

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Surrey Police

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The interim report sets out the full context of this inspection programme including the rules and standards governing crime data integrity: the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)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 leadership of Surrey Police has clearly communicated to the workforce the critical importance of integrity, transparency and a strong victim focus in the way crime is recorded. The Chief Constable's blog is well received by the majority of officers and most have understood the strong messages about ethical behaviour and crime recording contained within it.

The Chief Constable is seen as open and approachable on all subjects and her willingness to discuss crime recording and integrity openly on the force intranet is a powerful tool to convey these views. The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the chief officer who leads on this area of force business. He has spoken at leadership days, talking to most force managers about the consequences of poor service to those who report crimes and victim care.

There is a force-level monthly meeting called the strategic crime incident and risk recording group (SCIRRG) which focuses specifically on crime recording matters. This was introduced by the DCC and most of the force leads for key areas of business attend these meetings.

There is a wide-ranging series of audits and the force lead also commissions bespoke audits for different types of crime if particular problems emerge. The DCC has used these audits very effectively to make sure that serious crimes are properly recorded and such reports are always categorised to reflect offending in the force area with accuracy. He displays a strong desire to see positive improvements in the way officers deal with different types of crime and has introduced some important changes of practice in critical areas such as the recording of rape. This sense of commitment is not always visible to the front line.

The DCC has developed a new performance reporting structure which reflects a shift away from a focus on simple numerical targets. Attempts are being made to align this with comparable processes in its strategic partner force, Sussex Police. There has been significant consultation in drawing up this new approach.

There is no overarching crime recording policy and the force relies solely on NCRS and the HOCR for direction. Force procedures that do exist do not reflect the messages from the chief officer team on the importance of focus on the needs of victims or the requirement for integrity in recording crime.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that the force's approach to crime recording is readily accessible to all officers and staff.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

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

We examined 100 incident records⁶ and found that 72 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 72 crimes that should have been recorded, 59 were. Of the 59, one was wrongly classified and two were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

This is of concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (because, for example, certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

At the request of the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force, and to assess the quality of more recent data, a second separate audit of force incident records was carried out. These records were more recent than the samples selected as part of HMIC's audit. There was an extremely high degree of consistency between the two audits in the accuracy of crime recording.

The force also has a centralised crime recording unit through which we have estimated that the force record approximately 38 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public where they do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 35 calls from the public) found that of the 42 crimes that should have been recorded, 41 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force in respect of this element of the process.

There are two quality assurance mechanisms within the control room. The first of these is a supervisory check of incidents and any related crime reports. Within this approach established staff members only have a very small sample of their work checked each month, with more emphasis placed on quality assuring the work of newer staff. To enable them to complete this work, supervisors receive training on HOCR and NCRS when they are appointed.

⁶ 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.

The second check is through the event assessment unit (EAU), which works alongside the control room staff. Experienced detectives supervise this unit and alongside some investigative support, the EAU is a constant source of help and guidance on crime recording principles.

Despite these mechanisms, our audit findings show that the force needs to do more to improve its performance in the recording of crime from incident records following calls from the public.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should complete a review of its approach to crime recording from incident records to identify at what stages incorrect decisions not to record a crime are being taken. The force should take the necessary steps to improve compliance with the HOCR and NCRS.

We also examined 50 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the public protection investigation unit (PPIU) and recorded separately on other force systems. We found that from those 50 reports, 55 crimes should have been recorded and 34 crimes were recorded. Five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit specified within the HOCR. It is extremely concerning that the reports reviewed on this system had not been recorded properly as crimes – these included serious sexual offences, domestic abuse and offences against children committed by adults. This is a matter that should be rectified urgently by the force.

Managers and investigators in the PPIU do not have a developed understanding of the importance of crime recording and focus primarily on safeguarding concerns. This commitment to protecting the vulnerable should be matched with a similar focus on accurately recording crime. This would enable the force to have a full picture of all crime that is committed in its area so that it can more effectively reduce crime and bring offenders to justice.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the force crime and incident registrar (FCIR)⁷, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

⁷ 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.

Out-of-court disposals

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions dip-sampled we found that in 16 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In seven cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, 6 cases showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In eight cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the seven cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that no 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 19 cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

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

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 16 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 19 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 cases, 16 showed evidence that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate¹².

It is of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered in a substantial proportion of cases where a decision was taken to issue a caution, and in every case where there was a victim and a decision was taken to issue a PND. It is also of concern that in the vast majority of cases we could find no evidence of the offender being made aware of the nature and implications of accepting a caution, PND or cannabis warning.

The Chief Constable is taking active steps to address the shortcomings found.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should improve the supervision of the use of cautions and PND to ensure that where there is a victim, their views are appropriately considered and recorded, and that when issuing a caution, PND or cannabis warning, the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

No-crimes

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 66 no-crime records and found 44 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. This is a serious concern as the no-crimes we reviewed were for offences of rape, robbery and violence.

Recently the force changed its approach to those who are authorised to make no-crime decisions. They are now made within the EAU by three detective sergeants; this may promote a more consistent approach.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should evaluate the new arrangements for authorisations of no-crime decisions to assess whether the desired improvements in the accuracy of these vital decisions has been achieved.

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.

Victim-centred approach

A considerable amount of work has been done recently by Surrey Police to build a strong commitment to providing a victim-centred approach. This is emphasised by the chief officer team and especially by the Chief Constable who regularly stresses to staff in person and through the intranet the importance of keeping the victim firmly in mind when delivering policing services.

The force has a victims' board, chaired by a chief superintendent, which routinely monitors the service delivered to victims and aims to make continuing improvements. There is a very active unit that surveys the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour incidents. The unit feeds both good and poor performance reports back to the relevant officer or staff member through their supervisor. Effective action is taken to address repeatedly poor victim care.

Rape

Following a policy decision taken by the DCC, reports of rapes are now recorded immediately as a crime with strong checking and governance arrangements. Previously the force used an approach of recording all reports of rape as a crime-related incident (CRI) rather than a full crime. It was only when a detective inspector judged that the evidence confirmed that a rape had probably taken place that a crime was recorded. The force has rightly moved away from this practice to ensure the timely recording of these crimes, also making it compliant with NCRS and the HOCR. However the policy and procedure on rape still refers to the old approach; current practice and new policy should be published as soon as possible.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should withdraw the current policy that guides officers in the recording of rape. This should be replaced with one which recognises the new policy decision and which is compliant with NCRS and HOCR.

IT systems

The force has recently switched to a new crime recording system called Niche. There was extensive training before its introduction but some officers and staff are still getting used to this relatively new system. This has caused some delays in the work of the central crime recording unit, as the staff are unfamiliar with the new software. The force incident system is Intergraph Command and Dispatch (ICAD) and at present these systems are not linked. Before the introduction of Niche, the public protection unit area of business kept separate records of investigation in a document referred to as 'the yellow book'. These records are now included within Niche records as part of the general crime system but with restricted access to those details.

People and skills

Officers and staff frequently stated that 'the force is the best it ever has been' for attitudes on the ethical recording of crime. The majority of staff we interviewed felt that the messages from the Chief Constable had given them the freedom to act in the best interests of victims of crime and to record crimes appropriately as they were reported to them.

We found no evidence of crime data integrity being skewed by inappropriate performance pressures. Operational managers and supervisors encourage staff to display the correct behaviours when recording crime, helping victims through initial contact and providing timely updates.

Those overseeing crime recording in departments that manage the centralised crime recording process understand NCRS and the HOCR. They also had access to specialist advice when needed. However, specialist investigators and some key managers within the PPIU lack an appreciation of the importance of accurate crime recording and are not sighted on the associated risks. Prioritising the work to safeguard the victim resulted on occasions in crimes not being properly recorded.

While some staff have been briefed on crime recording matters the force would benefit from a more coherent approach that addresses the HOCR and NCRS training needs of frontline staff and supervisors who work in key departments responsible for crime recording. Currently, a lot of effort is put into making some principal departments and units aware of crime recording developments, while not supplying the same information to the rest of the workforce.

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 need such training receive it as soon as is reasonably practicable.

In the interim, every opportunity should be taken to make sure that current awareness-raising training is given to all those involved in crime recording.

Force crime and incident registrar (FCIR)

There is an independent FCIR who is able to oversee crime recording practice in an objective fashion and promote the correct application of HOCR and NCRS. The FCIR has assisted the DCC in making a number of helpful decisions on how crime is recorded in the force; these have led directly to improved crime recording standards. The FCIR is recognised as the final arbiter for all crime-recording issues in the force.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the force crime and incident registrar (FCIR), to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.
2. The force should withdraw the current policy that guides officers in the recording of rape. This should be replaced with one which recognises the new policy decision and which is compliant with NCRS and HOCR.

Within three months

3. The force should ensure that the force's approach to crime recording is readily accessible to all officers and staff.
4. The force should complete a review of its approach to crime recording from incident records to identify at what stages incorrect decisions not to record a crime are being taken. The force should take the necessary steps to improve compliance with the HOCR and NCRS.
5. The force should improve the supervision of the use of cautions and PND to ensure that where there is a victim, their views are appropriately considered and recorded, and that when issuing a caution, PND or cannabis warning, the offender is made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.
6. The force should evaluate the new arrangements for authorisations of no-crime decisions to assess whether the desired improvements in the accuracy of these vital decisions has been achieved.

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 need such training receive it as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

Our examination of records will be used as part of a statistically robust national audit to allow HMIC to report a figure for national crime recording accuracy across the 43 Home Office forces within our final report to be published in autumn 2014. 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 Surrey. 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 Surrey Police recorded the following number of crimes
100	72	59
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the Surrey Police 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 Surrey Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Surrey Police recorded the following number of crimes
35	42	41
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Surrey Police and held on other systems that contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Surrey Police should have recorded	From these identified crimes Surrey Police recorded the following number of crimes
50	55	34

No-crimes	
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery, which Surrey Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.
66	44

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

Since his arrival in force, the DCC has led the promotion of crime data quality. This is recognised by the senior managers of the force and most middle managers. Frontline officers and staff were unaware of who was the force lead. The DCC relies on the SCIRRG meeting to generate positive change but again, few on the front line knew of its existence. Better awareness could be generated by the force lead by seeking methods outside of the SCIRRG process to promote his work. Some practitioners in crime recording units expressed a desire to attend the meeting to help move things forward.

The blogs from the Chief Constable on the force 'Connect' intranet are read by staff and have contained clear and unequivocal messages on the importance of integrity, transparency and a victim focus for crime recording. These feature on the front page of the system and contain the record of any comments made by staff on the postings as well as her replies to the comments. Many staff view this personal transparency as powerful evidence to reinforce the values the Chief Constable is promoting which underpin crime recording.

The mechanism for reporting wrongdoing (called 'safe-call') is well publicised on the front page of the force intranet. Officers and staff are aware of how it operates and have trust in its confidential nature following a recent high profile case.

We found that despite the absence of a general policy on crime recording, several items of policy and procedure on specific areas had been introduced. We also spoke to some managers who stated that decisions had been made about local practice in crime recording, such as who could make no-crime decisions, but no policy or procedural guidance had been created to cover this change. This indicates the need for a more comprehensive and joined up policy approach to local practice that is clearly communicated to all staff.

The local policing plan for 2012-17, produced by the PCC, makes direct reference to the fact that no numerical targets are set locally for the police to achieve. Instead, there is a strong emphasis on building local satisfaction with the style of policing delivered in Surrey.

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

Surrey Police has conducted a review of the risks posed to the force from poor practice in recording crime. These are mostly seen as affecting the service provided to local people with consequential impacts on the force reputation. These risks do not currently feature in the strategic force risk register. Following the HMIC inspection and the recommended re-configuration of its own audit arrangements, the force should check the status of this risk to ensure the judgement is still valid.

The SCIRRG meeting produces a clear set of actions to promote improvement in crime recording and check performance in key crime categories. Since its creation, there has been an emphasis on checking that crimes are properly recorded within the correct categories and classifications. The intention was to ensure that pressures to deliver against numerical performance targets were not causing inappropriate crime recording decisions. This search, for what the force terms 'hidden crimes', has been effective, with many crimes being checked for this type of problem.

The DCC has also had incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) checked to ensure that officers were not missing any reports of crime. There are regular audits of ASB issues raised by the public to look for 'hidden' crime matters.

The force is aware of the ways that members of the public report crime and of the proportion of reports through each channel. This includes the internet reporting methods available to the public. Our visits to police stations within the force revealed that enquiry desks also use the internet reporting method at times of peak demand.

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

The FCIR uses his previous experience and knowledge of force systems to design an audit schedule that covers all the main areas relevant to crime recording. This schedule is approved by the DCC and is supplemented by audits designed to look at any new issues that emerge outside the planned programme.

This schedule is currently designed primarily to prevent any unintentional or unethical under-recording of serious crime and those categories for which performance targets had been set in the past. . The force is planning to increase the size of the audit samples in order to concentrate more on compliance in all crime types.

Each monthly set of audits is discussed at the next SCIRRG meeting and the DCC will commission action where appropriate. We note that at the end of each audit report, the FCIR sets out recommendations to resolve the problems found. We found a high degree of repetition of these recommendations at the end of numerous audits. This indicates that the issues causing poor crime recording have not been resolved. Similarly, we were told of actions from SCIRRG that some managers disagreed with and therefore did not carry out. One example followed an audit of robbery crimes where the action was that operational officers should be reminded of the legal definition of robbery. As this was thought to be a potential insult to some experienced officers it did not happen in all cases.

Very few officers on the front line could recall any feedback on their actions apart from when they did not comply with updating victims of crime; this is monitored by a separate section of the force.

Within the force there is a requirement for renewed focus on ensuring that timely and proportionate action is taken to address audit findings and crime recording errors at an individual and team level.

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

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

In Surrey Police, the force control room is responsible for creating an incident record and dispatching an officer to all crimes where police attendance is judged to be necessary. We found that operators listened carefully to the public with empathy and understanding and accurately recorded the circumstances on the incident record.

Control room supervisors check the work of operators by selecting one crime-related incident and one ordinary incident per month. With new members of staff or those subject to adverse feedback from previous calls, these tests are carried out more frequently. The EAU sergeants also review calls and check for correct crime recording practices.

We examined 100 incident records and found that 72 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 72 crimes that should have been recorded, 59 were. Of the 59, one was wrongly classified and two were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is of concern as it means that some victims' crimes are not being recorded and they are not getting the service they deserve (because, for example, certain victim support services are only triggered when a crime is recorded).

At the request of the PCC and the force, and to assess the quality of more recent data, a second separate audit of force incident records was carried out. These records were more recent than the samples selected as part of HMIC's audit.

Following officer attendance at an incident where a crime needs to be recorded, officers will telephone a separate contact centre to have the call recorded. With the delays currently being experienced in getting through to the contact centre, some officers feel frustrated that the mobile data terminals previously issued are either broken or unreliable and not fit for purpose. There are plans to introduce a new form of mobile device in the future.

The force also has a centralised crime recording unit through which we have estimated that the force record approximately 38 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public where they do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 35 calls from the public) found that of the 42 crimes that should have been recorded, 41 were recorded correctly. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force in respect of this element of the process.

We also examined 50 reports that were referred from other agencies directly to the PPIU and recorded separately on other force systems. We found that from those 50 reports, 55 crimes should have been recorded and 34 crimes were recorded. Five were recorded outside the 72-hour limit specified within the HOCR. It is extremely concerning that the reports reviewed on this system had not been recorded properly as crimes – these included serious sexual offences, domestic abuse and offences against children committed by adults. This is a matter that should be rectified urgently by the force.

There is no force policy to provide guidance to officers on the handling of crimes passed to the force from other areas, or for how to alert other forces to crimes reported in Surrey which had occurred in another force area. We found that some supervisors adopted a practical approach to the transfer of documentation following direct contact with officers in another force area but there is no defined procedure.

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

The Chief Constable of Surrey is the national policing lead for the association of chief police officers (ACPO) for the use of out-of-court disposals and takes a keen interest in this area. This has led to a number of major changes in the way these processes are handled since her arrival in the force two years ago. The operation of both cautions and community resolutions has undergone significant reworking to make the approach more compliant with national guidance.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions dip-sampled we found that in 16 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In seven cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, 6 cases showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable to receive a penalty notice in 17 cases. In eight cases we found evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the seven cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that no 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 all cases. In none of the cases did we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 16 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 19 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 cases, 16 showed evidence that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

It is of concern that given the emphasis on the views of the victim in other aspects of force service delivery, this was not a stronger feature in the out-of-court disposals we audited, apart from community resolutions. The force does, however, make use of an independent scrutiny panel to check on the appropriate use of these disposals and to advise it on possible improvements in their use. It is also of concern that in the vast majority of cases, we could find no evidence of the offender being made aware of the nature and implications of accepting a caution, PND or cannabis warning.

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

We examined 66 no-crime records and found 44 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. This is a serious concern as the no-crimes we reviewed were for offences of rape, robbery and violence.

The force has made a policy decision to exclude the detective chief inspectors on divisional areas from making these decisions. Now only the three EAU detective sergeants and the FCIR have this authority. The sample we reviewed was from before this change occurred. The FCIR alone reviews no-crime decisions for rape and serious sexual offence crimes. It is essential that the force monitors the implementation of this policy to check the quality of decision making against NCRS and the HOCR.

Some officers explained that they believed problems in making no-crime decisions were caused by a lack of accuracy and clarity in the investigation summaries completed by investigating officers. The consequence of this is that others working from this information may draw the wrong conclusions in making the decision to no-crime a recorded crime.

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

One of the PCC's six promises in his policing and crime plan 2012-17 is to ensure victims "are given a quality service from reporting crime to giving evidence". This intention is being shaped and delivered by a number of initiatives carried out by Surrey Police. The keynote behind these actions is provided by the Chief Constable, who regularly repeats to all staff the critical importance of paying attention to the needs of victims.

The force pays close attention to victim satisfaction data, both from the mandated regular victim satisfaction surveys and the work of its own victim intervention team. There is also a mechanism in place to feed back to staff and supervisors where adverse comment is received. In addition, there is a video available for staff to view on the code of practice for victims of crime on the force intranet.

The introduction of the Niche crime recording system together with operator unfamiliarity leading to delays in answering calls is thought to be behind the recent drop in victim satisfaction in the category of 'ease of contact'. The victim care board tracks progress against this and other actions concerning victim satisfaction. The force crime recording lead monitors the progress of these actions at the performance board.

All correspondence with victims has to be personalised to reflect the circumstances of the crime or the incident they have reported. There are annual 'summits' in each policing area so that the PCC and force can hear directly the views of victims.

This concentration on a victim-focused service is also evident in the way Surrey Police deals with calls from the public. In the control room environment, staff know they are assessed on their communication skills. Without exception, when we listened to calls from the public, we found that all the operators were polite, helpful and professional.

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

A specialist sexual offence investigation team (SOIT) handles the majority of rape crimes within Surrey. This unit does not provide cover on a 24-hour basis but has on-call arrangements for helping uniformed officers who normally attend these reports in the first instance. The SOIT has provided some training to many of the response and local neighbourhood teams to ensure that officers are aware of the primary concerns when they attend a report of rape. A step-by-step guide to officers attending rape reports is available to help them complete all necessary actions.

Following a policy decision taken by the DCC, reports of rapes are now recorded immediately as a crime with strong checking and governance arrangements. Previously, the force used an approach of recording all reports of rape as a CRI rather than as a full crime. It was only when a detective inspector judged that the evidence confirmed that a rape had probably taken place that a crime was recorded. The force has rightly moved away from this practice to ensure the timely recording of these crimes so that it is also compliant with NCRS and the HOCR. However the policy and procedure on rape still refers to the old approach. Crime recording specialists believe that, despite the absence of an updated policy, any attempt to record only a CRI would be quickly identified and changed. A detective inspector routinely reviews all rape reports after 24hours.

The force control room, contact centre managers and staff are all aware of the change in policy.

The force has identified a number of reports of rape from 2012 that were dealt with under the previous approach and only recorded as CRI. We have reviewed a small number of these cases and found some for which a full crime report should be recorded. Justifications given not to record a crime of rape include apparent inconsistency in the accounts of victims as well as victims being perceived to have mental health issues. The CRI list requires an urgent review to resolve any service shortfalls discovered.

We looked at 20 reports of rape that had been no-crimes. Of these, 14 decisions were judged by HMIC to be correct. These were all taken by the FCIR. In the six months to May 2014, the new force FCIR has reported on crimes of rape at the monthly SCIRRG meeting. During those six months, only one rape no-crime decision was made. We found that the current FCIR demonstrated a very positive approach to no-crime decision making and particularly for rape offences.

There is also no mention in the rape policy document on reports of rape sent to Surrey Police from another force or generated within Surrey and transferred elsewhere. Specialist investigators are aware of the importance of managing the critical victim care issues in such cases but do not currently have any policy material to guide their actions.

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

The force has a clear understanding of the IT systems it uses and which may contain reports of crime; these are the incident management system, ICAD and crime management system, Niche. There is no direct link between these two force systems, which means that data must be entered twice to record a crime. Surrey Police recently made a decision to replace its previous crime system (CIS) with the same crime system used by its collaborative partner force, Sussex Police. This will help to align processes and the sharing of information and intelligence about crime. An assistant chief constable in Surrey is responsible for overseeing the links between the systems in both forces.

The move to Niche has brought some difficulties in recording crime for the staff in Surrey Police as they become familiar with the new system. These include the length of time it takes for operational officers to get a crime recorded by the contact centre and to update victim contact information. In both cases the force has taken action to deal with these challenges as the transition to Niche is completed.

People and skills

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

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

In May 2014 the DCC was concerned that about 20 percent of the crime judged by the force to be of highest importance – called 'priority crime' – had been given the wrong crime classification and had to be reclassified following a review by crime recording specialists. This has prompted action to assess the level of awareness among frontline staff of the NCRS and the HOOCR. Our own findings established similar concerns.

There have been some awareness-raising sessions completed by sergeants from the EAU but these have not been comprehensive. In the same way, the training department devised a training package to help officers understand the new community resolutions policy but there is a lack of clarity and record keeping about which officers had received this session.

Changes in practice and revised policies are shared with the departments concerned with recording crimes or taking calls from the public. These changes are not always passed on to frontline officers. There is a pressing need for a single co-ordinated approach to help the workforce understand the basic elements of accurate crime recording. All staff in the PPIU responsible for making crime recording decisions need to develop an appropriate knowledge and experience of NCRS and the HOOCR as soon as is practicable.

Many frontline response and investigation department sergeants stated that the removal of the crime management unit (CMU), a decision taken as part of the force's response to reduced budgets, has had a deeply adverse effect on the standards of crime recording. They are now inundated by large numbers of crimes sent by the force contact centre. In the past, many of these crimes were assessed for solvability and only viable crimes were sent for further investigation. They also felt that many victims were being given unrealistic expectations on the action likely to be taken by the police; these expectations were previously managed by the CMU.

The DCC has recognised this critical issue and has explored, through SCIRRG, a number of options and models for a new process akin to that managed by the CMU. At present, staff resources preclude this option but planning has now been extended to include possible collaboration of processes with Sussex Police.

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

We met very few frontline officers or staff who knew that force audits were intended to identify where there had been inappropriate behaviour in crime recording. Instead many of them simply stated that they had been told by their supervisors to record crime correctly. One police community support officer said; "If it is a crime, it gets recorded. Stats don't count; we're here to do a job".

It is important for the force to draw a clear distinction between ethical crime recording and the need to work to reduce crime. Staff are, in the main, very responsive to the chief officer messages on crime recording and victim care. A notable change described by supervisors was that there were no longer any hard targets and these were no longer built into assessment objectives.

They were encouraged to record crime accurately and told their staff to do the same but still had to work hard to reduce offending. They described the accurate recording element as paramount, unaffected by any performance considerations.

The force has yet to include the assessment of knowledge, skills or attitudes needed to deliver accurate crime recording at any level of its promotion processes. When this issue was raised with the force lead there was an immediate commitment to consider how this might be achieved.

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

The FCIR is a capable champion of NCRS and the HOCR who uses his knowledge of force systems and practices to good effect. Much of the agenda of the SCIRRG meeting centres on his work and his ability to take actions forward. The FCIR has a regular meeting with detective chief inspectors from across the force to promote understanding of the latest issues and force policy for crime recording. He also looks for any problems and difficulties in any area of crime recording and considers how to resolve them. While the audit team has a significant workload, it is able to deliver against the force audit requirement.

The DCC makes his support of the FCIR clear through the agenda of the SCIRRG meeting and holds regularly scheduled meetings with him to discuss crime recording issues.

While not all frontline staff know of the FCIR, in practice he is the final arbiter for crime recording decisions and any disputes about the interpretation of NCRS and the HOCR.

The FCIR views all new policies as a matter of routine practice and checks them for compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.