

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Sussex 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 were inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

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

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the force lead for crime data integrity matters in Sussex Police. There is a clear and unambiguous expectation from the Chief Constable that reports of crime should be recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS; this has been extensively reinforced by the DCC.

In March 2014, the force executive board commissioned a review of crime data integrity; this review resulted in the production of a report entitled Force Integrity in Crime Recording. The findings of this report were approved in May 2014, and the force is now in the process of implementing the 105 recommendations made. HMIC found the review to be a thorough, evidence-based analysis of the crime data integrity issues faced by the force and it provides a clear basis for action. A significant proportion of the report's recommendations have already been implemented.

Accountability for NCRS compliance currently rests with investigating officers, and decisions not to record a crime from incidents that have a crime opening code on the incident management system (STORM) are more closely scrutinised by local sergeants and inspectors. The positioning of this responsibility alongside responsibility for investigations and force performance is a risk. NCRS compliance should be overseen by a small group of individuals trained in the HOCR and NCRS who are independent of investigations.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to review where responsibility for NCRS compliance is held. In particular the force should ensure there is a level of scrutiny independent of those with responsibility for force performance.

The force has a confidential reporting facility called 'Breaking the Silence'; no crime data issues have emerged from this source thus far.

The risk of poor data recording accuracy against NCRS and the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR) on the force's crime management system (Niche RMS) was added to the force risk register in November 2013. The force's own review of crime data integrity helpfully detailed and prioritised these risks which have been used to inform both the design of the review's recommendations and the focus of future force audits.

The force approach to performance management has been adjusted to incorporate crime data integrity and is supported by a new crime data integrity dashboard. This alignment of crime data accuracy information alongside force performance information is critical in re-enforcing the 'performance with integrity' message and is good practice.

The role of the force crime registrar⁶ (FCR) is to ensure that the force complies with the NCRS and HOCR. Additionally, the FCR has responsibility for overseeing force compliance with NSIR. The FCR oversees a comprehensive audit regime with reports widely circulated and failures directed to individual managers for action.

The audit regime is supported by the quality and customer service team within the force contact centre that dynamically quality assures calls against national standards and thematic issues.

The cost of achieving the good crime data integrity that currently prevails is high in the context of diminishing budgets. The reactive approach currently in place needs to be reviewed in the context of other lower cost interventions that deal earlier with identified issues.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

The force enables victims to choose the most convenient method of reporting crime through multi-channel reporting routes including telephone, internet, and third party reporting, in person and via links on social media. The force receives a high proportion of its reports via the internet; in the region of 12 percent of its total recorded crime.

We examined 157 incident records⁷ from these routes of reporting and found that 133 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 133 crimes that should have been recorded, 111 were. Of the 111, three were wrongly classified and 19 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There was sufficient information from the caller to record a crime at the time of first report in all of the 22 cases where

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 is a report of events received by the police 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 on the force's incident recording system.

a crime had not been recorded; this should have occurred. This is a matter of concern to HMIC as it means some victims' crimes were not being recorded.

Since the period covered by the audit, the force has changed its processes to require that all non-emergency calls which contain reports of crime are immediately recorded as such on the Niche RMS system, rather than the decision to record a crime only being taken after some level of investigation had taken place. This approach has more recently been extended to include referrals received from partner agencies (such as health and social services) which contain reports of crime, although we found that some referrals still go directly to public protection units. This has improved the accuracy of crime recording. Making similar changes to the process for recording crimes reported during emergency calls would further help the force to meet the standards required.

We examined 48 reports received through partner referrals which were recorded on the Niche RMS system.⁸ We found that from those 48 reports, 14 crimes should have been recorded. The force had recorded 2 out of the 14 correctly. It is extremely concerning that the reports reviewed on this system had not been recorded properly as crimes as they included serious sexual offences against children committed by adults. This is a matter that should be rectified urgently by the force.

The force has since changed its process for recording crimes from partner referrals and all of these must now be directed to the public contact centre where a decision is taken whether to raise a crime or a non-crime occurrence. However, this change has yet to be universally adopted with some reports of rape still being placed in the non-crime category. While improvements have been made in the way non-crime reports are handled, this remains an area of high-risk and requires close monitoring.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure that reports of crime are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements through the FCR to assure itself of the accuracy of its crime recording.

Responsibility for the classification of crime resides with the public contact centre with decisions being quality assured by the crime management unit. Our audit identified an excellent level of compliance in this area.

Out-of-court disposals

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

⁸ A non-crime is an incident which in the first instance has not been recorded as a crime as police are unsure as to whether it is a crime or not. A non-crime can eventually be recorded as a crime if the police find evidence that a crime has indeed occurred.

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.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions 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, 8 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 15 cases. In none of the 20 cases could we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found 2 cases 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. In none of the 20 cases could we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 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, 15 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. 18 cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim¹³.

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

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

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

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

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.

There is increasing use of restorative justice and community resolutions in Sussex Police and work is expanding in this area with financial support from the police and crime commissioner.

The crime management unit currently only validates cautions and will dip-check cannabis warnings while the central ticket support unit will process all PND. Divisional community resolution coordinators validate those out-of-court disposals administered by their officers. It is therefore of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered for a number of cautions, and for the majority of the PND we reviewed. It is particularly difficult to understand how community resolutions, which should only be considered with the agreement of the victim and the offender, can be authorised in some cases where there does not appear to be any consideration of the victims' wishes. It is also concerning that HMIC could find no record to show that offenders receiving PND and cannabis warnings had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting these disposals.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should improve the supervision of out-of-court disposals to ensure that the nature and implications of accepting the disposal are provided to the offender. In particular that the views of the victim are appropriately considered, and recorded, when the use of an out-of-court disposal is proposed.

No-crime

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information. We examined 72 no-crime records for offence of rape, robbery and violence and found 59 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. For rape no-crimes, of 30 rapes recorded as no-crime that we reviewed, we found 6 which should have remained classified as crimes. The force's approach to no-criming is a matter of concern.

The crime management unit finalises all no-crime decisions with the exception of those for rape which are personally determined by the FCR. These decisions are therefore independent of the investigative process. Our audit identified concerns in decision making for all no-crimes sampled, but due to their seriousness, those for rape are a particular concern. Specialist training is required for decision makers to improve compliance with the HOCR in this complex area.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that steps are taken to address the inaccuracy of its no-crime decisions. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.

Victim-centred approach

Notwithstanding the force's progress in becoming more victim focused, there remain challenges to it doing so. Consultation survey data indicate that its treatment of victims has improved but there are concerns that they are not being kept informed of the progress of investigations.

Our audit identified that the quality of call handling was excellent with 153 calls judged to have been handled professionally and courteously.

As with most forces, Sussex Police has responsibility for an increasingly diverse community. It has a large lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Brighton and growing migrant communities in other towns. In recognition of these facts, the force commissioned a scoping exercise and assessment of engagement with Sussex's black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community review; the report was finalised in October 2013. In support of the police and crime plan objective to address the under-reporting of domestic abuse, sexual offences, anti-social behaviour and hate crime, much work has been done to improve the reporting of crime from these communities. A 28.5 percent increase in the reporting of hate crime has been recorded over the past 12 months and this is partly attributed to the force's work in this area. Further work remains to be done to improve confidence in reporting from BAME communities and this is ongoing.

The force consultation team oversees a call-back regime in which 300 non-emergency callers and 300 emergency callers are contacted each year to assess their views of the service they received. The findings are included within the force performance dashboard. Force level victim satisfaction surveys are also completed. Following work with partners, the force is developing a survey for rape victims.

Rape offences

The force has a clear policy and procedure for dealing with reports of rape and this includes those identified by the sexual abuse referral centre. However, the policy makes no reference to how officers and staff should deal with reports made via other routes, such as via partners and front counters to secure compliance with the HOCR and NCRS in all cases.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should review its policy on rape investigations to ensure it is up-to-date and covers the approach to be taken for reports of rape, through whichever reporting route, so as to secure compliance with HOCR and NCRS.

Our audit found that five of the six rapes reported to police had been correctly recorded as crimes. The one failure related to a child protection referral that remained on the non-crime section of Niche RMS. This does not represent the total number of rapes recorded over the audit period but just those records we sampled and examined.

IT systems

The introduction of Niche RMS last year has provided an interface between that system and the incident, custody and case preparation applications. This helps avoid double keying and, once the data quality issues detailed below are overcome, it will help to release capacity and generate savings for the force. The force has a clear ambition to move towards increased use of mobile data devices and it expects these to release further capacity by avoiding the need for staff to return to police stations to access IT systems.

There are currently 3,000-4,000 duplicate people records on Niche RMS and this presents a significant risk to the force in the potential misidentification of individuals wanted for, or suspected of, crimes. The force recognises this challenge and it is one that is also being experienced by other Niche RMS-using forces.

Not unrelated to duplicate people records is the wider issue of data content quality on Niche RMS. The force is attempting to address these issues. This is taking considerable time and cost to remedy and it has a negative impact on the timeliness of crime recording. Some software changes have been made but more improvements are required.

People and skills

There has been specific training in the HOCR and NCRS for specialist staff and more general training for wider staff. As the force implements the recommendations from its own review and those that emerge from this inspection, there will be a need to focus training, including refresher training, on the key decision makers within the crime recording process.

Every sergeant is now receiving a day's training on integrity matters; this includes the force's expectation of compliance with the crime recording standards. This is work in progress with two of seven sessions having been completed at the time of our inspection.

An input on crime data integrity and the ethical recording of crime is delivered to new inspectors. Newly promoted sergeants are also trained. The material used is being trialled in preparation for it being integrated into the sergeants' operational skills training manual. The force has also developed an e-learning programme. It is not mandatory but a high number of staff have completed it.

It is important that the force evaluates the effectiveness of the training to ensure the expectations and skills delivered during the training are transferred into the workplace, and are enabling improvements to crime data integrity.

The introduction of Niche RMS coupled with the focus on crime data integrity and work to achieve the policing and crime plan objectives is placing a significant workload pressure on many staff. This includes PCSO and special constables who encounter crime but are not trained to investigate it or create a crime report. The force is therefore encouraged to clarify their role in the initial investigation and recording of less-serious crime.

Almost without exception, staff understand the message to record crime with integrity and the reasons for doing so. While there remain some isolated pockets within the force where performance pressure may influence recording, these are disappearing fast and the need for ethical crime recording is prevailing. We found no evidence of institutionalised performance pressure not to record crime. Failures in compliance at the user level relate primarily to officers' lack of HOCR knowledge alongside some workload pressure.

Force crime registrar

The FCR has unfettered access to his chief officer lead and he is routinely consulted for advice on crime recording matters. He is able to act impartially and is the final arbiter for all crime recording decisions in the force. He has sufficient resources to carry out the role effectively.

The FCR has also been directly engaged in the review of Force Integrity in Crime Recording, the crime data integrity gold group and in the design of business processes that support the use of Niche RMS.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should take steps to review where responsibility for NCRS compliance is held. In particular the force should ensure there is a level of scrutiny independent of those with responsibility for force performance.
2. The force should ensure that reports of crime are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements through the FCR to assure itself of the accuracy of its crime recording.

Within three months

3. The force should improve the supervision of out-of-court disposals to ensure that the nature and implications of accepting the disposal are provided to the offender. In particular that the views of the victim are appropriately considered, and recorded, when the use of an out-of-court disposal is proposed.

4. The force should ensure that steps are taken to address the inaccuracy of its no-crime decisions. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.
5. The force should review its policy on rape investigations to ensure it is up-to-date and covers the approach to be taken for reports of rape, through whichever reporting route, so as to secure compliance with HOCR and NCRS.

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 Sussex Police. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes.	From these identified crimes Sussex Police recorded the following number of crimes.
157	133	111
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Sussex Police and held on other systems that contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Sussex Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Sussex Police recorded the following number of crimes.
48	14	2
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery that Sussex Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
72	59	

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

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the force lead for crime data integrity matters in Sussex Police and staff are aware of this.

There is a clear and unambiguous expectation from the Chief Constable that reports of crime should consistently adhere to national standards. This has been extensively reinforced by the DCC through a personal video message to staff, inclusion of audit data within the force performance management regime and through the leadership competencies. We found the distinction made between the requirement to record and the discretion given to staff in how crime can be investigated and finalised to be particularly helpful.

In March 2014, the force executive board commissioned a review of crime data integrity and a team was formed to undertake the task. On 1 May the report entitled Force Integrity in Crime Recording was endorsed by the crime data integrity gold group. Formed in October 2013 and reset in May 2014, this group coordinates the implementation of the review's 105 recommendations. HMIC found the review to be a thorough, evidence-based analysis of the crime data integrity issues faced by the force and it provides a clear basis for action. A significant proportion of the report's recommendations have already been implemented.

Accountability for NCRS compliance currently rests with investigating officers and decisions not to record a crime from incidents with a crime opening code on the incident management system (STORM) are more closely scrutinised by their sergeants and inspectors. The positioning of this accountability is a key factor in maintaining good NCRS compliance and should be overseen by a small group of trained individuals who are independent of investigations.

The force has a confidential reporting facility called 'Breaking the Silence'. No crime data issues have emerged from this source thus far.

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

Force policy and procedures strongly emphasise the need for an ethical approach to crime recording with a clear victim focus. However, as the force identifies from its own review, there remains a need to update its policies for crime recording in light of recent changes. More specifically, there is a need to articulate clearly the accountabilities, responsibilities and standard operating procedures for crime recording through each recognised route of reporting, ideally supported by a process map. This also applies to the application of out-of-court disposals and transferred crime. While there is reference to the need for professionalism within the policing and crime plan, it contains no explicit requirement for ethical crime recording.

The risk of poor data recording accuracy against NCRS and NSIR on Niche RMS was added to the force risk register on 5 November 2013. The force review of crime data integrity helpfully identified and prioritised these risks by reporting (from the public) and recording (by the police) and presented them through a heat map analysis. This information has been used to inform the design of recommendations and will inform the focus of future force audits.

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

The force approach to performance management has been adjusted to incorporate crime data integrity and is supported by a new crime data integrity dashboard. This alignment of crime data accuracy information alongside force performance information is critical in reinforcing the 'performance with integrity' message and is good practice.

The role of the FCR is to ensure that the force complies with the NCRS and HOCR. Additionally, the FCR has responsibility for overseeing force compliance with the NSIR. The FCR oversees a comprehensive audit regime that comprises a weekly NCRS audit of 100 Niche occurrences (those with a crime opening code plus those with a domestic abuse or anti-social behaviour code); a monthly NCRS audit of 3 percent of a week's STORM logs; a monthly NCRS audit of at least 300 STORM logs segmented by crime type and a quarterly NCRS audit of 100 Niche non-crime occurrences. Audit reports are widely circulated and failures are directed to individual managers for action. Corrective action is tracked by the FCR.

The audit regime is supported by the work of the quality and customer service team within the force contact centre which will dynamically quality assure calls against thematic issues (e.g. short calls, serious sexual offences, closing calls resolved at source). Supervisors will also sample two calls per individual per month against the National Call Handling Standard, NSIR and NCRS with the summarised findings presented within the performance dashboard and discussed at the performance meetings. Individual feedback is also given and action plans are prepared to

formalise corrective action for those individuals who require such interventions. As NCRS compliance stabilises, the focus of audits could usefully shift to the application of out-of-court disposals.

The cost of achieving the good crime data integrity that currently prevails is high in the context of diminishing budgets. The reactive approach currently in place needs to be reviewed in the context of other lower cost interventions that deal earlier with identified issues.

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

The force enables reporting of crime via the channel which best suits the customer (telephone, internet, third party reporting, reporting in person and via links on social media). It reports that a high proportion of reports (12 percent) are received via the internet. This form of self-service releases capacity and yet there is a lack of understanding of the reasons for such high use of this channel and the potential benefits to victims and the force. We therefore encourage the force to seek feedback from victims (using call-backs etc.) to identify why callers chose this way of reporting over other modes.

We examined 157 incident records from these routes of reporting and found that 133 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 133 crimes that should have been recorded, 111 were. Of the 111, three were wrongly classified and 19 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. There was sufficient information from the caller to record a crime at the time of first report in all of the 22 cases where a crime had not been recorded; this should have occurred. This is a matter of concern to HMIC as it means some victims' crimes were not being recorded.

Since the period covered by the audit, the force has changed its processes to require that all non-emergency calls which contain reports of crime are immediately recorded as such on the Niche RMS system, rather than the decision to record a crime only being taken after some level of investigation had taken place. This approach has more recently been extended to include referrals received from partner agencies (such as health and social services) which contain reports of crime, although we found that some referrals still go directly to public protection units. This has improved the accuracy of crime recording.

Making similar changes to the process for recording crimes reported during emergency calls would further help the force to meet the standards required.

We examined 48 reports, received through partner referrals, which were recorded separately on the force non-crime system.¹⁴ We found that of those 48 reports, 14 should have been recorded as crimes. The force had recorded 2 out of the 14 correctly. It is extremely concerning that the reports reviewed on this system had not been recorded properly as crimes as they included serious sexual offences against children committed by adults. This is a matter that should be rectified urgently by the force.

The force has since changed its process for recording crimes from partner referrals and these must now be directed to the public contact centre where a decision is taken whether to raise a crime or a non-crime occurrence. However, this change has yet to be universally adopted with some reports of rape still being placed in the non-crime category. While improvements have been made in the way non-crime reports are handled, this remains an area of high-risk and requires close monitoring.

Our audit revealed a few cases where drug-driving offences were apparently overlooked and this issue was subsequently confirmed by staff who were largely unaware of what was required.

Responsibility for the classification of crime resides with the public contact centre with decisions being quality assured by the crime management unit. Our audit identified an excellent level of compliance in this area. It is estimated that the public contact centre has to correct about 60-70 percent of crime classifications proposed by officers from the forms they submit. This error rate is very high and creates a significant workload for the public contact centre and crime management unit to correct; on the 18 June 2014 there were 700 requiring attention. This workload has resulted in some crimes breaching the 72-hour time limit allowed under the HOCR. Notwithstanding this excellent work in the classification of crime, common errors among individuals and teams need to be identified from the classification correction process to enable learning and earlier intervention.

Incidents are supervised on a selective basis with an emphasis placed on strategic crimes and critical incidents. Drop-down menus are available on STORM to assist operators in identifying vulnerable and repeat victims.

¹⁴ A non-crime is an incident which in the first instance has not been recorded as a crime as police are unsure as to whether it is a crime or not. A non-crime can eventually be recorded as a crime if the police find evidence that a crime has indeed occurred.

2.2. How does Sussex 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 out-of-court disposals receive them.

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions 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, 8 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 15 cases. In none of the 20 cases could we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the penalty notice. Out of the 12 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found 2 cases 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. In none of the 20 cases could we find evidence that that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 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, 15 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Eighteen cases showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate for both the offender and the victim.

There is increasing use of restorative justice and community resolutions in Sussex Police and work is expanding in this area with financial support from the police and crime commissioner. As the force moves towards the use of tier two restorative justice disposals¹⁵ and the appropriate use of other types of out-of-court disposal (PND, cannabis warnings, etc) it is encouraged to tighten its processes to promote compliance with national guidelines. Specifically, this should include the need to seek the views of the victim and give a warning regarding potential disclosure implications. Such changes will minimise the risk of challenge by individuals who are the subject of these disposals.

¹⁵ More advanced mechanisms for restorative justice that usually involved contracted specialists

The crime management unit currently only validates cautions and will dip-check cannabis warnings while the central ticket support unit will process all PND. Divisional community resolution coordinators validate those out-of-court disposals administered by their officers. It is therefore of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered for a number of cautions, and for the majority of the PND we reviewed. It is particularly difficult to understand how community resolutions, which should only be considered with the agreement of the victim and the offender, can be authorised in some cases where there does not appear to be any consideration of the victims' wishes. It is also concerning that HMIC could find no record to show that offenders receiving PND and cannabis warnings had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting these disposals.

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

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 72 no-crime records for offence of rape, robbery and violence and found 59 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. For rape no-crimes of 30 rapes recorded as no-crime, we found 6 should have remained classified as crimes. The force's approach to no-crime is a matter of concern.

The crime management unit finalises all no-crime decisions with the exception of those for rape which are personally determined by the FCR. These decisions are therefore independent of the investigative process. Our audit identified concerns in decision making for all no-crimes sampled but, due to their seriousness, those for rape are a particular concern. Specialist training is required for decision makers to improve compliance with the HOCR in this complex area.

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

Notwithstanding the force's progress to become more victim focused, there remain challenges to it doing so. Consultation survey data indicate that its treatment of victims has improved but there are concerns that they are not being kept informed of the progress of investigations. Issues with Niche RMS have also affected the notification of crimes to the Victim Support scheme. This needs to be addressed in a co-ordinated way that incorporates the recent introduction of Track my Crime technology alongside the requirements of the code of practice for victims of crime¹⁶, updated procedures for the application and validation of out-of-court disposals and force audits that assess their compliance against national standards.

¹⁶ The code of practice for victims of crime: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime>

Our audit identified that the quality of call handling was excellent with 153 calls judged to have been handled professionally and courteously.

As with most forces, Sussex Police has responsibility for an increasingly diverse community. It has a large lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Brighton and growing migrant communities in other towns. In recognition of these facts, the force commissioned a scoping exercise and assessment of engagement with Sussex's black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community review; the report was finalised in October 2013. In support of the police and crime plan objective to address the under-reporting of domestic abuse, sexual offences, anti-social behaviour and hate crime, much work has been done to improve the reporting of crime from these communities. This has included the use of Language Line, use of the independent advisory groups and key individual networks and the establishment of 17 third party reporting centres with a further 6 planned. A 28.5 percent increase in the reporting of hate crime has been recorded over the past 12 months and this is partly attributed to work done in this area. Further work remains to be done to improve confidence in reporting from BAME communities and this is ongoing.

The force consultation team oversees a call-back regime in which 300 non-emergency callers and 300 emergency callers are contacted to assess their views of service each year. This work is contracted out and the findings are included within the force performance dashboard and discussed at performance meetings. Force level victim satisfaction surveys are also completed against the Home Office mandated categories and published on the dashboard. Following work with partners, the force is developing a survey for rape victims. Reference is also made to information from the Your Voice Counts internet facility through which members of the public can give feedback on the service they received.

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

The force has a clear policy and procedure for dealing with reports of rape and this includes those identified by the sexual abuse referral centre. However, the policy makes no reference to how officers and staff should deal with reports made via other routes, such as via partners and front counters to secure compliance with the HOCR and NCRS in all cases. As stated above, all partner referrals must now be directed to the public contact centre where a decision is taken whether to raise a crime or a non-crime occurrence although this new approach has yet to be adopted universally with some reports of rape still being placed in the non-crime category.

Our audit disclosed that seven of the eight rapes reported to police had been correctly recorded as crimes. The one failure related to a child protection referral that remained on the non-crime section of Niche RMS.

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

The introduction of Niche RMS last year has provided an interface with the incident, custody and case preparation applications. This helps avoid double keying and once the data quality issues detailed below are overcome, it will help to release capacity and generate savings for the force. The force has a clear ambition to move towards increased use of mobile data devices and it expects these to release further capacity by avoiding the need for staff to return to police stations to access IT systems.

There are currently 3,000-4,000 duplicate people records on Niche RMS and this presents a significant risk to the force in the potential misidentification of individuals wanted for, or suspected of, crimes. The force recognises this challenge and it is one that is being experienced by other Niche RMS-using forces. An exception report of anomalies is generated every 24 hours and this is dealt with by a data compliance team. User behaviour is also being addressed through training input and by the appointment of divisional Niche RMS managers.

Not unrelated to duplicate people records is the wider issue of data content quality on Niche RMS. This includes the issue of duplicate locations, blank fields and system generated activity such as Victim Support Scheme referrals. The force is attempting to address these issues. This is taking considerable time and cost to remedy and it has a negative impact on the timeliness of crime recording. Some software changes have been made but more improvements are required.

There is no facility currently available on Niche RMS for staff to complete an abbreviated crime report for less-serious crime. This is subject of further exploration through the Minerva Group of 17 forces which use Niche RMS nationally.

The force uses the Centurion and iBASE systems to record professional standards investigations and these have no interface with Niche RMS. These are not subject to FCR oversight and entries are only made when the Crown Prosecution Service decides to charge. This process needs to become compliant with the HOCC and NCRS as crimes should be recorded if they meet the NCRS test, not just at the time of the Crown Prosecution Service decision.

People and skills

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

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

There has been specific training in the HOCC for specialist staff within the public contact centre, crime management unit and the public protection units as well as more general training for staff. As the force implements the recommendations from its own review and those that emerge from this HMIC inspection, there will be a need to focus training, including refresher training, on the key decision makers within the crime recording process and control the cost of training in so doing. Training for Niche RMS will therefore need to become more role-specific than generic and users would benefit from clear and concise instruction on its use as it relates to their role.

Every sergeant is now receiving a day's training on integrity matters that includes the force's expectations following its crime data integrity review. This is work in progress with two of seven sessions having been completed at the time of our inspection.

An input on crime data integrity and the ethical recording of crime is delivered to new inspectors. Newly promoted sergeants are also trained. The material used is being trialled in preparation for it being integrated into the sergeants' operational skills training manual. The force has also developed an e-learning programme. It is not mandatory but a high number of staff have completed it.

The introduction of Niche RMS coupled with the focus on crime data integrity and work to achieve the policing and crime plan objectives is placing a significant workload pressure on many staff. This includes PCSO and special constables who encounter crime but are not trained to investigate it or authorised to create a crime report. The force is therefore encouraged to clarify their role in the initial investigation and recording of less-serious crime.

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

Almost without exception, staff understand the message on recording crime with integrity and the reasons for doing so. While there remain some isolated pockets within the force where performance pressure may still influence recording, these are disappearing fast and the new outlook of ethical crime recording is prevailing. We found no evidence of institutionalised performance pressure not to record crime. Failures in compliance at the user level relate primarily to officers' lack of HOCR knowledge alongside some pressures of workload.

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

The FCR has unfettered access to his chief officer lead and he is routinely consulted for advice on crime recording matters. He is able to act impartially and is the final arbiter for all crime recording decisions in the force. He has sufficient resources to carry out the role effectively.

The FCR has also been directly engaged in the review of Force Integrity in Crime Recording, the crime data integrity gold group and in the design of business processes that support the use of Niche RMS.