

Crime data integrity

Inspection of Staffordshire Police

November 2014

© HMIC 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78246-548-5

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.....	12
Part B: Audit findings in numbers	13
Part C: Additional detailed inspection findings.....	14
Leadership and governance	14
Systems and processes.....	17
People and skills.....	22

Introduction

In its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) committed to carry out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. All 43 forces were inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Each force inspection involves:

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

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

Scope and structure of report

This report is divided into the following sections:

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

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

Part A: Summary of inspection findings, and recommendations

Leadership and governance

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the named officer responsible for crime data quality. She is supported by her chief officer colleagues in communicating a clear and consistent message on the importance of accurate and ethical crime recording. This message has been received. Staff understand clearly that effective victim care demands that crimes are properly recorded and that truly accurate crime data are essential to sound operational decision making.

Since September 2013, the force has not had numerical targets for crime reduction. There is still a focus on reducing crime but this is balanced against the need to behave with integrity and to do the right thing for victims. As a consequence of the removal of strict targets, there is no pressure to record crime unethically or inaccurately. Staff are supported and have confidence to report concerns about ethics or integrity. A confidential reporting line exists for staff to bring wrongdoing to notice.

The desire to maintain integrity within crime recording is highlighted in relevant force policies and is reflected within the policing and crime plan 2013-18. It is supported by the police and crime commissioner (PCC).

The force identifies the crimes that pose greatest risk in terms of inaccurate recording and an audit programme has been structured to reflect these themes. Audits are extensive and the results are used to drive improvement and organisational learning. Currently, auditing is confined to the review of records stored on computer systems or paper files. This may not capture information on how the specific needs of individuals are being met, particularly when they report crime that is not subsequently recorded. Widening the scope of audits, for example, by including 'call-backs' to those who report crime that is not subsequently recorded as such by police may provide greater reassurance that the decision making and justification for not recording a report of crime are sound.

The force recognises and understands the routes through which crime is reported. As well as systems for incident recording, crime recording and management, the force uses a system called Guardian to record third party reports of incidents received from partner agencies. From our auditing, and that by the force itself, it is clear that some incidents that amount to crime and which are reported through this system do not always get recorded on the force's crime recording system. While this is not an indication of a lack of thorough investigation, it does result in an under-recording of crime. The force has recognised this risk and has introduced some additional auditing of the system to assess compliance with NCRS and the HOOR.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should formalise the inclusion of the auditing of third party reports recorded on the force Guardian system within its wider audit programme so as to ensure reports of crime are being recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS.

Systems and processes

Accuracy of crime recording

We examined 131 incident records⁶ and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 113 were recorded. Of the 113, one was wrongly classified and 15 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under NCRS and the HOCR. This suggests that the force has strong systems in place to ensure reported crime is recorded; however some improvement could be made in the timeliness of crime recording decisions.

The force does not have a centralised crime recording unit to record reports of crime directly from members of the public without the creation of an incident record.

Within the force control room there is accurate and precise transfer of information to the incident management log on the command and control system, STORM. Operators are subject to regular monitoring by their supervisors.

There is a clear and detailed policy and procedural guidance on crime recording that is made available to staff through the force intranet. The policy includes a clear process for the transfer of crime both into Staffordshire Police from other forces and out to other forces by Staffordshire Police. Where a crime is not recorded following a report from a member of the public, the decision maker is expected to include a detailed rationale before the incident log is closed as a crime-related incident⁷. This is reviewed and supported by supervision from the control room staff and by first line supervisors.

The force has systems to ensure that crime records are populated with sufficient detail at the time of recording and that they are correctly classified. We

⁶ An incident in this context is a report of events received by the police, recorded on the electronic incident systems, that requires police attention. Whether or not an incident report becomes a crime record is determined on the balance of probability that a notifiable offence has occurred as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules. If an incident does not turn out to be a crime, it must still be logged in an auditable form on the force's incident-recording system or some other accessible or auditable means.

⁷ A crime related incident is an incident which on the balance of probabilities would amount to a crime but it has not been recorded as the alleged victim can't be found or won't confirm a crime, it is being dealt with by another force, or it is under another HOCR rule where no crime needs to be recorded.

found that much of the force's success in terms of crime recording accuracy rests on the fact that they have a centralised crime administration unit to input, validate, classify and close crime records. This ensures that quality is maintained.

We also examined 55 reports that were recorded separately on the Guardian system. We found that of those 55 reports, 43 crimes should have been recorded and 29 were recorded. Of the 29 crimes, none was wrongly classified and one was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under the NCRS and the HOCR.

Some under-recording of crime from reports within the Guardian system has been found from our audit and through audits carried out by the force itself. The force has recently introduced new procedures and has posted a dedicated staff member within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to address this situation as it affects referrals from partner agencies for child protection issues. This appears to have led to improvements in crime recording but, at the time of the inspection, these changes had not yet been reflected across all the areas managed by the MASH, such as those involving vulnerable adults.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should ensure that the new systems and processes introduced within the MASH to secure HOCR and NCRS compliance, in respect of reports of crime which form part of child abuse referrals made by partner organisations, are mirrored for vulnerable adult and other cases received within the MASH.

Recommendation: Immediately, the force should undertake an historical audit of third party referral records contained within the Guardian system to scope the full extent of any problems relating to the under-recording of crimes, ensuring that any reports of crime that have not been recorded as crimes, and the outcomes of the investigations into these crimes, are recorded in accordance with the HOCR and NCRS.

Out-of-court disposals

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 19 cases the offender’s previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 18 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 13 cases where there was a victim to consult, 2 showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that in 19 cases, the offender was suitable for the issue of a penalty notice and in all cases that they had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting it. Out of the six cases where there was a victim to consult, all showed that the victims’ views had been considered.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In 14 cases the offender had been warned fully about the implications of accepting the warning.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 cases the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender’s past history still justified the use of the community resolution. In one case it was unclear what the resolution actually comprised and whether this was meaningful and appropriate¹². Out of the 20 resolutions where there

⁸ A form of immediate financial punishment used by police to deal with low-level offending such as being drunk and disorderly, retail theft, and minor criminal damage.

⁹ A cannabis warning is a non-statutory disposal for cases of possession of cannabis for personal use. It constitutes a warning to the offender and confiscation of the cannabis.

¹⁰ Resolution of a minor offence or anti-social behaviour incident through informal agreement between the parties involved, for example involving the offender making good the loss or damage caused.

¹¹ National guidance for the use of out-of-court disposals is detailed in a number of documents:

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

¹² National guidance for community resolution directs that at the point the community resolution is administered an officer will need to confirm the offender admits the offence and explain the process to the offender – including how the offender will make good the harm caused. The implications of receiving a community resolution need to be explained to the offender – it does

was a victim, 13 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 resolutions, 15 showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

Policy on the use of out-of-court disposal options is included within the force's crime recording policy. This is clear and detailed. The authorisation by a supervisor is required before an out-of-court disposal option is applied. These disposals are routinely audited by the crime closure team to ensure compliance with the national guidelines.

Force policy on out-of-court disposals makes clear that the needs of the victim are important but that these should be balanced with a proportionate investigative response to the criminal act. The policy requires that the victim should be kept updated and informed of the outcome. Since April 2014, new recording forms have been introduced to ensure this happens and compliance with national guidelines forms part of the auditing process.

The force has set up a restorative justice oversight group to ensure independent oversight and scrutiny of community resolutions.

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 that all were compliant with NCRS and the HOCR. This is an excellent outcome and demonstrates a good application of the NCRS in respect of no-crimes.

Only six individuals within the force are authorised to make no-crime decisions and their responsibilities are set out in the force crime recording policy and procedural guidance. A significant proportion of decisions are dip-sampled and audited by the force crime registrar¹³ (FCR) to ensure compliance.

There is independence for no-crime decision making and there is no involvement of staff connected either to the case investigation or who are held accountable for force performance. Operational staff and investigators recognise the robustness of the process for authorising no-crimes and ensure that requests are thoroughly prepared and capable of withstanding rigorous challenge.

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.

¹³ 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.

Victim-centred approach

The importance of, and need for, a victim-centred approach is reflected in the police and crime plan 2013–18, and the force’s crime recording policy and procedural guidance. This has been effectively reinforced through messages from chief officers. Victim notification is audited on a regular basis and additional guidance has been provided to support operational staff.

Within the force control room, operators taking calls from the public were very aware of the importance of assessing the needs of victims. A number of ‘question sets’ exist to support decision making on threat, risk and harm. Where victims do not speak English or are otherwise unable to communicate, facilities exist to provide the necessary support.

The force routinely carries out surveys of victims of crime and the results of these are fed back to operational staff. However, current surveys only capture the views of victims of recorded crime; it would be beneficial for the force also to understand the experience of those people contacting the force whose service requirements did not result in the recording of a crime.

Rape offences

The force has policy and procedural guidance for dealing with reports of rape and serious sexual offences and the recording of crime in accordance with NCRS and the HOCR. This includes offences reported by third parties and the transfer of crime in and out of the force. Reality testing within the force suggests that the policy and procedural guidance for rape and serious sexual offences is clearly understood by operational staff.

Reports of rape and serious sexual offences are audited by the FCR to ensure that crimes are correctly recorded on the crime recording system. All offences are investigated by specialist officers within the protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) unit.

All requests for no-crime decisions in cases of rape or serious sexual offences are dealt with by either the FCR or the force crime manager (FCM). Decisions are supported by a detailed rationale and only made after full access to relevant case files.

IT systems

The force maintains a number of different computer systems. There is some linking for the purpose of crime recording but otherwise there is limited sharing of data between systems. This situation not only presents a risk in terms of under-recording crime as highlighted by the Guardian system, but may also result in the loss of intelligence. The number of systems also gives rise to a need for multiple logging in, significant double keying and duplicate entries.

The force recognises it has a problem with its disparate IT systems. However, given that there may be specific benefits offered to users by a particular system, there is unlikely to be an opportunity for short-term change. The force is currently investigating the modernisation and updating of its IT and this will be an ideal opportunity to rationalise its various systems.

People and skills

In general, the level of knowledge among staff of NCRS and the HOOCR is good. There is a good professional relationship between the FCR, the FCM and colleagues within the crime administration unit (CAU). Where gaps in knowledge have been identified, additional training has been provided. Formal training days for control room staff have been used to provide updates on issues around crime recording.

Knowledge among staff responsible for reviewing and validating crime reports is good. This is reflected in the quality of the records we audited and the accuracy of crime classifications. The force only authorises a very small number of decision makers in relation to no-crimes and it is therefore able to ensure that the knowledge of these individuals is current and appropriate.

The force has recently employed a very experienced and knowledgeable member of staff within the MASH to ensure the accuracy of crime recording processes and decisions. While this individual has clearly made a difference, the force needs to ensure there is resilience and that not all the knowledge rests in one person.

Recommendation: Within three months, the force should ensure that the number and training of decision makers and supervisors within the MASH reflects their important role in promoting NCRS and HOOCR compliance, while also ensuring resilience in the absence of key staff.

Staff are aware of key messages from the DCC and her chief officer colleagues on the standards of behaviour expected. The messages are reinforced in force policies and feature strongly in a number of posters which are on prominent display. We found no evidence that staff were under any pressure, implicitly or explicitly, not to record crime or to record it inappropriately against the requirements of NCRS or the HOOCR.

Force crime registrar

The FCR has the clear support and confidence of chief officers and is regarded as the final arbiter on crime recording decisions. He has unrestricted access to the chief officer lead. His role and responsibilities are clearly documented within the force crime recording policy and procedural guidance.

The FCR operates within a deliberate 'ethical corridor'. This ensures that his decision making is independent and not influenced by pressures within investigative/operational delivery.

Recommendations

Immediately

1. The force should formalise the inclusion of the auditing of third party reports recorded on the force Guardian system within its wider audit programme, so as to ensure reports of crime are being recorded in accordance with the HOOCR and NCRS.
2. The force should ensure that the new systems and processes introduced within the MASH to secure HOOCR and NCRS compliance, in respect of reports of crime which form part of child abuse referrals made by partner organisations, are mirrored for vulnerable adult and other cases received within the MASH.
3. The force should undertake an historical audit of third party referral records contained within the Guardian system to scope the full extent of any problems relating to the under-recording of crimes, ensuring that any reports of crime that have not been recorded as crimes, and the outcomes of the investigations into these crimes, are recorded in accordance with the HOOCR and NCRS.

Within three months

4. The force should ensure that the number and training of decision makers and supervisors within the MASH reflects their important role in promoting NCRS and HOOCR compliance, while also ensuring resilience in the absence of key staff.

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 Staffordshire Police. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes.	From these identified crimes Staffordshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
131	117	113
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Staffordshire Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime.	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Staffordshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Staffordshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
55	43	29
No-crimes		
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Staffordshire Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.	
88	88	

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

Within Staffordshire Police, the DCC is the chief officer lead for crime data integrity (CDI). The role of the DCC is highlighted within the force crime recording policy and a good number of the staff spoken to during the inspection were aware that she had this responsibility. Where staff were unable to name the chief officer responsible for CDI, they were able to identify the other nominated members of staff who support her in the role as well as the structures in place to ensure accurate and ethical crime recording.

The DCC undertakes her governance role through the information assurance board (IAB), which she chairs. This meeting, which is supported by data from internal audits of the crime recording function, reports to the police and crime commissioner's ethics transparency audit committee.

Messages from the DCC on the need for integrity and ethical crime recording have been clear. The requirement is highlighted in relevant force policies and procedures and has been communicated by direct meetings with the DCC herself and with other chief officers. At the time of the inspection, the chief constable had personally briefed about half of the force on the issues as part of his policing plan workshops. Posters, newsletters, emails and other documents are used to reinforce expectations. The importance of ethical crime recording and the force's stance on it feature highly in crime recording training sessions run by the force crime manager (FCM) and her team within the CAU. It was clear from our inspection that messages have been received by staff and are understood.

In September 2013 the force, with the support of the PCC, abolished all numerical targets for crime reduction. While there is still a focus on reducing crime, the emphasis is now on 'doing the right thing' and ensuring that ethical crime recording prevails over crime performance. The approach is reflected in the police and crime plan 2013-18, which makes clear that effective policing is not about the numbers of crimes recorded but the quality of service provided to the public.

There is a strong belief within the force that the removal of numerical targets has driven a cultural shift away from performance pressures that might encourage unethical behaviour.

While staff are encouraged to report wrongdoing in general, the force recognises that it could do more to ensure there is an understanding that this specifically includes the lack of integrity in the recording of crime. Staff are encouraged to report concerns in the first instance through supervisors but the force does have a system called 'Bad Apple' that enables confidential reporting. Bad Apple, which has not been used in the recent past for any ethical crime recording issues, can be accessed from the force's intranet and includes a password facility to ensure true anonymity. We found that there does appear to be good knowledge of these systems and staff have the confidence to make use of them. A recent staff survey carried out by Durham University on behalf of the force, and which had an exceptionally high return rate (64 percent), indicated that staff do have confidence in the force's reporting systems and are willing to report their concerns.

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

The force is aware of the various routes by which crime is reported. These include reports received by telephone from which an incident record is created and third party reporting through the MASH and Guardian system. There is no facility for the direct recording of crime outside the incident reporting system.

The force is also clearly aware of its key crime categories and the risks associated with under-recording in these areas. The areas of greatest risk currently include rape, serious sexual offences, violence and hate crime. The impact on public confidence that could result from poor quality recording is understood. Environmental scanning is used to identify future risks to the force.

The risks associated with the under-recording of crime from third party reports received through the MASH, and the recording of referrals from partner organisations on Guardian, have been identified by the force and new processes have been put in place in response. We conducted additional sampling of this system during our inspection and this revealed that while the situation may have improved in some areas such as child protection referrals, a risk of under-recording in other areas, such as reports of crime involving vulnerable adults, still exists.

To ensure that data are accurate and of sufficient quality, an audit programme has been published which is aligned to the force's identified risk areas. Those crimes which present the highest risk are audited in greater depth and in larger numbers than others. This ensures an appropriate level of confidence in terms of recording compliance against NCRS and the HOCA. The force's auditing of Guardian records has not been as robust as that applied to other systems.

This is recognised and the force has introduced additional measures to improve the efficacy of auditing these records.

There is no policy or procedural guidance that requires a proportionate approach to the level of detail included in crime records and, in practice, this is determined by the seriousness of the crime. However, there is a minimum level of detail necessary for all crime records and by their very nature, more serious crimes will tend to generate more information and involve more detail.

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

The force's audit schedule is detailed and extensive and makes use of relevant NCRS and HOCR provisions to assess compliance. Audits are linked to areas of risk in terms of their frequency and number of records reviewed. In addition, there is a range of thematic audits. The office of police and crime commissioner (OPCC) also undertakes its own independent audits of crime recording on behalf of the ethics transparency audit committee and these have been used to test compliance with NCRS and the HOCR.

The audit programme is flexible and can take account of emerging issues. Evidence of this flexibility can be seen in the recent requirement for additional auditing of reports of violent crime following concerns about the accuracy of relevant data. Regular auditing now takes place of all incident logs which are opened using a violence incident code but which do not result in a crime being recorded.

The results of auditing are used to inform discussion at the information assurance board (IAB) and drive improvement actions from this meeting. They are also embedded within the crime performance management review process. Individual failings are raised directly with relevant staff or through their supervisors. Identified trends in non-compliance are used to support additional training and guidance to staff. This has included specific presentations to custody staff on out-of-court disposal options and more general crime recording briefings to shift officers.

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

We examined 131 incident records and found that 117 crimes should have been recorded. Of the 117 crimes that should have been recorded, 113 were recorded. Of the 113, one was wrongly classified and 15 were recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under NCRS and the HOCR. This suggests that the force has strong systems in place to ensure reported crime is recorded; however some improvement could be made in the timeliness of crime recording decisions.

The force does not have a centralised crime recording unit that records reports of crime directly from members of the public without the creation of an incident record.

The audit revealed that control room operators were very engaging and empathetic with callers and that the transfer of information received to the incident management system log on STORM was accurate and precise; this is particularly important given that the information taken by the operator forms the basis of any resulting crime record. Call handing by control room operators is regularly monitored, both in live time and by dip-sampling recorded calls, in order to ensure that good performance is maintained.

The force crime recording policy and procedural guidance is very detailed and outlines the entire reporting and recording process. This includes the individual responsibilities of various staff within the process. In particular, where crime is reported but not recorded the policy is clear on requiring a detailed rationale from whoever makes the decision not to record. This is an important feature since it supports transparency and understanding.

While some of the basic information contained in the crime record is transferred directly from the incident log, validation, classification and closure of crime is the sole responsibility of the CAU. The force does not operate a system of direct entry of crimes onto the crime recording software. Compared to some other forces, the number of staff in the CAU is relatively high at 29 full-time equivalent posts, but proportionately for the force it appears appropriate. There is little doubt that the high level of compliance with NCRS and the HOCR in terms of recording and classifications of crime is down to the functions of input, validation, classification and closure residing within a small group of people. This aspect is perhaps best demonstrated by reference to the force's

compliance with NCRS and the HOCR for partner referrals recorded on Guardian which is not so good. The CAU has little or no oversight of Guardian entries and clearly the same level of scrutiny is not applied.

We examined 55 reports that were recorded separately on the Guardian system. We found that of those 55 reports, 43 crimes should have been recorded and 29 were recorded. Of the 29, none was wrongly classified and one was recorded outside the 72-hour limit allowed under NCRS and the HOCR.

In relation to reports contained on Guardian, there are clearly some allegations of crime that are not correctly recorded on the crime recording system. While this is not an indication of the thoroughness or effectiveness of any investigation, it nevertheless represents under-recording which has an impact on the force crime demand and its analysis of crime patterns. At the time of our inspection, the force was aware of this problem and had introduced new systems, processes and staff to address it. While there has been improvement in the handing of data from child abuse cases, the problem still exists for vulnerable adults and other referral cases dealt with by the MASH.

The force has a clear policy and procedural guidance for the transfer of crimes into Staffordshire Police from other forces and out of Staffordshire Police to other forces. A no-crime, on the basis of the offence taking place in another force area, will not be allowed if this process has not been followed or if a clear audit trail has not been established.

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

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

Cautions – Out of the 20 cautions we dip-sampled, we found that in 19 cases the offender's previous history made them suitable to receive a caution. In 18 cases we found evidence that the offender was made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting the caution. Out of the 13 cases where there was a victim to consult, 2 showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Penalty Notices for Disorder – We dip-sampled 20 PND and found that the offender was suitable for the issue of a penalty notice in 19 cases and that they had been made aware of the nature and future implications of accepting it in all cases. Out of the 6 cases where there was a victim to consult, all showed that the victims' views had been considered.

Cannabis warnings – We dip-sampled 20 cannabis warnings and found that the offender was suitable to receive a warning in 19 cases. In 14 cases the

offender had been warned fully about the implications of accepting the warning. This issue has been resolved in an updated version of the form.

Community resolutions – We dip-sampled 20 community resolutions and found that in 18 cases, the offender either had no previous offending history or that the offender's past history still justified the use of the community resolution. In one case it was unclear what resolution was actually applied and whether this was meaningful and appropriate. Out of the 20 resolutions where there was a victim, 13 cases showed that the wishes and personal circumstances of the victim had been properly considered. Of the 20 resolutions, 15 showed that the agreed outcome was meaningful and appropriate.

Clear guidance on the application of out-of-court disposal options is contained within the force's crime recording policy and procedural guidance. This includes the expectations and responsibilities of individuals involved in applying the options, and the role of supervisors in the process. A check list and new recording forms have recently been provided to ensure that all relevant actions are met. Involvement of a victim in decision making and keeping the victim informed is an integral part of this process.

The use of out-of-court disposal options is monitored by the CAU as part of the closure process. All uses of the options are reviewed before the crime is closed and those which do not comply with relevant guidance are referred back to individuals through the relevant supervisor. The review includes ensuring the involvement of victims and the fact that they have been informed of the outcome. Where guidance has not been followed, the respective crime outcome will not be allowed.

Prior to our inspection, the force had undertaken refresher training for supervisors and custody staff on the use of out-of-court disposal options. This was delivered to reinforce existing policy and to introduce new guidance and recording systems.

The use of restorative justice options by the force is subject to scrutiny and oversight by an independent restorative justice oversight group. This group is chaired by a representative of HM Courts Service and includes representation from the Crown Prosecution Service, (CPS), Victim Support Service (VSS) and the local independent advisory group (IAG).

2.3. Are no-crime decisions for high-risk crime categories correct and is there robust oversight and quality control in Staffordshire 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 that all were compliant with NCRS and the HOCR.

Only six individuals within the force are authorised to make no-crime decisions. These include the four crime closure managers, the FCR and the FCM. With the

exception of the FCR which is an independent role, all of these staff are employed within the CAU function and their responsibilities are described within the force crime recording policy and procedural guidance. When decisions are made by crime closure managers, between 50 and 75 percent of them are dip-sampled and audited by the FCR. Once again, there can be little doubt that the high level of compliance in relation to no-crime decision making as revealed by our audit is attributable to the fact that responsibility rests with a small group of individuals, each of whom is independent of the crime investigation role and local performance pressures.

The robustness of the process for approving no-crimes is recognised and respected by operational staff and investigators. This ensures that any requests they make are thoroughly prepared and capable of withstanding rigorous challenge.

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

The importance of and need for a victim-centred approach to policing is reflected in the police and crime plan 2013-18 and in the force's crime recording policy and procedural guidance. This has been effectively reinforced through messages from chief officers. We found evidence that officers had received personal briefings on victim care from the chief constable and that victims were the focus of discussions within local daily management meetings. Victim notification is audited on a regular basis and compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime¹⁴ is checked by the crime closure team before a crime is closed. Additional guidance has been provided by the CAU to support operational staff.

Staff taking calls from the public were very aware of the importance of assessing the needs of victims. A number of 'question sets' exist to support decision making by staff on threat, risk and harm. If a victim does not speak English or is otherwise unable to communicate, facilities exist to provide the necessary support. Where appropriate, an appointment system is used to ensure that the timing of police visits reflects the needs of the victim and, in cases where no police response is necessary, follow-up reassurance visits by local officers and PCSO are arranged. Call handing by control room operators is regularly monitored by their supervisors, both in live-time and by the dip-sampling of recorded calls, to ensure good performance and compliance with NCRS and the HOCC is maintained.

The force uses partner agencies such as the independent sexual violence advisory group and the independent domestic violence advisory group to ensure additional support is provided to victims.

¹⁴ The code of practice for victims of crime: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime>

The force routinely carries out surveys among victims of crime, this includes hate crime, victims and witnesses who do and do not attend court along with people involved in road traffic collisions and the victims of ASB; these results are fed back to operational staff. The force public opinion survey, 'Feeling the Difference', also identifies responses from victims and witnesses and is providing useful insight into what impact being a victim of crime has on feelings of safety and overall quality of life.

However, current surveys only capture the views of victims of recorded crime; it would be beneficial for the force also to understand the experience of those people contacting the force whose service requirements did not result in the recording of a crime. The force also receives some feedback from partner agencies.

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

The force has a clear policy and procedural guidance for recording of rape and serious sexual offences. This includes offences reported by third parties. Reality testing within the force suggests that the policy and procedural guidance for rape and serious sexual offences is clearly understood by operational staff.

All reports of rape and serious sexual offences are audited by the FCR to ensure that crimes are correctly captured and classified within the crime recording system. All offences are dealt with by specialist officers within the PVP unit.

All requests for no-crime in cases of rape or serious sexual offences are dealt with by either the FCR or FCM. Auditing reveals that decisions are only made after full access to relevant case files and papers and that they are supported by a detailed rationale recorded within the crime system.

The force has a clear policy and procedural guidance for the transfer of rape crimes in and out of the force. This ensures that evidence is not lost and that the victim is properly supported. A no-crime, on the basis of the reported offence taking place in another force area, will not be allowed if this process has not been followed and a clear audit trail established.

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

The force maintains approximately 11 different computer systems and these include an incident recording system, STORM; crime recording system, CMS2; third party reporting system, Guardian; a custody management system and an intelligence system. While there is some linkage between STORM and CMS2 in terms of crime recording, there is limited sharing of data between the other systems. This situation not only presents a risk in terms of the under-recording of crime as highlighted by the Guardian system, but may also result in a loss of intelligence. The lack of interconnectivity between the different systems also

gives rise to the need for multiple logging in, significant double-keying and duplicate entries. For the purpose of auditing 'active intelligence', a global search engine is used to search across all relevant data.

The force recognises the problems it has with its IT systems. However, given that there may be real benefits offered to certain users by a particular system currently in use, there is unlikely to be opportunity for short-term change. The force is currently investigating the options for IT modernisation and this may present an ideal opportunity to rationalise. A consultant has been employed to examine the scope of this and to advise on the project, and is currently developing detailed user requirements.

People and skills

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

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

Reality testing during the inspection revealed that, in general, the level of knowledge amongst staff of NCRS and the HOCR was good. Where gaps in knowledge have been identified, additional training has been provided to relevant officers by the FCM and her team. An example of this is the recently delivered series of workshops for custody staff to update them on the requirements for out-of-court disposals. Control room staff have a formal training day every 10 weeks as part of their working rota. This has been used to provide updates on crime recording matters. Initial training for new staff within the control room also includes input from the FCR.

The level of knowledge among staff responsible for reviewing and validating crime reports is good. This is particularly apparent from the quality of the records and the accuracy of classifications. Given that the force only authorises a very small number of decision makers for its no-crimes, it is able to ensure that the knowledge of these individuals remains current and appropriate.

The level of knowledge within specialist departments is generally good. The force has recently employed a very experienced and knowledgeable member of staff within the MASH to ensure the accuracy of crime recording processes and decisions. While this individual has clearly made a difference, the force needs to ensure there is resilience and that not all the knowledge rests in one person.

Throughout the inspection it was clear that the experts in NCRS and the HOCR within the CAU were approachable and made themselves available to provide training and guidance to less-knowledgeable colleagues. This approach in itself is vital in supporting the force to ensure that staff have necessary skills to promote compliance.

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

There is a strong belief within the force that the removal of numerical targets has driven a cultural shift away from performance pressures that might otherwise encourage unethical behaviour. We found no evidence that staff were under any pressure, implicitly or explicitly, to under-record or mis-record crime in any way.

Messages about the need for integrity and ethical crime recording have been clear. These are highlighted in relevant force policies and procedural guidance and have been communicated through direct meetings with the DCC herself and by other chief officers. They are also included in training and briefing sessions. At the time of our inspection, the chief constable had personally briefed approximately half of the force on the issues as part of his policing plan workshops. This had clearly had an impact on the staff interviewed during the inspection. Posters, newsletters, emails and other documents are used to reinforce expectations.

From reality testing and interviews undertaken as part of the inspection, it was clear that messages have been received by staff and that they are understood. If there is any wrongdoing, staff clearly have the confidence to report it and the force has made confidential reporting systems available.

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

The force employs a full time FCR whose role and responsibilities are clearly documented within the force crime recording policy and procedural guidance. The post-holder has worked for Staffordshire Police for a number of years and clearly has a good understanding of the force culture. He has the clear support and confidence of chief officers and unrestricted access to the chief officer lead for crime data integrity. We found that it was clear that the FCR is regarded as the final arbiter for crime recording decisions in the force and that he is not afraid to challenge others.

The force structure allows the FCR to operate within an 'ethical corridor'. This is a deliberate move and ensures that his decision making is independent and not influenced by pressures from either an investigative or performance perspective. Additionally, while he receives some support from the CAU, his post sits outside of the unit and therefore remains independent of the crime recording, validation, classification and closure functions.

The FCR is involved in the delivery of training and makes himself available to provide advice and guidance to others. The majority of staff we spoke to during the inspection knew and could name the FCR, the FCM and their colleagues within the CAU. There is clearly a good professional relationship between them.