



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Crime data integrity

Inspection of South Wales Police

November 2014

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

We strongly recommend our findings in this report are read alongside the interim report, *Crime recording: A matter of fact - An interim report of the inspection of crime data integrity in police forces in England and Wales*, available at <http://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 for compliance a small sample of crime records from each force. Taken together, these samples are sufficient to provide a reliable national estimate, but are too small to produce a force estimate of compliance. Force compliance rates typically result in a margin of error of around +/- 10 percent and therefore a range of 20 percent. This range of uncertainty means that few, if any, conclusions can be drawn from individual force compliance rates or comparisons of rates between forces based on the data alone. (Samples large enough to make more reliable force judgements, while desirable, were not affordable.) Our conclusions and recommendations are, therefore, based upon the evidence drawn from our inspection of the force's crime-recording arrangements.

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The force has a knowledgeable and determined chief officer lead in the assistant chief constable (ACC), who has experience of managing the departments responsible for recording crime. Through this experience, he has drawn on the benefits of the force information technology infrastructure to establish robust central mechanisms.

Working with the force crime registrar⁶ (FCR), he has responded to national developments in crime data integrity by personally championing a new approach of taking reports of crime in the force. Rather than waiting for officers to attend crime scenes or incidents involving crime, he has introduced a system where crime reports are recorded as soon as is practicable. This often involves recording crime at the same time as a victim is making their first call to South Wales Police – known as ‘criming at source’. This approach, introduced in April 2014, reflects what the NCRS requires – the recording of crime at the earliest possible opportunity – and is good practice.

The ‘criming at source’ approach is, however, producing some unforeseen pressures in the crime recording system and for some operational teams. These are largely a consequence of higher number of crimes being recorded than under the previous system. The ACC recognises these pressures and, at the time of our inspection, was planning a seminar to discuss this new approach to review its effectiveness, and to identify any issues or risks that need addressing.

South Wales Police has a very strong performance regime with a well established force approach for measuring delivery called the ‘compstat meeting’. The ACC responsible for recording crime also chairs this performance meeting.

The police and crime reduction plan for South Wales 2014-17, published by the PCC, makes several references to the need for accurate crime recording. The plan sets out the desire “to encourage quick and confident reporting” in several areas such as child sexual exploitation and abuse of the elderly, where various factors have led to probable under-recording.

⁶ The person in a police force who is responsible for ensuring compliance with crime-recording rules. The HOCR provide that he is ultimately responsible for all decisions to record a crime or to make a no-crime decision, as the final arbiter. The force crime registrar’s responsibilities include training staff in the crime-recording process and carrying out audits to check that the force is complying with all applicable rules. For the purpose of this report FCR will refer to either of the two staff performing the role

In addition, the PCC makes a positive declaration of principle about the need to “understand the real levels of crime”.

The force is currently revising its internal policy for reporting on wrongdoing, but there is a mechanism on the force’s intranet for submitting a confidential ‘integrity report’ to the professional standards department (PSD). Staff know how to access this reporting mechanism and a telephone reporting line is also used by staff when needed. There have been no matters relating to crime data integrity reported to the PSD in the last 18 months.

A strong audit regime with experienced staff uses ‘word search’ methodology to identify gaps in recording. Rather than relying on checking incidents by means of the codes given to incidents when first recorded, a more thorough check of all crime-related records is done. Auditors look at all possible crime-related records for certain words which regularly feature in crimes. These are then checked to make sure a crime has been recorded when required. This helps to address individual or team-based errors and ensures that crimes are then recorded when they should be.

There is a well-developed crime recording policy produced by the FCR; this positively articulates the need for ethical crime recording and a victim focus. This comprehensive document emphasises to staff the importance of following both NCRS and the HOCR.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 179 incident records⁷ and found that 164 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 164 crimes that should have been, 158 were recorded. Of the 158, just 2 were wrongly classified and 18 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is an effective approach adopted by the force to secure the integrity of crime data, although during the period of this audit (November 2012 to October 2013) the timeliness of crime recording is of concern.

As a result of a specific request from the chief constable and the PCC, we carried out a second audit during our inspection. This involved a sample of more recent incident records, from the period of April to June 2014. We examined 116 of these additional records and found that 69 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 69 crimes that should have been, 64 were recorded.

⁷ 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.

Of the 64, 63 were correctly classified and 1 was recorded outside the 72-hour limit required by NCRS and the HOOCR.

The 'criming at source' policy requires the Police Service Centre (PSC) to record reports of crime directly from members of the public at the same time as the initial call is received. This is achieved by means of a direct link between the command and control computer system called NSPIS, and the Niche crime system. Operators enter a separate code for routine incidents that do not contain crime issues to keep them within the NSPIS command and control system only. We conducted sampling audits of a total of 52 NSPIS incident records; we found that 20 crimes should have been recorded from these incidents. Of these 20 crimes, 3 were not recorded on the crime system; this reflects some inaccuracy in this area. This element of the NSPIS system is not audited by the FCR.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that incidents retained on the NSPIS command and control system which contain reports of crime are properly recorded as crimes.

Operators are now creating the vast majority of crime records in advance of sending an officer to an incident for both emergency and non-emergency incidents. The officer can add detail to the crime which has already been created, or clarify the situation in subsequent update reports. It is no longer left to the attending officer to make the initial decision on whether a crime should be recorded. The ACC lead believes that this method will provide a better service to the public and allow the force to record crime more accurately.

Through the compstat process, the ACC has been tracking the changes in crime recording patterns carefully since beginning this initiative. From this monitoring it is estimated by the force that criming at source has resulted in an increase in recorded crime of 8 percent since it was fully implemented.

PSC supervisors run hourly checks of all crime-related incidents to ensure that crimes are properly recorded. Of the 178 incidents we reviewed from our audit, there was evidence of effective supervision in 138 of them. Similarly in the second audit, 107 out of 116 incidents showed that effective supervision had taken place. On occasion it was difficult to differentiate front-line supervision from that in the PSC but this level of involvement by supervisors is evidence of the supervisory oversight that the ACC wished to see.

While the volume of emergency calls using the 999 system has remained relatively stable, the levels of non-emergency calls using the 101 system are beginning to show rising patterns of demand and a decline in call answering times. During our inspection there was some suggestion that the PSC staff could be prioritising call answering over crime recording activity. There was very limited evidence of this occurring and PSC managers immediately began checks to establish whether any crimes were not being recorded promptly and

left for attending officers to record. Nonetheless, any sustained increase in call volumes in the PSC needs to be managed to avoid a negative impact on the recording at source approach and the erosion of confidence in it.

Another important area of force business we audited was the way crime is recorded within the public protection unit (PPU). We examined 50 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments. In the 50 cases we audited, we judged that 19 crimes should have been recorded and 14 were recorded. The force recognises the issue of inaccurate crime recording in the PPU as one of the few areas where substantial improvements could be made. PPU staff are rightly focused on the safeguarding of potential victims but some see the creation of crime reports as unnecessarily criminalising those involved. This is a misunderstanding of the reasons why crime reports are created. However, the FCR is the final decision maker and ensures that incidents do not breach NCRS and HOCR.

Gaps in crime recording practice can also arise from the way PPU staff record potential crimes of neglect or abuse of vulnerable adults and children. In order to address these problems, the FCR is raising the awareness of staff on the need for compliance with NCRS and the HOCR. There are also background word search audits carried out on these records to identify potentially unrecorded crime.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should evaluate the full results of the involvement of the FCR to assure the organisation of the compliance levels being achieved. This should include all referrals by other organisations (public sector, voluntary sector and private sector) to the force of incidents and reports of crime, with special attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals include cautions, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND),⁸ cannabis warnings⁹ and community resolutions.¹⁰ The HOCA (section H) states that national guidance must be followed¹¹.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 14 cases where there was a victim to consult, 4 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Officers stated to us that they did not consult with assault victims before giving offenders cautions because of likely adverse reactions. This has been discussed at performance meetings and the force is preparing a leaflet to inform victims about the nature of cautions, particularly in assault cases.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 11 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that all victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

We were informed in advance of the audit that the force had become aware of the absence of suitable warnings to offenders about disclosure on their PND forms. As a result, the force intends to replace every PND issued to operational staff by having a new form printed setting out the right information for offenders.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In one case we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning. In checking these disposals, we considered that there was insufficient detail within the Niche records to assess whether national guidance had been followed.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 19 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of a community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 4 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 cases, 14 showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹². Again, we felt that the number of records available of these disposals was insufficient to make judgments on whether the national guidance had been followed.

Community resolutions should only be used if both the victim and offender agree to the resolution; it is therefore disappointing to see that in a great majority of cases, our audit could not establish if the victims’ wishes and personal circumstances had been considered, reflecting the findings of our audit of caution records.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should develop a strategy to ensure officers consult with victims of all types of crime before administering cautions or agreeing community resolutions. The force should assure itself through audit that any explanatory information on the nature of these disposals is being shared with victims in advance and that their views are recorded and considered in each case.

Force level checks on out-of-court disposals need to be improved through the availability of fuller records to internal auditors.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure the forms used to record out-of-court disposals are designed in such a way as to demonstrate that national guidance has been followed. Immediately thereafter, the force should introduce an effective mechanism for monitoring the use of out-of-court disposals.

¹² 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.

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 44 no-crime records and found 43 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. The quality of the no-crime decisions for rape, violence and robbery was of a high standard.

Since the introduction of the criming at source approach, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of no-crime decisions. Force data for July 2013 reveals that there were 156 no-crime decisions compared with 758 in July 2014, representing a 386 percent increase. While an increase in no-crimes could be anticipated from the new approach to crime-recording, the extent of the increase appears excessive.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should carry out a detailed analysis of the pattern, nature and causes of the increase in no-crimes to understand what actions are necessary to ensure that crimes are not being recorded unnecessarily at the outset, and that no criming decisions are correct.

This review should assist in identifying any potential training needs for PSC staff and help maintain frontline confidence in the approach being taken.

Victim-centred approach

Surveys show that South Wales Police achieves high levels of public satisfaction. This is replicated in its overall approach to crime recording which is intended to demonstrate that the force is acting on calls from local people by recording crime at the first point of contact. There is a customer care board chaired by a chief superintendent which has researched national best practice and introduced a new system for updating victims of crime. Frontline staff are asked 'not to miss a TRICK', standing for Time, Reference, Incident, Complete and Keep – shorthand for the main information needed by victims and the key update times.

The results of public satisfaction surveys are widely distributed throughout the force and disseminated by command teams to each divisional area. Managers know the issues that are relevant to their areas and the crime categories that require focus to improve public satisfaction.

Rape

Policy for the recording of reports of rape is included in the force crime recording policy and procedures; this includes a description of how such crimes should be investigated. The force has made substantial advances in the recording and management of rape since a detailed audit was carried out in 2013. The PCC also focuses much attention on this area, checking police action to increase reporting and to reduce the number of women and girls who become repeat victims of violence.

All reports of rape received within the PSC are recorded immediately. Few operational uniformed officers attend reports of rape as they are usually allocated to a specialist in dealing with these offences. The allocation of sexual offence liaison officers (SOLO) to conduct the initial investigation in almost every case supports the force view that reports of rape are given a 'platinum level' service. The word search technique, described earlier in this report, is adopted to ensure that reports are not misclassified.

During our audit, we found 12 reports of rape and judged that all had been properly identified and recorded in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR.

IT systems

South Wales Police is planning some significant changes to its incident recording system due to the age of its current platform (NSPIS) and it is anticipated that a replacement system will be procured within the next 12 months. The force makes excellent use of the Niche crime recording system to include those reports generated from the PPU area of business. The new incident, command and control system will be designed to maintain the interface it currently enjoys with Niche, the force crime system.

Plans are well advanced to provide frontline officers with a new generation of mobile data equipment in tablet form to support the remote recording and updating of crime records. At present officers are equipped with small hand-held devices which do not lend themselves readily to the recording of crime.

People and skills

Some teams that undertake crime recording in South Wales Police are still in a state of transition as the introduction of the new approach to crime recording is being fully developed. Some staff have moved to central roles and others transferred to the crime integrity team (CIT), set up to provide resilience in the management of crime reports as well as overseeing quality assurance and audit. The incremental introduction of the new method of recording crime has, in the main, helped to address a lack of confidence and experience in some staff by allowing time for additional training on NCRS and the HOCR.

At the time of inspection, there were 319 staff working within the PSC; managers believe that this reflects the force commitment to making this initiative successful. There has been some rapid staff turnover in the PSC as experienced staff have moved on to other policing roles. This has served to erode the experience and skills base in an area crucial to accurate crime recording at source.

Recommendation: Within three months, South Wales Police should establish robust arrangements to ensure that the number of suitably trained and experienced staff working within the PSC adequately reflects demand, and the need to deliver accurate and effective crime recording.

During the inspection, we found that frontline uniformed staff welcomed the introduction of criming at source, and the clear demonstration of a commitment to an ethical approach to recording. We found no evidence that staff or managers had received any implied or overt pressure to mis-record or under-record crimes.

Many uniformed officers and specialist investigators stated that they would like to be provided with a clearer understanding of the basics of the crime counting rules and standards. The majority had received some information on how the new crime outcomes were to be introduced but few could confirm that they had received any training in or information about NCRS or HOCR. There are some active strands of training and awareness that build upon NCRS and the HOCR, notably with newly promoted sergeants and for staff who take on new roles as part of the new crime recording process. This training input is currently conducted and organised by the FCR.

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

Force crime registrar (FCR)

The FCR is an experienced individual who has a strong determination to improve crime recording standards continuously. He and his deputy have a sound grasp of both crime standards and the counting rules. The FCR is widely known in the force and, while initial questions over crime recording issues are referred to the CIT, the FCR is seen as the final arbiter. There is a positive relationship between the ACC lead for crime recording and the FCR with frequent meetings between the two.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that incidents retained on the NSPIS command and control system which contain reports of crime are properly recorded as crimes.
2. The force should evaluate the full results of the involvement of the FCR to assure the organisation of the compliance levels being achieved. This should include all referrals by other organisations (public sector, voluntary sector and private sector) to the force of incidents and reports of crime, with special attention being directed to those involving vulnerable adults and children.

3. The force should carry out a detailed analysis of the pattern, nature and causes of the increase in no-crimes to understand what actions are necessary to ensure that crimes are not being recorded unnecessarily at the outset, and that no-criming decisions are correct.

Within three months

4. The force should develop a strategy to ensure officers consult with victims in all types of crime before administering cautions or agreeing community resolutions. The force should assure itself through audit that any explanatory information on the nature of these disposals is being shared with victims in advance and that their views are recorded and considered in each case.
5. The force should ensure the forms used to record out-of-court disposals are designed in such a way as to demonstrate that national guidance has been followed. Immediately thereafter, the force should introduce an effective mechanism for monitoring the use of out-of-court disposals.
6. South Wales Police should establish robust arrangements to ensure that the number of suitably trained and experienced staff working within the PSC adequately reflects demand and the need to deliver accurate and effective crime recording.

Within six months

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

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

Our examination of records will be used as part of a statistically robust national audit to allow HMIC to report a figure for national crime recording accuracy across the 43 Home Office forces within our final report to be published in autumn 2014. The audit undertaken at a force level is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside our fieldwork interviews to form qualitative 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 South Wales. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes that South Wales Police should have recorded	From these identified crimes South Wales Police recorded the following number of crimes
179	164	158
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to South Wales Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that South Wales Police should have recorded	From these identified crimes South Wales Police recorded the following number of crimes
50	19	14
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery, which South Wales Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
44	43	

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

South Wales Police has made high standards in crime recording one of its main aims of service delivery for a sustained period. The chief officer lead is an assistant chief constable (ACC), who was also the project manager for the introduction of the force crime management system in 2007, called Niche RMS. As a result he has considerable background information and experience to draw from in making decisions to improve crime data accuracy in the force. Those working closely with him in the subject area spoke about his powerful determination to get things done.

The ACC also chairs the force compstat performance meeting. We found that crime recording performance data featured in the performance analysis and the force lead had set a compliance target of 95 percent for crime recording within 72 hours. This alignment of crime data accuracy alongside force performance helps to assure the force of the integrity of its performance and to focus on any areas where crime recording accuracy could be improved.

The force lead is also responsible for policing delivered in each of the force's four divisional areas. He spoke directly to the managers from each these areas to discuss his plans for crime recording so that they fully understood the new approach before it went live in April this year. Alongside a podcast which was made available to the whole force, he has written articles published in the force magazine about criming at source.

We found that frontline officers and staff had received key messages about crime standards but were unable to recall how they were made aware of these issues or who was the force lead for crime data integrity. Many stated they would be only too pleased to see the force crime data integrity lead on their divisions more often, and wanted the chance to hear about crime recording from the ACC himself, given the impact of the new approach.

As well as beginning to communicate within the force, the ACC has also assisted both the chief constable and the PCC in the preparation of a press statement about the new system of recording crime. This was released with the intention of making the public aware of the initiative, but also to explain to the public that as a result of the new approach, levels of recorded crime may increase following a prolonged period of reduction.

The police and crime reduction plan for South Wales 2014-17, published by the PCC, makes several references to the need for accurate crime recording. The plan sets out the desire “to encourage quick and confident reporting” in several areas such as child sexual exploitation and abuse of the elderly, where various factors have led to probable under-recording. In addition, the PCC makes a positive declaration of principle about the need to “understand the real levels of crime”.

The force intranet has a section set up by the professional standards department (PSD) that allows staff to report unethical behaviour. This is done in two ways. The first is an integrity report form that can be filled in and allows the reporter to choose anonymous reporting. The second method is by means of a confidential reporting line. A test of this system indicates it is regularly checked by PSD. The force policy on the internal reporting of wrongdoing was unavailable at the time of the inspection as it was being re-drafted.

There is a well developed crime recording policy produced by the FCR which positively articulates the need for ethical crime recording and a victim focus. This comprehensive document emphasises to staff the importance of following both NCRS and the HOCR.

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

The South Wales Police joint risk register contains entries that relate to the potential consequences from its new crime recording procedures. Both these risk entries are forward looking and aim to respond to maintaining public confidence in the wake of possible rises in crime. The force considers these rises are likely to arise from recording crime at an earlier stage than before as well as from increased reporting in areas of under-reporting. This latter rise could occur when restraining factors on victims are removed by generating more confidence in local police. Careful scrutiny of national developments in crime recording and a desire to copy best practice have resulted in new initiatives as a strategic response to the risk of failing to deliver the best service possible to local communities.

The force has taken action in the last 12 months to review the reporting of both sexual offences and robbery crimes which were considered to have associated recording risks. In respect of sexual offences, a team was set up to ensure that all such reports were properly recorded and correctly classified. For robberies,

concerns about relatively low numbers of crimes led to a check to assess whether reports were being correctly recorded as thefts by examining the initial accounts from victims. The new approach has led to a number of new key crime risk areas emerging, such as violence without injury, and significant rises are being critically reviewed by force analysts.

The ACC is clearly sighted on the way that the vast majority of crime is reported through the force control room. This had led to the amalgamation of the previous divisional control rooms into a single PSC to achieve a consistent service across the force. Crime can be reported through the internet and members of the public visiting enquiry offices are normally put in contact directly with the PSC. PSC managers are also responsible for the enquiry office staff to promote the same levels of customer service.

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

One of the great strengths of crime recording in South Wales Police is the thorough and timely use of the crime audit function enabled by the Niche IT system.

Until April 2014, the FCR and his team of auditors presented regular checks of force incidents to the compstat meeting, making comment on both NCRS and HOCR compliance and the degree to which NSIR¹³ had been followed. Since the force introduced the recording of crimes at an earlier stage, a crime integrity team (CIT) has been formed in the PSC. This unit will be responsible for most audits but will retain a quality control link to the FCR.

The force has been able to audit its Niche system with a high degree of confidence as a result of being able to carry out word searches across the system. Many forces have to rely on auditing incidents on their systems from the 'opening code' first allocated by staff from the force control room. This code is chosen from set lists and is thought to be the best summary of what the incident is about. Auditing often checks the eventual outcome of incidents by code to confirm how many incidents are correctly managed and whether crimes were correctly recorded. The word search approach widens the force's ability to look for crimes that should have been recorded by searching on words most commonly associated with certain types of crime or victims. The force continues to use this very strong approach in a positive way within the CIT.

We found that supervisors of frontline teams were aware of errors made by their staff and any corrective action by means of the Niche 'information portal', which provides them with a real time review of crimes linked to staff.

¹³ National Standards of Incident Recording

There is a high degree of flexibility built into the audit regime and the ACC is able to commission additional audit work on the basis of questions raised at his compstat meetings, or when questions emerge about specific crime types. He recently requested audits of shoplifting crimes and another on the theft of bicycles following a sudden rise in reports.

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

In describing the recent shift to creating crime reports at the first opportunity, the ACC stated that this was “one of the most fundamental changes” in the recent history of South Wales Police. His aim in moving to this approach was to create the most transparent and ethical way possible of recording crime. Even before this development, South Wales Police showed a strong commitment to making sure reports of crime were correctly identified and recorded. While a number of adjustments may be needed to a system only introduced fully since the beginning of June 2014, the criming at source approach offers the opportunity for very high compliance with NCRS and the HOCR once fully embedded.

Niche is used as a means of achieving consistent standards of crime recording and decision making. Effective supervision of crime-related incidents on force systems has enabled a high level of accuracy in recording crime from incidents. Within the PSC there is the flexibility for an operator to handle a serious emergency and have additional assistance from a colleague to ensure that the relevant crime is recorded. When not helping in this way, these additional staff work alongside the supervisors to conduct real time checks of incidents to ensure a crime has been correctly recorded. The force senior leadership checks each day to assess the speed with which all the crime in the force is recorded. Managers review this by means of the ‘NCRS timeliness tool’, which is widely available across the force.

This degree of intrusive supervision underpins our finding that in the 164 crimes that we judged should have been recorded, only 6 were missed. Two recorded crimes from our audit sample were incorrectly classified. We also found that in the 179 incidents, 173 had been finalised with the correct code for the type of incident involved. A separate quality assurance supervisor in the PSC undertakes call monitoring to ensure that a professional service has been provided to victims and that there has been compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

Feedback from this monitoring is provided directly to the individual call-handler but also to the PSC team during team meetings, focus groups and training days set up to improve performance.

The force compstat meeting has highlighted the additional pressures currently being felt in the PSC from an increase in the number 101 calls received from the public. The ACC is aware of this pressure which coincides with the move to recording crime at source. This is particularly acute during the Friday evening to Saturday night period when demand is at its highest. This issue should be carefully considered at the seminar being planned by the ACC.

As part of our audit, we examined 50 records that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments and recorded on the Niche computer system. We judged that from these records, 19 crimes should have been recorded and of these 14 were. Of the 14, all were correctly classified and 6 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit within NCRS and the HOCC. The force is working with the PPU to improve standards of crime recording. At present the unit is capable of generating its own records within Niche, but some staff do not use the correct coding to help identify when crimes should be recorded. Often the coding 'concern for welfare' is used as a general description for a report when a crime-related code would have been more useful. This again reflects many of the officers' concerns for safeguarding issues rather than an understanding of NCRS and the HOCC. The separate auditing function in the CIT plays an important role in helping to identify and rectify these errors.

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

South Wales Police has conducted some internal auditing of out-of-court outcomes, including a review of the use of PND. Through these audits, it realised that some out-of-court outcomes were not used in accordance with national guidance. This has led to a complete reprint of one force form. On each division, there is a chief inspector, who acts as a single point of contact (SPOC) for out-of-court disposals. Each SPOC then links in to the CIT who flag up any significant errors. Any officer making repeated mistakes is then placed on an action plan to resolve the shortfall.

There is a scrutiny panel for out-of-court disposals at a force level, which is chaired by the PCC. This is shortly to change to two panels where there is separate checking of adult and youth cases.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in all cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 14 cases where there was a victim to consult 4 cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

This was corroborated by interviews we held with front line staff on the administration of cautions, particularly in assault cases. Local victims often expressed dissatisfaction with the use of a caution and staff were very sensitive to this fact. As a result, some officers seemed to issue a caution in such cases without reference back to the victim to avoid any resistance about using this disposal. Officers appear to prefer to deal with any subsequent comment from the victim rather than addressing the victim’s views in advance. The force is aware of this approach and is trying to assist officers through the production of guidance for victims about what a caution involves.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 11 cases, where there was a victim to consult, we found that all victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

We were informed in advance of the audit that the force had become aware of the absence of suitable warnings to offenders about disclosure on their PND forms. As a result, the force intends to replace every PND issued to operational staff by having a new form printed with this information contained therein.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In just one case did we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning. In checking these disposals, we considered that there was insufficient detail within the Niche records to assess whether national guidance had been followed.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 19 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 4 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 cases, 14 showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate. Again, we felt that the records available in these disposals were insufficient to make judgements as to whether the national guidance had been followed.

Community resolutions should only be used if both the victim and offender agree to the resolution; it is therefore disappointing to see that in a great majority of cases our audit could not establish if the victims' wishes and personal circumstances had been considered, reflecting the findings of our audit of caution records.

Force level checks on out-of-court outcomes need to be improved through the availability of fuller records to internal auditors. Recent changes to information given to offenders in these types of disposals should be used in all cases. With the roll out of the new generation of mobile data devices, there is also an ambition to move to a paperless approach to recording this type of outcome. In this regard, it is even more critical that officers routinely generate a full record of their actions for victims and offenders when using out-of-court disposals.

There are proposals to extend the scope of cases in which community resolution can be used beyond the current focus on young people. The PCC's plan includes a reference to the desire to implement a wider restorative justice scheme in the area.

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

Our audit of 44 no-crime decisions in the categories of robbery, violence and rape offences revealed that 43 were correctly recorded.

Before the introduction of the approach of criming at earliest report, each divisional area had a member of staff responsible for co-ordinating and checking all no-crime applications before they were submitted for final approval to headquarters. Each of these individuals has now been brought into the new CIT where this central team makes decisions on no-crimes. The FCR alone makes determinations on rape no-crimes.

There has been a significant change in the scale of no-criming decisions since June 2014. The force is aware of this and analytical work should be carried out to understand the drivers of this change. This research would help establish if some calls from the public are being incorrectly recorded as crimes from the outset. It may also help the force understand if the current level of no-crime is proportionate to the additional crimes being reported.

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

The ACC is keen for the force to follow its vision 'to be the best at understanding and responding to our communities' needs'. He feels that recording reports of crime almost straight away sends a powerful victim-centred message to local communities.

Our visits to the force control room and other units involved in managing crime confirmed that there was a clear ethos of victim focus and a desire to adopt a victim-centred approach to the recording of crime. This is made evident in the way that victim accounts are recorded verbatim on the NSPIS incident system and on Niche records of crime.

Within South Wales Police, the chief constable is recognised by staff as having a real desire to ensure victims are given the best service possible. The force uses the TRICK mnemonic to guide officers in their regular contact with victims. Compliance levels for the required victim contacts are checked at force and divisional level against a red, amber and green status report. At present, the majority of these measures indicate red levels of compliance across the divisional areas. This may be a feature of the unexpected demand generated by the adoption of the new system. The issue of victim contact compliance did not feature in the force compstat meeting we observed.

A supervisor in the PSC has a responsibility for checking the quality of the interaction with members of the public on the telephone. Advice and guidance is given to staff members when necessary. We found that operators answering the call from the public were polite, helpful and professional in 292 out of 293 cases.

Positive use of victim and public satisfaction data is used to influence crime management and recording practice, with the result of surveys distributed to the local policing area commanders.

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

The general crime recording policy of the force sets out clearly the NCRS and HOCA requirements for when a report of rape should be recorded. It also emphasises a victim-focused approach and that any crime should be recorded as soon as possible. In our audit we found 12 reports, all of which were correctly recorded as rapes. Rapes are recorded within the PSC as with other crime types, but operators are trained not to ask inappropriate or insensitive questions on first report.

Operational managers stated that there was a strong system of mutual support within the divisions to ensure that a sexual offences liaison officer (SOLO) attends any reported rape and deals with the victim. There is a rape action plan to guide the subsequent investigation of the crime. Undetected crimes are the subject of very early review to consider missed investigative opportunities.

Checks within the control room every hour, and in the CIT aim to identify and address any rapes that may have been overlooked or incorrectly classified. Word searches are an effective tool to do this.

South Wales Police has a commitment from its policing and crime plan to increase reporting and reduce repeat victims of violence against women and girls. A good example of this is the way a volunteer introduces the victim's perspective of rape and domestic abuse into force training sessions. The recent rise in reported sexual offences "is seen as a positive" by the ACC, showing evidence of greater confidence from victims in talking to the police about these crimes.

Meetings have taken place between the CIT and PPU staff to ensure that all incidents of serious sexual offences and rape are recorded accurately. A select group of PPU staff can create their own records on Niche to manage referrals into the department by social services and other partners, but not to record crime. Their approach is to conduct their enquiries and then update the PSC, which creates any necessary crime report. The CIT stresses the importance of using the correct crime-related codes on Niche as some codes have previously been used to raise safeguarding or welfare concerns.

No-crime decisions are made by the FCR after an initial screening review by a detective inspector to ensure the application is appropriate. The ACC has deliberately removed the examination of rape reports and no-crime rates from the force compstat meeting to signal that he wishes this area to be free from any suggestion of performance pressure.

The vast majority of rapes occurring in other force areas are dealt with by the PSC in the same way as other crimes. Specialist investigators confirmed that local guidelines directed staff to deal with any victim in exactly the same way as they would if an offence had taken place in their area.

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

The force has benefited from using the Niche system since 2007 and the force crime recording lead has made sure that the force has taken full advantage of the system's capabilities. There are plans to build in even greater gains from interface links when the force purchases a new incident, command and control system to replace the existing NSPIS system. User groups for both current systems are in place with identified user managers.

There is a clear commitment to draw constantly on the latest IT developments to improve operational delivery by the frontline staff and to capture efficiencies from their adoption. Evidence of this is provided in the way South Wales Police has successfully bid for innovation fund money to supply a new generation of hand-held mobile devices for officers.

People and skills

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

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

Much has been done by the force to manage the staffing numbers and the skills required to support the change to recording crime at source. At the time of our inspection, the FCR was in the process of arranging the transfer of some of his team to the new CIT where they will conduct essential quality assurance work. In the weeks since the new system began to operate, the force has recognised that despite preparations, there is more to be done to meet the demand generated.

There is a comprehensive 22-week training period for new staff within the PSC and those who have transferred in have undergone a targeted five-week up-skilling programme. All staff in the PSC are capable of recording crime but not reviewing and finalising it. As a consequence, there is a 24-hour backlog for this type of work. Similarly no-crime decisions are reserved for the CIT to manage and we found backlogs of around 7 to 10 days. Some patrol staff spoke of waiting up to half an hour on the phone to update the PSC on crime reports following their attendance at incidents. It is anticipated that remote updating through mobile devices will ease this issue.

The ACC believes that some of these issues will be resolved as staff become more familiar with the new system, and he intends to review any continuing pressure points in the force review of the new system during October 2014.

Some operational managers believed that knowledge of out-of-court outcomes by staff and first line supervisors needs to be improved, with issues such as PND notices never being received at the force's central ticket office illustrating their point. The force estimates from research work that 13 percent of issued tickets are never located. Action is being taken on divisions to improve this situation but training on national guidance is seen as necessary.

Staff from the CIT spoke of being confident in their task and well supported. In time this unit will become a useful source of help for specialist investigators and uniform staff alike.

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

One of the key benefits coming from the criming at source approach is that those responsible for recording crime in the PSC sit outside any inappropriate pressures that could stem from the desire to meet performance targets. The ACC is known within the PSC and wider environment for stating repeatedly

“record what you’ve got to record”. Many of those we interviewed in all parts of the force and in different roles contrasted the current position of the force with the way things were done in the past.

The force crime recording lead believes that the current upturn in certain areas of crime is due to the fact that in the past, many uniformed officers would not have interpreted some circumstances as amounting to a crime, even with immediate access to NCRS and the HOCR. Crimes such as minor assaults and harassment offences are now being correctly recorded by the PSC when in the past they were left unnoticed and unrecorded.

The vast majority of staff welcome the clear signals from the ACC and the new way of working, although many are waiting for the changes to become established.

The views of the ACC on some officers not recognising certain categories of crime chimes with a clear desire from many officers for some basic awareness training in NCRS and the HOCR. Some frontline staff said they had seen emails on the new crime outcomes when these were introduced, but most have had no direct training on NCRS or HOCR. Both transferees and newly promoted sergeants are now receiving inputs on HOCR and NCRS but the input should be introduced more widely to the workforce.

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

The FCR in South Wales Police has the support of a deputy and together they are supporting the refinements needed to the new crime recording at source approach. This will include how he engages with the CIT, which is soon to absorb most of his current team. The FCR attends the force performance meeting and introduces findings from audits of crime recording to flag up emerging trends or patterns of errors.

Both the ACC and the FCR confirmed that they have a positive relationship that allows full and frank discussion of crime recording issues, particularly when any changes are required.

The FCR is known to many officers in the force and has established a clear position as the final arbiter on any disputes involving interpretation of NCRS and the HOCR. Many issues are resolved through initial contact with the CIT but the FCR is seen as the ultimate decision maker on such matters.

The FCR maintains oversight on matters of policy to ensure that it reflects the latest position on national crime recording standards.