

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Nottinghamshire Police

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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

We strongly recommend our findings in this report are read alongside the interim report, *Crime recording: A matter of fact - An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales*, available at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/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)⁴ and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)⁵.

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

The audit examined 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.

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations

Leadership and governance

Chief officers promote the importance of crime data integrity to the force. This has been reinforced to frontline staff mainly through briefings by senior managers and by chief officers publishing messages on the force intranet as well as broadcast emails to all account holders.

The assistant chief constable (ACC) responsible for crime, justice and protective services is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality. He is also the lead chief officer for performance management. We did not find any evidence that these combined responsibilities in Nottinghamshire Police had compromised accurate crime recording.

The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance. It maintains several policies and procedures on crime recording, crime management and criminal investigations that generally meet the requirements of NCRS and HOCR. The force crime recording procedure is explicit in stating that crime should be recorded accurately and ethically and in a timely manner. The force PROUD⁶ values set out a high-level commitment to act with integrity in a wider sense.

At the time of this inspection, the force was considering whether the policy of attendance at every crime by officers is still appropriate, sustainable and feasible. The force was also about to introduce organisational changes, including the introduction of a contact resolution team and telephone investigation bureau.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC), in advance of our inspection, commissioned external auditors to review crime recording in the force and their findings were reported in May 2014. The force accepted the majority of the recommendations from the external audit and work had started on implementation prior to our inspection.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes. This includes the anonymous reporting facility called 'Integrity Messenger' that enables staff to report concerns directly to the professional standards department (PSD). Staff from the PSD routinely give presentations on police ethics and integrity to all new staff.

⁶ Professionalism, Respect for all, One team, Utmost integrity, trust and honesty, Doing it differently

While chief officers are explicit about the ethical standards required for crime recording, it is not apparent that chief officers had actively encouraged officers or staff to report wrongdoing by colleagues. It is important for officers and staff to know they will be supported if they identify and report colleagues operating contrary to the high standards set.

The force has two people performing the role of force crime registrar (FCR)⁷, providing resilience for the function. We did not find this caused any confusion amongst those seeking advice on NCRS or HO CR. One of the responsibilities of the FCR is to help ensure that the force complies with NCRS and the HO CR.

The force has identified inaccurate recording of crime as a risk, with the matter featuring on the force risk register. It has assessed its key crime categories and carries out audits to assess compliance against standards. The audit regime is also sufficiently flexible to take into account new commissions by chief officers. The crime and incident data quality board is a high level meeting that monitors performance in this area.

There is daily checking by staff within the crime management bureau (CMB) of incident closures for the priority crimes of sexual offences, robbery, violence and burglary. Weekly updates on compliance against NSIR⁸, NCRS and the HO CR are reported at victim offender location tasking (VOLT) meetings, which are chaired by an ACC.

We found that timely and proportionate action is taken to ensure crime recording errors and audit findings are addressed. The force intranet contains examples of the more common errors made by officers and staff when identifying and recording crime.

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. For the purpose of this report FCR will refer to either of the two staff performing the role

⁸ The national standard for incident recording (NSIR) is designed to ensure that all incidents, whether crime or non-crime, are recorded by police in a consistent and accurate manner. This allows resulting data to be used at a local and national level for management and performance information purposes.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

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

HMIC examined 122 incident records⁹ and found that 122 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 122 crimes that should have been recorded, 104 were. Of the 104, three were wrongly classified and six were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is a matter of concern as it means some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (because, for example, certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

We examined 55 reports that were recorded on the case administration and tracking system (CATS). We found that from those 55 reports, 20 crimes should have been recorded and all were correctly recorded.

However, reports and referrals sent by email to the domestic abuse support unit (DASU) by partner organisations do not feature within the current audit regime. Owing to the high risk nature of offences reported through this route, the force should introduce an audit to ensure crimes are not being missed.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should begin a process for the auditing, by the FCR, of all referrals made to the domestic abuse support unit by other organisations (public, voluntary and private sectors) to assess for NCRS and HOCR compliance, with particular attention being directed to those that involve vulnerable adults and children.

Force control room supervisors monitor live calls taken by call-takers, especially those calls deemed to be higher risk. A number of volunteers have also been used to monitor calls for the level of service provided.

⁹ 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.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should take steps to ensure the quality assurance process within the force control room includes a check of compliance with the NCRS and, where appropriate, feeds into the development of professional practice and continuous improvement within the force control room to secure crime data accuracy.

Only crime management bureau (CMB) staff can validate or reclassify a crime. This is a particular strength within the force crime-recording processes. The CMB also plays a crucial role in quality assurance and we found significant evidence that remedial action had taken place to ensure crimes were recorded and classified correctly. The use of CMB staff to correct regular mistakes is effective, albeit costly. The force intends to move to a position where officers improve their recording of crime from the outset. At the time of our inspection this intention was aspirational with no firm plans as to how it would be achieved.

Although the force crime recording policy and procedure makes reference to the transfer of crime reported to Nottinghamshire Police but committed in another force area, it does not provide guidance on how to transfer the relevant documentation to the other force and vice versa for crime reported into Nottinghamshire Police by other forces.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),¹⁰ cannabis warnings¹¹ and community resolutions.¹² The HOCR (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹³.

¹⁰ A form of immediate financial penalty used by police to deal with low-level offending such as being drunk and disorderly, retail theft, and minor criminal damage.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹³ 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 – Out of the 22 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 20 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 19 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 21 cases where there was a victim to consult, two cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – HMIC dip-sampled 22 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 19 cases. In 19 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 5 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that none of the 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 17 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – 21 community resolutions were dip-sampled and in all 21 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 21 resolutions where there was a victim, all cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. All 21 cases showed that the agreed resolution was meaningful and appropriate¹⁴.

All out-of-court disposals in the force are checked by a designated decision maker (DDM)¹⁵ before the outcome is recorded as such. A multi-agency panel meets quarterly to review out-of-court disposals to ensure that they meet the standards within national guidance. It is therefore of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered for the majority of cautions, and for all of the PND we reviewed. Nor could we find records to show that offenders receiving cannabis warnings had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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 improve the supervision of out-of-court disposals to ensure that the nature and implications of accepting the disposal are provided to the offender. In particular that the views of the victim are considered when the use of an out-of-court disposal is proposed.

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 91 no-crime records and found 84 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. The force's approach to no-criming is generally acceptable.

No-crime decisions can only be taken by DDMs or the FCR. The FCR is the final arbiter for all recorded sexual offences to ensure they have been correctly recorded and classified against NCRS and the HOCR. He is also the only person in the force able to authorise a no-crime for an offence of rape.

There was some confusion among some staff, and a lack of knowledge within public protection, on what constitutes additional verifiable information (AVI). This could be rectified by the provision of additional training to those involved in the application process for no-crime. We also found some misunderstanding on the classification of offences.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training for PPU staff on the no-crime decision-making process that includes expert input on the use of additional verifiable information and on how to correctly reclassify crimes.

Victim-centred approach

The implementation of the victims' code and the care of victims is overseen by the local criminal justice board and the victims and witnesses group, chaired by the deputy chief constable. The witness care unit provides direct support to those who have been victims of crime and arranges for personal impact statements to be prepared in advance of court hearings.

We found that frontline officers and staff, including call-takers, understood the importance of meeting the needs of the victim when considering crime recording and investigation. The frequency of victim updates is monitored at force performance meetings.

The force regularly conducts surveys of people who report incidents and crime and those who call the non-emergency 101 number. Nothing specific about crime reporting or recording had been raised by those surveyed.

Rape offences

The force policy and guidance on the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault is a comprehensive document that makes specific reference to the need to take ownership of reports of rape whether reported within or outside the force geographical boundary. In more general terms, the guidance needs amending to more accurately reflect the requirements of NCRS and the HOCR of when to record a crime.

The section in the same guidance that deals with the process for rape no-crimes could also be updated to include a detailed definition of AVI and how it applies to the no-crime application and decision-making process.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should amend its guidance on the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault to accurately reflect NCRS for the recording of crime and to include a definition of additional verifiable information and how it applies to the no-crime process.

Recognising the significant risk to victims and public confidence, the force has taken a number of steps to minimise the risk of reports of rape being lost within systems. One example is where a tab known as 'serious incident not a crime' has been removed from the crime-management and recording system (CMRS). This now prevents rape investigations being recorded anywhere other than on the crime recording system.

IT systems

The force computer systems for the incident, crime recording and intelligence functions are not fully linked. Development work is being progressed by the force with a number of other local forces to introduce a single and integrated IT platform for all three functions. Until then, multiple keying of information will continue to result in the duplication of effort and the potential for lost data.

Although IT systems are owned and managed within the force, little has been done in the way of weeding records. This issue needs to be addressed specifically for the CRMS in advance of the new integrated system being introduced to reduce the potential for duplicate records.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should assess and put in place appropriate actions to mitigate the risks associated with duplicate records being carried forward to any new multi-force IT system for incidents, crime and intelligence recording.

People and skills

The force has sufficient resources responsible for the recording and reviewing of incidents and crimes and the force control room is able to manage demand.

Staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes alongside those working in specialist departments, were generally found to have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and the HOCR.

The FCR and CMB staff have provided input on crime recording to training for new recruits, including PCSOs, control room staff and to divisional supervisors. The force recognises more needs to be done to ensure all officers and staff fully understand NCRS and the HOCR as it applies to their roles. It has identified a training package used by another force and plans to introduce further training in September 2014.

The vast majority of staff understand the chief officer's message on the need for integrity and the high standards expected for crime recording. Non-adherence to NCRS and the HOCR is considered unacceptable at all levels of the force and we did not find any evidence that performance pressures, implicitly or explicitly, led to failures to record crime correctly.

Force crime registrar

The two individuals who fulfil the role of FCR in Nottinghamshire Police have extensive knowledge and experience in recording crime, the management of crime data and the application of NCRS and the HOCR. They have unrestricted access to the assistant chief constable who is the force lead for crime data integrity.

All crime-recording disputes are appropriately referred to the FCR and the role is seen as the final decision maker in any disputes arising from the crime-recording process.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should begin a process for the auditing, by the FCR, of all referrals made to the domestic abuse support unit by other organisations (public, voluntary and private sectors) to assess for NCRS and HOCR compliance, with particular attention being directed to those that involve vulnerable adults and children.
2. The force should amend its guidance on the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault to accurately reflect NCRS for the recording of crime and to include a definition of additional verifiable information and how it applies to the no-crime process.

Within three months

3. The force should take steps to ensure the quality assurance process within the force control room includes a check of compliance with the NCRS and, where appropriate, feeds into the development of professional practice and continuous improvement within the force control room to secure crime data accuracy.
4. The force should improve the supervision of out-of-court disposals to ensure that the nature and implications of accepting the disposal are provided to the offender. In particular that the views of the victim are considered when the use of an out-of-court disposal is proposed.
5. The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training for PPU staff on the no-crime decision-making process that includes expert input on the use of additional verifiable information and on how to correctly reclassify crimes.
6. The force should assess and put in place appropriate actions to mitigate the risks associated with duplicate records being carried forward to any new multi-force IT system for incidents, crime and intelligence recording.

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. The audit undertaken at a force level is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside our fieldwork interviews to form qualitative judgments only.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Nottinghamshire. 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, Nottinghamshire recorded the following number of crimes.
122	122	104
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Nottinghamshire Police and held on other systems that contained reports of crime.	From these referrals, HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Nottinghamshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes, Nottinghamshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
55	20	20
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery that Nottinghamshire Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these, HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
91	84	

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

Chief officers promote the importance of crime data integrity throughout the force and this has been reinforced to staff, mainly through briefings and messages on the force intranet alongside broadcast emails to all account holders. Not all staff with whom we spoke were able to name the force lead for data integrity. They considered the local senior manager, who reiterated messages on the need for integrity from chief officers, to be the lead.

The assistant chief constable (ACC), crime justice and protective services (CJPS) is the named, responsible officer for crime data quality. He is also the lead chief officer for performance management. A potential risk exists when if the performance lead in a force is also responsible for ensuring integrity on crime recording. We did not find any evidence that these combined responsibilities had compromised accurate crime recording. The ACC (CJPS) also chairs the force data integrity and data quality board.

The force has an established governance structure for monitoring performance. It maintains several policies and procedures on crime recording, crime management and criminal investigations that generally meet the requirements of NCRS and HOCR. The force crime-recording procedure is explicit in stating that crime should be recorded accurately and ethically and in a timely manner. The force PROUD values also set out the importance of integrity, trust and honesty throughout the organisation.

At the time of this inspection the force was examining whether the policy of officers attending every crime is appropriate, feasible and sustainable. It was also about to introduce organisational changes that include the introduction of a contact resolution team and telephone investigation bureau.

The PCC, in advance of our inspection and also taking into account national publicity on this area, commissioned the force's external auditors to examine force performance on crime recording. The report was published and made available to

the public in May 2014, with the majority of recommendations being accepted. None of the report's findings are contradicted by what we found. Progress on the recommendations is monitored by oversight of the crime audit delivery plan and reported to the PCC and the audit and scrutiny panel.

Officers and staff can raise concerns about unethical practices of any kind through a number of confidential, internal reporting routes. This includes use of the "Integrity Messenger" for anonymous reporting into the professional standards department (PSD). Staff from the PSD routinely give presentations on police ethics and integrity to all new staff.

While chief officers are explicit about the ethical standards required, it is not apparent that chief officers had actively encouraged officers or staff to report wrongdoing by colleagues. It is important for officers and staff to know they will be supported if they identify and report colleagues operating contrary to the high standards set.

The force has two people performing the role of force crime registrar (FCR). One of the responsibilities of the FCR is to help ensure that the force complies with the NCRS and HOCR. The force does not have a named person responsible for overseeing force compliance with NSIR.

There is daily checking validation of crime recording by staff within the crime management bureau of incident closures for the priority crimes of sexual offences, robbery, violence and burglary.

The audit regime is flexible to take into account new commissions by chief officers such as additional and thematic audits on sexual offences, violent crime and making off without payment offences¹⁶. We found that timely and proportionate action is taken to ensure that crime recording errors and audit findings are addressed. The force intranet helpfully contains examples of the more common errors made by officers and staff when identifying and recording crime.

1.2. How does Nottinghamshire Police ensure they have a proportionate approach to managing the strategic and organisational risk of recording crime data?

The force has identified inaccurate crime recording as a risk with the matter featuring on the force risk register. Nottinghamshire Police has assessed its key crime categories and carries out audits to measure standards of compliance. The crime and incident data quality board is a high level meeting that monitors performance in this area. Weekly updates on compliance are reported at VOLT meetings.

¹⁶ 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.

Overall, the quality of the incident and crime reports we examined were adequate. We found examples where incident records, in the main, contained the detail necessary for the effective response and deployment of resources. More detail was generally found on reports of more serious crime. However, we also found that the modus operandi field in some reports could have been more detailed and contain more information.

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 most of these channels.

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

The force is working hard to ensure that crimes and incidents are recorded in accordance with the HOCR, NCRS and NSIR but still has further work to do.

Daily audits take place by the CMB checking that all incidents opened as a crime and closed as anything other than a crime are examined. This is to ensure crimes have not been missed. Any incident opened as a crime and not crimed, or closed within 72 hours, will automatically be recorded as a crime.

Two auditors carry out weekly checks to ensure NCRS and HOCR compliance. These checks comprise a sample of 30 records for the following offence types: sexual offences, robbery, burglary, theft, vehicle crime and incidents reported as domestic abuse, hate crime or anti-social behaviour. Results are collated in a quarterly report to the crime data quality board (CDQB) and published on the NCRS webpage.

Force control room supervisors monitor live calls taken by call-takers, especially those calls deemed to be higher risk. A number of volunteers have also been used to monitor calls for the level of service provided. The force could further improve the quality of incident reports (where they relate to crimes) by expanding assurance checks by control room supervisors and volunteers to include compliance with NCRS.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

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

We examined 122 incident¹⁷ records and found that 122 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 122 crimes that should have been recorded, 104 were. Of the 104, three were wrongly classified and six were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There is a need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime-recording decisions.

Only CMB staff can validate or reclassify a crime. This is a particular strength within the force crime-recording processes. The CMB also plays a crucial role in quality assurance and we found significant evidence of where remedial action had taken place to ensure that crimes were recorded and classified correctly. The use of CMB staff to correct regular mistakes is effective but costly. The force intends to move to a position where officers improve their recording of crime from the outset. At the time of our inspection this intention was aspirational with no firm plans as to how it would be achieved.

The force crime-recording procedure reflects NCRS standards and HOCR. The aims and objectives section makes clear the importance recording crime accurately, ethically and in a timely manner. The need for accurate crime data is not specifically reflected in the police and crime plan 2013-17.

We examined 55 reports that were received by the force and recorded separately on the CATS database which is used to track child protection, vulnerable adults and domestic abuse cases. We found that of those 55 reports, 20 crimes should have been recorded and all were correctly recorded. Information and incidents reported direct to the central referral unit do not feature within the current audit regime.

During our reality testing we visited the DASU and checked five incidents on the CATS database listed as police referrals. This included a number of serious offences such as violent assaults. Where a crime should have been recorded each of these

¹⁷ An incident is a report of events received by the police that require 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 on the force's incident-recording system.

reports had been crimed and within 48 hours. We also checked five referrals from other agencies and of the five crimes we consider should have been recorded, two had been entered as crimes on CMRS.

An audit of CATS will assure the force that crime and investigation opportunities are not being missed, particularly when investigations are single agency led other than by the police. An area of focus should be on referrals from other agencies where the victims have reported crime but wish to remain anonymous. Under such circumstances and if the victim is deemed to be vulnerable, a crime should be recorded even if the name of the victim is not passed to police.

Although the force crime-recording policy and procedure makes reference to the transfer of crime reported to Nottinghamshire Police but committed in another force area, it does not provide guidance on how to transfer the relevant documentation to the other force and vice versa for crime reported into Nottinghamshire Police by other forces.

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

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

Cautions – Out of the 22 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 20 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 19 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 21 cases where there was a victim to consult, two cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 22 PNDs and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 19 cases. In 19 cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 5 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that none of the 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 17 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 21 community resolutions and found that in all 21 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 21 resolutions where there was a victim, all cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. All 21 cases showed that the agreed resolution was meaningful and appropriate.

All out-of-court outcomes in the force are checked by a designated decision maker (DDM) before the outcome is recorded as such. A multi-agency panel meets quarterly to review out-of-court disposals to ensure that they meet the standards within national guidance. It is therefore of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered for the majority of cautions, and for all of the PND we reviewed. Nor could we find records to show that offenders receiving cannabis warnings had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

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

We examined 91 no-crime records and found 84 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. The force’s approach to no-criming is generally acceptable.

No-crime decisions can only be taken by DDMs or the FCR. The FCR is the final arbiter for all recorded sexual offences to ensure they have been correctly recorded and classified against NCRS and the HOCR. He is also the only person in the force able to authorise a no-crime for an offence of rape.

There was confusion among some staff, and a lack of knowledge within public protection, on what constitutes additional verifiable information (AVI). This could be rectified by providing additional training to those staff involved in the application process for no-crimes. We also found some misunderstanding on classification of offences.

We found no evidence that any of the incorrect no-crime decisions were made as a result of any intention to mis-record crime. The accuracy of no-crime decision making is monitored by the FCR and he is the final decision maker for these cases.

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

Chief officers advocate a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crimes. We found that 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.

Nottinghamshire Police is also engaging with colleagues and partners in the region to try and understand the level of criminality committed by and against foreign nationals. This has not extended to analysis of the true extent of the scale of crime committed against those communities, especially those people who either cannot speak English or have it as a second language.

The force routinely carries out surveys of people who report incidents or crime. We did not find any results that directly related to crime recording, positive or otherwise. As with many forces, the feedback referred to the investigation of crime or incidents and the need to keep people informed and updated with their cases. The force monitors this issue as part of its wider performance management process.

To understand how the force deals with businesses that are victims of crime we visited two supermarkets. Staff at both informed us they did not have any problems in reporting this type of offence to the police. If restorative justice was suggested as an option, it would be decided and led by the store, not the police. We then checked the community resolution records at the local police station and found that they had been completed correctly with all crimes recorded.

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

The force guidance on the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault is a comprehensive document but it needs amending to more accurately reflect NCRS and the HOCR on when to record. The document currently states that a rape should be recorded 'when an officer considers sufficient evidence exists'. The general principles of NCRS state that a crime should be recorded if, on the balance of probabilities, the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law with no credible evidence to the contrary. The current wording provides a higher standard of proof than that set out in the rules, which could lead to fewer crimes recorded and investigated.

The no-crime process for rape also needs to be updated to include a detailed definition of AVI and how it applies to the no-crime application process.

The force has taken a number of steps to ensure that reports of rape are recorded accurately. One example is where a tab known has "serious incident not a crime" has been removed from CMRS. This now prevents rape investigations being recorded and managed anywhere other than on the crime-recording system.

All rape no-crime requests are initially assessed by the head of public protection although she does not examine offences where rape offences are reclassified to a different offence. This is something that would strengthen the overall scrutiny applied at this level as we found some staff were not reclassifying some rape offences correctly. Rape no-crimes are forwarded to the FCR who is the only person in the

force able to authorise a submission of no-crime for a report of rape. HMIC examined 30 rape no-crime records and found that 29 complied with NCRS and the HO CR.

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

The force has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses that may contain reports of crime. These are: the incident management system; VISION; and the crime management system, CMRS. These systems are not fully linked and CRMS has not been regularly weeded to ensure that duplicate records are removed.

During a recent upgrade to the force-wide IT system, it was identified that over 1,000 databases had been opened under personal accounts. This poses the potential risk that information on crimes is being held on systems other than that approved for recording crime. The force is currently reducing the overall number of databases and spreadsheets in use across the force to reduce this risk.

People and skills

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

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

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

Two auditors work full-time on weekly audits whilst the two FCRs carry out quality control. The force does not have a designated post to carry out checks against National Standards for Incident Recording (NSIR). This is checked by auditors and the FCR.

Some officers had received training on the use of restorative justice. The FCR and CMB staff provide training on NCRS and HO CR to new police officer recruits, PCSOs and divisional supervisors.

Longer serving constables, including some specialist staff and detectives, have not received any training on NCRS or the HO CR. This is a gap that was identified by the PCC's audit report and has been accepted by the force. A training package on NCRS has been identified and the force will be delivering additional training on the subject in September 2014.

Comprehensive guidance exists on the force intranet on NCRS and the HOCR together with examples of best practice such as when to record and how to classify crime. Force policies, procedures as well as the PCC commissioned report are all accessible from the same site. Audits feature as well as minutes from NCRS meetings, local and national. Despite the availability of a significant amount of relevant and useful material, we only found a small number of staff who were unaware of its existence. Many staff said they would contact the CMB directly if they have any questions on crime recording.

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

A significant majority of staff had heard and understood force messages on the required standards of behaviour and conduct for crime recording. Many staff that we spoke with explained how there had been a genuine step-change towards more accurate crime recording that commenced about 18 months ago. An example of how things had changed was that patrol officers no longer have to seek authority from their criminal investigation department (CID) colleagues to record a crime. Officers now feel able to record crime without any implied pressure to keep figures down.

We did not find any recent evidence of pressure, whether implicit or explicit, to under-record or mis-record crime. Non-adherence to NCRS and the HOCR is considered unacceptable by those with whom we spoke.

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

We found both FCR to be very active in their oversight of crime-recording systems and processes within the force. They have specific responsibility for helping to ensure that NCRS and the HOCR are consistently applied. They are well known to senior managers and by some staff. Both FCRs showed objectivity and impartiality in managing the current force audit programme. They had also demonstrated a long-term effort to convince the force on the most ethical way to record crime.

They are known to be and operate as the final decision maker for any disputes occurring from the crime-recording process. Both have ready access to the assistant chief constable lead for crime data integrity, with whom they routinely discuss crime recording and data issues.