HMICS
HM INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 In 1829 Sir Richard Mayne, the first commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, described nine principles for policing, one of which was: "*To recognise always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them*". Although nearly 200 years old the basic premise behind that statement still holds true today. A key indicator of success in achieving the Scottish Government's objective of *'helping communities to flourish, becoming stronger, safer places to live'* is to reduce overall crime victimisation rates.

1.2 There is a range of data that suggests positive progress has and is being made in this vein. Since 2008-09 overall victimisation rates (for household and violent crimes against the person[1]), as reported by the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS), have fallen a statistically significant 2.6 percentage points to stand at 17.8 per cent. Over this same time period other, indicative, data show similarly positive trends: SCJS estimates of the prevalence of a comparable subset of crimes and offences[2] puts these as being down by 23.9 per cent to stand at 556,274, while a comparable subset of crimes and offences recorded by the police shows an equivalent 18.7 per cent drop to reach 225,207.

1.3 Beyond acknowledging the caveats recorded in the SCJS, it is not the remit of this review to discuss why these numerical, if not directional, differences exist or what they mean. It is clear though that debate about the nature of crime and the way in which it is recorded has persisted ever since Mayne published his principles of policing. Suffice to say, these differences are acknowledged and add weight to the argument for an accurate and ethical police recording process that can give the public greater confidence in the veracity of information about the nature and scale of crime, and the police and partner agencies better intelligence on how to tackle it.

1.4 In recognition of this, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) introduced the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS)[3] in 2004. Its purpose is to improve the consistency of crime recording across Scotland thereby enhancing its efficacy in determining police priorities and, ultimately, achieving more efficient allocation of public funds. ACPOS also created the position of crime registrar in each force to act as an arbiter for compliance with the Standard. To complete the new arrangements, a

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[1] Crime and offences included in the SCJS' victimisation rates include the following crimes against adult residents in households: assault, robbery, personal theft, housebreaking, other household theft, all motor vehicle theft incidents and vandalism. They exclude threats and sexual offences.

[2] Considered to be more, but not precisely, comparable with figures recorded by the police. See the SCJS report for caveats and details on the crimes and offences include in these comparisons: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/10/28142346/19).

[3] Scottish Crime Recording Standard & Crime Recording and Scottish Government Counting Rules (2011), ACPOS.

national forum for crime registrars was set up with the purpose of maintaining consistency in matters of policy and interpretation of the Standard, nationally.

1.5   Since then, forces have been carrying out internal crime audits to assess their compliance with the SCRS. We have also previously conducted two thematic inspections on the subject[4] [5]. In the second of these we recommended that: *in order to achieve greater transparency and consistency within the audit regime, forces agree to co-ordinate individual force crime audits through the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG) so that each audit is scrutinised by a crime registrar from a neighbouring force.* Subsequently, in 2009 ACPOS introduced a nationally co-ordinated annual audit which has since been supplemented by an element of cross-force scrutiny.

1.6   In 2010 we conducted a small-scale audit of crime records in which we reviewed a selection of internally audited and non-audited incidents recorded by each of the Scottish forces[6]. We found consistently high levels of accuracy in forces' own audit processes, and generally high levels of compliance at the initial recording stage. In some cases we encountered as many as five layers of quality assurance in the crime recording process.

1.7   With the introduction of cross-force scrutiny any additional audit by us could mean that up to six levels of quality assurance are being applied. Rather than add this further tier our intention with this audit was to validate the self-assessment process used by forces and the Scottish Crime Registrars Group to achieve compliance with the SCRS. In adopting this risk-based approach our aim was to reduce any inspection burden on forces whilst providing assurance that the police recording of crimes and offences is sufficiently robust.

2.   <u>Background</u>

2.1   When a member of the public contacts the police to tell them about an incident, the information they provide typically results in an entry being created and logged on an electronic incident logging system. Once the incident log is created, officers will examine the circumstances as reported and act accordingly. The SCRS and Scottish Government Counting Rules provide a framework for determining what circumstances amount to an incident being recorded as a crime and what particular crime should be recorded. Once it is established, on the balance of probabilities, that a crime has occurred officers are expected to record the details and then carry out an investigation. Whilst every effort is taken to ensure that the Standard and

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[4] A review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the police service in Scotland since 2005 (2008), HMICS Thematic Inspection Report.
[5] Meeting the Standard (2005), HMICS Thematic Inspection Report.
[6] Crime Audit: National Overview Report (and Individual Force Reports) (2010), HMICS.

counting rules are applied correctly, there are occasions where it is not clear if a crime or crimes have been committed or what type of crime should be recorded.

2.2   The SCRS places responsibility for auditing the quality of crime recording processes on chief constables, through their crime registrar. The role of crime registrar is a specialist one that requires knowledge, skills and experience of the crime recording process. A large part of what they do involves advising police officers on the day-to-day matters associated with recording crimes, as well as conducting regular audits of crime records. It is the crime registrar who has ultimate authority over whether or not a matter is recorded as a crime and which crime classification should be applied. For this reason the post-holder should never be placed in a position where he/she is directly responsible for reducing crime levels or is directly answerable to a line-manager who does have such responsibility. The advantages of this approach are openness, transparency and independence.

2.3   On occasions where the classification of an incident remains problematic, the crime registrar has recourse to the national Counting Rules sub-group. The group comprises the eight Scottish crime registrars and representatives of Scottish Government, and meets throughout the year to discuss matters arising from the application of the counting rules. This collective approach helps to maintain consistency in the way that the SCRS is applied across Scotland.

2.4   During the autumn of 2011 Scottish police forces completed a further round of internal crime audits, in accordance with the ACPOS Audit Methodology[7]. In doing so they demonstrated a scope and frequency of audit that is robust and compatible with the spirit of the SCRS.

2.5   The crime audit is an examination of a sample of incidents reported to the police to determine whether they have been properly recorded as crimes. The method used is commonly termed a 'two test' approach. Test one examines incidents as reported to the police to determine whether or not a crime should have been recorded. It involves examining the text describing the circumstances of the incident to assess whether the incident was:
    i.   clearly a non-crime, i.e. content and/or disposal correctly indicate no crime occurred, or
    ii.   clearly a crime, i.e. content and/or disposal indicates a crime and a crime record exists, or
    iii. unclear (potentially a crime), or
    iv.   clearly a crime, i.e. content and/or disposal indicates a crime and no crime record exists.

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[7] Audit Methodology For Reviewing The Quality Of Crime Data Recorded By Scottish Police Forces (2011), ACPOS.

2.6 This is a simple pass or fail test: if the auditor is satisfied that i. or ii. applies the incident is recorded as a pass; if iii. or iv. apply then it is a fail. Compliance is achieved if the pass rate is 95% or above.

2.7 Essential to the test one process is the need for forces' incident recording systems to be updated with sufficient information to allow the auditor to make the correct determination. If the information is not readily available to the auditor then the test one will be recorded as a failure, even if the information required to make the determination is available elsewhere, e.g. in an officers notebook, or in another force system, e.g. a domestic violence database.

2.8 Test two covers two separate questions, both of which require a pass or fail determination to be made:
   i. whether the counting rules have been applied correctly or incorrectly, and
   ii. whether or not the correct crime classification has been applied.

Here too compliance is achieved if the pass rate is 95% or above.

3. <u>Methodology</u>

3.1 The purpose of this review was to ensure that forces are robust in the scrutiny of their crime recording practices, with particular emphasis on the processes involved in responding to the initial call from a member of the public, through to the closure of incidents and the decision whether or not to record a crime. In order to do this, we conducted the following:
   - A desktop review of forces' policies, procedures and audit reports, with particular reference to the findings of the national annual audit and the effectiveness of cross-force scrutiny.
   - A limited dip-sample of incidents and crime records involving minor assault, domestic abuse and vandalism and encompassing the areas for improvement identified in our 2010 audit. In keeping with our risk-assessment policy, we examined only those forces that had previously failed to achieve the required standard.
   - A smaller additional dip-sample of incidents and crime records involving incidents in schools across all forces, in order to assure ourselves that amendments to the SCRS[8] introduced as a result of our last audit were being applied.
   - A series of interviews and focus groups with relevant individuals, in order to assess the extent to which the SCRS and its counting rules are being applied throughout each organisation.

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[8] Following the 2010 audit a change was made to the counting rules that allowed for minor incidents that occur on school premises to be recorded as incidents only subject to certain conditions.

3.2   The findings from each of the above strands were considered against a set of general criteria, adapted from those identified by the Audit Commission as common to organisations across the public sector that are achieving higher than minimum performance around data quality, outlined below:

1. ***GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:*** *The force has put in place arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of the incident and crime data recorded; leadership responsibilities for incident and crime data quality are clearly defined and identified; there is a proportionate approach to managing strategic and organisational risk and to ensuring efficiency in achieving data quality; and, police boards actively oversee the quality of crime and incident data.*
2. ***POLICY AND PROCEDURE:*** *The force has defined its expectations and requirements in relation to incident and crime data quality, and these are supported by a process for improving incident and crime data quality by way of a set of operational procedures.*
3. ***SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES:*** *There are effective systems and processes in place to ensure that incidents and crimes are recorded in a consistent and accurate manner and accurately reflect the sequence of events as described by the victim/witness; the force captures all reports of incidents and crimes reported to it; the force correctly records incidents and crime; and, the investigation and disposal of crime is conducted proportionately, efficiently and effectively, taking account of the victim's needs.*
4. ***PEOPLE AND SKILLS:*** *The force has suitably trained and skilled individuals in place throughout the organisation to capture incident and crime data; these individuals are supported by a quality assurance process that is underpinned by a force crime registrar through whom good quality crime and incident data is maintained.*
5. ***AUDITS AND PERFORMANCE:*** *Quality checking of recorded incidents and crimes takes place to ensure that the data are fit for purpose and that any necessary action is taken; there is an efficient and effective crime and incident audit system in place; and action is taken to address audit findings and results.*

3.3   As part of the review we also looked at how the results of force and national audits have been used to improve crime recording. Where relevant we have sought to tie in with relevant recommendations made in previous HMICS reports. On a general level, for example, the way in which forces respond to reports of incidents from members of the public is related to the theme of our 2008 report, '*Quality of service and feedback to users of the police service in Scotland'*. More specifically, we have used the audit to assess forces' progress in responding to recommendations in two other HMICS reports:

1. '*A review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the police service in Scotland since 2005'* (2008)**, Recommendation 5:** that, in order to achieve greater transparency and consistency within the audit regime, forces agree to co-ordinate individual force crime audits through the SCRG so that each audit is

scrutinised by a crime registrar from a neighbouring force. *On an annual basis HMICS will dip-sample crime audits across all forces, including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police.*

2. '*Domestic abuse*' (2008)**, Recommendation 5:** that forces review and reinforce their quality assurance practices and processes for recording domestic abuse incidents.

4. Main findings

4.1. General themes

4.1.1   Whilst each force approaches the aspect of the crime recording process subject of this review differently, the fundamentals – Policies and procedures, call handling, initial assessment, incident recording, incident updating, supervision, audit and scrutiny and governance and accountability – are essentially similar. The review found that in general all forces had in place structures to ensure that the SCRS were being applied ethically. The methods used to achieve this however did vary significantly between forces. Some have invested in a 'getting it right first time' approach, with responsibility for the supervision or scrutiny of incidents at a local level e.g. within the force control room as in Central Scotland Police, or within local crime management units such as in Strathclyde Police and Northern Constabulary, or frontline supervisors such as Fife Constabulary, or in a combination of supervision and IT as in Dumfries and Galloway, whose incident recording system prompts officers to provide appropriate information. Other forces, such as Lothian and Borders and Grampian also use these methods, which have become embedded in their processes. This has allowed them to develop a more risk based approach, empowering all staff involved in the process to get it right with light touch audit to provide an assurance that this is working.

4.1.2   At the time of the 2010 audit Tayside Police had in place a Force Crime Registrar and deputy. The deputy provided the capacity to conduct regular audits for the force. This approach would appear to have contributed to the force achieving the standard at the last national audit. Following the resignation of the Deputy Crime Registrar the potential risk brought by not filling the post immediately was identified as low. Around the same time the detective chief inspector acting as Force Crime Registrar, took on additional operational responsibilities, which is at odds with ACPOS guidance (paragraph 2.2). This change resulted in a reduction in audits of incidents and the force accepts that regular monitoring through audit would have highlighted the dip in performance more swiftly. The force has accepted

these findings and has instigated an improvement programme to ameliorate the situation[9].

4.1.3   Another general area of concern is the time taken from creating a record of an incident to recording it as a crime. The SCRS states that a crime record must be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable. However, we found that in a minority of cases (1.5 per cent of incidents) delays of several days or even weeks had elapsed between the time of reporting the incident and recording the crime. While in some cases this might involve an incident being closed whilst awaiting further details, force incident recording systems have no inbuilt processes for flagging them as such. How forces have attempted to resolve this problem (and the wider one of monitoring the quality of incident updates) is discussed in more detail at paragraphs 4.2.2 – 4.2.5. In the meantime, these delays have the potential to put already vulnerable victims at greater risk, minimise opportunities for evidence-gathering and generally reduce the quality of service to the public.

Recommendation 1 – Minimising delays between the report and closure of incidents: All chief constables should ensure that processes are in place for routine monitoring of all incidents, in order to minimise delays between the initial call and the caller being visited or contacted for the purpose of obtaining the information necessary to decide whether or not a crime has taken place.

Recommendation 2 – Consideration of the definition of 'reasonably practicable': The chair of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group should consider if the term 'reasonably practicable' is appropriate and whether a target timescale might help to ensure that victims' needs are being met.

4.2.   Governance and accountability

4.2.1   All forces have executive-led governance and accountability structures that are able to initiate remedial action in the event of problems identified through audit. In general crime registrars will deal directly with matters of concern, updating managers for information only. It was evident in some of the smaller forces that executive leads have the capacity to intervene down to individual officer level if required, with divisional crime management units able to assume similar responsibility in larger forces. All forces also hold performance meetings at various levels within the organisation in which crime audit matters are dealt with, and all confirmed that the last national audit will be the subject of discussion with their respective police boards.

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[9] Tayside Police has been provided with details outlining areas of specific concern and has developed a series of improvement actions. We will revisit the force within six months of this report being published to assess what progress it has made.

4.2.2   What was less clear is where ownership for the process lies at an operational level. Many of our focus groups with operational officers and supervisors revealed a general recognition that supervisors are there to reinforce standards, deal with the closure of incidents and work to the premise that if an incident is opened as 'crime-related' then a crime should be recorded unless there is a satisfactory update to the contrary. However, this was not universally the case. Some forces having different owners for particular parts of the process, e.g. call handling, or for certain types of incident, e.g. domestic abuse liaison officers and race/hate crime units, who are responsible for quality-assuring specific types of incident. This creates the potential for gaps to emerge in the wider incident recording process. This potential shortcoming was one that we highlighted following last year's crime audit, when we advised that: *'forces should therefore consider where and by whom the work of reviewing how incidents are quality assured is best carried out'.*[10]

4.2.3   As a result of our comments last year, Strathclyde and Central Scotland Police, and Fife and Northern Constabularies introduced measures that provide an element of 'grip' on the process. Strathclyde Police and Northern Constabulary have introduced Divisional Crime Management units whose responsibilities include assuring the quality of incident updates. This method provides an 'after-the-event' scrutiny or a slow time review model, where failings are found retrospectively and officers can be re-tasked to provide further information. Elsewhere, Central Scotland Police has delegated quality assurance responsibility to its control room inspectors, Fife Constabulary to its operational sergeants. The live time review model that these two forces have implemented could be argued to be the more efficient in that they have not needed to provide additional resources to improve quality assurance. Both models have, however, helped to develop operational officers' and supervisors' understanding of what is required to improve performance.

4.2.4   Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Borders and Grampian forces already had established structures and process in place (see paragraph 4.1.1) in this regard. It is worthy of note that both Grampian and Tayside Police have recently moved away from the divisional crime management model, and while Grampian maintains a regular audit to support performance improvement Tayside does not.

4.2.5   HMICS notes that Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Borders and Grampian forces already had established structures and process in place (see paragraph 4.1.1) that have ensured standards are maintained. It is perhaps significant that the forces that have embarked most recently on improvement programmes (Strathclyde, Northern, Central Scotland and Fife) with an audit function have tended to fare slightly better in the national

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[10] Crime Audit: National Overview Report (2010), (page 5) HMICS.

audit[11]. HMICS concludes that by raising awareness and understanding of the importance of the correct application of the SCRS amongst staff accompanied by local ownership of the process and supportive audit results in sensible recording decisions. However, as will be seen at paragraph 4.6.2 current austerity measures may have an impact on some forces ability to maintain this approach.

4.3. Policy and procedure

4.3.1   The majority of forces have a crime recording policy, supported by standard operating procedures, that clearly articulates their commitment to the Standard and Counting Rules. Most provide clear guidance on recording and investigating crimes, and on roles and responsibilities with particular reference to role of force crime registrar as ultimate arbiter in recording decisions. All forces' policies and procedures are either up-to-date or have reviews scheduled, and all have been subject to equality impact assessment. In all cases the SCRS and Counting Rules are available to operational officers via force intranets and all our focus groups confirmed that these were accessible and used to inform recording decisions.

4.3.2   Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary has chosen not to publish a crime recording policy or procedural documents because the guidance contained in the Scottish Crime Recording Standard meets its needs. All incidents in Dumfries and Galloway are recorded on the force's IMAGE system. Consequently all officers are trained in how to use the system and in what information is required for updating incidents, with particular reference to the SCRS.

4.4. Systems and processes

4.4.1   Overall, updating of incidents does take place and is generally of a good standard. Nevertheless there are occasions where a lack of information forces the crime registrar to make assumptions about crime recording decisions based on his or her wider knowledge of how the force operates. For example, forces often record details of vulnerable persons involved in domestic abuse incidents on separate systems to which the crime registrar does not have ready access. He or she will then make an assumption about whether a crime has or has not been recorded based on the belief that appropriate action has been taken and is being scrutinised elsewhere in the organisation.

4.4.2   There are a number of incident and crime recording systems in use across Scotland. All have their strengths and weaknesses. Whilst it was not within

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[11] HMICS notes also the good national audit results achieved by Dumfries and Galloway whose established model is based on supervisory intervention supported by an IT solution (paragraph 4.1.1).

the scope of this review to comment on any particular system, our focus being on the quality of the information recorded on the systems, we did note that the amount and quality of information recorded by individual forces appeared to vary according to the operating system in use. For example, the problem of missing information described above appeared to be more prevalent in forces using the STORM system. Officers in these forces reported that the system, whilst useful as a resource allocation and incident management tool, was not conducive to more detailed updating on decisions made about an incident.

4.4.3   The reality is that this is an issue which requires to be addressed with STORM users rather than a shortfall of the STORM system. This is a disappointing finding given the fact that this issue was commented upon during last year's audit: *First we would stress that the SCRS is clear in its direction here: where the initial circumstances as reported to the police would suggest that a crime has taken place and yet on further investigation it is not assessed as a crime,* **then a clear rationale must be recorded. We would urge that this information be held in a readily accessibly place to allow supervisors and other staff reviewing these decisions to examine and validate them. It should also save time when conducting future audits**[12]

4.4.4   As the police service in Scotland moves towards a single force model there will be an aspiration to adopt or develop a single incident and crime recording system.

Recommendation 3 – Quality of information recorded on incident management systems: The Criminal Justice Police Reform Team should ensure that information recording is an integral part of any deliberations on developing a single incident management system. Indeed consideration should be given to amending current incident recording guidance to reflect the direction provided by SCRS. The reform team may wish to consider how aspects of the systems currently used by Dumfries and Galloway and Northern Constabularies, both of which are judged to be examples of effective practice in terms of the quality of information recorded, can be incorporated into any national system.

4.5.   *People and skills*

4.5.1   Focus groups of operational officers and staff revealed a good understanding of the need for ethical and accurate crime recording. However there was some confusion as to what the Standard requires by way of incident updates. For example, a number of staff in one discussion thought that they needed to prove that a crime had been committed before it should be recorded. All were consistent in suggesting that training, or lack of it, was a problem; although most officers acknowledged receiving some training inputs or

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[12] Crime Audit: National Overview Report (2010), (page 5), HMICS.

bulletins on the subject and know how to find information or contact their respective force crime registrar, the majority claimed to have had little or no recent direct training. This is in spite of our finding that a range of training has been delivered across Scotland.

4.5.2   In our 2008 thematic inspection we recommended that: *forces and the SCRG review the current ad hoc arrangements for SCRS training with the aim of securing, within specified timescales, a standardised, national approach from the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA)*[13]. As a result, a formal training package was developed to form part of the induction training for newly appointed officers which would then be supplemented by additional inputs from their respective forces. However, according to the focus groups no formal refresher training is provided beyond this.

4.5.3   In terms of what training individual forces provide, Grampian Police and Fife Constabulary both make use of PowerPoint packages developed and updated from the original SCRS training material. Operational officers and the forces' service centre staff are the main recipients of the packages, which have been adapted to meet local need. Other forces rely on local bulletins and e-mail to update officers of changes to counting rules.

4.5.4   Both Northern Constabulary and Strathclyde Police introduced improvement programmes during 2011. In Northern's SCRS Pilot, divisional crime managers with day-to-day responsibility for crime and incident recording underwent a two-week training and mentoring programme to learn more about individual roles and responsibilities. Strathclyde's programme of improvements also includes formal training for operational staff and crime managers. Having discovered that only a proportion of relevant staff had received recent training, the force introduced a programme of mandatory e-training based on a national package developed by the Scottish Crime Registers Group. It also created a software package to track who and how many people have been trained. By the beginning of December 2011 the number of staff trained had more than trebled (from 1,754 to 5,322). Over the same time the force has experienced a steady rise in SCRS compliance rates.

4.5.5   Whether or not staff receive refresher training of this nature appears to depend not just on the force they work in but also their levels of experience. Some more experienced officers in other forces told us that they had received no refresher training, while a minority of older officers implied that they had received no formal training at all.

4.5.6   Another area of concern raised by focus groups is the initial confusion that sometimes accompanies the introduction of new legislation. Officers cited recent changes to sexual offences and drugs legislation that had generated some early uncertainty about what to record as a crime. With regard to

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[13] Thematic Inspection: A review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the police service in Scotland since 2005, (2008), HMICS.

sexual offences, a particular set of circumstances can now result in several crimes being recorded when in the past only one was; the converse applies to drug offences.

4.5.7   Interestingly legislative change was not considered to be a major problem because over time and with the assistance of force crime registrars its potential to generate recording errors diminishes. Making sure that police officers and staff are aware of and understand the possible effects of the change is another obvious way of achieving the same end. From the evidence we have seen, possibly one of the best means of doing so is through regular refresher training inputs to staff rather than relying on local bulletins and e-mail. Some focus group participants who had looked up the counting rules found the scenarios demonstrating how to apply them to be useful. They suggested that having more of these in the counting rules manual, together with better explanations of definitions, could also help to maintain or raise compliance.

Recommendation 4 – Annual refresher training: The chair of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group should produce yearly updates on crime recording in order to help maintain a standard approach across Scotland. The updates should be available to all police officers and staff and contain at the very least an overview of why SCRS and counting rules exist, how they should be applied, what information investigating officers must record in order to satisfy the Standard and information on any changes implemented in the previous year.

4.6.   Audits and performance

4.6.1   Audits are an important part of the crime recording process, ensuring compliance with the SCRS and Counting Rules. All forces, with the exception of Tayside Police, were able to produce evidence of regular planned audits led by the force crime registrar. Force audit schedules are based around risk areas identified by the crime registrar through internal consultation, the results of previous audits or following the introduction of new legislation or other changes to SCRS and Counting Rules. Again with the exception of Tayside Police, none of the crime registrars has operational responsibilities. That is not to say that none have roles extending beyond their crime registrar remit, but rather that as registrars they are able to function independently and are empowered to act accordingly. In most cases the force crime registrar acts alone but can draw upon additional ad hoc support for audits if required.

4.6.2   As forces strive to achieve savings both the role of the crime registrar and the audit processes they oversee are being reviewed. The potential to adversely affect compliance with the SCRS should the function be cut is obvious. A challenge for the current reform programme, may therefore be to identify an alternative structure that can generate the necessary savings whilst retaining an effective auditing capacity. This would help to maintain recording

accuracy during the transition period and provide baseline data against which to monitor future performance.

Recommendation 5 – Standard approach to monitoring incidents and crime recording practices: The Criminal Justice Police Reform team should engage all forces with a view to establishing a national crime audit function to ensure that crime recording standards are at least maintained through the transition period and beyond. In doing so the reform team should consider the variety of approaches that exist, and in particular the importance of staff awareness, local ownership and regular audit to support performance improvement.

4.6.3   All forces hold performance meetings at various levels within the organisation in which matters relating to crime recording and audit can be discussed. This was particularly apparent in Strathclyde Police, Northern Constabulary (through the introduction of its divisional crime management units) and Central Scotland Police (where the control room inspector is responsible for checking closed incidents). In addition, all forces have conducted internal audits during the past 12 months and have used the findings to improve performance.

4.7.   The role of SCRG audit and counting rules sub-groups

4.7.1   In order to gain a better appreciation of the crime registrar role we observed the work of the Scottish Crime Registrars Audit sub-group and the Scottish Crime Recording Standard Counting Rules sub-group. The detailed discussions that took place in each group were a good indication of the robust scrutiny of incidents and crime recording that takes place.

4.7.2   To many, the work of these sub-groups might be construed as an overly cautious approach that leads to the over-recording of offences. However, the reality is that the counting rules are not exact and the varied nature of scenarios dealt with by police officers is such that an element of discretion in how incidents are recorded is invariably required. As a result, consensus on what should or should not be recorded as a crime is not easy to achieve. For these reasons we commend this approach whereby discussion serves to ensure that the Standard is applied as consistently as possible. Consequently it is our view, that the current audit process provides a sufficiently robust level of scrutiny to ensure that the SCRS is being applied ethically and in the spirit intended.

Recommendation 6 – The future of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group: The Criminal Justice Police Reform Team should carefully consider how the critical area of business of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group will operate under the Police Service of Scotland and how recording standards can be maintained and improved through the transition period and beyond.

4.8.   Dip-samples of individual crime types

4.8.1   In our 2010 crime audit we focused on recorded crimes of domestic abuse, vandalism and minor assault. Accurate recording in these three risk areas helps the police service to understand and manage the risks associated with violence and anti-social behaviour. In response to Test 1, performance varied across the eight forces with a number failing to meet the standard in one or more of the three crime categories. In this latest audit we have reviewed how these particular forces have responded to our previous findings.

4.8.2   In keeping with our determination to minimise the inspection burden on forces we confined our review to examining dip-samples of just 40 crime-related incidents in each crime category. In addition to applying Test 1 (see paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7), we scrutinised each incident for evidence of supervisory or specialist input into the decision-making process. This was done in order to assure ourselves that improvements had become firmly established. As the sample sizes were insufficient to produce statistically significant data, pass or fail percentage scores were not awarded.

4.9   Domestic abuse

4.9.1   The four forces whose compliance rates for domestic abuse fell below the 95 per cent level in our previous audit and which were therefore examined again here are Grampian and Central Scotland Police and Northern and Fife Constabularies.

4.9.2   Our findings on this occasion revealed a small number of incidents (three in Grampian; two in Fife) containing insufficient information to determine whether or not a crime had been committed. Both forces use the STORM incident management system which, as discussed in section 4.4. above, is not set up to record detailed information on incidents. No records were identified showing that a crime had not been recorded when it should have.

4.9.3   During the audit we found evidence of domestic abuse incidents being robustly investigated, as well as the active intervention of domestic abuse liaison officers and/or supervisory officers in providing incident updates. Having noted the progress made by these forces we are satisfied that all have now made sufficient progress for us to consider recommendation 5 of our thematic inspection on domestic abuse (paragraph 3.3) discharged.

4.10 Vandalism

4.10.1 Four forces, Strathclyde, Grampian and Central Scotland Police and Fife Constabulary fell below the 95 per cent SCRS compliance level for vandalism in our last audit and were therefore examined here.

4.10.2 Here too our findings revealed small numbers of incidents (five in Strathclyde; three in Central Scotland) containing insufficient information to determine whether or not a crime had been committed. In a further two incidents (one in Strathclyde and one in Grampian) we found no crime report despite circumstances to suggest that a crime had been committed. All three forces use the STORM incident management system.

4.10.3 Again we found evidence of active intervention from supervisors indicative of a robust approach to investigation and recording. We note the progress made by the forces concerned.

4.11 Minor assaults

4.11.1 Only Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary and Lothian and Borders Police exceeded the 95% compliance target for minor assaults at the last review, as a result of which the other six forces were examined under this category.

4.11.2 On this occasion we found a larger a number of incident updates containing insufficient information, (six in Strathclyde; five in Grampian; two in Central Scotland), although we found no recording errors in the incidents examined in Fife and Northern Constabularies. Whilst this is an improvement on last year's audit, the number of incidents requiring more information in this particular crime category is greater than that for either domestic abuse or vandalism. Incidents of minor assault were also more likely than those of domestic abuse or vandalism to be subject to delays prior to closure, with one that we examined still unresolved after more than two months.

4.11.3 Many of the incidents in this category were noted to involve alcohol and/or individuals with chaotic lifestyles, which may explain some of the delays and lack of information in the updates. However, as stated earlier in sections 4.1 and 4.2, consideration should be given to setting time limits for closing incidents and recording crimes, and every effort should be made to ensure that a clear rationale for decisions is recorded.

4.11.4 We note the progress that has been made in this area and are aware of the factors that can affect the recording of this type of crime. However, we will revisit Strathclyde and Grampian Police later in the year to review their performance.

4.12 Minor incidents in schools

4.12.1 Following the 2010 audit the counting rules were changed to allow minor incidents occurring on school premises to be recorded as incidents only, subject to certain conditions. The conditions are that the incident is not serious, i.e. it is judged not to have resulted in serious loss or harm to any schoolchild, or the school is happy to deal with the matter in accordance with its internal discipline procedures rather than through a formal police investigation, and the child, parent or guardian has not asked for the police to investigate.

4.12.2 We therefore examined additional dip-samples of incidents and crime records of assaults in schools in all forces, to assure ourselves that these amendments are being acted upon. However, the numbers of incidents that fall into this category and therefore were available for us to assess were so low that any meaningful judgment was not possible. That said, we did find evidence of all forces putting these changes into action through, for example, recorded discussions between children, parents and teaching staff prior to decisions being made.

5. <u>National audit</u>

5.1 As has already been mentioned, forces carried out their annual audit of SCRS compliance between September and November 2011. This involved each of the eight Scottish forces and British Transport Police undertaking an audit of their own recording systems. Force samples were then scrutinised by their peers in other forces to verify findings. The final results of the process, which adheres to prescribed audit methodology, were agreed by the crime registrars then submitted to the Scottish Crime Registrars' Audit sub-group who produce a national audit report. The table below presents the findings for Test 1 of the audit process.

Table 1: National Audit Test 1 Results

SCRS - Annual Audit 2011	Central	Dumfries & Galloway	Fife	Grampian	Lothian & Borders	Northern	Strathclyde	Tayside	BTP	Scottish Total
Sample size	305	568	351	307	770	1146	888	353	66	**4754**
iii. Insufficient information	2	5	15	14	12	1	21	4	6	**80**
iv. Clearly a crime, but no record found	0	10	0	0	35	18	17	51	0	**131**
Compliance Rate Test 1	**99.34%**	**97.36%**	**95.73%**	**95.44%**	**93.90%**	**98.34%**	**95.72%**	**84.42%**	**90.91%**	**95.56%**

Source: ACPOS National Crime Audit 2011

5.2   As can be seen the majority of forces exceeded the 95 per cent compliance target, thus bringing the Scottish average up to just over 95 per cent too. Tayside Police is the most notable exception, the primary reasons for this having been discussed at section 4.1.

5.3   Two other forces – Lothian and Borders Police and British Transport Police – also failed to meet the target. In Lothian and Borders the force accepts the findings and is taking to measures to deal with the dip in compliance, which equates to just nine incidents containing insufficient information. The situation for the British Transport Police is discussed below. In both cases the fact that their internal audit processes were able to identify these shortcomings, and the cross-scrutiny process to verify them, illustrates the integrity of the system.

6.   **British Transport Police**

6.1   British Transport Police (BTP) is the national police force for the railways, providing a policing service to rail operators, their staff and passengers using the mainline railway network throughout Britain. It also covers a number of underground and tram systems including the Glasgow subway system. Unlike the other Scottish forces that are funded by the taxpayer, BTP is overseen by the Department for Transport and funded predominantly by the rail industry.

6.2   The force has in place a range of policies and procedures to ensure that officers and staff are aware of the need to record crime accurately and ethically. Moreover our assessment in 2010 that its audit and recording practices were robust was borne out by an overall compliance rate at that time of 96.2 per cent. As a result we took the view that we would not conduct any closer examination of the force on this occasion, beyond considering the findings of the national audit.

6.3   As Table 1 above shows, BTP's compliance rate as measured in the national audit has slipped to 90.9 per cent. In actual numbers this amounts to only six failures because of the relatively low numbers of incident records occurring in the Scottish area. All six were the result of insufficient information having been recorded.

6.4   BTP has two control rooms, one in London the other in Birmingham. The control room in Birmingham serves the North West, Wales, the North East and Scotland. Given the geographical spread, staff in the centre must work to two recording standards – the SCRS and England and Wales' National Crime Recording Standard – which may be a factor behind its lower compliance rates.

6.5   Since the findings of the national audit the force has updated its command and control system in line with the National Standards of Incident Recording (NSIR) and issued fresh guidance on the correct closure of incident records.

Both came into effect on 3rd January 2012. In order to ensure that subsequent improvements are sustained, one of the force's crime auditors will be moved into the control room environment in April 2012 to assist with training, advice and guidance on the standards. From the same date, all control room staff are to receive refresher training.

We note these developments and will revisit the force later in the year to review what progress has been made.

7.   **Conclusions**

7.1   The importance of accurate crime data to enable policing to prioritise its activities and resources cannot be understated. The Scottish Crime Recording Standard and Scottish Government Counting Rules set out how accurate crime recording is to be achieved.

7.2   On the basis of our review we are confident that all forces have in place arrangements at a senior level to deal with any matters of concern to emerge through audit. All also have policies, procedures or processes intended to maintain the integrity of the recording process. In general compliance rates tend to meet the required standard, although the methods and systems employed to achieve this vary. There is widespread variation too in the quality of information recorded on force systems, which can have an adverse effect on compliance. With the imminent move to a single force, those charged with developing single incident and information recording systems will need to ensure that the ability to record information to the standard required by the SCRS is an integral feature.

7.3   Awareness of the Standard and counting rules is firmly established at all levels throughout forces, although understanding of them is more erratic. In our view continual training is needed in order to develop and maintain understanding, especially as the Standard and rules can be subject to change.

7.4   Forces also differ in the way in which roles and responsibilities for the crime recording process, in particular the stage between the initial call and the decision whether or not to record a crime, are assigned. The most efficient and effective approaches appear to be those that put greater emphasis on recording the incident correctly at the time, with *regular audit to support performance improvement*, as opposed to relying more heavily on a later, formal, audit stage.

7.5   Variations are apparent again in their audit and quality assurance processes. Forces with dedicated crime registrars fare better in terms of scrutiny, and best when supported by a regular audit programme that feeds into a force performance framework. The Scottish Crime Registrars Group provides a platform for the consistent application of the Standard and a means to ensure the independence and robustness of scrutiny. Careful consideration will

need to be given to how these will be maintained under a single force structure.

7.6   Overall we are satisfied with the robustness of the crime recording audit and scrutiny process in the Scottish police service, to the extent that Recommendation 5 of our 2008 inspection on the SCRS can be discharged. However, there are a number of opportunities for further improvement as the recommendations in this report identify. We will follow up force and national responses to these as indicated in the report, and will return to the subject of crime recording as part of our inspection programme over the next twelve months.

8.   Recommendations

We have made the following recommendations in this report:

Recommendation 1 – Minimising delays between the report and closure of incidents: All chief constables should ensure that processes are in place for routine monitoring of all incidents, in order to minimise delays between the initial call and the caller being visited or contacted for the purpose of obtaining the information necessary to decide whether or not a crime has taken place.

Recommendation 2 – Consideration of the definition of 'reasonably practicable': The chair of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group should consider if the term 'reasonably practicable' is appropriate and whether a target timescale might help to ensure that victims' needs are being met.

Recommendation 3 – Quality of information recorded on incident management systems: The Criminal Justice Police Reform Team should ensure that information recording is an integral part of any deliberations on developing a single incident management system. Indeed consideration should be given to amending current incident recording guidance to reflect the direction provided by SCRS. The reform team may wish to consider how aspects of the systems currently used by Dumfries and Galloway and Northern Constabularies, both of which are judged to be examples of effective practice in terms of the quality of information recorded, can be incorporated into any national system.

Recommendation 4 – Annual refresher training: The chair of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group should produce yearly updates on crime recording in order to help maintain a standard approach across Scotland. The updates should be available to all police officers and staff and contain at the very least an overview of why SCRS and counting rules exist, how they should be applied, what information investigating officers must record in order to satisfy the Standard and information on any changes implemented in the previous year.

Recommendation 5 – Standard approach to monitoring incidents and crime recording practices: The Criminal Justice Police Reform team should engage all forces with a view to establishing a national crime audit function to ensure that crime recording standards are at least maintained through the transition period and beyond. In doing so the reform team should consider the variety of approaches that exist, and in particular the importance of staff awareness, local ownership and regular audit to support performance improvement.

Recommendation 6 – The future of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group: The Criminal Justice Police Reform Team should carefully consider how the critical area of business of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group will operate under the Police Service of Scotland and how recording standards can be maintained and improved through the transition period and beyond.

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