a result of a wide-ranging re-organisation within the force and a change of telephone numbers. The policy for the reporting of behaviour needs updating so that concerns about crime recording can be raised within the force using the method most suited to the circumstances and the concerns felt by an individual.

The force policies on crime recording that we reviewed had no specific reference to the importance of ethical crime reporting and did not always reflect the chief constable's emphasis on victim care. However, the force was in the process of updating these policies.

The force has a clear understanding of the routes by which the public report crime; about 98 percent of crime is reported through contact by telephone with the control room. This understanding has allowed the force to drive up recording standards by concentrating on the way it handles and responds to this contact.

Inspectors and sergeants working in the investigation management unit (IMU) have the responsibility for carrying out a range of daily, weekly and monthly audits to look for areas where crimes might have been missed. The force recognises the importance of these audits and has brought the timing of these as close as possible to the point at which contact is first made with the force. This allows for early corrective action to be taken if required. As a result it has not been able to carry out more formal retrospective audits until very recently.

The force data accuracy unit (DAU) will soon be conducting a series of thematic reviews and audits designed to maintain the high levels of NCRS compliance found within our own audit. These are set out in an audit calendar for 2013-14. While there is sufficient flexibility in the audit plan to respond to identified issues it is important that the force ensures that those audits in the audit calendar which relate to critical risk areas, such as serious sexual offences and records involving child abuse allegations and vulnerable people, are completed regularly.

Another area requiring careful checking is the 'Themis' database, recently adopted by the force to record and administer records of reports of anti-social behaviour. Officers and police community support officers can make entries on this database; these often relate to issues picked up through community contact rather than reported through the force control room. Patrol sergeants assess any entries thought by the officers to be high-risk cases. Community safety unit sergeants based in each district review medium and standard-risk cases.

The force crime and incident registrar⁷ (FCIR) has recognised the risks of unreported crime being overlooked within the Themis database and plans to carry out an audit. In the meantime, sergeants are being asked to be alert to any potential crime issues on the system.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should develop and introduce an effective process for the auditing of anti-social behaviour records held on the Themis database to ensure any reports of crime contained within these records are recorded as crimes in accordance with the HO CR and NCRS.

⁷ The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HO CR 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.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

When a member of the public telephones the police this contact is recorded as an incident report on a command and control computer system. This may subsequently be recorded as a crime when a decision has been made that, on the balance of probability, a notifiable offence has occurred.

We examined 252 incident records⁸ and found that 186 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 186 crimes that should have been recorded, 179 were. Of the 179, all but 3 were correctly classified and 170 were recorded inside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR. This is a good result for the force and gives confidence that victims who report crime in this way are receiving the service and support that they should.

We examined 49 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments and found 17 crimes that should have been recorded. Of the 17 crimes that should have been recorded, 9 were. Of the nine, all were correctly classified. Four were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR.

The force adopted a systematic and positive approach to all areas of concern raised in previous HMIC reports by developing a comprehensive crime action plan. A new concern, however, is how effectively crimes are recorded by the force's public protection unit (PPU). Investigations of reports within the PPU specialist area, such as those dealing with child protection or vulnerable adult cases, show a high number of crimes going unrecorded. The force is aware of this issue and active discussions involving the FCIR are taking place.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure that reports of crime recorded on systems used by the PPU are recorded as crimes in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS. The force should also put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCIR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

⁸ 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 found that force control room operators record details from the public with a high degree of accuracy. Supervisors in the control room listen to a number of calls to check the accuracy of the information recorded. They are also involved in checking the actions taken in response to these calls and document their involvement. 127 out of 252 incidents we reviewed showed evidence of effective supervisory guidance.

Kent Police is adopting a system of investigation over the telephone for dealing with some reports of crime which do not require an officer to attend to see the victim. A team within the IMU carries out the telephone investigation. Suitable calls are routed to the IMU from the control room after initial assessment and no incident record is generated from the calls; instead they are recorded directly onto the Genesis crime system. There are numerous safeguards in the incident system to identify any potential repeat or vulnerable callers; these include a question set for the staff to use. It was evident that while the system is good at identifying repeat victims, it is not so good at identifying vulnerable callers as to do so requires additional searches on the force incident command system.

The current force crime recording policy sets out expectations about how a crime reported to Kent Police but occurring elsewhere should be handled. The same is true of crimes received by the force but recorded elsewhere. There is no policy guidance about how officers should handle related paperwork but questioning of officers and IMU staff showed a clear understanding of what is required.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),⁹ cannabis warnings¹⁰ and community resolutions.¹¹ The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹².

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

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

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

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

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

Cautions – Of the 25 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all cases the offender’s previous criminal history made the use of a caution an appropriate disposal. In all but one case it was documented that the victim’s views were considered. All of the offenders were made aware of the implications of accepting the caution.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND disposals, and found that in 17 cases, the offenders were suitable to receive the disposal. In all 20 cases the offender was made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. In the 11 cases where there was a victim, we found that their wishes had been considered in 3 cases.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 24 cannabis warnings and found that in all cases the offender’s previous criminal history fitted this type of out-of-court disposal. In four cases we could not find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning as the force form had not been used, or was not available for checking.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in every case the offender’s previous criminal history made them suitable for the disposal. In 18 cases, we found that the wishes of the victim had been considered.¹³ Seven cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim.

As with incident records, we selected a dip-sample of these outcomes from the period following our earlier inspection so that we could track progress. The emphasis on continued improvement generated by the force’s comprehensive crime action plan is evident in a significant improvement in the completion and supervision of out-of-court disposals cases since these were last inspected. However, it is of some concern that we could find no evidence of the views of victims being considered in a substantial proportion of PND, and that the nature of the agreed outcomes when using community resolutions still require some attention to ensure they are meaningful for both the offenders and the victims.

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

No-crime

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We examined 62 no-crime records and found 57 records to be compliant with the HOCC and NCRS. The five records which were not compliant with the HOCC and NCRS all fell within the category of violent crime. The force's approach to no-crime is generally acceptable

No-crime decisions are made within the IMU by the four detective inspectors or eight detective sergeants; this helps to ensure a consistent approach.

Victim-centred approach

The need for a victim-centred approach has been a key message from the chief constable since his appointment and he stresses this repeatedly when travelling around the force area. Working with the police and crime commissioner, the force has introduced a number of initiatives to demonstrate the need to make this a reality. These include ways for victims to lodge an appeal if the force makes judgements on crimes with which they do not agree, surveying victims in no-crime cases and allowing a victim to check progress on their crime investigation using the internet.

Within the control room, operators are almost always polite, helpful and professional. When we listened to the calls from the public we noticed that, on occasions, operators did not tell the public that they were updating records or checking systems which resulted in unexplained silences. Sometimes the need to establish a caller's location and postcode got in the way of the caller's attempt to ask for help or explain to the operator what was happening.

Rape

To ensure checks are made of all sources of information and intelligence including information sent to the force from the local sexual assault referral centre (SARC) Kent Police has mapped the routes through which reports of rape are received.

Those incidents and crimes clearly identified as involving reports of rape are effectively monitored and robustly tracked through a separate tasking and co-ordinating group; this is led by the head of the PPU who personally checks progress on individual cases and looks for thoroughness of investigative methods. As mentioned earlier in this report, more detailed audits in some areas of specialist crime would provide an even higher degree of confidence that all potential crime matters involving reports of rape are recorded at the first opportunity.

IT systems

The force uses a separate computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions. At present these systems are not linked. The PPU area of business keeps its records within the general crime system but with restricted access to them.

People and skills

Kent Police has a strong and resilient centralised approach to crime recording; this is well staffed and supervised. With the exception of some staff in the PPU, specialist teams have a working knowledge of HOCR and NCRS. The IMU is seen as instrumental in guiding officers on crime-recording matters and provides a central repository of expertise which officers can readily access. IMU managers maintain an active presence in their allocated areas of the force.

HMIC found no evidence to suggest any pressure remaining to meet numerical performance targets, and staff have universally welcomed the vision of the new chief constable to focus on victims and better service provision. Supervisors at all levels recognise the benefits of integrity of recording and encourage staff to record crime properly and accurately. Some training on the HOCR and NCRS has been provided to groups such as new recruits and inspectors, but the FCIR recognises the legacy of there having been little active awareness-building of NCRS and HOCR for most officers over a number of years.

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

Force crime and incident registrar

The FCIR has proved an invaluable catalyst for the improvements and progress made by the force in crime recording accuracy. He is an energetic advocate of crime data integrity who uses his extensive experience and excellent communication skills to good effect. His personable style and investigative experience are definite assets in the way he is seen to do his job by other members of the force. The FCIR is clearly understood to be the final arbiter on NCRS matters.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should ensure that reports of crime recorded on systems used by the PPU are recorded as crimes in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS. The force should also put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCIR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

Within three months

2. The force should develop and introduce an effective process for the auditing of anti-social behaviour records held on the Themis database to ensure any reports of crime contained within these records are recorded as crimes in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS.

Within six months

3. The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of further training in crime recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime-recording decisions, and ensure that those who require such training receive it as soon as is 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. This is a separate audit undertaken at a force level and is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside our fieldwork interviews to form qualitative judgements only.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Kent 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 incidents Kent Police recorded the following number of crimes.
252	186	179
Crimes referred from other agencies directly to Kent Police specialist departments		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Kent 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 Kent Police should have recorded.	From these incidents Kent Police recorded the following number of crimes.
49	17	9
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Kent Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
62	57	

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

The chief constable has, since his appointment, personally put significant energy and drive into taking action on the key issues necessary to improve crime data recording in Kent Police. This has resulted in remarkable changes in force culture, practices and procedures in a very short time frame.

The entire chief officer team has seized every opportunity to reinforce the need for ethical crime recording and to engage with all areas of the force to understand how well key messages are being received. They achieve this in part by holding chief officer meetings in different force locations and going out to talk to staff about the force position on crime recording. Initiatives such as the widening of attendance at the culture board to constables and support staff have clearly demonstrated the desire to listen to the front line about response to changes within the force including how best to stop performance targets skewing the accurate reporting of crime.

Kent Police professional standards department currently operates an anonymous email and telephone system to report wrongdoing in accordance with the force policy. Unethical crime recording practice is not specifically mentioned in the policy. At the time of the inspection, the confidential wrongdoing telephone line was not working following the recent relocation of business areas in the force. The policy on reporting unethical behaviour could be refreshed to signpost more effectively how staff can flag concerns about crime recording to the organisation. Currently the policy emphasises the chain of command approach to such reporting and the force should encourage all possible routes giving them equal weight.

The force policies on crime recording that we reviewed made no specific reference to the importance of ethical crime recording and did not always reflect the chief constable's emphasis on victim care. However, the force was in the process of updating these policies.

The re-published police and crime plan 2013-17 contains no direct reference to accurate and ethical crime recording.

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

Since the publication of the first inspection report commissioned by the police and crime commissioner, the force has been extremely conscious of the principal risks linked to inaccurate crime recording. The force has made strategic response to a potential loss of confidence in Kent Police and reputational damage a primary focus. This is indicated by the routine assessment of the formal risk placed on the force risk register and the careful measurement of progress to reduce the likelihood of the risk and its possible impact. The force has viewed the risks from this issue as reducing as they make progress against an action plan on crime recording.

The force has a clear understanding of the routes by which the public report crime; about 98 percent of crime is reported through telephone contact with the control room. Since May 2014, the force has started to use telephone investigation for certain types of crime. This has the effect of saving an officer from having to attend a small selection of relatively straightforward types of crimes. Kent Police may expand this approach in the future to deal with a wider group of crime types.

Currently there is a requirement to complete a thorough and detailed report of investigations into all crimes. As this telephone investigation approach develops and is thoroughly checked to ensure there is no loss of service there are further plans to move to less-detailed recording of straightforward crimes which cannot so easily be resolved.

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

Since the police and crime commissioner commissioned inspection and the publication of the report, Kent Police has undergone a fundamental review of the checking and audit functions of crime recording in the force control room and the IMU. Under the direction of a new FCIR the force has rightly put great emphasis on real time monitoring and checking of systems. There is a fixed schedule of checking which takes place daily, weekly and monthly to quality assure the handling of incidents and the production of crime records. This also prompts action to re-contact individual members of the public if something is recognised as having been missed or incorrectly handled.

The degree of reassurance provided by this approach would be strengthened by the development of some specialist audit processes in key areas of risk for the force. An audit calendar has recently been produced and ratified by the chief officer team as an outline document with a welcome degree of flexibility. Auditors recognise that these changes are in an embryonic form and will develop as the improvements now secured in crime recording allow more focus to be given to emerging areas of potential under-recording. We found that out-of-court disposal cases had been audited by the FCIR and his team before our inspection; this is an indication of the

emphasis the force has placed on improving the quality of these processes. The force has recently adopted the Themis database for recording and managing anti-social behaviour incidents and investigations. This is a positive development, allowing other agencies and partners to access information but the database is not routinely checked for unrecorded crime issues. Without any audit insights for reassurance, this could prove to be a risk to the force.

The force is aware of the need to create more effective scrutiny measures to improve the accuracy of crime recording in child protection and other investigations involving vulnerable people. This remains an area of significant risk to the force and the FCIR is actively engaged in resolving this with the senior detectives overseeing these areas of investigation.

A result of the daily and weekly real time quality assurance of incidents and crimes is that managers take swift action to correct mistakes and advise officers and staff of any errors or shortfalls in the service provided. Supervisors in the IMU make direct contact with officers and their sergeants to advise them of these issues. In addition, the IMU managers regularly go out onto the divisional areas allocated to them to deal with any widespread or repeated problems.

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

Kent Police has significantly improved the supervision of incidents and of the recording of information given to them by the public when telephoning in. We looked at 252 incidents during our audit work and found that there were 244 incidents closed on the force command and control computer system with the correct closing code.

Of the 252 incident records we reviewed, we found that 186 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 186 crimes that should have been recorded, 179 were. Further checks showed that only 3 crimes were not correctly classified, and 170 out of the 179 were recorded within 72 hours. Of those, 9 were recorded outside of the 72 hours allowed under the NCRS, 8 were recorded within 96 hours of the crime being reported. This is a good result for the force and provides confidence that victims who report crime in this way are receiving the service and support that they should.

We examined 49 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments and recorded on the force's Genesis crime system. We judged that from these records, 17 crimes should have been reported but only 9 were. Of the 9, all were correctly classified and 4 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed by the HOCR.

The checking of public protection unit (PPU) records fell outside the scope of the previous two inspections carried out within the force. As such, there had been no specific actions within this area to bolster performance levels. As a consequence of our audit on this occasion revealing significant shortfalls in crime recording in this area, the FCIR and departmental heads urgently began problem-solving activity to resolve this gap. During the inspection, the force was even considering allowing only the IMU specialists to take over crime recording decisions in an attempt to avoid missing further crimes. While this approach was not adopted, it reflects the determination expressed by the force to deal firmly and decisively with this problem in the near future.

There has been a significant investment of resources, staffing and management in the IMU to achieve these overall positive standards of crime recording. Additional staff have been recruited into the IMU to provide the levels of support deemed necessary. The challenge will be for the force to maintain this level of performance in the face of future budgetary pressures.

Since March this year, the force has moved from its previous position of sending an officer to every report of crime, whether the victim wished this to happen or not. This is in part a response to members of the public who do not wish to be visited, but also to save resources by resolving straightforward issues over the telephone. This new approach is being evaluated but there are already outline considerations of how control room functions can be integrated with crime recording processes in the IMU to make best use of this development.

Force policy and procedures give guidance to officers on the handling of crimes passed to the force from other areas as well as how to alert other forces about crimes occurring in their areas but reported in Kent. The audit team checked crimes transferred between forces in this way and the required reference numbers were clearly documented. Officers know how to pass the paperwork involved in such cases through the IMU.

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

One of the areas of activity within the Kent Police action plan was the need to improve the overall quality of files and officers' understanding of out-of-court disposals. Exceptional effort has gone into this area with the result that the files we examined were of a very high standard with very few errors. Many force forms have been comprehensively re-designed to incorporate necessary changes identified in previous inspections.

Cautions – Of the 25 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all cases the offender's previous criminal history made the use of a caution an appropriate way forward. In all but one case it was documented that the victim's views were considered. All of the offenders were made aware of the implications of accepting the caution.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND disposals, and found that in 17 cases the offenders were suitable for the disposal. In all 20 cases the offender was made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. In the 11 cases where there was a victim, we found that the wishes of the victim had been considered in 3 cases.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 24 cannabis warnings and found that in all cases the offender's previous criminal history fitted this type of out-of-court disposal. In four cases, we could not find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of the warning as the force form had not been used or was not available for checking.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in every case the offender's previous criminal history made them suitable for the disposal. In 18 cases, we found that the wishes of the victim had been considered. Seven cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim.

As with incident records, we selected a dip-sample of these outcomes from the period following our earlier inspection so that we could track progress. The emphasis on continuing improvement generated by the force comprehensive crime action plan is notable and shows a significant improvement in the completion and supervision of out-of-court disposals cases since these were last inspected. However, it is of some concern that we could find no evidence of the views of victims being considered in a substantial proportion of PND, and that the nature of the agreed outcome when using community resolutions still requires some focus to ensure it is meaningful for both the offender and the victim.

Every case showed evidence of supervision although forms were not always fully completed. There is also an external scrutiny panel brought together to look at these cases and advise the force on best practice and how to make improvements. The change in force culture in terms of a shift away from the unquestioning focus on achieving targets has also helped in this regard. Officers now concentrate on doing what is right for the victim.

The force had conducted an audit of out-of-court disposals before our visit using a similar approach to HMIC. These results were in line with our findings and indicated that the majority of these cases are well understood, documented and supervised.

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

Effort has gone into making sure the quality of decision making is of the required standard when judging that reports should be no-crimes. The force writes to each victim where a no-crime is created with a personalised letter giving details of the decision making process. Members of the public are informed of their right of appeal, but this has only been made use of on two occasions. The FCIR examines these cases to provide independence. Surveys of a sample of victims' reports marked as no-crimes are also carried out and these repeatedly show high levels of satisfaction.

The four detective inspectors in the IMU assess burglary and robbery no-crimes, while the eight detective sergeants look at violence no-crimes. The FCIR and the decision makers in the IMU do not have a role linked to force performance. The FCIR monitors a proportion of these decisions, as does the detective chief inspector in charge of the IMU. Our audit of 62 no-crime decisions in the important crime areas of robbery, violence and rape revealed that 57 were correctly recorded. The five records which were not compliant with the HOCA and NCRS all fell within the category of violent crime. The force's approach to no-criming is generally acceptable.

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

The force demonstrated its degree of commitment to understanding the needs of victims and delivering a victim-centred approach when, following the first crime recording inspection, it contacted every victim of a missed crime identified in the audit. Both the current chief constable and the police and crime commissioner repeatedly stress their determination to place the victim at the centre of police activity and decision making.

During our visits to operational stations, officers repeatedly made reference to the messages they had heard directly from the chief constable or read from force intranet pages (called 'Insight'). Without exception, staff welcomed this new regard for the importance of victims and their views. Managers check for compliance in updating victims as required by the automated prompts built into the crime recording

system. The force leadership is highlighting the value of good service to victims of crime through a new reward and recognition system for staff.

In the control room environment, customer-centred delivery is a major priority. We listened to 252 calls from the public into the force, and made the judgement that in 250 cases, the operators were polite, helpful and professional. The force has also speedily introduced the new Home Office method of describing how crimes are concluded at the end of police involvement or investigation. Uniformed officers have been given effective training on the use of these 18 new outcomes for crime and they are being used extensively and have assisted in reducing the number of crimes with inappropriate outcomes.

While the force carries out the surveys of victims of crime as required by the Home Office user satisfaction programme, it also aims to gain insights into particular victim group experiences such as those of hate crime victims. The deputy chief constable has gathered and used a number of poor victim experiences and unsatisfactory service examples to illustrate to operational officers and public-facing support staff why this is important when delivering his roadshows around the force.

Kent Police has introduced the 'track my crime' system to allow victims to check updates on the progress of their crime over the internet. At present this is only available for certain categories of crime with the more serious or sensitive types of crime being excluded. Supervisors review any crime where the victim requests this facility to make sure all updates are both meaningful and timely. This system is showing around a 19 percent take-up by victims at present.

Greater use could be made of the results from analysing customer satisfaction surveys by those overseeing and managing crime. This is particularly true of the FCIR to ensure that any useful information is included within checking or audit processes.

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

As part of the daily routine monitoring of all incidents, the detective inspector within the IMU responsible for quality assurance will check all incidents for all matters connected to possible reports of rape. This is set as an essential requirement to be completed each day of the week. As a result, crime managers responsible for the area of rape crime have a high degree of confidence that all such crimes are identified as they are reported into the force.

On-duty detective constables assist uniformed colleagues attending calls for service involving rape allegations and a crime is recorded once sufficient detail from the victim has been collected to indicate a crime has occurred. Officers seen during the inspection confirmed there were normally no delays or reluctance to record such

crimes. They outlined that this was normally done strictly in line with a victim-centred approach.

There is no force policy setting out any special arrangements regarding the management of rape crime, as this is included in the general crime policy. The force is experiencing growing numbers of rape crimes; this is believed to be attributable to greater confidence in reporting (in part through domestic abuse cases) and historical case reporting. Given this trend and the complexity of some investigations, managers are planning a central rape and serious sexual offences referral team. This initiative will probably see the development of a policy giving specific direction on the recording and investigation of rape; this would be welcomed by HMIC.

We looked at 21 recent cases of reports of rape, which had been no-crimed. Of these, every decision contained a good level of explanation for why that decision had been made. These decisions are all made by the FCIR and revealed a high standard of decision making.

Reports of rape sent to Kent Police from another force, or generated in Kent and transferred elsewhere are not dealt with under a separate policy and the general force policy applies to transferred reports.

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

The force has an understanding of the IT systems it uses which may contain reports of crime, (namely STORM for command and control of incidents in the force control room and the Genesis crime system). There is no direct link between the two key force systems which means that data have to be re-entered to record a crime. Some officers use an electronic form known as an e-form to report crime to the IMU when that unit is busy. We have recommended that the force considers the shared partnership Themis database which is used to track reports of antisocial behaviour and partnership actions to tackle them. At present there is no assurance that crime matters are appropriately recorded in this database.

There has been a long history of collaboration with Essex Police to produce joint management of computer records which it is hoped will begin next year with the adoption of the Athena system. In the meantime, systems currently operating are owned and maintained by user-managers but there is no facility for the weeding of crime records to take place at present.

People and skills

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

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

The Kent Police control room has sufficient staff, who are well versed in the Home Office counting rules. There are eight team leaders within the control room, each of whom is responsible for eight members of staff. Each team leader has responsibility for one element of core business central to the operation of the control room. The IMU itself operates 24 hours a day to make sure there are enough trained staff to record crime as it is reported and to give advice to frontline officers.

The force has arrangements in place to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to deliver accurate crime recording. There are three development coaches in the IMU who conduct all of the internal initial and ongoing training and development of IMU staff. A change noted by managers since the last inspection is that IMU operators are far more willing and confident to challenge if they think a crime has not been properly recorded. In the past, the update from the scene by an officer was usually accepted, even if this differed from details on the incident log. Now, however, such differences are regularly questioned.

On average the force runs two initial courses for new staff each year. In order to cover all the areas they need to be aware of, these are of nine weeks in duration. However, this year a third course is planned to ensure resilience due to recent staff losses. When the coaches are not training new staff they maintain standards in the IMU. This determination to invest in improvement is also reflected in plans to appoint a deputy FCIR in the very near future.

Staff numbers in the IMU have recently increased to deliver a very strong crime recording function without any shortfall. This comes at considerable cost to the force and the challenge will be to retain these high standards if there are renewed pressures to make budgetary savings.

The FCIR is making progress in working with specialist staff to improve the way they apply the HOOCR and NCRS, particularly within the PPU which is his current focus. He has also held discussions with covert policing teams to make sure their operations follow the requirements of the crime counting rules but without compromising undercover actions through crime recording on force crime systems.

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

In all the stations visited during the inspection, we met officers, staff and managers who were well informed about the chief constable's aim to improve the accuracy of crime recording, making sure individuals make ethical decisions and improving the satisfaction of victims. We often heard the phrase, "performance without integrity is nothing" being used to sum up this understanding. Frequently, these individuals had heard the chief constable speaking locally on the subject and welcomed the clear change of direction.

Some senior managers spoke about conversations with the command team about emerging rises in crime, but stated that this could now be discussed without the performance pressures of the past. Managers spoke about chief officers still wanting to know the reasons behind crime increases. Rather than being unduly concerned or seeking to minimise this numerical increase as might have happened in the past, the emphasis was now on service to the victim; on understanding, for example, whether the increase was a sign of growing confidence in the force by victims reporting these more sensitive crimes.

The FCIR is providing training to all new probationers by means of scenario-based learning during their initial training. He has also given training to inspectors' courses, which have been held recently. The FCIR initiated this opportunity to update a number of middle managers on what they needed to know. He is very conscious, however, of what he describes as, "the legacy of three and a half thousand staff with little or no training on HOOCR".

Kent Police has also used mandatory e-learning and the completion of these training packages is tracked centrally with managers reminding individuals to complete this until they have done so.

Recent promotion processes for inspectors have seen a shift from the need to demonstrate the ability to drive operational performance and achieve targets to showing operational competence and ethical behaviours during assessment.

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

The FCIR is a capable, knowledgeable and visible operational champion of the HOOCR and NCRS. His personable style and investigative experience are key assets in the way he is seen to do his job by other members of the force. Many of the officers to whom we spoke during the inspection stated that the FCIR had brought a new desire to discuss issues with frontline staff and would listen to other opinions before he made a decision. This was a great help in developing frontline understanding of the crime recording rules.

He has a very positive relationship with the chief officer team and speaks regularly with both the chief constable and the deputy chief constable, lead for crime integrity. He is able to request meetings with them as frequently as he feels the need and they approach him on any matter they need to discuss.

Throughout the force there is absolute clarity that the FCIR is the final decision maker on questions about the interpretation of crime counting and recording rules. As a result, any dispute is automatically referred to him for a decision. He has recently discovered some policy interpretations on certain categories of crime which were used before his arrival in force; these served to suppress more serious types of crime and were not in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS. Recognising that these policies were not victim-focused, he immediately publicised their cancellation. He now views all new policies as a matter of routine and checks them for compliance with NCRS and HOCR.