



Crime data integrity

Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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Introduction

Background

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 have now been inspected and the full thematic report was published on 18 November 2014. The central question of this inspection programme was:

"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.

The crime data integrity inspection for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

As well as a full audit and inspection of the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales, we were commissioned to carry out inspections of the British Transport Police (BTP) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). These additional inspections were carried out after the main 43 force inspections had been completed but before the thematic audit had been published. Both followed the same methodology in terms of auditing and inspection fieldwork. However, the data from the audit did not form part of the national crime-recording calculations reported in the thematic report and this report should be treated as a standalone audit and inspection of crime recording for PSNI.

Our national report, published on 18 November 2014, reported on how well police in England and Wales record crime. In it we found that, on average, 1 in 5 crimes was not recorded by the police, although some forces performed much better than this. This inspection in PSNI, although using data and crime records from a different time period, showed that PSNI performed strongly in comparison. We recommend our findings in this report are read alongside our national report.

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, the Northern Ireland Policing Board for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Methodology

The PSNI inspection involved:

- An audit of incident and crime records for the 6-month period 1 February – 31 July 2014;
- A dip-sample of out-of-court disposals. This included Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND), and discretionary disposals. (In the PSNI, PNDs and discretionary disposals are the out-of-court disposals which the police have full discretion on issuing. Cautions can only be administered with the approval of the Public Prosecution Service);
- A dip-sample of no-crime decisions for rape, robbery and violence;
- Visits to the PSNI where inspectors assessed local crime-recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance, systems and processes and people and skills.

The audit examined a sample of crime records for compliance. The sample used in the PSNI gave a margin of error of +/- 2 percent. Our conclusions and recommendations are, therefore, based upon the evidence drawn from our audit and the inspection of the PSNI'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 makes a statistically valid estimate of the accuracy of crime recording and a qualitative assessment of the services' crime-recording arrangements. It makes recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

There is an acceptance within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) of the need for external scrutiny, and this far exceeds that for of other police force in England and Wales. As a result, all officers and staff know they can be questioned and asked to justify their actions at any time. This environment, coupled with an effective crime-recording process including several layers of scrutiny and validation that was introduced by chief officers in 2010 following the 'R4 Project'³, has resulted in a culture whereby ethical and accurate crime recording is viewed as the 'norm', or as one interviewee said, 'it's the way we do business in Northern Ireland'.

The chief officer lead for crime data integrity is the assistant chief constable for operational support (ACC Ops Support). The ACC is separate from the performance structure in place to hold district commanders to account. The crime-recording process is now well embedded in the PSNI and the need for frequent messages from chief officers to drive cultural change has passed, but should there be a requirement to notify staff of any changes or to reinforce the need for accurate crime recording, this is undertaken. We found no evidence of performance pressures of any kind influencing crime recording.

There is an independent confidential reporting line, 'Safecall', which allows officers and staff to report suspected wrongdoing or misconduct by colleagues using their personal details or anonymously. It was apparent during the inspection that officers and staff felt confident that should they have any concerns in relation to crime recording they could raise the matter with supervisors or line managers rather than use Safecall.

There is no overarching crime-recording policy but officers and staff are aware that advice on NCRS and the HOCR is available on the intranet. The risk of not recording crime accurately features on the organisational risk register. The service is well aware of the risk to public confidence and the impact that can have on trust in the community if the PSNI is not recording crime accurately.

The PSNI has fully assessed its key crime categories and is acutely aware of the crime-recording risks, notably in respect of work undertaken in the public protection units (PPU).

³ R4 - Project delivered in 2011 to address issues relating to call handling, data capture, visible response, updating information and access to services - Right people, Right place, Right time, Right job 2011

Some elements of the call-handling process in the PSNI are outsourced to Noonans, a provider of contract staff (formerly Resource). Call handling and some despatch functions are delivered by this private sector organisation, although ex-police officers are employed for some despatch functions. No private sector staff are involved in recording crime.

There is a unique situation in Northern Ireland with the PSNI not only having a statistics branch, but also with the key posts in that branch being filled by independent personnel employed by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The head of the statistics branch by default undertakes the role of force crime registrar (FCR)⁴. This statistical approach is evident in the type and style of audits undertaken.

We found that there are numerous statistical and ad hoc audits conducted by the statistics branch to ensure that the correct number and types of crime are being recorded following calls from, and contact with, members of the public. The frequency of audits and the number of sample crimes examined are entirely appropriate, based on our findings that there is a low risk of crimes not being recorded. However, the methodology used for checking each crime-recording decision does not cover an assessment of the incident from start to finish and should be more comprehensive. It should include listening to the original call, identifying the number of crimes that should be recorded from that call and then tracking the crime report through to conclusion with subsequent contact with the victim.

Recommendation 1

Not later than 30 June 2015, the PSNI should adopt a more comprehensive methodology when assessing each crime-recording decision, judging the whole incident from the initial call to victim feedback at the conclusion.

⁴ 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.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 481 incident records⁵ and found that 474 crimes should have been recorded. The PSNI recorded 459. This represents a crime-recording accuracy rate of 97 percent with a confidence interval of +/- 2 percent. Of the 459 crimes recorded, 448 were correctly classified (98 percent) while 385 (84 percent) were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

We examined 50 safeguarding reports that are referred from other agencies directly to the PSNI's specialist departments - primarily the PPU. We found that out of the 50 reports, 46 crimes should have been recorded and the service recorded 39. Of the 39 crimes recorded, all 39 were classified correctly but only 26 were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

While we found that 84 percent of crimes from incident records were recorded within the 72-hour time limit, it was a concern that 35 crimes had not been recorded for over 7 days. This delay was also apparent in the safeguarding reports where 11 were not recorded for over 7 days. The delays in recording, apparent from the audit, were a concern. The PSNI needs to reinforce the need for timely crime recording by the most effective means available to it, especially in the safeguarding area of business, and focus its own audits and quality assurance checks with more vigour on this aspect of crime recording to ensure a better service to victims.

Recommendation 2

Not later than 30 April 2015, the PSNI should reinforce the need to record crime at the earliest opportunity, and certainly within the 72-hour limit, unless there are exceptional circumstances, and ensure that quality assurance checks and audits consider and report on the timeliness of crime recording as well as the accuracy.

We found that the processes in the PPU for dealing with referrals from other agencies or third parties were robust, but the audit identified that of the 46 crimes that should have been recorded, the PSNI recorded 39. The service should examine the 7 cases that were not recorded to identify what lessons can be learned.

⁵ 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 incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

A recent review of the recording of 'making off without payment' prompted by new Home Office guidance on this offence has identified variations in the way the offence was being recorded across Northern Ireland. New guidelines have been issued by the PSNI to reinforce the need for a corporate approach to this offence. With these differences in mind we were concerned that there may be a similar inconsistencies in the recording of other key crime categories given the degree of autonomy that has been apparent in the PSNI in the past. A review should be undertaken to ascertain if there are any disparities in the way each district records key crime categories to give reassurance that crime-recording practices are applied consistently across the PSNI.

Recommendation 3

Not later than 30 June 2015, the PSNI should undertake a review of crime-recording policies to reassure itself that there is a corporate approach to the recording of key crime categories across all districts and branches.

The investigation of historic sexual abuse cases by police forces in England and Wales has identified many victims and numerous offenders. We have found that in many instances police forces were not accurately recording the correct number of offences in accordance with HOOCR. This was primarily due to a lack of knowledge of HOOCR within the investigation teams but also a lack of appropriate scrutiny from the relevant FCR. Where this was apparent it has now been addressed. There are similar inquiries taking place in Northern Ireland and we found a lack of clarity regarding how many offences could or should be recorded as it relied on the knowledge of HOOCR amongst the investigating team. The PSNI should review these inquiries to ensure that correct numbers of crimes are recorded.

Recommendation 4

Not later than 30 April 2015, the PSNI should review any historic sexual abuse inquiries currently being undertaken to ensure the accuracy of crime recording, given the likelihood of there being a large number of victims and offenders.

In the absence of a crime-recording policy we could find no guidance that advised officers and staff what they should do in the event that a victim, resident either permanently or temporarily in Northern Ireland, reports a crime that occurred in another police area or jurisdiction. It was also apparent from reality testing that there was confusion around this issue. There must be clarity to ensure the needs of the victim are made paramount.

Recommendation 5

Not later than 30 June 2015, the PSNI should provide guidance to officers and staff so that they can deal appropriately with reports of crime that occur in another jurisdiction or police force, but where the victim either resides or is temporarily resident in Northern Ireland; this should include specific reference to the offence of rape.

The joint agency Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults (SGVA) policy and procedural guidance advocates the recording of assaults by patients in institutions, albeit the opportunities for detection are remote. The crimes remain recorded but undetected. For the sake of complete transparency we consider this is to be good practice.

Out-of-court disposals

In Northern Ireland out-of-court disposals include Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs)⁶ and discretionary disposals⁷. In line with national guidance⁸ only certain offenders may be offered out-of-court disposals (for example, previous offending may mean an out-of-court disposal is not appropriate). Cautions can only be administered if approved by the PPS and cannabis warnings are not used in Northern Ireland.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 25 PND disposals, and found that in all 25 cases the offender had been told the implications of the notice. In 13 cases there was evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered. In all cases we considered that the offender was suitable for this means of disposal.

PNDs can only be issued to those over 18 years old who have no, or limited, previous history of offending and not had another PND within the last 12 months. Although all PNDs we examined were given to offenders who met these criteria, we found in some cases that there was no evidence of PNC checks having been undertaken or any action taken to ascertain the offender's criminal record or lack of it.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Discretionary disposals – a non-court diversion for low level offences similar to community resolutions disposals in England and Wales

⁸ National guidance for the use of penalty notices for disorder is detailed in the *Home Office Police Operational Guidance for Penalty Notices for Disorder*, March 2005. Available from www.justice.gov.uk

Discretionary disposals – Discretionary disposals provide an alternative to formal criminal justice processes in minor crimes where the victim agrees to this approach and the offender admits responsibility for the crime. Subject to the professional judgement of the police officer, a proportionate outcome should be agreed which resolves the matter to the satisfaction of the victim. This outcome could involve an apology and, in appropriate cases, payment for any damage caused. The offender must also agree to the discretionary disposal which is deemed complete when the victim confirms that any obligation placed upon the offender by the discretionary disposal has been completed. Information on the use of discretionary disposals is available on the PSNI website.⁹

We took a dip-sample of 20 discretionary disposals. We found evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered in 14 out of 15 cases where there was an identifiable victim. The offender was suitable for the disposal in 19 out of the 20 files examined, but we found evidence in only 2 of the 20 cases that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. In 12 cases the discretionary disposal was appropriate for the type of crime that had been committed. In the eight cases where the discretionary disposal was not considered appropriate, either the file was not clear what the discretionary element of the disposal was or this outcome was not considered suitable for the type of offence committed. We were concerned that this means of disposal could be used as an informal caution.

PNDs and discretionary disposals are audited by a joint PSNI/PPS group that looks at ten percent of disposals selected at random. This group should apply more rigour to its process and ensure it looks at all aspects of both PNDs and discretionary disposals to ensure they are being used and applied in accordance with both local and national guidelines. It would also be beneficial if a larger sample was selected.

Recommendation 6

Not later than 30 April 2015, the joint PSNI/PPS group that examines PNDs and discretionary disposals should review its process to ensure more rigour is applied and that its approach is more risk-based to ensure all aspects of local and national guidance are adhered to when using these means of disposal.

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 usually on the basis of additional verifiable information (AVI). We examined 45 no-crime records and found 44 records to be compliant with HOCCR and NCRS. This review was of no-crime decisions for robbery, violence and rape offences.

⁹ www.psnipolice.uk/discretionary_disposals.pdf

All no-crime decisions are taken centrally by the FCR in the statistics branch. There is a very robust, independent process in place which is highly effective. The only anomaly was a complex case of rape where concerns about the victim's credibility were (incorrectly) deemed sufficient to no-crime. The investigation had been thorough and the no-crime review was comprehensive; the only issue was a misinterpretation of the meaning of additional verifiable information.

Victim-centred approach

The PSNI promotes and displays a victim-centred approach to crime recording. Despite there being no overarching crime-recording policy, the need to be victim-focused is well established and was confirmed during reality testing. The PSNI is also becoming more victim focused in relation to outcomes with the introduction of discretionary disposals. The audit examined 45 no-crime decisions and found that the victim had been told of the decision in 39 cases. It was also apparent that out of the 481 incidents that we listened to during the audit, we considered that the operator had been polite, professional and helpful in 480 incidents.

Victims' satisfaction is assessed as part of the overall standards of service which the PSNI will deliver to the people of Northern Ireland as outlined in their 'Commitments'¹⁰. The assessment takes the form of call-backs to victims or more formal surveys. These are undertaken by both the PSNI and NIPB.

Rape offences

The PSNI does not have a specific policy on dealing with rape but rather a comprehensive service procedure document entitled, 'Investigating Sexual Crime - Standard Operating Guidelines'. This was issued in April 2014. The document is very victim-focused and is also clear about the steps to take to record allegations as crimes. The guidelines are also explicit about the initial response expected from officers. Allegations of rape in Northern Ireland are investigated by a central rape crime unit (RCU) in those cases involving adults and/or the child abuse investigation unit, where the victim was under 18 at the time of the offence. Reality testing confirmed that despite not necessarily being aware of the new guidelines, officers and staff had a comprehensive understanding of their role in recording a rape crime.

The audit identified that of the eleven incidents identified as sexual offences, eight sexual offences and two rapes crimes were recorded and classified correctly. The one missed crime was a crime of rape. However, this case would have been subsequently no-crime so it was a technical failure only.

¹⁰ Commitments – a series of standards of service promised by PSNI to the public of Northern Ireland and titled 'The Commitments' 2011 / 2012

Examination of the 46 safeguarding crimes referred from other agencies directly to the PPU showed that of the 7 crimes missed, 4 were sexual offences and one was a missed crime of historical rape.

Any no-crime decision for rape can only be taken by the FCR who is completely independent and removed from the investigation. The audit identified that of the 11 rape no-crime decisions examined, 10 were deemed to be correct. Decisions to no-crime for rape are made in compliance with HOCR criteria.

We found, during both reality testing and interviews, that there was confusion about dealing with allegations of rape that had occurred in another police area or jurisdiction but where the victim was resident or temporarily resident in Northern Ireland. There is no mention of this in the service procedure. This is an area that requires more clarity (see recommendation 7, page 13).

IT systems

All crimes within Northern Ireland are recorded on the PSNI Niche records management system (RMS) which links to the Atlas command and control system. This includes all crimes dealt with by PPUs and the RCU. There is an interface between Atlas and Niche which allows for the transfer of data direct from the command and control system to the crime-recording system within 90 seconds of the creation of the incident; this greatly assists in the overall crime-recording process.

People and skills

Crime recording in the PSNI is a very structured process with numerous checks and levels of validation undertaken in centralised units. This process, involving occurrence case management teams (OCMT) and the crime management support units (CMSU) with final validation by the statistics branch, delivers accurate crime recording and classifications. We were impressed by the level of knowledge within these units of both NCRS and the HOCR. This process means that operational staff do not need the same understanding of NCRS and the HOCR as officers in police forces that adopt a different process. We found no evidence that the knowledge of NCRS and the HOCR was anything other than appropriate for their roles.

The PSNI has sufficient resources for the current model of crime recording and incident management, but the challenge in the future will be to maintain the same high standards in the face of significant budgetary pressures.

Reality testing confirmed that the level of knowledge about AVI among inspectors and sergeants in the OCMT, CMSU and PPU could be improved, and the PSNI would benefit if scenario-based training or advice was provided to these key staff in specialist units.

Recommendation 7

Not later than 30 September 2015, the PSNI should arrange scenario-based training on additional verifiable information for all sergeants and inspectors in OCMT, CMSU and PPU.

We found no evidence of staff, of whatever rank, being put under any pressure (implicit or explicit) to under record or mis-record crime. There was no evidence that officers or staff lack integrity or are unethical in the way in which they record crime. Supervisors and managers were viewed as being supportive and encouraging of accurate crime recording.

The PSNI has no dedicated post of FCR. The head of the statistics branch undertakes this function. This individual is employed by the NISRA and, as such, is totally independent of the PSNI, albeit he has been in post since 2002. There is added value in this arrangement as he is able to undertake the role of FCR effectively and with total independence but can also add a statistics dimension to any analysis. Due to the longevity of the posting, he and his staff can also apply a level of consistency not always apparent in police forces in England and Wales.

The FCR, supported by other trained independent personnel in the branch, has responsibility for ensuring NCRS and the HOCR are consistently applied. The FCR is the final arbiter in all disputes relating to crime recording or no-crime classifications. He and his team have the total support of chief officers and the individual in particular is held in high regard with his views and counsel welcomed by the senior executive team.

Recommendations

Not later than 30 April 2015:

- The PSNI should reinforce the need for timely crime recording within the 72-hour limit and ensure that quality assurance checks and audits consider and report on the timeliness of crime recording as well as the accuracy.
- The PSNI should review any historic sexual abuse inquiries currently being undertaken to ensure the accuracy of crime recording given the likelihood of there being a large number of victims and offenders.
- The joint PSNI/PPS group that examines PNDs and discretionary disposals should review its process to ensure more rigour is applied and that its approach is more risk-based to ensure all aspects of local and national guidance is adhered to when using these means of disposal.

Not later than 30 June 2015:

- The PSNI should adopt a more comprehensive methodology when assessing each crime-recording decision, judging the whole incident from the initial call to victim feedback at the conclusion.
- The PSNI should undertake a review of crime-recording policies to reassure itself that there is a corporate approach to the recording of key crime categories across all districts and branches.
- The PSNI should provide guidance to officers and staff so that they can deal appropriately with reports of crime that occur in another jurisdiction or police force, but where the victim either resides or is temporarily resident in Northern Ireland, this should include specific reference to the offence of rape.
- The PSNI should arrange scenario-based training or advice on additional verifiable information for all sergeants and inspectors in OCMT, CMSU and PPU.

Part B: Audit findings in numbers

The examination of records in the PSNI will not be used as part of the England and Wales audit.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in the PSNI. 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 the PSNI recorded the following number of crimes.
481	474	459
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to the PSNI and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that the PSNI should have recorded.	From these identified crimes the PSNI recorded the following number of crimes.
50	46	39
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which the PSNI had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
45	44	

Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings

Our detailed findings are set out against three headings: leadership and governance, systems and processes, and people and skills.

Leadership and governance

1 Does the PSNI 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 the PSNI ensuring that leadership responsibilities and expectations for crime data integrity are clearly defined and unambiguously communicated to staff?

There is an acceptance within the PSNI of the need for external scrutiny, but this far exceeds that of any other police force in England and Wales. As a result all officers and staff know they can be questioned and asked to justify their actions at any time. This environment, coupled with an effective crime-recording process, including several layers of scrutiny and validation that was introduced by chief officers in 2010 following the 'R4 Project', has resulted in a culture whereby ethical and accurate crime recording is viewed as the 'norm' or as one interviewee said, 'it's the way we do business in Northern Ireland'.

The chief officer lead for crime data integrity is the ACC operational support who is separate from the performance structure in place to hold district commanders to account. The current incumbent is relatively new in role but this post has, over recent years, been the driving force behind the significant changes in the crime-recording and case management processes. The current ACC established a crime recording working group in May 2014 to take action on all recommendations made in internal or external audits of crime recording.

The crime-recording process is now well embedded in the PSNI and the need for frequent messages from chief officers to drive cultural change has passed. If there is a requirement to notify officers and staff of changes to the process, for example in the recording of the offence of making off without payment, this is communicated by the head of the statistics branch or other staff. Messages sent out from chief officers on other subjects have been received and understood. We found no evidence of performance pressures of any kind influencing crime recording.

There is a confidential reporting line, 'Safecall', for all anonymous reports, not only issues relating to crime recording. This is monitored by the professional standards department and chief officers would be made aware of any concerns about crime recording. It was apparent during the inspection that officers and staff felt confident that should they have any concerns in relation to crime recording, they could raise the matter with supervisors or line managers rather than use Safecall.

The need for ethical and accurate crime recording is well embedded and, while there is no overarching crime-recording policy, officers and staff are aware that advice on NCRS and the HOCR is available on the PSNI intranet. The need for accurate and ethical crime recording does not feature in the NIPB Policing Plan 2014–2017, although there are numerical crime reduction targets and targets for outcomes relating to certain crime types such as racist or sectarian hate crime.

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

At the start of 2014, significant work was undertaken to review the risks to the organisation, and the need for accurate crime recording now features on the risk register. The service is well aware of the risk to public confidence and the impact that can have on trust in the community if the PSNI is seen not to be recording crime accurately. The PSNI recognise the impact that poor data quality can have on effective problem solving and resource deployment. Chief officers are also acutely aware of the budgetary pressures the organisation faces in the future, and the need to ensure that the consequent reductions in staff do not undermine the high levels of accuracy that are currently a feature of crime recording in Northern Ireland.

The service has fully assessed its key crime categories and, as a result, is planning to restructure its approach to public protection. This is a significant area of concern in Northern Ireland, and the service is not only dedicating resource to this area but is also well aware of the crime-recording risks associated with all aspects of PPU work.

While there is a standard data input for all crimes, there is evidence that more serious crimes require - and receive - more extensive information, in particular in the MO¹¹ field. This was evident in the contact centres where call-handlers use a short crime report that contains all the necessary information for a minor crime, whereas for more serious crime, such as reports of rape, there is a more extensive set of questions and more information is gathered before the investigation phase.

The PSNI understands the various channels through which crime is reported. These have been identified as emergency and non-emergency calls, direct to an officer or local enquiry desk, via the force email and internet site or from a third party (this is unique to the PPU units). All reports have to be recorded on the Niche system and, as such, there is effective case management and the capability for corporate analysis of demands via the different routes into the organisation.

Some elements of the call-handling process in the PSNI are outsourced to Noonans (formerly Resource). Call-handling and some despatch functions are delivered by the private sector organisation although ex-police officers are employed for some despatch functions. No private sector staff are involved in recording crime.

¹¹ MO - 'modus operandi', which describes how a crime is committed.

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

There is a unique situation in Northern Ireland with the PSNI not only having a statistics branch, but also with the key posts in that branch being filled by independent personnel employed by the NISRA. This statistical approach is evident in the type and style of audits undertaken.

The crime-recording process in the PSNI has numerous checks and validation processes built in to the system and statistical audits are also undertaken. One such process was the 'Recorded Crime Data Quality Audit' undertaken between December 2013 and January 2014. This was a comprehensive statistical audit that was reported to the resource, demand and risk committee (RDRC)¹² in February 2014; the committee responded by instigating various activities as a result of the audit findings, one of which was the establishment of the crime recording working group.

It was apparent from the inspection that while there are numerous statistical audits undertaken and an annual audit of incidents to crimes, the methodology used, while statistically based, does not cover an assessment of the incident 'from cradle to grave'. The audit methodology for this area of business needs to retain the statistical dimension but be more comprehensive. This would include listening to the original call, identifying the number of crimes that should be recorded and then tracking the crime report through to conclusion with subsequent contact with the victim to ascertain what they were told.

Audits can be undertaken in the PSNI as a result of emerging issues or themes, and it is also apparent that the use of opening and closing codes or the application of NCRS and the HOCR does not in any way inhibit the effectiveness of these audits.

¹² RDRC sits just below the senior executive team (SET) and looks at a range of risks across the organisation.

Systems and processes

2 Does the PSNI 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 the PSNI effectively manage and supervise incidents, other reporting routes and crime records in order to ensure that crimes are correctly recorded?

The PSNI has adopted a corporate model for occurrence case management that includes checks and validation at various stages and this has proved very effective. A non emergency report of crime is first logged on the customer relationship management system (CRMS) to determine previous caller history and vulnerability - this was introduced in 2012. The call is then logged on the Atlas command and control system when a decision is taken about deployment. Emergency calls are recorded directly onto Atlas. The details of the incident pass direct to the Niche case management and crime-recording system.

In the case of a report of crime requiring deployment, the officers will contact the CMSU; staff from the unit will then input details of the crime onto Niche and check with the officer if all the necessary information has been obtained. In those incidents not deemed necessary for deployment either straight away or by diary appointment, the call is passed direct to the CMSU where staff will record sufficient details from the member of the public to record the crime.

Once the details of the crime are complete, the report passes to the OCMT which checks that all NCRS and HOCR requirements have been fulfilled. A further layer of scrutiny and validation occurs when the crime is finally passed to staff in the statistics branch who provide a final layer of independent scrutiny.

We examined 481 incident records¹³ and found that of 474 crimes should have been recorded, the PSNI recorded 459. This represents a crime-recording accuracy rate of 97 percent with a confidence interval of less than +/- 5 percent. Of the 459 crimes recorded, 448 were correctly classified (98 percent) while 385 (84 percent) were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

¹³ 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 incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

We examined 50 safeguarding reports that are referred from other agencies directly to PSNI's specialist departments, primarily the PPU. We found that out of the 50 reports, 46 crimes should have been recorded and the service recorded 39. Of the 39 crimes recorded, all 39 were classified correctly but only 26 were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR.

The audit identified limited evidence of any supervisory input on the crime records examined; only 20 out of 481 incidents examined. However we were satisfied, on further examination, that there was indeed a supervisory process but this did not always manifest itself on the relevant logs. There is good supervisory overview in both the CMSU and OCMT.

All crimes in Northern Ireland are recorded on the PSNI Niche crime-recording system.

We were impressed with the knowledge of staff and the working practices in both the CMSU and OCMT. There was a thorough understanding of the importance of accurate crime recording and an understanding of the legislation.

The timeliness of crime recording was an area of concern with 35 crimes in the primary audit exceeding 7 days before they were recorded as a crime. In the PPU audit, 11 of the 39 crimes recorded were not recorded for over 7 days. The PSNI needs to reinforce the need for timely crime recording and ensure that this aspect is considered in all quality assurance checks and audits and effectively reported.

The recording of the offence of 'making off without payment' specifically in relation to petrol filling stations has been subject to clarification by the Home Office in April 2014, and an email containing both the counting rules for this offence and an explanation of the AVI needed to no-crime a report was circulated to staff within the PSNI. From an examination of the data for this offence in each district it was apparent that there was considerable variation across Northern Ireland in the way this offence was being recorded. The new guidelines have reinforced the need for a corporate approach to this offence. We were concerned that other offences may also be dealt with in different ways in different districts given the degree of autonomy that has been apparent within the PSNI in the past. A review therefore needs to be undertaken to check for disparities between districts in the way they record key crime categories.

The inspection of police forces in England and Wales has identified that many are currently investigating historic sexual abuse cases. These can involve numerous victims and many offenders from just one establishment. We have found that in many instances, police forces were not accurately recording the correct number of offences in accordance with HOCR. This was primarily due to a lack of knowledge of HOCR within the investigation team but also a lack of appropriate scrutiny from the relevant FCR. Where this was apparent it has now been addressed. There are similar inquiries taking place in Northern Ireland and we found a lack of clarity on

how many offences could or should be recorded as this relied on the knowledge of HOOCR amongst the investigating team. The PSNI should review these inquiries to ensure that correct numbers of crimes are being recorded.

In the absence of a crime-recording policy we could find no guidance that advised officers and staff what they should do in the event that a victim, resident either permanently or temporarily in Northern Ireland, reports a crime that occurred in another police area or jurisdiction. It was also apparent from reality testing that there was some confusion around this issue. There needs to be clarity so that the needs of the victim are made paramount.

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

Out-of-court disposals

In Northern Ireland out-of-court disposals include PNDs and discretionary disposals. The process is designed to be victim and offender focused while providing a suitable and quick outcome. Officers are encouraged to use a common sense approach to these disposals but in the absence of strict corporate guidance, there will be a lack of corporacy across Northern Ireland.

In line with national guidance, only certain offenders may be offered out-of-court disposals (for example, previous offending may mean an out-of-court disposal is not appropriate). Cautions can only be administered if approved by the PPS and cannabis warnings are not used. Discretionary disposals are to be re-launched by the service in 2015 with greater clarity for operational staff.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 25 PND disposals and found that in all 25 cases, the offender had been told the implications of the notice. The form used in Northern Ireland contains this information. In 13 cases there was evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered; in all cases we considered that the offender was suitable for this means of disposal.

PNDs can only be issued to those over 18 years old who have no, or limited, previous history of offending and not had another PND within the last 12 months. In some cases there was no evidence of PNC checks having been undertaken or any action taken to ascertain the offender's criminal record or lack of it, and in some cases the PNDs were issued for an inappropriate offence.

Discretionary disposals – We took a dip-sample of 20 discretionary disposals. In 15 cases where there was a victim we found evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered in 14. The offender was suitable for the disposal in 19 out of 20 files examined, and in 12 cases the disposal was appropriate for the crime. In the eight cases where the discretionary disposal was not considered appropriate, either the file was not clear about what the discretionary element of the disposal was or this outcome was not considered suitable for the offence.

In 2 out of the 20 cases there was evidence that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal.

PNDs and discretionary disposals are audited by a joint PSNI/PPS group that looks at ten percent of disposals selected at random. This group should apply more rigour to its process and ensure it looks at all aspects of both PNDs and discretionary disposals to ensure they are being used and applied in accordance with both local and national guidelines. It would also be beneficial if a larger sample was selected.

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

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 AVI. We examined 45 no-crime records and found 44 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. This review consisted of robbery, violence and rape offences.

All no-crime decisions are submitted to the OCMT. Staff review the cases and provide advice and guidance but the ultimate decision is taken centrally by the FCR in the statistics branch. This is a very robust, independent process which is highly effective. The only anomaly was a complex case of rape where the investigation had been thorough and the no-crime review was comprehensive. The only issue was an isolated misinterpretation of the meaning of AVI where concerns about the credibility of the victim were considered sufficient to no-crime the report of rape.

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

The PSNI promotes and displays a victim-centred approach to crime recording. This was particularly apparent in the investigation of rape offences. Despite there being no overarching crime-recording policy, the need to be victim focused is well established and was confirmed during reality testing. An area of weakness in the past, as confirmed by numerous surveys, has been in the follow-up investigation and keeping the victim informed. The service is seeking to address this through the new case progression teams. Within these units victim update targets are set at 10, 30 and 75 days with supervisors responsible for checking if victims have received the appropriate update by the date set.

The PSNI is also becoming more victim focused in dealing with outcomes, with the introduction of discretionary disposals. The audit examined 45 no-crime decisions and found that the victim had been told of the decision in 39 cases. It was also apparent that out of the 481 incidents that we listened to during the audit, we considered that the operator had been polite, professional and helpful in 480 incidents.

Victims' satisfaction is assessed as part of the 'Commitments' initiative and takes the form of call-backs to victims or more formal surveys. These are undertaken by both the PSNI and NIPB and include the Northern Ireland Crime Survey undertaken by the Department of Justice (DoJ), victim's satisfaction survey (PSNI), Omnibus Survey (NIPB) and victim call-back data (PSNI). In the latter, up to 200 individuals per month are surveyed with the results being fed back to the organisation at a senior level.

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

The PSNI does not have a specific policy on dealing with rape but rather a comprehensive service procedure document entitled, 'Investigating Sexual Crime - Standard Operating Guidelines'. This was issued in April 2014 and is available on the intranet although reality testing confirmed that not all staff were aware that the guidelines were available. The document is very victim focused and is also clear about the steps to take when recording allegations as crimes. The guidelines are also explicit about the initial response expected from officers. Allegations of rape in Northern Ireland are investigated by the central RCU for those cases involving adults and stranger rapes on children; the PPU deals with other rapes of children. Reality testing confirmed that despite not necessarily being aware of the new guidelines, officers and staff had a comprehensive understanding of their roles in recording a rape crime.

There is a sexual assault referral centre (SARC) called The Rowan Centre which provides a 'one-stop' location for all victims of sexual assault and is located in the grounds of Antrim hospital. The PSNI understands the totality of rape allegations and the central RCU co-ordinates all statistical data on rape. The audit identified that out of the 11 incidents identified as sexual offences, 8 sexual offences and 2 rape crimes were recorded and classified correctly. The one missed crime was a crime of rape. Examination of the 46 safeguarding crimes referred from other agencies directly to the PPU showed that of the 7 crimes missed, 4 were sexual offences and one was a missed crime of historical rape.

Any no-crime decision for rape can only be taken by the FCR who is totally independent and removed from the investigation. The audit identified that of the 11 no-crime decisions examined, 10 were deemed to be correct. Decisions to no-crime rapes are made in compliance with HOCR criteria.

We found, during both reality testing and interviews, that there was confusion around dealing with allegations of rape that had occurred in another police area or jurisdiction, but where the victim was resident, or temporarily resident, in Northern Ireland. There is no mention in the service procedure. This is an area that requires more clarity.

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

All crimes within Northern Ireland are recorded on the PSNI Niche RMS which links to the Atlas command and control system. This includes all crimes dealt with by PPU and the RCU. There is an interface between Atlas and Niche which allows for the transfer of data direct from the command and control system to the crime-recording system within 90 seconds of the creation of the incident; this greatly assists in the overall crime-recording process. Both systems are 'owned' at ACC level but day to day management of the system is undertaken by Information and Communications Services branch (ICS). The systems are well managed and capable of appropriate audit and weeding, although in Northern Ireland all data are retained. Proportionate auditing and quality checks of both systems take place.

People and skills

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

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

Crime recording in the PSNI is a very structured process with numerous checks and levels of validation undertaken in centralised units. This process, involving OCMTs and the CMSU with final validation by the statistics branch, delivers accurate crime recording, classifications and no-crime decisions. We were impressed by the level of knowledge within these units of both NCRS and the HOCC. Staff in all the units are available to give advice and guidance to all officers and staff; this means that the level of knowledge of NCRS and the HOCC among patrol officers and detectives does not need to be as high as in other police forces in England and Wales that adopt a different process to record crime. We found no evidence that the knowledge of NCRS and the HOCC was anything other than appropriate for their roles.

The PSNI has sufficient resources for the current model of crime recording and incident management but the challenge in the future will be to maintain the same high standards in the face of significant budgetary pressures.

Specialist staff, notably in the RCU, have their own OCMT and can refer to knowledgeable staff in that unit for advice and guidance about crime recording. Similarly, staff in the professional standards unit (PSD) refer to one of the OCMTs when the need arises to record a crime.

Reality testing confirmed that the level of knowledge among inspectors and sergeants in the OCMT, CMSU and PPU could be improved around their understanding of AVI, and the PSNI would benefit if scenario-based training or advice was provided to these key staff in specialist units.

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

It was clear from reality testing that officers and staff clearly understand the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of them around crime recording.

We found no evidence of staff, of whatever rank, being put under any pressure - explicit or implied - to under record or misrecord crime, or that officers or staff lack integrity or are unethical in the way in which they record crime.

Supervisors and managers were viewed as being supportive and encouraged accurate crime recording; as one interviewee said, "it is better to record it and no-crime afterwards". There could be challenges to the classification of a crime, but ultimately there was an acceptance that staff in the OCMT knew their business. Any serious challenge would be referred to the statistics branch to adjudicate.

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

The PSNI has no dedicated post of FCR and the head of the statistics branch undertakes this function. This individual is employed by the NISRA and, as such, is totally independent of the PSNI, albeit he has been in this post since 2002. The added value is that not only is he able to undertake the role of FCR effectively and with total independence but he can also add a statistics dimension to any analysis. Due the longevity of the posting, he and his staff can apply a level of consistency not always apparent in police forces in England and Wales.

The FCR, supported by other trained independent personnel, has responsibility for ensuring NCRS and the HOOCR are consistently applied. He has responsibility for specific audits of crime data integrity and also has a key role in the overall crime-recording process in Northern Ireland. All crimes are validated by the OCMT and dip-sampled by the statistics branch (FCR). Only the FCR or his staff can designate that an allegation should be classified as no-crime. All crime outcomes are validated by the statistics branch. There are sufficient resources to undertake the role but future budgetary pressures may have an impact on this ability.

The FCR is the final arbiter in all disputes about crime recording or no-crime classifications. He and his team have the total support of chief officers and the individual in particular is held in high regard. His views and counsel are welcomed by the senior executive team.