

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Thames Valley Police

November 2014

© HMIC 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78246-551-5

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Scope and structure of report	4
Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations	5
Leadership and governance	5
Systems and processes.....	6
People and skills.....	11
Recommendations.....	13
Part B: Audit findings in numbers	14
Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings.....	16
Leadership and governance	16
Systems and processes.....	18
People and skills.....	24

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 Thames Valley Police chief officer team promotes ethical working practices and integrity, including crime recording, using the police Code of Ethics⁶ as the primary medium. We found that while the chief officer message on ethical crime recording is clearly heard and understood at senior levels within the force, the same is not true for frontline staff. Officers were aware of the messaging on the Code of Ethics but not explicitly for crime data recording.

Recommendation: Immediately, chief officers should ensure all police officers and police staff are provided with clear messages on the importance of achieving crime data accuracy in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS and on how this links to the force message regarding the importance of the Code of Ethics.

The deputy chief constable is the lead officer for crime data integrity and has demonstrably sought to make a difference to crime recording standards using the established force governance structure to hold senior officers to account.

Officers are encouraged to report wrongdoing through their line managers or the data standards team and the force maintains an anonymous confidential reporting line. Over the past 18 months, one case involving crime data integrity was reported through this route. It was assessed as being appropriate for the local policing command to resolve.

The force crime recording policy states that “all reports of crime will be dealt with in line with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for recorded crime”⁷. This policy also includes an initial validation process where certain more serious crime types are reviewed by designated decision makers⁸ (DDM). The role of the DDM is to review the full circumstances of the incident as reported and confirm the crime classification as recorded or amend it as they deem appropriate.

⁶ *Code of Ethics: A code of practice for the principles and standards of professional behaviour for the policing profession of England and Wales*. College of Policing, July 2014. Available from www.college.police.uk

⁷ Thames Valley Police, (11.10.13) *Crime recording, investigation and management policy*, 3.1

⁸ The DDM role is to provide practical advice, guidance and act as arbiter at a local level to ensure the accurate recording of crime and crime-related incidents in accordance with national standards.

The police and crime plan for Thames Valley Police 2013-17 specifies high-risk crime types for attention and includes reduction and detection targets.

The force moved to the Niche RMS crime recording system on 29 April 2014. Before doing so, it conducted a detailed mapping and risk assessment process, allowing the force to understand its risks from inaccurate crime recording.

The force's crime and incident data standards management strategy details the audit processes and is explicit around the importance of ethical crime recording and HOOCR and NCRS compliance. The audit regime seeks to allow real time checking of crime records and has a degree of flexibility. At the time of our inspection, we found that a significant backlog of reports for auditing had built up, with most local policing areas being at least two weeks behind and non-crime occurrences being much further behind; the force is working hard to reduce the backlogs. It is recognised that at the time of the inspection, the force was still in the transition stage with the move to Niche RMS. As a consequence, the force had, by necessity, prioritised data quality assurance activity. Audit findings and reports are discussed at an executive level, and at a local level through the local performance manager.

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 156 incident records⁹ and found that 139 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 139 crimes that should have been recorded, 118 were. Of the 118, six were wrongly classified and three were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOOCR. 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).

⁹ An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police, recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

The force also has a control room and enquiry department through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 38 percent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public that do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 61 calls from the public) found that of the 64 crimes that should have been recorded, all 64 were recorded, 1 was incorrectly classified and 1 was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 40 reports that were recorded as non-crime occurrences on the Niche system, 20 from the adult at risk category and 20 from the child at risk category. We found that of five reports of crime should have been raised, none was. All five crimes were found in the child at risk category. This is a matter that should be rectified urgently by the force.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should undertake an audit of reports recorded under the non-crime occurrence adult and child at risk categories of Niche, to ensure all reports of crime contained therein are recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS. Any identified failings in the use of these systems should be identified and addressed in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of these crimes not being recorded in the future.

Supervisors in the control rooms conduct some monitoring of call taking; they examine five per call-handler per month. These checks tend to be focused on higher risk call types.

We found that some control room staff are reluctant to challenge attending officers when they seek to close incidents opened on a crime code as a non-crime, with some control room staff stating that 'the officer is always right'. There is not an established risk-based process of immediate control room supervisory review of such incidents. Responsibility and accountability for NCRS compliance that is independent of local performance pressures also needs to be clear.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should establish an effective supervisory review of incidents opened with a crime code but closed as a non-crime. The force should also ensure that police officers and police staff in the control room are provided with clear messages as to their role in ensuring compliance with the NCRS.

The force uses an appointment system, linked with Niche, to attend and deal with some types of non-priority incidents. We found instances of the process creating delays in crime recording, of limited supervision, of appointments not being finalised and of crimes going un-recorded. During a spot check of this system we found that there were 473 incidents closed pending an appointment or to be updated after allocation to an officer; of these 391 were at least a week old. This means that the service to the victim is not as effective as it should be and that some crimes are being recorded late as a result.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should take steps to reduce the backlog of appointments and appointment records awaiting update.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should review and amend as necessary the appointments system, ensuring it both meets the needs of victims and ensures HOCR and NCRS compliance.

Out-of-court disposals

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

Cautions – Out of the 23 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in 22 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all 23 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, all 15 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 all of the 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 10 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that in 2 cases the victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ A cannabis warning is a non-statutory disposal for cases of possession of cannabis for personal use. It constitutes a warning to the offender and confiscation of the cannabis.

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

¹³ National guidance for the use of out-of-court disposals is detailed in a number of documents:

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

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 24 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 24 cases. In none of the 24 cases could we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning. After the date that these warnings had been issued, but before the inspection sampling taking place, the cannabis warning form had been amended and introduced by the force.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in 19 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 18 resolutions where there was a victim, 16 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 victim¹⁴.

The force maintains a centralised team of 15 scrutineers¹⁵ who review all out-of-court disposals to ensure they comply with the national standards. In some cases, the disposal is rescinded and action taken to rectify the issues found. We found examples where officers who had issued an out-of-court disposal that had subsequently been rescinded had little idea of what to do once the sanction had been removed.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should publish a clear procedure for officers detailing what action they should take when an out-of-court disposal is subsequently rescinded.

It is of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered in the vast majority of cases where a decision was taken to issue a PND. It is also of concern that in the sample reviewed there was no evidence of the offender being made aware of the nature and implications of accepting a cannabis warning. The force has addressed the latter issue.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should improve the supervision of the use of PNDs. Where there is a victim, their view should be appropriately considered and recorded.

¹⁴ National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence, explain the process to the offender – including how the offender will make good the harm caused. The implications of receiving a community resolution need to be explained to the offender – it does not form part of a criminal record but may be disclosed as part of an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check. The community resolution is to be recorded appropriately, in accordance with the NCRS and HOCR.

¹⁵ Scrutineers act as DDM and auditors and work for the FCR.

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 88 no-crime records and found 79 records to be compliant with HOCA and NCRS. The force's approach to no-criming is generally acceptable.

We found that frontline officers saw the no-crime process as rigorous. The level of authority for no-crime decisions is set within the crime policy; however the decision making for initial recording and classification of burglary and robbery reports has been devolved to local detective sergeants, but they are not the DDM for no-criming decisions for those crime types.

Victim-centred approach

The force promotes a victim-centred approach through its policies and communications to officers and staff. Regular victim satisfaction surveys are undertaken as required nationally. In addition, work has been undertaken with the Rape Crisis and Victim Support Scheme to understand and improve victim service. Officers reported that the chief officer team expected local supervisors to complete victim call-backs but that this was no longer occurring.

The force has carried out work into the demographic of the force area and uses Language Line so non-English speaking callers are able to relay information to the force. The force has mapped out organised crime groups from minority communities so as better to protect these and others, and is engaged in work on race hate crime and female genital mutilation.

We could not find any evidence of work being commissioned to understand fully the true extent of crime being committed against non-English speaking people.

Rape offences

The force's crime recording, investigation and management policy details the process and accountabilities for the recording of rape and sexual offences, and is explicit regarding the need for NCRS compliance. All officers that we spoke to had a clear understanding of the policy for dealing with reports of rape, and how and when these should be recorded onto the Niche crime recording system.

We found that the public protection units are strong advocates of ethical crime recording, actively scrutinising crime and delivering safeguarding.

Reports of rape are monitored effectively through the audit system. This ensures correct and timely recording and supervision. The investigation of rape offences (with exception of intra familial/domestic) are dealt with by the force's major crime team.

No-crime applications for rape must be authorised by the detective chief inspector, and the FCR and his deputy are the only persons who can finalise a rape no-crime.

The force policy on rape investigations is clear on the course of action that should be taken for allegations from outside the force and we found officers and staff to be well aware of the policy.

IT systems

Thames Valley Police uses the OASIS incident management system and the Niche system for crime recording. These systems are not linked but we found them to be well managed, and standalone databases are actively discouraged.

The force moved from the CEDAR crime recording system to Niche on 29 April 2014 and it was evident that the system is still in the process of being embedded. The move to Niche includes a programme to back record convert and while this is resource intensive to complete, the benefits of doing so were clear to senior managers.

People and skills

While training on the HOCR and NCRS has been limited we found that staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, all have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR. New scrutineers are receiving bespoke training as will those new recruits in the police enquiry centres (PEC).

The ability of the force to record crime onto the Niche system is at present hindered by the capacity of the PEC to handle officer-recorded crime. Officers reported long delays in getting through to the PEC; this was confirmed by PEC managers. We note that the force has a gold group whose scope includes this issue and that new recruitment into the PEC has improved the situation. However, a spot-check during our inspection found that there were 216 incidents closed awaiting the officer to record the crime with the PEC; of these 197 were at least a week old. This means these reports of crime are not being recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS and do not feature in the force understanding of the extent of criminal offending for the purposes of prevention and detection. HMIC will continue to monitor this matter to ensure that the steps the force is taking to rectify the situation are effective.

We found staff had heard the chief officer messages on the Code of Ethics and that they understood the importance of accurate crime recording. Senior managers are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and there is no pressure, explicit or implied, to under-record or record crimes incorrectly, or in any way to work outside the NCRS when pursuing outcomes.

We found integrity issues, and particularly that of crime data recording, have featured in the force's promotion process and in a recent scrutineer recruitment process.

Force crime registrar

The FCR is also head of performance and his role is of a strategic nature while his deputy performs the day-to-day FCR functions. The FCR is known and recognised as the crime recording expert across all levels of the force. He has full support from, and unrestricted access to, the chief officer team; he is the final arbiter and has sufficient resources. Both the FCR and his deputy are very knowledgeable and clearly have the skills to ensure accurate crime recording. They are a very good source of advice to the force and are regarded as such.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. Chief officers should ensure all police officers and police staff are provided with clear messages on the importance of achieving crime data accuracy in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS and on how this links to the force message on the importance of the Code of Ethics.
2. The force should undertake an audit of reports recorded under the non-crime occurrence adult and child at risk categories of Niche, to ensure all reports of crime contained therein are recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS. Any identified failings in the use of these systems should be identified and addressed in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of these crimes not being recorded in the future.
3. The force should establish an effective supervisory review of incidents opened with a crime code but closed as a non-crime. The force should also ensure that police officers and police staff in the control room are provided with clear messages as to their role in ensuring compliance with the NCRS.
4. The force should take steps to reduce the backlog of appointments and appointment records awaiting update.

Within three months

5. The force should review and amend as necessary the appointments system, ensuring it both meets the needs of victims and ensures HOCR and NCRS compliance.
6. The force should publish a clear procedure for officers detailing what action they should take when an out-of-court disposal is subsequently rescinded.
7. The force should improve the supervision of the use of PND and cannabis warnings. In the case of PND, where there is a victim, their view should be appropriately considered and recorded. In the case of cannabis warnings, the offender should be made aware of the implications of accepting the warning and this should be recorded.

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 TVP. 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 TVP recorded the following number of crimes.
156	139	118
Crimes reported directly from the victim		
HMIC reviewed the following number of reports of crimes that were reported directly by telephone to the TVP 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 TVP should have recorded.	From these identified crimes TVP recorded the following number of crimes.
61	64	64
Crime reports held on Niche non-crime occurrences		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to TVP and held on the Niche non-crime occurrences section.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that TVP should have recorded.	From these identified crimes TVP recorded the following number of crimes.
40	5	0

No-crimes	
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which TVP had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.
88	79

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

Thames Valley Police's chief officer team promotes ethical working practices and integrity including crime recording using the police Code of Ethics as the primary medium. We found that while the chief officer message on ethical crime recording is clearly heard and understood at senior levels within the force, the same is not true for frontline resources. Officers were aware of the messaging on the Code of Ethics but many could not identify a specific message for ethical crime recording. However there was a common understanding of the need to be victim-centred and to report crimes if they are alleged.

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the lead officer for crime data integrity and he has held this responsibility for around six years. The DCC chairs a bi-weekly performance meeting which alternates between a risk-based meeting and a cluster meeting based upon the old county boundaries of Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Attendance at these meetings includes all relevant senior managers; cluster meetings include relevant local policing team commanders and risk meetings include relevant senior investigators. Performance review at these meetings includes elements of HOCR compliance set against crime reduction and outcome data.

Six times a year the chief constable holds a performance meeting for senior executive members at which she holds the DCC and assistant chief constables to account for performance.

Officers are encouraged to report wrongdoing through their line managers or the data standards team. The force has an anonymous confidential reporting line called the integrity line which is an independently run system managed by Crimestoppers. The integrity line has a two-way online system that allows the individual to answer additional questions about the information provided at a later date while retaining anonymity. Over the past 18 months, one case involving crime data integrity was reported through this route and it was assessed as being appropriate for the local policing command to resolve.

The force crime recording policy states that “all reports of crime will be dealt with in line with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for recorded crime”¹⁶. This policy also includes an initial validation process where certain more serious crime types are reviewed by designated decisions makers (DDM). The DDM reviews the full circumstances of the incident as reported and confirms the crime classification as recorded or amends it as they deem appropriate.

The police and crime plan for Thames Valley Police 2013-17 specifies high-risk crime types for attention and includes reduction and detection targets, such as cutting the level of violence against the person by 2 percent compared to 2012/13 levels and achieving and maintaining a percentage of crime detected for violence with injury above 45 percent.

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

The force moved to the Niche crime recording system on the 29 April 2014 and before doing so conducted a detailed mapping and risk assessment process; thus the force understands its risks from inaccurate crime recording. This process also highlighted to the force a need for better monitoring to track crimes in real time to ensure that staff got it right first time.

There are minimum data standards for all records of crime but the level of detail may vary according to particular offences.

Officers reported that the police enquiry centre (PEC) records reports of potential crimes against children as crime-related occurrences rather than crimes. This problem, with immediately recording an incident as a crime, was thought to persist as the facts are often confused and sometimes exaggerated by people reporting crimes on behalf of others (third party reporters). However there was frustration at the inherent delay this creates. Our dip-sample of crime-related occurrences confirmed the issues as reported.

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

The force’s crime and incident data standards management strategy details the audit processes and is explicit on the importance of ethical crime recording and compliance with HOCR and NCRS. The audit regime seeks to deliver real time checking of crime records and has a degree of flexibility so it is also able to focus in on short-term issues such as unexpected/explained reductions in offence types. The amount of auditing completed is statistically significant.

¹⁶ Thames Valley Police, (11.10.13) *Crime recording, investigation and management policy*, 3.1

The force maintains an establishment of 15 scrutineers (two vacancies at the date of our inspection) within the crime data management team. We found that at the time of our inspection, a significant backlog of reports for auditing had built up with most local policing areas being at least two weeks behind. Cherwell was reported as being 600-700 behind with force-wide non-crime occurrences being much further behind. The team of scrutineers was found to be working hard to reduce the backlogs. However, the scale of the challenge was recognised by the force. It is recognised that at the time of the inspection, the force was still in the transition stage with the move to Niche RMS. As a consequence, the force had, by necessity, prioritised data quality assurance activity.

Audit findings and reports are discussed at an executive level and at a local level through the local performance manager. The focus is upon the vulnerable areas, trying to spot trends, establishing why the issue has occurred and finding a solution. The DCC was clear that his concern was that managers understood problems and had a clear plan to address and improve the issues.

The FCR pays regular visits to local policing commands to discuss and resolve audit findings, and local audits are undertaken by officers on restricted duties. These include identifying incidents opened with a crime code that have been concluded without a crime being recorded. We found evidence of audit results being reported back to teams and then used to develop the team and individuals.

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 Thames Valley 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 probabilities, a notifiable offence has occurred.

We examined 156 incident records and found that 139 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 139 crimes that should have been recorded, 118 were. Of the 118, six were wrongly classified and three 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).

The force also has a control room and enquiry department through which we have estimated that the force records approximately 38 per cent of the total of its recorded crime. This unit records reports of crime directly from members of the public which do not require the creation of an incident record. Our inspection of this unit (a review of 61 calls from the public) found that of the 64 crimes that should have been recorded, all 64 were recorded; one was incorrectly classified and one was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. This is an effective approach to crime recording for the force.

We examined 40 reports that were recorded as non-crime occurrences on the Niche system; 20 from the adult at risk category and 20 from the child at risk category. We found that five reports of crime should have been raised; none was. All five were found in the child at risk category. This is a matter that should be urgently rectified by the force.

Control room staff are encouraged to clarify results with others within the control room to ensure incidents are recorded and closed correctly. However we found that some control room staff are reluctant to challenge officers when they seek to close incidents opened with a crime code as no crime having occurred, a non-crime. Some control room staff stated that 'the officer is always right' and that the officer's decision was final. We found that there was a lack of clear accountability for NCRS compliance, and an absence of an established risk-based process of immediate control room supervisory review for such incidents.

We found that supervisors in the control rooms conduct some monitoring of call taking; five per call handler per month with checks that tend to be focused on higher risk call types. These checks can be extended to every other month for more experienced staff who are performing satisfactorily. The results of this monitoring are fed back to staff on a one-to-one basis and if issues are identified after some research to confirm there is a trend and not just a one-off issue, development plans are instigated.

The force uses an appointment system, interfaced with Niche, to attend and deal with some types of non-priority incidents. We found instances of the process creating delays in crime recording, of limited supervision, of appointments not being finalised and crimes going un-recorded. In one case a domestic harassment appointment was delayed for four days after which the officer rang the victim and then recorded that the victim no longer wished to pursue a complaint. The case was filed as a no-crime.

During a spot check of this system we found that there were 473 incidents closed pending an appointment or to be updated after allocation to an officer; of these, 391 were at least a week old. This means that the service to the victim is not as effective as it should be and that some crimes are being recorded late as a result.

The force crime recording policy explains how to deal with reports of crime that have occurred in another force area. We found that officers understood the actions to be taken including the victim support requirement and the need to ensure a defined audit trail.

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

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

Cautions – Out of the 23 cautions we dip-sampled we found that in 22 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In all 23 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 15 cases where there was a victim to consult, 15 cases showed that the victim’s 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 all 20 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 10 cases where there was a victim to consult, we found that in 2 cases the victims had their views considered when the police decided to issue a penalty notice.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 24 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in all 24 cases. In none of the 24 cases could we find evidence that the offender had been made aware of the nature and implications of accepting the warning. After the date that these warnings had been issued, but prior to the inspection sampling taking place, the cannabis warning form had been amended and introduced by the force.

Community resolutions – We took a dip-sample of 20 community resolutions and found that in 19 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. Out of the 18 resolutions where there was a victim, 16 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 victim.

Force scrutineers review all out-of-court disposals to ensure they comply with the national standards. In some cases the disposal is rescinded and action taken to rectify the issues found. We found examples where officers who had dispensed an out-of-court disposal that had subsequently been rescinded had little idea of what to do once the sanction had been removed.

It is of concern that we could find no record of the views of victims being considered in the vast majority of cases where a decision was taken to issue a PND. It is also of concern that in the sample reviewed there was no evidence of the offender being made aware of the nature and implications of accepting a cannabis warning. The force has addressed the latter issue.

2.3. Are no-crime decisions for high-risk crime categories correct and is there robust oversight and quality control in Thames Valley 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 88 no-crime records and found 79 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. The force's approach to no-criming is generally acceptable

We found that frontline officers had a good understanding of the force no-crime process with many seeing it as rigorous. Officers identified that they could approach the force scrutineers if they needed advice on no-crimes. For rape no-crime, the detective inspector will discuss the matter with the FCR team who will then advise if there is enough evidence to no-crime before any submission.

PEC staff are able to complete administrative no-crimes; those that are created in error, duplicated or where the victim finds their property which they had previously reported as stolen, and such. Thereafter the force has a set authorisation process with identified ranks required; thus applications for a rape no-crime must be authorised by a detective chief inspector. The decision making for initial recording and classification of burglary and robbery reports has been devolved to local detective sergeants, but they are not the DDM for no-criming decisions for those crime types.

We found that the force has 175 DDM permissions in place on Niche, 19 being scrutineers, 5 being administrative and 151 being police officers. This is a high number of people to be involved in a critical area of decision making and could lead to inconsistency in the way decisions are taken.

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

The force crime recording policy makes it clear that the investigator responsibilities include providing regular updates to victims and witnesses in accordance with the Code of practice for victims of crime¹⁷ and the Witness Charter. The investigator should provide victims and witnesses with acknowledgement of their incident in an accessible format, including incident reference numbers, contact details and advice on both what to do if further incidents occur and the accessible support services available. The named officer should also provide regular feedback and progress updates. When it is identified that a victim or witness is disabled, steps should be taken to identify their individual needs and to communicate accordingly.

Messages from the chief officer lead stress the need to put the victim first and that the focus is on providing a quality service to the victim. A recent presentation from the deputy FCR made clear reference to putting victims first.

Regular victim satisfaction surveys are undertaken as required nationally. In addition, work has been undertaken with Rape Crisis and the Victim Support scheme to understand and improve victim service. Officers reported that the force used to complete victim call-backs, sometimes calling victims during performance meetings. However, officers all thought that victim call-backs had now stopped, possibly as a consequence of austerity measures.

We could find no evidence that frontline officers and staff were receiving, or that they were aware of, any meaningful feedback from customer or victim feedback in order that crime recording processes could improve.

The force has carried out work into the demographic of the force area and uses Language Line so that non-English speaking callers are able to relay information to the force. The force has mapped out organised crime groups from some minority communities so as to better protect these and others, and is engaged in work on race hate crime and female genital mutilation.

We could not find any evidence of work being commissioned to understand fully the true extent of crime being committed against non-English speaking people.

¹⁷ The code of practice for victims of crime:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

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

The force's crime recording, investigation and management policy details the process and accountabilities for the recording of rape and sexual offences and it is explicit on NCRS compliance. It states that:

"A victim's reluctance to provide precise details of the incident, undergo medical examination, or support a criminal investigation are not in themselves reasons not to record their complaint. Any decision not to record a rape or sexual assault complaint as a crime must be justified by the reviewing officer"¹⁸

All officers that we spoke to had a clear understanding of the policy for dealing with reports of rape, and how and when these should be recorded onto the Niche crime recording system. We found that the process is that local police officers attended the scene to ensure that it is secured for forensics. They confirm that the victim impact aspect is covered and the case is then sent to investigators. Child abuse and vulnerable adult cases are referred to the PEC within 24 hours and given a Niche non-crime occurrence number, becoming a crime within 72 hours unless it is decided that a crime has not occurred.

The force lead for rape investigation was aware that reports had increased by 45 percent last year and have increased by 37 percent so far this year. We found that reports of rape are effectively monitored through the audit system. This ensures correct and timely recording and supervision. The investigation of rape offences (with exception of intra familial/domestic) are dealt with by the force's major crime team.

In August 2013 the force ran a developmental training session (called a master class) on managing rape investigations. The FCR provided training on crime recording standards and ethical recording to those attending, and staff were told to report all crimes and classify them fully as crimes.

No-crime applications for rape must be authorised by the detective chief inspector, and the FCR and his deputy are the only people allowed to finalise rape no-crimes.

The force policy on rape investigations is clear on the course of action that should be taken for allegations from outside the force and we found officers and staff to be well aware of the policy.

¹⁸ Thames Valley Police (11.10.13), *Crime recording, investigation and management policy*, page 14, para 6

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

Thames Valley Police uses the OASIS system for its incident management and the Niche system for crime recording. These systems are not linked but they were found to be well managed.

Officers can set up an Access system, which they need to request it from the IT department, but standalone databases are actively discouraged.

The force moved from the CEDAR crime recording system to Niche on 29 April 2014 and it was evident that the system is still in the process of being embedded. Staff received one day of training on the Niche system. The move to Niche includes a programme to back record convert and while this is resource intensive to complete, the benefits of doing so were clear to senior managers.

The head of IT attends a variety of executive boards including the chief constable's management team meeting, the DCC's project board, the force information board and the information programme board. The IT team attends all the various business boards as required.

People and skills

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

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

While training on the HOCR and NCRS has been limited, we found that staff and supervisors responsible for managing out-of-court disposals and no-crimes, and those working in specialist departments, have an appropriate knowledge of NCRS and HOCR. New scrutineers are also receiving bespoke training, as do those new recruits in the PEC.

The ability of the force to record crime onto the Niche system is at present hindered by the capacity of the PEC to handle officer-recorded crime. Officers reported long delays in getting through to the PEC; this was confirmed by PEC managers. We found that some officers were seeking to record a number of crimes at the end of their shifts but they are only able to report one crime at a time to the PEC and were required to ring in again if they had more than one crime. Officers reported handing crimes onto colleagues for them to ring in the crime or holding onto them to ring them in on their next shift.

We note that the force has a gold group whose scope includes this issue and that new recruits into the PEC have improved the situation. However, a spot-check during our inspection found that there were 216 incidents closed awaiting the officer to

record the crime with the PEC; of these 197 were at least a week old. This means these reports of crime are not being recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS and do not feature in the force understanding of the extent of criminal offending for the purposes of prevention and detection. HMIC will continue to monitor this matter to ensure that the steps the force is taking to rectify the situation are effective.

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

We found staff had heard the chief officer messages on the Code of Ethics and that they understood the importance of accurate crime recording. Some officers gave examples of how the force's crime recording culture had changed from previous years to one of ethical recording. Senior managers reported that they are encouraged to secure accurate crime recording and we found no evidence of pressure, explicit or implied, to under-record or record crimes incorrectly, or in any way work to outside the NCRS in respect of outcomes.

We found that local scrutiny of recording was in place across the local policing commands and specialist units. The force scrutineers' role in reviewing recorded crime is widely understood across the force.

We found examples of integrity issues, and specifically relating to crime data, featuring in the force's promotion process and recent scrutineer recruitment process.

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

The FCR is also head of performance and his role is of a strategic nature while his deputy performs the day-to-day FCR functions. The DCC noted that while the FCR has responsibility for both HOCR compliance and performance management, he does not see any compromise on integrity as HOCR and NCRS compliance is part of a good performance measurement and accountability regime. We found that the FCR was able to act objectively and impartially to ensure the force records crime correctly.

The FCR is very well known and recognised as the crime recording expert at all levels of the force. He has the full support of, and unrestricted access to, the chief officer team; he is the final arbiter on crime recording issues and is recognised as such and he has sufficient resources to carry out his role effectively. Both the FCR and his deputy are very knowledgeable and clearly have the skills to ensure accurate crime recording.

Both the FCR and his deputy are a very good source of advice to the force and are regarded as such. The FCR has written parts of the force's crime recording, investigation and management policy and was able to articulate the policy in some detail. He was very clear that the initial validation part of the crime recording policy

was designed to stop any arguing about crime classification. Staff understood that there were no localised policies on crime recording and that they followed the force's crime recording, investigation and management policy.