

The crime scene

A review of police crime and incident reports

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Executive summary

This review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) of police crime and incident reports in England and Wales considers the quality of crime and incident data, and the arrangements in place to ensure standards are maintained and improved.

Methodology

The findings from this review are derived from evidence gathered from an examination of key documents; a relatively small number of incident logs and crime reports; interviews with staff; and visits to police stations and police control rooms. The data collected was largely qualitative in nature. Any quantitative results should be viewed as indicative only.

Key findings

HMIC found that three-quarters of forces made correct crime recording decisions from incidents 90% or more of the time. Eighteen forces made correct decisions in 95% and above of incidents checked; 15 forces in 90–94% of incidents; and 11 forces in 86–89% of incidents.

There is no single factor which contributes to forces consistently making good crime and incident recording decisions. Those aspects which are considered most influential are: leadership, with good governance also required; supervision (intrusive and proportionate checking and quality assurance of incident records is needed); and skilled people (in particular, an objective force crime registrar with strong influence over local crime recording decisions to ensure performance pressures are not unduly exerted).

We found limited evidence of forces directly assessing whether their own crime quality audits provided confidence that their crime figures gave an accurate account of their performance. Few forces compare crime audits with crime performance in any meaningful way.

Two aspects of anti-social behaviour (ASB) management were found to be widely variable: the recording of crimes from ASB incidents, and attempts to identify repeat and vulnerable victims at the point of first contact.

The national average of correct no-crime decisions for violent offences was 84% – much improved from 2009, when the average was 64% for the most serious violent offences.¹ The average of correct no-crime decisions across all the categories examined by HMIC was 87%.

¹ HMIC (2009) *Crime Counts*. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The public rely on crime and incident data to judge how well their local police force is performing. It is therefore crucial that there are clear and transparent checks and balances in place to ensure that these data are accurate and used appropriately. Such scrutiny and audit is not only seen as critical in the United Kingdom: in Australia and the USA, among others, standards exist to bring consistency to crime recording. However, these vary from state to state, with little national consistency. Some federal and national comparisons are carried out in both countries, but these are very limited at best, because of the different interpretation and protocols in use.
- 1.2 In January 2011, HMIC was commissioned by the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, Nick Herbert, to examine how the police record, investigate and resolve crimes and incidents of anti-social behaviour. Reviews of police crime and incident reports were completed in all 43 police forces across England and Wales, as well as in the British Transport Police (BTP). This thematic report provides an overview on the findings, their causation and effect.
- 1.3 The review programme is **not solely** about testing compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR): it seeks to examine whether forces **do the 'right things'** in terms of recording crime, **take appropriate action** to properly investigate crimes, and **give an appropriate service to victims**. It also takes into account the local context in terms of individual force policies, processes, governance and oversight.
- 1.4 The examination of incident logs and crime reports serves to 'signpost' potential areas of strength and improvement, which were further tested during the fieldwork phase of the review. However, the number of records examined was not large enough to be statistically significant; nor was the data collection designed to be representative of the full set of incidents logged by forces (but rather comprised a limited data set of higher risk crime types, aligned with the CrimeMapper categories²). It nevertheless provided a useful indicator of the quality of crime and incident data outputs, which outlined lines of enquiry for the reviews.

² The national portal for CrimeMapper (www.police.uk) went live in January 2009, with the latest iteration launched in October 2011. The application enables the public to access crime data presented on a map interface. Crime data for CrimeMapper is uploaded by forces every

- 1.5 The overall objective of the review programme was to give the public a clearer idea of how confident they could be in their force's crime and incident statistics. HMIC ensured that where there were concerns an opportunity was created for them to be addressed, rather than simply generating public anxiety. The approach followed is fully compatible with the findings of the National Statistician's review of crime statistics.³ In this, she highlights that effective audit and inspection is critical to ensuring public confidence in crime statistics; and in line with her draft recommendations, this review (along with statistical scrutiny of the recorded crime figures) will form the basis for a more focused inspection regime in 2012/13 (see Section 10).

month. Thirty-seven use up-to-date gazetteers, and all have systems in place to ensure that the uploaded data is accurate and in the right format.

³ Matheson, J. (2011) *National Statistician's Review of Crime Statistics for England and Wales*. Available from www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

2. Key points

- 2.1 HMIC's Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports concluded in November 2011. It comprised an assessment of crime and incident data in all 43 forces in England and Wales, plus a separately commissioned review of this data in the British Transport Police (BTP).
- 2.2 Whilst the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) aim to standardise crime recording, there will always be a degree of subjective interpretation in making decisions about how to record crimes. This notwithstanding, **three-quarters of forces examined are performing to a level where over 90% of incidents result in correctly recorded crimes.**
- 2.3 There is **room for improvement in areas such as leadership and supervision, the identification of repeat, vulnerable or intimidated victims of anti-social behaviour** (ASB), and in the 'independence of judgement' for key HOCR decision-making, so as to avoid any undue performance influence. However, ASB incidents that should have been 'crimed' appear low overall, especially in some forces. But the numbers looked at are very small and we intend to return to this issue in 2012 to establish whether this is a real matter of substance as opposed to an artefact of the data collection methodology.
- 2.4 In addition (and within the limits of the data collection), whilst the majority of forces do well, **there remains a wide variation in the quality of decision making associated with the recording of crime.** Eighteen forces correctly recorded crimes in 95% or more of cases; 15 forces did so in between 90 and 94% cases; and 11 forces in between 86 and 89% of cases. This variation has the potential to impact on the levels of recorded crime, particularly for those forces that made poorer decisions in this area.
- 2.5 **The supervision and justification for making a decision to 'no-crime' has been subject to a marked overall improvement since this area was last examined in 2009.**⁴ For instance, HMIC found that 84% of no-crime decisions for violent offences

⁴ HMIC (2009) *Crime Counts*. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk

were correct in 2011, compared with 64% in 2009, **although there remained a degree of variability**. Across all categories examined, the lowest forces recorded 75% correct no-crime decisions; in the highest force, 100% of records were appropriately no-crimed (see para 8.1). Active, intrusive leadership (para 8.3), independence of judgement, effective scrutiny and a technical understanding and knowledge of the HOCR are key to attaining good performance in this area.

- 2.6 In terms of ultimate resolutions of crime records, an average of 98% of recorded crimes were subject to a resolution that was recorded appropriately and in line with national and local guidance and policies. However, it should be noted that the review's data collection was based solely on information collected on the crime system; victim and offender circumstances were not taken into account, nor was a complete review of the evidence carried out.

3. Leadership matters

- 3.1 The findings from data collection revealed that no single factor directly influences crime and incident data quality. Instead, it is a combination of good leadership, coherent and succinct policies, effective systems/processes, good people and performance management that collectively influences data quality outcomes. Of these elements, review evidence strongly supports the notion that leadership, supervision and oversight help attain good crime and incident data quality results. Strong and effective leadership is therefore a critical component in raising standards.
- 3.2 It is therefore of little surprise that the forces which enjoy good standards of data quality all have a clearly identified ACPO lead, who acts as the force champion for such issues and actively promotes good crime and incident recording standards. The message they send to their force about the importance of maintaining high standards (integrity) in order to give confidence in their crime performance needs to be consistent, unequivocal and practiced at every performance interaction. It must also be clearly understood by staff.
- 3.3 These ACPO leads are also subject to proportionate and informed oversight of data quality issues by their police authority. Requests for information and analysis are confined to those areas of greatest risk, and responsible individuals are routinely held to account.
- 3.4 Roles, responsibilities and standards for data quality are, in good forces, clearly understood by staff at every level. They are also succinctly underpinned by force policy and procedural documents which are fully compliant with the HOCR – from the first line supervision of incidents on the street and in force control rooms, to the way in which audit and quality assurance data is directly used by senior managers.
- 3.5 Analysis of recorded supervisory rates of control room staff showed little correlation with any other outcome (e.g. with correct identification of those incidents where crimes should be recorded, or success in identifying repeat and vulnerable victims of ASB). The rate of incident supervision from the data collection varied widely between forces. It is both unrealistic and inefficient to expect a supervisory rate of 100%; supervision should therefore be selective and proportionately targeted towards those

incidents that represent the greatest risk or opportunity to the force. Effort should also be focused on members of staff who need development and training.

- 3.6 In good forces, the Force Crime and Incident Registrar (FCIR) acts as the final arbiter for disputes over how the HOCR should be applied, and has full ACPO support in doing so. These forces know their data quality risks and act upon them through a targeted audit and quality assurance regime of activity.
- 3.7 Successful forces also ensure that the first line supervision and oversight of primary and secondary investigations is proportionate, robust and constructive. This is usually supported by dynamic and targeted scrutiny exercised at Daily Management Meetings (DMMs), and/or performance review processes which ensure that risk is correctly managed.
- 3.8 Equally, where there is the slightest doubt as to the chief officer's expectation for crime and incident data quality, standards will inevitably slip. The 'performance with integrity' message therefore needs to reach all staff and be endorsed in a clear and visible way through performance management processes and key publications and policies. The absence of these measures can simply nurture a culture of resistance against the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and lead to unethical crime and incident recording, usually driven by a pressure to improve force performance.

Case Study One

Early in the review programme, HMIC's data collection identified that only 82% of one force's decisions not to record crimes from incidents were appropriate. This was much less than the national average (92%) and represented a significant concern. The review found a lack of clear and positive ACPO support for data quality, limited staff understanding of the NCRS, poor operational supervision of incidents within operational control rooms (OCRs), and a lack of real time reviews of incidents and crimes closed by the OCRs to ensure NCRS compliance across the force. This has since been addressed by the force and a subsequent review of their incident records by HMIC six months later showed an improvement to 90% appropriate crime recording decisions. The force is continuing to work on this area.

- 3.9 Forces with lower standards of crime and incident data quality are those where staff are poorly supervised and unsure of their data quality risks, and/or where roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined. Many staff will have had little (if any) training

on the NCRS and therefore only have very limited awareness of its basic requirements. On occasion, policies in these forces are not compliant with the HOCR and the supervision of crimes and incidents is rarely conducted in a systematic and focused way.

Case Study Two

One force's new policy on crime recording was found to be non-compliant with the NCRS as it introduced a requirement for 'credible evidence' alongside the 'balance of probabilities' decision to record. This significantly changed the emphasis within the 'NCRS test' and had the potential to incorrectly reduce the number of crimes recorded by police. To its credit, the force has since commissioned a peer review of its crime data, and has now re-drafted its crime recording policy.

4. The importance of performance review

- 4.1 Forces that perform well in their finalisation of crime and incident data also have effective and correctly resourced regimes of audit and quality assurance, with findings integrated within their force performance management framework.
- 4.2 Audit and quality assurance programmes in these forces are constructed proportionately against risk, and force priorities outline data quality objectives and set higher standards for high risk and more serious crime types. Data quality risks are assessed in terms of their likelihood (threat) and potential impact (harm). Corporate audit and quality assurance programmes use trained staff and proportionately target high risk incidents, crimes and 'no crimes'. They may even include the selective monitoring of calls made to police before incidents are raised. Good forces have a layered approach to quality assurance, with checks made against pre-determined criteria and/or standards. Results are communicated to operatives and their line manager in a timely manner, and sometimes form the basis of team-based indicators to identify good/bad team performance and training requirements.
- 4.3 Effective audit and quality assurance regimes also move closer towards the 'ideal' of displaying a data confidence 'rating' alongside traditional performance information (e.g. crime reduction). Good use is made of bespoke management information that helps to identify areas where a basic command unit's data is out of line with its peer group.
- 4.4 Poorly performing forces have often not invested in an audit capability that is proportionate to their risk, and sometimes even leave auditing solely to the FCIR or his/her deputy. Their audit and quality assurance programmes are limited and not based upon risk. More importantly, the findings from audits are not treated seriously or integrated within the force performance management regime. The review found evidence that over half of forces do not make effective use of their crime audit results: 11 forces had no effective audit follow-up arrangements, and 12 made limited use of audit results to improve recording standards. However, 11 forces used results from audits to help make meaningful improvements to recording practices, while 10 more forces did this while also making full use of their crime audits in analysing crime performance. This helps them build confidence in their crime data.

Case Study Three

One force has developed an audit and quality assurance regime which combines targeted, risk-based audits, technological improvements and innovative use of management information. A software change has helped improve anomalous information in crime reports from a 10% to 0.3% error rate, and has increased sanction detections by enhancing reconciliation between custody and crime systems. The management information covers a range of key tests which indicate the degree of consistency against 'norms', and the proportions of crimes supervised, no crimes, etc. The information is actively used by ACPO officers as a key reference point within their performance review discussions with basic command unit commanders.

5. Do forces record crime from incidents accurately?

- 5.1 Table One sets out the results from an examination into how accurately forces record crime from incidents, giving the range and the average for findings from the review data collection.

Table One⁵

	Question	Highest	Lowest	Number of records reviewed	Average ⁶
1	Was the percentage of incidents where decision to crime appropriate?	100%	86%	5,878	92%
2	Was there sufficient information to make a judgement on whether to record a crime or not?	100%	80%	4,855	95%
3	Was there evidence of proportionate supervision?	87%	1%	4,650	21%

- 5.2 The critical question of whether the “...decision not to crime was appropriate under NCRS”⁷ was considered within the data collection (see Row 1 in Table One above). Extrapolations from this figure to assess a force’s potential under-recording of crime from incidents should be avoided, for the reasons discussed in the Methodology (Annex A). Such extrapolations would also take no account of other variables not captured by the HMIC sample, such as over-recording, invalid ‘no crimes’, differences in judgements, and unrecorded crimes which were not reported to police via the control room (e.g. telephone receipt errors and direct reports to neighbourhood policing staff).

- 5.3 With 9.2m emergency calls⁸ made by the public to the police, 3.2m recorded ASB incidents and 4.2m crimes⁹ recorded in 2010/11, it is unrealistic to expect absolute

⁵ See Annex B for a force-by-force summary of results from the data collection.

⁶ This is the average across the 44 forces reviewed.

⁷ National Crime Recording Standard.

⁸ Annual Data Requirement return from forces (ADR 441).

compliance for staff judgements against the NCRS when finalising incidents. The question must therefore be: “What is an acceptable margin of error for these judgements?” Previous audits of the NCRS have used the bandings suggested by the National Data Quality Assurance Manual, and these are considered equally applicable for this review’s data collection result.

5.4 The distribution of data collection results for forces recording crime from incidents was:

- 18 forces with 95% and over of good crime recording decisions;
- 15 forces between 90 and 94% good decisions; and
- 11 forces between 86 and 89% good decisions.

5.5 The data collection showed that an average of 92% of incidents were correctly finalised, indicating a good overall national standard. However, the range of between 86% and 100% (from the lowest to the highest performing force) remains a concern; and it is these outlying forces that provide a useful reference point for potential good practice and areas for improvement. These areas were explored during the fieldwork stage of the review. This diagnosis provides an instructive view on ‘what works’ in attaining the accurate recording of crimes from incidents. The findings from HMIC’s analysis of this are discussed further below.

The positioning of key functions

5.6 Whilst the HOCR require the FCIR to be “...outside operational line command...”, it is clear from this review that the positioning of other key functions can also greatly impact on the quality of crime and incident data. Indeed, a ‘principle of separation’ has emerged from the review that suggests that an ‘independence of judgement’ is key to ensuring HOCR compliance. The final responsibility for HOCR compliance should not, therefore, be vested in the same individuals as are accountable for crime reduction and detection. To do so runs the risk of deviation from the HOCR requirements when, for some, the pressure on performance delivery becomes too great.

5.7 Two key points are critical to the integrity of the crime and incident recording process. First, when incidents are finalised on the incident system (usually the control room);

⁹ Home Office Statistics: *Crime in England and Wales 2010/11*.

and second, when crimes are first recorded on the crime system (either by officers directly or by a centralised bureau).

- 5.8 Two aspects of control room expertise were found to have the greatest impact on a force's ability to finalise incidents accurately: levels of NCRS awareness among the control room staff, and access to NCRS specialist advice. Forces tended to make better decisions in *recording* crimes if staff had a grounding in the NCRS. Likewise, regular involvement of specialist NCRS staff in *finalising* incidents also made accurate decision making more likely. Weaker forces had control room staff who tended towards the view that crime recording had little to do with their role; their knowledge of the NCRS (if any) was gleaned from colleagues rather than the result of any formal training.
- 5.9 For crime recording, the use of a centralised bureau, whether at force or basic command unit level, tended to offer the benefit of a more consistent and efficient approach to crime recording, screening, allocation and finalisation. (In the alternative set-up to centralised recording, the force's frontline staff self record crime reports or tell the crime recorder what crimes should be recorded.) Of the 18 forces that were 95% or more compliant for Theme 'A' (ie finalisation of incidents), 13 had centralised crime recording bureaus at force or BCU level. Staff who are trained and familiar with the HOCR are usually better placed to classify and finalise crimes than those who use these skills less frequently. A bureau that both records crimes telephoned through by officers and conducts a telephone investigation of carefully selected crimes against strict criteria arguably offers the optimum mix of efficiency, and the potential to attain high standards of data quality. However, it is recognised that in the future, the development will be towards mobile devices linking frontline staff directly to databases, representing a move away from centralised bureaus. Risks to crime recording quality will need to be carefully considered as this work progresses.

Effective and efficient processes

- 5.10 Forces that perform well in the finalisation of incidents invariably benefit from: effective and efficient processes in the way incidents and crimes are handled; control room staff whose shift patterns are correctly aligned to demand, with contingencies for unpredicted spikes; and incident records that contain sufficient information to make classification and recording decisions. Some forces also benefit from an

electronic interface between their incident and crime systems, which reduces unnecessary duplication.

- 5.11 Better performing forces ensure that responsibility for NCRS compliance in the closure of incidents rests with control room staff, and that they fully understand their responsibilities. They also ensure that supervision of incidents in the control room and for crimes entered (ideally within a bureau environment) is robust and prioritised towards those crimes/incidents that present the greatest risk to the force.
- 5.12 These forces also clearly understand and use the concept of ‘crime related incidents’ (CRIs) for incidents where a decision to crime cannot be made at the time of initial police action because of insufficient victim information. The CRI category is not abused by these forces. Crimes are recorded as soon as sufficient information to decide has been attained, and within the 72-hour limit stipulated by the HOCR. However, little effective use of the CRI category was found across any of the 44 forces. CRIs are a useful aid in identifying higher risk incidents where crimes may not be properly recorded. Failing to record the CRI category therefore means higher risk incidents are not visible and auditing opportunities are being missed.
- 5.13 The quality of data accuracy as required under the Management of Police Information (MOPI) initiative¹⁰ is equally strong in these forces; for instance, HMIC found that surnames were spelled correctly, and telephone numbers recorded accurately. (However, MOPI should not be confused with compliance with the HOCR, which is focused on standardising crime recording decisions.) Some force IT systems promote good data quality, and software changes can enhance this even further.
- 5.14 Conversely, forces that performed poorly in the finalisation of incidents have incomplete data entered at the time of first report, and weak systems of active and focused supervision. Responsibility for NCRS compliance in the finalisation of incidents is not clearly defined or understood. Some of these forces place an emphasis on scrutinising the crime recording element of the process but overlook the need to ensure that incidents are also correctly finalised – and not just those that were opened as allegations of crime.

¹⁰ More information on MOPI is available from www.npia.police.uk

Case Study Four

A force had recently undergone a period of change, with more modifications planned. The new structures concentrated on investigating and managing recorded crimes. However, by not fully understanding the process of correctly recording crime from incidents, and by failing to identify the risks, they missed some important control room functions. For instance, responsibility for NCRS compliance was not clearly understood in the control room, and the force compounded this situation by employing staff from agencies, who had little knowledge of when crimes should be recorded. A small and unrepresentative number of incidents were checked each month for quality, but there was no routine auditing of incidents recording standards and trends, especially for high risk crime areas. The result was that many crimes were not recorded and investigated – particularly for ASB, where too many incidents were being closed as nuisance behaviour, when in fact crimes of harassment or public order should have been recorded.

- 5.15 Resources are not correctly aligned to demand in these poorly performing forces, and key processes (such as the allocation of non-urgent incidents – often to neighbourhood policing teams – for scheduled appointments) are not robustly followed up. The supervision of incidents can be particularly weak. It was also found that decisions to no-crime incidents reported to police by means other than the control room (for instance, by emails to neighbourhood teams) are not easily auditable and cannot therefore be firmly validated. There was little evidence found of forces routinely assessing the amount of crime reported through these other routes.
- 5.16 Eighteen percent of forces do not record some serious sexual offences in a timely way. These forces delay the classification of such crimes until the primary investigation is complete, and then decide – sometimes weeks later – what classification to record. This is a clear breach of the HOCR. There was also little evidence found of forces auditing and checking the crimes raised by other internal departments (for instance, by Professional Standards Departments). This means that forces cannot state with confidence how many crimes are being correctly recorded from internal sources.

Trained and capable staff

- 5.17 Those forces that finalised incidents well have a strong FCIR,¹¹ who acts as the final arbiter for disputes over HO CR interpretation and enjoys clear, unequivocal ACPO support. Indeed, evidence from the review indicates that 34 of the 44 forces reviewed claimed to have sufficiently strong, independent FCIRs, with clear ACPO support. Knowledge of NSIR,¹² the NCRS and the HO CR is commensurate with the role expected of staff, and training is provided accordingly. Forces that finalised incidents well also have Designated Decision Makers (DDMs), who have specific responsibilities (concerned mainly with detection standards) and are correctly appointed and trained under the HO CR; staff in general also have good levels of awareness of the NCRS and the wider HO CR requirements.

Case Study Five

One force's crime audit team uses performance analysis, operational knowledge, an understanding of the capability of force IT systems and professional judgement to help tailor their audit programme. For instance, recently the crime analysts observed a decrease in robberies. The auditors then searched for theft from person and aggravated burglary crimes using key words such as 'force' and 'violence' to ensure that crimes were not being wrongly classified. This methodology has also been applied to identify burglary from a dwelling offences which had been incorrectly recorded as criminal damage to buildings, s18 GBH and s20 Wounding offences hidden in ABH, and common assaults and rapes wrongly classified as sexual assault. Their responsive and well-judged audits, applied with skill and experience, have provided the force with a consistent, reliable and more accurate picture of crime performance. This is especially impactful as the force presents the qualitative audit results alongside the quantitative crime performance information on its website.

¹¹ Force Crime and Incident Registrar.

¹² National Standard for Incident Recording.

6. Anti-social behaviour

6.1 Wide variation was found in how accurately forces record crime from anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents, and in whether attempts are made to identify repeat, vulnerable or intimidated victims of ASB at the first point of contact. However, the numbers in the majority of forces were very small, and as such provide only a limited suggestion of the effectiveness or not of systems and processes. Overall, two key concerns emerged from this review: that only a low number of crimes were recorded from ASB incidents; and the poor identification of repeat, vulnerable and intimidated victims of ASB at the first point of contact. The data collection showed the numbers of ASB incidents which should have been recorded as crimes varied between forces. Furthermore, many incident records did not show an attempt by the force to identify repeat, vulnerable and intimidated victims at the point of first contact. This can lead to insufficient or even no deployment to such incidents. A small number of records were reviewed: but ASB is an area to which HMIC will return later in 2012.

6.2 This is of particular concern when considered in the context of the findings from HMIC's 2010 inspection of ASB,¹³ which revealed that:

- only 22 forces could effectively identify repeats at the point of report;
- only 16 forces could effectively identify vulnerable and intimidated victims; and
- only 13 forces could effectively identify both.

6.3 In the current review, the few (five) forces that were found to have performed well in the recording and identification of repeat, vulnerable or intimidated victims of ASB all had tight processes and SOPs¹⁴ that were correctly followed by staff, alongside system software that supported decision-making. It is clear that it is not enough to simply rely on software systems alone, as many victims of ASB have not previously reported their experience to the police; careful questioning of callers by control room staff is therefore essential.

¹³ HMIC (2010) *Stop The Rot*. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk. This report did not include BTP.

¹⁴ Standard Operating Procedures.

Case Study Six

Three forces which do well in identifying repeat, vulnerable and intimidated victims all share the following features: scheduled quality assurance and dip sampling of incidents as part of 'business as usual', with results then fed back directly to staff; automated systems for identifying these victims (or managed alternatives such as scripted questioning), with clear minimum standards (particularly around crime and ASB recording); user-friendly and integrated IT systems which help quickly identify repeat and vulnerable victims; and a victim-focused approach to initial assessment, deployment, updating and investigation.

- 6.4 It is also important that ASB-related calls made to the police are correctly recorded as incidents in the first place, and subsequently (where appropriate) as crimes. Such calls are often made through force telephone systems which are separate from crime and incident systems. These are not easy to audit or supervise; whilst calls are usually taped, the reasons for not creating an incident or crime are not written down. This can present a risk to those forces using such an approach, as the decisions made by telephone operatives cannot be easily validated.

7. What is the quality of investigation and service to victims that follows?

- 7.1 Table Two sets out the results from an examination of how well forces investigate crime, and of the service they offer to victims, giving the range and the average for findings from the RPCIR data collection.

Table Two¹⁵

	Question	Highest	Lowest	Number of records reviewed	Average ¹⁶
4	Is the modus operandi (MO) sufficient to confirm the classification of crime?	100%	59%	4,893	95%
5	Where there was a victim, is there evidence of regular victim contact?	100%	42%	4,567	84%
6	Is the method of disposal appropriate (i.e. the detection, RJ ¹⁷ , CR ¹⁸ correctly applied)? ¹⁹	100%	69%	2,456	98%

- 7.2 As stated above (para. 5.6), the positioning of key functions can greatly help improve the quality of crime and incident data. This principle equally applies for the quality of crime data as it moves from the initial investigation and report to its finalisation.

Primary and secondary investigations

- 7.3 This review considered some basic elements of crime investigation and victim service to help understand if they were influenced by good crime recording decisions being made when incidents were reported to control rooms. What became clear was that once a crime was correctly recorded, standards of investigation and victim contact were generally good. But HMIC found little correlation between making good

¹⁵ See Annex B for a force-by-force summary of results from the data collection.

¹⁶ This is the average across the 44 forces reviewed.

¹⁷ Restorative Justice.

¹⁸ Community Resolution.

¹⁹ The methodology does not include an examination of prosecution files and caution is therefore required with these results.

decisions to record crimes from incidents and the quality of service and investigation standards subsequently carried out. This disconnect means that rather than an investigation commencing effectively at the point where a victim makes contact with the police in a control room, the tendency is for investigations to begin fully only once a formal crime record has been created.

- 7.4 Forces that have good quality investigations and higher levels of victim satisfaction usually have a crime recording/investigation bureau that is responsible for the initial entry on the crime system. Trained staff within these bureaus (which are positioned either centrally or in basic command units) receive details of crimes called through by officers and, for specified offences, conduct a telephone investigation of crimes reported by the public. HMIC has established that 34 of the 44 forces reviewed have these bureaus in place. Bureaus have responsibility for ensuring compliance with the HOCA and NCRS for crimes entered on the crime system, although responsibility for finalisation of incidents (including decisions not to record a crime from an incident) remains with the control room.
- 7.5 Clearly, there are some efficiencies to be attained by the use of a single central bureau. The functions such units undertake need to be carefully selected, and all issues (such as costs) fully assessed. However, while a single bureau will also tend to promote greater consistency and quality within crime reports, evidence from this review indicates that the day-to-day management and oversight of crime investigations should be where such activity occurs – usually on a basic command unit, or its local equivalent.
- 7.6 Equally important is the use of minimum standards for primary investigation, usually with bespoke standards for priority crimes. However, it is insufficient just to publish these standards: they must be supported by supervision and routinely checked in a proportionate and targeted way. Forces that do not use minimum standards or that fail to adequately ensure supervision struggle to attain good quality investigations. Indeed, in our data collection only 27 of the 44 forces reviewed had full accounts of crimes, recorded to a good level, in over 90% of cases.
- 7.7 The process of screening, allocation and finalisation of crimes is also essential to enable effective investigation and high victim satisfaction. As discussed above (para. 5.6), this function is most accurately discharged by a bureau, and most forces operate a system of allocating crimes to specialist units or to multi-skilled reactive

investigative teams. QUEST²⁰ and 'lean' system design has also led to some forces redesigning their approach to crime management, with crime enquiries allocated to investigators by a supervisor each day (instead of the traditional approach whereby crimes are allocated to an investigating officer for their duration).

- 7.8 The data collection also indicated high standards of detail recorded when finalising crime investigations to make them suitable for filing. An average of 98% of crimes reviewed were found to have good levels of detail recorded, and 39 of the 44 forces reviewed showed good final decisions in over 95% of their crimes reviewed.²¹

Flanagan 21, restorative justice and community resolution

- 7.9 In May 2009, the Flanagan Review of Policing recommended that "...a new, streamlined recording process... will ensure that crimes are subject to proper recording".²² This review has established that some 35 of the 44 forces reviewed have adopted this initiative to a greater or lesser extent. However, the degree of adoption varies force by force, with some placing greater emphasis on the disposal decision than on recording, and vice versa. This clearly presents an opportunity for the Police Service to improve efficiency in this area by adopting a common approach.
- 7.10 The appropriate use of out of court disposals (such as restorative justice and community resolution) can equally have a significant impact upon victim satisfaction and effective use of police time;²³ and it is also favoured by the public.²⁴ This review has established that many forces have now adopted community resolution and restorative justice disposals, with at least 26 applying the option to some degree. Policies and procedures tend to be good, although how effectively these were applied varied from force to force. This variation might partly be explained by the fact that these disposals do not currently count in official Home Office figures as sanction

²⁰ QUEST (Queries Using Extended Search Techniques) is a programme to improve operational processes in the Police Service.

²¹ It should be noted that the review did not consider offender and victim circumstances and aggravating crime factors, or quality of evidence, to justify detection decisions.

²² Recommendation 21a.

²³ HMIC (2011) *Exercising Discretion: The Gateway to Justice*. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk

²⁴ Ipsos MORI (2006) *Public Attitudes to Alternatives to Prosecution*.

detections for the less serious crimes to which they can be applied. These means that full adoption could result in a reduction in TNO²⁵ sanction detection performance.

- 7.11 One large force that has fully embraced out of court disposals reported that some 7,000 community resolutions were administered in 2010/11,²⁶ with high levels of victim satisfaction. Another smaller force cited more than 5,100 cases that involved community resolution and/or restorative justice since its introduction two years before.

Service offered to victims

- 7.12 The data collection revealed that an average of 84% of crime reports showed evidence of regular victim contact. However, this conceals a concerning range between the lowest (42%) and highest (100%) forces. It is also interesting to note that there is no correlation between those forces that have regular victim contact and those that have the highest levels of victim satisfaction. This may show that other factors affect the victim's perception of service, and that it is the *quality* of victim contact that really matters – not just the frequency. For instance, it was found that whilst most forces comply well with the frequency of contact required by the victim codes of practice (VCOPs), little evidence was found of forces checking the quality of contact with victims. HMIC will return to test this important issue.
- 7.13 Forces that have good systems of victim contact usually benefit from crime systems which automatically provide regular prompts when contacts are due, and from good crime management oversight exercised by a bureau (see above). The more sophisticated forces in this area tailor victim contact to expectation and need, often using a 'victim contact contract'. Most forces have an automated system of referral to the Victim Support Scheme (VSS).

²⁵ Total Notifiable Offences.

²⁶ HMIC (2010) *Stop The Drift*. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk

Case Study Seven

One force consistently updates victims of crime well (98% from the data collection). It achieves this by making a focus on the victim a high priority for all investigations. The force designed and owns its crime recording IT system, so can make alterations to it and improve victim care pages. The crime recording system has a queue that enables supervisors to see clearly which victim updates and care packages require attention. The levels of crime supervision are high but proportionate (72% of crime records were found to have meaningful supervisory input recorded). Underpinning this is a long history of leadership that insists on good victim care, and an embedded culture which meets these expectations. The force is consistently higher than the national average in terms of victim satisfaction, and has been for the past three years.

8. Were decisions to 'no-crime' accurate?

- 8.1 Table Three sets out the results from an examination into how well forces deal with 'no-crimes', giving the range and the average for findings from the data collection.

Table Three²⁷

	Question	Highest	Lowest	Number of records reviewed
7	Is there a rationale recorded to support the 'no-crime' decision?	100%	82%	4,836
8	What is the proportion of correct 'no-crime' decisions?	100%	75%	4,829

- 8.2 This aspect of the data collection originates from a 2009 HMIC review²⁸ which showed the average compliance rate for 'no-crime' decisions for AWLSI²⁹ and MSV³⁰ to be a clear concern (at 64% nationally). This review looked at more categories of crimes and found an average 'no-crime' compliance rate of 87%. Tellingly, all violent crime no-crime decisions had improved to 84%. The range of correct no-crime decisions for all the categories examined was between 75% and 100% for all forces reviewed. Equally reassuring is the finding that 'no-crime' compliance for rape offences is higher than the average (90%), which indicates that forces are giving greater scrutiny to their most serious crimes. These results show that forces understand the importance of making correct no-crime decisions, particularly for the more serious crime types.
- 8.3 Intrusive leadership that supports the FCIR, the 'principle of separation' and 'independence of judgement' applies to no-crime decisions as they do for other key decisions under the HOCR. Decisions to 'no-crime' can be complex matters of judgement that require a detailed understanding of the HOCR, such as the use of

²⁷ See Annex B for a force-by-force summary of results from the data collection.

²⁸ HMIC (2009) *Review of Data Quality for Offences of Most Serious Violence – Technical Report*.

²⁹ Assault With Less Serious Injury.

³⁰ Most Serious Violence.

additional verifiable information (AVI) which determines that no notifiable crime has been committed (this being a higher test than the balance of probability needed to record a crime in the first place). The use of a small cadre of trained individuals who both understand the HOCR and are independent of any performance requirement for crime reduction or detection is therefore highly desirable, and a common feature of forces that perform well in this area. The direct involvement of the FCIR for decisions to 'no-crime' the more serious offences is another common attribute of successful forces.

Case Study Eight

The force uses specialist NCRS Compliance Officers (NCOs) from the FCIR's department. They are based in local crime management units and able to discuss crime recording and no-crime decisions directly with officers. For instance, a rape allegation was made by a woman who said that two men had forced their way into her flat, cut her arm with a knife and raped her. During a thorough, lengthy and professional investigation many inconsistencies, contradictions and doubtful circumstances were uncovered on every aspect of the allegation, but the victim continued to insist that she had been raped. The NCO reviewed the crime and realised that there was no additional verifiable information available to determine that no notifiable crime had been committed – only circumstantial evidence and doubt. Because the NCO was locally based he discussed the case with the investigating officer and made the correct decision to leave the crime as recorded undetected.

- 8.4 The use of proportionate and targeted 'no-crime' auditing is another feature of successful forces, and some even set a higher threshold for HOCR compliance for the most serious offences. Forces with lower volumes of no-crimes tended to be more able to make better judgements around the appropriateness of decisions. This is because numbers were lower and files were easier for the crime registrar's department to access.

Case Study Nine

Two forces have a central specialist for no-crimes relating to sexual offences and other high priority and sensitive crime types. This has resulted in a high degree of compliance (both were 100% compliant for rape no-crime decisions, according to the data collection). They devolve responsibility to basic command units for all other no-crime decisions, but maintain a register of the DCIs and DIs who are authorised to no-crime and ensure these individuals understand the HOCR requirements. FCRs regularly audit no-crimes and vary the frequency and sample size (based on previous audit results) to reflect where they believe there are higher risks in understanding crime types (for instance, around lack of knowledge of the difference between accidental and criminal damage).

9. Implications

- 9.1 HMIC's Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports programme may become an important reference point in assessing the standard of crime and incident data quality across the police service in England and Wales. It has helped to identify the outlying forces for key aspects of crime and incident data quality, together with the common reasons that sit behind their successes or challenges in this specialist area of activity.
- 9.2 Public confidence in crime statistics has been low for some time³¹ and there is a risk, for the outlying forces at least, that it could be further unnecessarily damaged by publication of the HMIC findings. Action therefore must be taken by these forces to improve their data quality and investigative activity; this will need to be independently validated by HMIC. It is therefore recommended that a leaner and more targeted second review programme is conducted in 2012/13 (see para. 10.1).
- 9.3 Given the small number of crimes and incidents reviewed in the data collection, there is also a risk that the findings could be challenged. However, this can be strongly countered by the fact that the data collection forms only one part of a proportionate (and affordable) review process. It seeks to identify crime and incident data quality issues, giving forces the opportunity to improve and react rapidly.
- 9.4 The review has also considered whether forces adopt a proportionate and non-bureaucratic approach to the attainment of good crime and incident data quality. The current fiscal challenge faced by forces to deliver key policing services within a reducing budget brings the bureaucracy challenge sharply into focus, and makes meeting it all the more essential. This review proved instructive in the identification of ways to improve data quality and to understand where greater efficiencies can be achieved. It will also build upon the findings from the recent HMIC study on reducing bureaucracy in crime recording.

³¹ Casey, L. (2008) *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime Review*.

10. 2012/13 programme

10.1 Any review of crime and incident data quality in 2012/13 will need to reflect the findings of this programme. This will ensure that HMIC resources are focused on those forces that have yet to attain an acceptable standard (relative to their data quality challenge). Equally, it will be important to take account of each force's share of overall crime, in order to consider the potential impact poor data quality has on public confidence in national crime statistics. HMIC recognises that across the country the public, and those who govern them, will want some assurance of the integrity of crime figures.

Annex A: Methodology

The review programme is not solely about testing compliance with the HOCR: it seeks to examine whether forces do the 'right things' in terms of crime and incident data quality. It considers the local context and the adopted approach, assessing whether it is effective, efficient and proportionate. Where national standards exist (e.g. HOCR), the review examines the approach taken for their delivery and constructively assesses any strengths and areas for improvement.

This approach strikes a balance between recognising local discretion in the methods of delivery, and the need to follow national standards of data quality. The HMIC review is therefore tailored for each force within a common framework. This represents a more flexible, responsive and constructive approach than that of an audit (which would simply test for compliance).

Following three pilot schemes, the Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports programme started in March 2011. HMIC reviewed all 43 forces in England & Wales (plus BTP) and the programme concluded in October 2011. Each review comprised four distinct phases of work: (1) desktop review; (2) data collection; (3) fieldwork; and (4) report drafting. Detailed feedback was provided to forces, and public-facing individual force reports are published alongside this national overview.

The examination of incident logs and crime reports served to 'signpost' potential areas of strength and improvement that were further tested during the fieldwork phase of the review. The number of records examined was not large enough to be statistically significant; nor was the data collection designed to be representative of the full set of incidents logged by forces (but rather comprised a limited data set of higher risk crime types, aligned with the CrimeMapper categories³²). In addition, the same number of incidents for each type of crime were examined: but this is unlikely to reflect the proportions of these crimes present in the full set of incidents.

³² The national portal for CrimeMapper (www.police.uk) went live in January 2009, with the latest iteration launched in October 2011. The application enables the public to access crime data presented on a map interface. Crime data for CrimeMapper is uploaded by forces every month. Thirty-seven use up-to-date gazetteers, and all have systems in place to ensure that the uploaded data is accurate and in the right format.

For Theme A, approximately 120 incidents were examined from six crime types: burglary, robbery, vehicle, violence, 'other' + rape, and ASB. These were tested for compliance with crime recording standards as laid down by the HOCR. For Theme B, approximately 100 crimes were taken from burglary, robbery, vehicle, violence and "other" categories, and were examined for investigation standards. Finally, for Theme C, approximately 100 'no-crimes' were examined from burglary, robbery, vehicle, violence and rape and tested for compliance with no-crime standards as defined by the HOCR. About twice as many crimes, incidents and 'no-crimes' were examined for the larger forces. The aggregated results from all forces are at Annex B.

The results of the data collection should not be extrapolated to measure whole-force or to compare force-by-force performance in this area of business. Nevertheless, it provided a very useful indicator of the quality of crime and incident data outputs, and provided lines of enquiry for the fieldwork stage of the review.

Annex B: Summary of results for data collection

	<u>Incident to crime conversion</u>			<u>'No Crime' decisions</u>		
	Number of records reviewed (1)	Number of records reviewed where the decision to close the incident and record a crime (if necessary) was correct.	% of the records reviewed where the decision to close the incident and record a crime (if necessary) was correct.	Number of 'No Crime' records reviewed	Number of 'No Crime' records reviewed where the decision to 'No Crime' was appropriate.	% of the records reviewed where the decision to 'No Crime' was appropriate.
England and Wales	5,878	5,434	92%	4,829	4,207	87%
Avon and Somerset	120	103	86%	100	78	78%
Bedfordshire	120	111	93%	100	86	86%
Cambridgeshire	119	116	97%	100	97	97%
Cheshire	120	120	100%	97	80	82%
City of London	120	114	95%	100	86	86%
Cleveland	119	113	95%	99	83	84%
Cumbria	115	110	96%	88	70	80%
Derbyshire	120	116	97%	100	87	87%
Devon and Cornwall	120	113	94%	100	90	90%
Dorset	120	117	98%	100	94	94%
Durham	118	105	89%	97	86	89%
Dyfed Powys	120	114	95%	81	74	91%
Essex	120	114	95%	99	89	90%
Gloucestershire	120	111	93%	100	89	89%
Greater Manchester	239	216	90%	202	177	88%
Gwent	120	103	86%	100	85	85%
Hampshire	120	109	91%	100	82	82%
Hertfordshire	120	113	94%	100	91	91%
Humberside	120	107	89%	100	87	87%
Kent	120	116	97%	100	82	82%
Lancashire	120	112	93%	99	95	96%
Leicestershire	120	114	95%	100	76	76%
Lincolnshire	120	117	98%	100	91	91%
Merseyside	238	209	88%	200	175	88%
Metropolitan	244	214	88%	200	150	75%
Norfolk	120	119	99%	100	91	91%
North Wales	120	113	94%	100	85	85%
North Yorkshire	124	111	90%	100	79	79%
Northamptonshire	120	110	92%	100	91	91%
Northumbria	120	107	89%	100	96	96%
Nottinghamshire	120	115	96%	96	91	95%
South Wales	120	106	88%	95	87	92%
South Yorkshire	120	104	87%	100	91	91%
Staffordshire	120	111	93%	100	75	75%
Suffolk	120	117	98%	101	92	91%
Surrey	120	116	97%	100	94	94%
Sussex	121	107	88%	100	97	97%
Thames Valley	120	119	99%	100	100	100%
Warwickshire	120	109	91%	75	65	87%
West Mercia	121	111	92%	100	80	80%
West Midlands	240	214	89%	200	179	90%
West Yorkshire	240	216	90%	200	152	76%
Wiltshire	120	114	95%	100	89	89%
British Transport Police	120	108	90%	100	93	93%

(1) This includes ASB incidents, Burglary, Robbery, Vehicle crimes, Violent Crimes, Rape and other crimes. The number of records reviewed was not sufficiently large to be statistically significant and the figures in this table are not designed to be representative of the full set of incidents recorded by forces. Therefore these figures should not be used to compare force-by-force performance.