

Crime data integrity

Inspection of South Yorkshire 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. All 43 forces will be inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

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

The scope and structure of the report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The chief officer team promotes the importance of data integrity throughout the force. The deputy chief constable is the named officer responsible for crime data integrity.

The force has an established governance structure to monitor crime data integrity. Policies and procedures make reference to NCRS and HOCC compliance; however references and links to an ethical approach or the wider issues around victim-focused integrity are not absolutely clear.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should assess all crime recording policies and procedures to ensure they consistently reflect the required ethical approach to recording crime in accordance with the HOCC and NCRS, and that they clearly describe the importance of a victim-focused approach.

The force has a confidential reporting line by which officers can raise concerns in respect of unethical practices, although there was no evidence that officers and staff were directly encouraged to use this line of communication to report concerns about crime recording. Additionally, some officers did not know about the confidential line and others thought it wasn't for reporting issues in respect of crime recording.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to promote the existence of the confidential reporting line to all officers and staff, and in so doing clearly communicate that this line can be used for the confidential reporting and effective handling of concerns in relation to crime-recording.

Chief officers have an understanding of the risks associated with inaccurate crime recording, such as their analysis of demand, the allocation of resources and the support provided to victims. An annual force NCRS audit takes place to inform this understanding. Crime data integrity does not feature as a bespoke risk on the force's risk management group agenda.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and ensure that any risks identified are included in, and monitored through, the force risk register; and that any necessary actions identified to mitigate against these risks are progressed.

South Yorkshire Police has an extensive audit regime that is flexible and can take account of emerging issues. All auditing activity is led by the force crime registrar⁶ (FCR) through the audit and governance unit. Results of crime recording audits are used to direct organisational changes, and training as required.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 152 incident records⁷ and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 89 were. Of the 89, 3 were wrongly classified and 9 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There is a serious need for improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of crime recording decisions.

The force also has a centralised crime management unit through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 24 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 19 calls from the public) found that of the 19 crimes that should have been recorded, all 19 were recorded and classified correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 53 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments. Of the 34 crimes that should have been recorded, 18 had been recorded. All 18 had been correctly classified, but 8 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This level of under-recorded crime is a significant cause of concern and is a matter of material and urgent importance, particularly as some of these relate to violence and sexual assault against vulnerable children. One issue affecting the accurate recording of crimes in this area is the inability of the force to audit easily the standalone computer system (CATS) used by the public protection unit.

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.

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.

We also found that in some cases of more serious crime, an ‘investigate-to-record’⁸ process was being implemented; this was particularly evident in the public protection unit, with a great deal of time spent trying to disprove the word of the victim from the outset, rather than record the crime in compliance with the NCRS and HOCR and then take the appropriate action as the investigation progressed. This culture of dealing with reports of crime shows a disregard for victims and is unacceptable; it hides the true extent of the picture of crime from the force and is particularly concerning when the offences investigated by this unit are often of the most serious nature and victims are often the most vulnerable.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to identify in which areas of the force a culture of ‘investigating-to-record’ exists, and take unequivocal steps to end this approach and introduce victim-centred crime recording in line with the HOCR and NCRS. This should then be followed by the early introduction of a robust and regular method of audit to ensure the ethical working practices introduced are sustained.

There is an inherent risk that a significant number of reported offences of a serious nature have not been recorded and that vulnerable victims have, as a consequence, been left unprotected or at risk of further offending.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should commission an independent review of historical records retained by those areas of the force in which they identify a culture of ‘investigate-to-record’; this should go back for a minimum of two years. In particular, the public protection unit standalone system (CATS) should be reviewed, so as to ensure reports of crime, or referrals containing reports of crime to this unit, have been recorded. Where they haven’t, the force should ensure they are now recorded and the victim receives the level of service and support they require, and the offence is fully investigated in an effort to bring the offender to justice.

It is important to recognise that this culture is not applied by all officers working within the sphere of public protection. An officer in the child abuse unit described how some years before there had been pressure not to crime rape, robberies and burglaries straight away but rather to investigate to record – in her experience she said that things had now changed and that pressure was no longer around. Indeed she said that they were encouraged to crime everything and on the morning of our inspection she had raised crimes on every referral that she had received.

⁸ This means that the police do not record the incident as a crime at first, but instead investigate the matter in order to establish whether a crime has been committed.

Some monitoring of calls and incidents is undertaken by supervisors within the force control room, these supervisors are aware of the need for compliance with the NCRS and HO CR.

The force crime recording policy details how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area, highlighting the responsibility of the attending officer to ensure the crime details are submitted to the relevant force.

Out-of-court disposals

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 15 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all 20 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, 7 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PNDs and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 20 cases. In 12 cases we found evidence that showed the offender had been made aware of the future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 13 cases where there was a victim to consult we found seven where the victim's had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

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

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

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

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

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

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 18 cases. We found no evidence in any of the samples which showed that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 24 community resolutions and found that in 20 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, 20 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 22 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹³.

The appropriateness of out-of-court disposals is monitored and managed at either a force or local level. The force has an external scrutiny panel to review out-of-court disposals; this panel is made up of the force out-of-court disposal scrutiny lead, a criminal justice intervention officer, the FCR, an auditor, magistrates (bench chairs), a youth magistrate, Youth Offending Service and Victim Support representatives. The panel meets quarterly and reviews a five percent sample of out-of-court disposals from the previous quarter.

Operators within the crime recording bureau quality assure out-of-court disposals and feed back any irregularities to officers. However, despite this monitoring, it is evident from our inspection that out-of-court disposals are being used too often when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use. The views of victims are not being considered and the information which should be provided to the offender regarding the future implications of accepting the disposal does not appear to be given.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to ensure that the oversight of the decision to use out-of-court disposals is sufficiently robust so that they are only used in appropriate circumstances; in particular, that they are not used when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use, and that the views of victims are taken into account. This should be supported by the immediate introduction of an effective mechanism for the monitoring of the use of out-of-court disposals to ensure the decisions being taken to use the disposals are appropriate.

¹³ National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence 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.

Our inspectors also found that officers have a limited ability to check for previously issued out-of-court disposals. This was explained, in part, as the reason for some offenders inappropriately receiving multiple out-of-court disposals.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should review the means by which officers are able to access previous records of out-of-court disposals to ensure they are able to understand the full offending history when making decisions in respect of offences committed by individual offenders.

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.

The accuracy of some no-crime decisions is monitored as part of the force audit regime led by the FCR, with more comprehensive monitoring of high-risk crimes, including rape, by the FCR. Despite this, significant numbers of no-crime decisions do not comply with the requirements of the HOCR.

We reviewed 66 no-crime decisions in respect of offences of rape, robbery and violence. Here, 11 were found not to comply with the NCRS and HOCR.

Most no-crime decisions are made by specifically trained officers within the four district crime management units, but there are variations in approach in each of these units. The force was planning to amalgamate the four crime management units shortly after our inspection visit; this should enable improved monitoring and consistency.

Victim-centred approach

The deputy chief constable is clear that a victim-centred approach to crime recording is expected and that the police and crime commissioner has made this one of their priorities. We found that the force promotes and generally displays a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crime decisions. However, the commitment to a victim-centred approach is not emphasised in the force's crime recording policies and strategies, and as discussed earlier in this report, the working practices within some specialist areas of the force demonstrate that the victim is not always the central concern.

Most frontline members of staff, including call-takers, understand the victim-centred approach, display it in practice, and are consistently polite, professional and helpful. The force conducts customer satisfaction surveys and the data from these are used to improve crime recording processes, particularly in relation to victim follow-up.

Rape offences

The force policy states that offences of rape should be recorded on the crime management system in accordance with the NCRS but there is no specific direction on when and how to record these offences. We found that some, but not all, officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy.

The force has established a specialist rape investigation team called Apollo. This followed a force audit which showed the area of rape recording and management to be weak. We noted the force has an 'investigate-to-record' approach to rape and will, as with no other crime type, demand that a lengthy handover package is created by the officer attending to allow a slower time assessment by the specialist rape investigation team.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should review the force policy, and the approach taken by officers to recording reports of rape to ensure they comply with the NCRS and HOCR.

Following a force review of rape offences in 2013, additional audit scrutiny now takes place including an examination of every recorded sexual offence by the FCR to ensure correct classification. The audit scrutiny is to ensure reported incidents of a sexual nature are transferred to the crime system in accordance with NCRS and correctly classified in compliance with the HOCR.

The force has a policy to describe how to deal with no-criming of rape crime records which is in compliance with HOCR no-crime criteria and is generally understood. Decisions to no-crime reports of rape are made by a small number of designated officers. Our audit of the 17 rape no-crime decisions, found that 13 complied with the NCRS and HOCR.

IT systems

South Yorkshire Police uses a single computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions. These systems are linked. There are some standalone systems which are not linked. Of particular note is the lack of any integration between the case administration tracking system (CATS) and the crime management system 2 (CMS2).

We found that the current IT systems used by the force present a significant barrier to effective operational policing, crime recording, auditing and supervisory oversight. IT applications and associated processes have been developed over time; there is a lack of integration between systems and an inability to isolate even basic records to assist auditing and operational search enquiries.

Recommendation: Within six months, to the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should address the significant barrier that the current IT systems pose to effective and ethical recording and auditing of reports of crime.

People and skills

We found that staff and supervisors with responsibility for applying out-of-court disposals, no-crimes, and specialist staff that make crime recording decisions had an inconsistent knowledge of NCRS and HOCR.

The force has identified the need to focus on accurate and ethical recording. They have devised a training and development programme and placed crime data integrity into selection and promotion criteria. There has been a significant investment in training frontline officers and supervisors on the NCRS and HOCR. However our reality testing showed that not all staff that were responsible for making crime recording decisions had received, or were due to receive, any training.

Recommendation: Within six months, the force should conduct a NCRS and HOCR training needs analysis, and immediately thereafter ensure that the training programme on NCRS and HOCR is made accessible to all personnel in roles which impact on quality, timeliness and victim focus, and in particular ensure the training is always made available to new personnel during their induction.

Most members of staff had seen and understood the chief officer messages regarding the need for ethical crime recording. It was recognised that where officers attend a crime, they now had responsibility for identifying the crime classification and recording the crime in adherence to the NCRS and HOCR. However, while officers are empowered to make professional judgments at the scene and are routinely raising crimes directly to the crime recording bureau, there is a lack of consistency in local scrutiny by supervisors to ensure the decisions being taken are correct.

It is expected that the proposed move to a centralised crime bureau will resolve this issue through increased corporate scrutiny and audit capability. This will allow closer oversight by supervisors who will have the knowledge and experience to make effective challenges to officers when required.

Senior managers are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and in this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

Force crime registrar

The FCR has oversight of crime recording in SYP and is able to act objectively and impartially to assess whether the force records crime correctly and is involved in the development, of crime recording policies, and the subsequent audit programmes to ensure standards of data integrity. The FCR has sufficient resources to carry out the role effectively and stated that the main issue hampering her work is the limitations of the force's IT systems.

The FCR has the full support of, and access to, the chief officer with lead responsibility for crime data quality and is recognised across the force as the final arbiter for the crime recording process and interpretation of the HOCRs.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should take steps to promote the existence of the confidential reporting line to all officers and staff, and in so doing clearly communicate that this line can be used for the confidential reporting and effective handling of concerns in relation to crime-recording.
2. The force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and ensure that any risks identified are included in, and monitored through, the force risk register; and that any necessary actions identified to mitigate against these risks are progressed.
3. The force should take steps to identify in which areas of the force a culture of ‘investigating-to-record’ exists and take unequivocal steps to end this approach and introduce victim-centred crime recording in line with the HOCR and NCRS. This should then be followed by the early introduction of a robust and regular method of audit to ensure the ethical working practices introduced are sustained.
4. The force should commission an independent review of historical records retained by those areas of the force in which they identify a culture of ‘investigate-to-record’; this should go back for a minimum of 2 years. In particular, the public protection unit standalone system (CATS) should be reviewed, so as to ensure reports of crime, or referrals containing reports of crime to this unit have been recorded, and where they haven’t, to ensure they are now recorded and the victim receives the level of service and support they require and the offence is fully investigated in an effort to bring the offender to justice.
5. The force should take steps to ensure that the oversight of the decision to use out-of-court disposals is sufficiently robust so that they are only used in appropriate circumstances; in particular, that they are not used when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use, and that the views of victims are taken into account. This should be supported by the immediate introduction of an effective mechanism for the monitoring of the use of out-of-court disposals to ensure the decisions being taken to use the disposals are appropriate.
6. The force should review the means by which officers are able to access previous records of out-of-court disposals to ensure they are able to

understand the full offending history when making decisions in respect of offences committed by individual offenders.

7. The force should review the force policy, and the approach taken by officers to recording reports of rape, to ensure they comply with the NCRS and HOCR.

Within three months

8. The force should assess all crime recording policies and procedures to ensure they consistently reflect the required ethical approach to recording crime in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS, and that they clearly describe the importance of a victim-focused approach.

Within six months

9. The force should conduct a NCRS and HOCR training needs analysis, and immediately thereafter ensure that the training programme on NCRS and HOCR is made accessible to all personnel in roles which impact on quality, timeliness and victim focus, and in particular ensure the training is always made available to new personnel during their induction.
10. To the greatest extent economically feasible, the force should address the significant barrier that the current IT systems pose to effective and ethical recording and auditing of reports of crime.

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

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

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in SYP. 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 SYP recorded the following number of crimes.
152	117	89
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the SYP centralised crime recording unit. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these reports received directly by telephone from the victim by the centralised crime recording unit HMIC identified the following number of crimes that SYP should have recorded.	From these identified crimes SYP recorded the following number of crimes.
19	19	19
Crimes referred from other agencies directly to SYP specialist departments		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to SYP specialist departments from other agencies which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals to specialist departments HMIC identified the following number of crimes that SYP should have recorded.	From these identified crimes SYP recorded the following number of crimes.
53	34	18
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which SYP had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
66	55	

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

Within South Yorkshire Police (SYP), the deputy chief constable is responsible for crime data integrity and has made a difference to recording standards through a number of interventions; the centralisation of the crime recording bureau and crime management units to form the new crime bureau, the removal of priority crime packages and the re-introduction of at-the-scene decision-making by the officer in attendance. The deputy chief constable is the chair of the performance gold group and he uses this forum to drive data integrity.

We found that messages from chief officers are consistent in relation to ethical crime recording, which has ensured that most senior managers and frontline staff understand the need for ethical crime recording. The force has a confidential reporting line for concerns to be recorded and monitored although there was no evidence that members of staff were directly encouraged to use this line of communication to report concerns about crime recording.

The force has policies and strategies on crime recording and these make reference to the NCRS and HOCR compliance; however, references and links to an ethical approach or the wider issues around adopting a victim-centred approach are not absolutely clear.

There is no reference to the need for accurate crime data in the policing and crime plan.

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

The force has mechanisms and governance to manage crime recording risks via the force performance board which is led by the deputy chief constable. There is an understanding of the risk of inaccurate crime recording impacting on the analysis of demand, the allocation of resources and victim support. An annual force NCRS audit takes place to inform this understanding. Crime data

integrity does not feature as a bespoke risk on the force's risk management group agenda.

The force has assessed its main crime reporting routes in order to understand its recording risks. There are standalone systems in use within the force that, owing to lack of integration with the core force IT systems, make comprehensive audit difficult. One example of a standalone system is the case administration tracking system (CATS) used by the public protection unit.

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

South Yorkshire Police has been working hard to ensure HOCR, NCRS and National Standard of Incident Recording compliance and carries out extensive audits. This is led by the force crime registrar through the audit and governance unit. The force has an annual audit programme based on an understanding of risk. The audit regime remains flexible and can take account of emerging issues.

Results of crime recording audits form an integral part of the force performance gold group. This group communicates audit findings, reviews processes, directs organisational changes, and recommends training as required. We found that timely and proportionate action is taken to deal with errors with the central crime recording bureau leading this function.

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

We examined 152 incident records and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 89 were. Of the 89, 3 were wrongly classified and 9 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

The force also has a centralised crime recording bureau through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 24 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 19 calls from the public) found that of the 19 crimes that should have been recorded, all 19 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 53 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the force's specialist departments. Of the 34 crimes that should have been recorded, 18 had been recorded. All 18 had been correctly classified, but 8 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. We found examples where the delay in recording the crime was two to three months. During this period, officers appear to investigate the circumstances of the report/referral, assessing whether they are likely to be able to prosecute the suspect based around whether there is sufficient evidence. Recording the crime in compliance with the HOCR is not at the forefront of this process. This was particularly evident in the public protection unit, with a great deal of time spent trying to disprove the word of the victim from the outset, rather than record the crime in compliance with the NCRS and HOCR and then take the appropriate action as the investigation progressed. This culture of dealing with reports of crime shows a disregard for victims and is unacceptable. It hides the true extent of the picture of crime from the force and is particularly concerning when the offences investigated by this unit are often of the most serious nature and victims are often the most vulnerable.

We found that where a victim is vulnerable, either through age or mental health issues, and it appears that there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of the report, a no-crime is often submitted.

It is important to recognise that this culture is not applied by all officers working within the sphere of public protection. An officer in the child abuse unit described how some years before there had been pressure not to crime rape, robberies and burglaries straight away but rather to 'investigate-to-record' – in her experience she said that things had now changed and that pressure was no longer around. Indeed she said that they were encouraged to crime everything and on the morning of our inspection she had raised crimes on every referral that she had received.

Some monitoring of calls and incidents by supervisors is undertaken and supervisors are aware of the performance focus on crime recording in compliance with the NCRS and HOCR.

The force crime recording policy details how officers and staff should deal with reports of crime which have occurred in another force area, highlighting the responsibility of the attending officer to ensure the crime details are submitted to the relevant force.

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

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 15 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all 20 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, 7 cases showed that the victim’s views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PNDs and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in all 20 cases. In 12 cases, we found evidence that showed the offender had been made aware of the future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 13 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found seven where 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 18 cases. We found no evidence in any of the samples which showed that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 24 community resolutions and found that in 20 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, 20 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 22 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

The appropriateness of out-of-court disposals is monitored and managed at either a force or local level. The force has an external scrutiny panel to review out-of-court disposals; this panel is made up of the force out-of-court disposal scrutiny lead, a criminal justice intervention officer, the FCR, an auditor, magistrates (bench chairs), a youth magistrate, Youth Offending Service and Victim Support representatives. The panel meets quarterly and reviews a five percent sample of out-of-court disposals from the previous quarter. Operators within the crime recording bureau quality assure out-of-court disposals and feedback any irregularities to officers. However, despite this monitoring, it is evident from our inspection that out-of-court disposals are being used too often when the offending history of the offender should preclude their use, the views of victims are not being considered and the information which should be provided to the offender regarding the future implications of accepting the disposal does not appear to be given.

Within the custody environment, we found that custody officers had good knowledge and understanding of the appropriate use of out-of-court disposals and the HOCR and NCRS.

Our inspectors also found that officers have a limited ability to check for previously issued out-of-court disposals. This was explained, in part, as the

reason for some offenders inappropriately receiving multiple out of court disposals.

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

The accuracy of some no-crime decisions is monitored as part of the force audit regime led by the FCR, with more comprehensive monitoring of high-risk crimes, including rape, by the FCR. Despite this, a significant number of no-crime decisions do not comply with the requirements of the HOCR.

We found that of the 66 no-crime decisions made, 11 failed to comply with the NCRS and HOCR.

Most no-crime decisions are made by specifically trained officers within the four district crime management units, but there are variations in approach in each of these units. The force is amalgamating the four crime management units on 1 April 2014 which should enable improved monitoring.

We found there to be a good system of contacting officers to ensure timely compliance with *Victims' Code of Practice* with entries on the appointment management IT system reminding officers to keep victims informed. We found no indication that victims are routinely informed of no-crime decisions.

The force makes regular use of Fixed Penalty Notices for wasting police time in circumstances where the victim has admitted that they have fabricated the initial allegation.

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

The deputy chief constable is clear that a victim-centred approach to crime recording is expected and that the police and crime commissioner has made this one of their priorities. We found that the force promotes and generally displays a victim-centred approach to crime recording, crime outcomes and no-crime decisions. However, the commitment to a victim-centred approach is not emphasised in the force's crime recording policies and strategies, and as discussed earlier in this report, the working practices within some specialist areas of the force demonstrate that the victim is not always the central concern.

Some frontline members of staff, including call-takers, understand the victim-centred approach, display it in practice, and are consistently polite, professional and helpful. The force is moving towards an approach where victims are consistently believed at the first point of contact. The force conducts some customer satisfaction surveys and the data from these are used to improve crime recording processes, particularly in relation to victim follow-up.

The force restorative justice policy clearly states that it aims; “To give victims a greater say in how an offender will be dealt with, giving them a voice in what is essentially their harm, which will help to increase victim satisfaction”.

At one police station it was evident that the victim focus was being driven by the local command team. ‘*Keep calm and Update the Victim*’ posters were on display around the building, and we found that coffee mugs which displayed the same message had also been produced.

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

We found that allegations of rape crimes are mostly recorded accurately but not on every occasion. The force policy states that offences of rape should be recorded on the crime management system in accordance with the NCRS but there is no specific direction on when and how to record these offences. We found that some, but not all, officers and staff have a clear understanding of the policy.

The force has established a specialist rape investigation team (Apollo) after audit data showed the area of rape recording and management to be weak. We noted the force has an ‘investigate-to-record’ approach to rape and will, as with no other crime type, demand that a lengthy handover package is created by the officer attending to allow a slower time assessment by the specialist rape investigation team. Officers at the scene of a rape do not raise the crime report at the scene due to force concerns regarding their training. They will raise a crime report, however, if positive steps are being taken such as a victim medical or an arrest has been made.

Following a force review of rape offences in 2013, additional audit scrutiny takes place to ensure that incidents reported of a sexual nature are transferred to the crime system in accordance with NCRS and correctly classified as per the HO CR. The audit and governance unit led by the FCR undertakes this scrutiny.

The force has a policy to describe how to deal with no-criming of rape crime records which is in compliance with HO CR no-crime criteria and is generally understood. Decisions to no-crime reports of rape are made by a small number of specifically trained officers. Our audit of the 17 rape no-crime decisions found that 13 complied with the NCRS and HO CR.

The force does not have a policy which specifically deals with allegations of rape occurring in other force areas and, while the force crime management policy makes mention of this area, it gives no guidance other than to refer to the NCRS and HO CR standard.

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

The force utilises a single computer system for each of its incident and crime recording functions; these systems are linked. There are some standalone systems which are not linked. Of particular note is the lack of any integration between CATS and the crime management system 2 (CMS2).

We found that the current IT systems used by the force present a significant barrier to effective operational policing, crime recording, auditing and supervisory oversight. IT applications and associated processes have been developed over time; there is a lack of integration between systems and an inability to isolate even basic records to assist auditing and operational search enquiries.

People and skills

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

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

The force has sufficient staff and supervisors responsible for recording and reviewing incidents and crimes and most of these are trained on HOCR, NCRS and the National Standard for Incident Recording. The force has reviewed the arrangement of resources involved in this area of business and has made the decision to centralise these resources on 1 April 2014.

As regards staff and supervisors with responsibility for applying out-of-court disposals, no-crimes, and specialist staff that make crime recording decisions, we found that knowledge of HOCR was inconsistent. However recent supervisor training on NCRS/HOCR has taken place in conjunction with the restructure of crime recording and management functions which should aid improvements in this important area.

In conjunction with the introduction of the new centralised crime bureau on the 1 April 2014, training has been given to every sergeant in the force on new procedures of recording crime because they now have a role in supervising investigations and the crime recording process. This entails use of CMS2 and input on the NCRS as well as the HOCR and understanding reporting routes and what is generally expected of them regarding crime recording.

3.2 How does the behaviour of South Yorkshire Police staff reflect a culture of integrity for crime recording practice and decision-making?

Most members of staff recognise that culture in the force has changed over the past 12 months. They recognised that the officer attending the crime now has responsibility for identifying the crime classification and recording it in adherence to the NCRS and HOCR. It was clear to our inspectors that senior management messages on ethical and accurate recording, together with encouragement for senior officers to secure accurate crime recording figures and the absence of any pressure to under-record, are having a positive impact.

Most members of staff had seen and understood the chief officer messages regarding the need for ethical crime recording. It was recognised that where officers attend a crime, they now had responsibility for identifying the crime classification and recording the crime in adherence to the NCRS and HOCR. However, while officers are empowered to make professional judgments at the scene and are routinely raising crimes directly to the crime management bureau, there is a lack of consistency in local scrutiny by supervisors to ensure the decisions being taken are correct.

It is expected that the proposed move to a centralised crime recording and crime management function will resolve this issue through increased corporate scrutiny and audit capability will allow closer oversight by supervisors who will have the knowledge and experience to make effective challenges to officers when required.

Senior managers are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and in this inspection we did not find any evidence of performance pressures leading to failures in crime recording, whether under-recording or misclassification of crimes.

The force has identified the need to focus on accurate and ethical recording. They have devised a training and development programme and placed crime data integrity into selection and promotion criteria. There has been a significant investment in training frontline officers and supervisors on the NCRS and HOCR. However our reality testing showed that not all staff that were responsible for making crime recording decisions had received, or were due to receive, any training.

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

The FCR is responsible for ensuring the correct application of and adherence to, NCRS, HOCR and NSIR, and heads up the audit and governance unit.

The FCR has oversight of crime recording in South Yorkshire Police and is able to act objectively and impartially to assess whether the force records crime

correctly and is involved in the development, of crime recording policies, and the subsequent audit programmes to ensure standards of data integrity. The FCR has sufficient resources to carry out the role effectively and stated that the main issue hampering her work is the limitations of the force's IT systems.

The FCR has the full support of, and access to, the chief officer with lead responsibility for crime data quality and is recognised across the force as the final arbiter for the crime recording process and interpretation of the HOCRs.