HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland

Review of incident and crime recording

December 2013

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Summary

It is essential that the public are confident that crimes are recorded accurately and ethically by the police, and that Police Scotland uses reliable crime data to effectively deploy its resources to maximise community safety.

Crime recording practice is governed by the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) and the Scottish Government's Counting Rules. These documents provide a framework for deciding when an incident should be recorded as a crime, what type of crime should be recorded and how many crimes should be counted.

HMICS has conducted a national review of incident and crime recording. The review was conducted shortly after the creation of Police Scotland and at a time when the service and its personnel were experiencing significant change. The timing of our review allowed us the opportunity to consider emerging arrangements for the management of crime recording within a national police service and to assess compliance with crime recording standards since 1 April 2013. We reviewed documents relating to crime recording and spoke with a range of people involved in the recording process. We also examined 1,501 incident records relating to domestic abuse, sexual offences, assault and robbery.

Key findings

- Of the 1,501 records examined, 93% complied with the SCRS. Compliance rates varied according to crime type, ranging from 99% for domestic abuse to 89% for sexual offences. We were disappointed that the total proportion of compliant incidents fell below the accepted standard of 95%. However, the very high compliance rate for domestic abuse illustrates what can be achieved when a focused and robust approach is taken to attending, investigating and recording a particular crime type.

- Responsibility for compliance with the SCRS lies with the Chief Constable and is discharged on a daily basis by crime registrars. At the time of our review, Police Scotland was proposing to implement new governance arrangements for crime recording and to rationalise the number of crime registrars in line with the new structures of the service. While there were clear advantages to this proposal, we had some concerns about whether sufficient resources were being allocated to crime recording.

- We were pleased to hear from most of the officers and staff we spoke to that they were encouraged to record crime accurately and ethically. However, while the majority of those we spoke to said they had heard strong messages from the Chief Constable and others about the importance of accurate and ethical crime recording, such messages were not always reaching frontline personnel.

- Almost everyone we spoke to during our review said improved incident and crime recording systems would facilitate compliance with crime recording standards. We welcome the service's plans to address deficiencies in existing systems by rolling out a national incident recording system and a national crime recording system by 2015.

- Awareness of SCRS was good although some officers and staff did not feel confident that they were correctly applying rules regarding the classification of crimes. We found that a more strategic approach to initial and refresher training would promote consistency and accuracy in crime recording decisions.

- Scrutiny and audit of crime recording decisions varied slightly across Scotland. While we found evidence that scrutiny and audit were mostly proportionate and risk-based, we felt that there could be more emphasis on a 'right first time' approach. The service should continue to use the results of scrutiny and audit to drive improvement at all levels.

- Adherence to the SCRS across Scotland is generally good and we were impressed by the knowledge and commitment of many officers and staff. We have identified several areas in which Police Scotland could improve its approach to crime recording and maintain the progress that has already been made since the introduction of the SCRS in 2004.

1. Introduction

1. The public rely on information about crime levels to assess how safe their communities are and how well their police service is performing. The government, the police and other agencies rely on crime data to help measure the effectiveness of their efforts to reduce crime and keep communities safe. Analysis of crime data by the police allows the service to anticipate and prevent crime by allocating resources where they are most needed. It is therefore essential that crime is recorded accurately and that recording is consistent, allowing comparisons to be made over time and between local areas. Interest in the volume of recorded crime will be particularly high following the creation of Police Scotland on 1 April 2013, with crime rates likely to be seen as a key indicator of the effectiveness of the new service.

2. In the year leading up to the creation of a single national police service for Scotland, the volume of crimes and offences recorded by the police fell by 5%. The total number of crimes recorded by the police in 2012-13 was the lowest since 1974.[1]

3. Given the importance of accurate crime recording, HMICS conducted a national review of incident and crime recording practice between July and August 2013. This followed previous reviews of crime recording, the most recent of which was conducted in 2011.[2] That review found variable but generally good crime recording practice across the then existing eight police forces. While compliance rates tended to meet the required standard, we noted a number of opportunities for further improvement and made six recommendations.[3]

4. The purpose of our current review is to examine the state, efficiency and effectiveness of crime recording by assessing the governance and implementation of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) and the Counting Rules. While crime recording was last reviewed fairly recently, the move to a single police service involved changes to the way in which crime recording is managed. HMICS therefore considered that a further review would afford us the opportunity to consider emerging arrangements for the management of crime recording and to provide the service with feedback early in the development of those arrangements. The review also allowed us to examine whether progress made since the introduction of the SCRS in 2004 has been maintained despite the significant changes experienced by the service and its personnel, and whether the recommendations made in our last review have been implemented. Our review was conducted at a time when the service was undergoing considerable change and we greatly appreciate the contribution of all those officers and staff who took part in our work.

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1 Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin, *Recorded crime in Scotland 2012-13* (June 2013). Contraventions of criminal law in Scotland are divided for statistical purposes into 'crimes' and 'offences'. 'Crime' is generally used for more serious criminal acts with seriousness generally relating to the maximum sentence that can be imposed.

2 HMICS, *Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report* (2012).

3 See Appendix 2.

2. Background

The recording process

5.   When a member of the public contacts the police to report a crime, the information provided is logged on an electronic incident recording system. The police assess the circumstances of the incident and respond accordingly. Depending on the information supplied and on the outcome of additional enquiries, the incident may result in the creation of a crime report. The SCRS and the Scottish Government's Counting Rules provide a framework for determining when an incident should be recorded as a crime, the type of crime that should be recorded and how many crimes should be counted.

Crime recording standards

6.   The SCRS was introduced in 2004 to encourage a more victim-oriented approach to crime recording and to ensure greater consistency in crime recording across the eight police forces which existed at that time.[4] The SCRS requires that all incidents, whether crime-related or not, result in the creation of an auditable report. The incident will be recorded as a crime if (a) the circumstances amount to a crime or offence in Scots law; and (b) there is no credible evidence to the contrary. Once recorded, a crime remains recorded unless there is credible evidence to disprove that a crime occurred.

7.   Responsibility for compliance with the SCRS lies with the Chief Constable and is discharged on a daily basis by crime registrars. The role of crime registrar is described in the SCRS as critical to the implementation and development of the Standard. It is a specialist role that requires knowledge, skills and experience of the crime recording process. The role does not require the exercise of police powers and may therefore be performed by a member of police staff. The registrar should not be placed in a position where he or she is directly responsible for reducing crime or is answerable to a line manager who has such responsibility. The registrar has ultimate authority to determine whether an incident is or is not recorded as a crime and the crime classification that will be applied. The advantage to this approach is openness, transparency and a degree of independence. Until 2013, each of Scotland's eight police forces had its own crime registrar. Upon the creation of a single police service on 1 April 2013, the registrars continued to perform their role pending the implementation of a proposal to reduce their number and operate on a regional rather than legacy force basis.

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4   ACPOS, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard* (2007). The SCRS has been incorporated into Police Scotland policy (Police Scotland, *Crime Recording Standard Operating Procedure* (April 2013)).

8. The Scottish Government's Counting Rules should be read alongside the SCRS.[5] The Counting Rules set out more detailed information about when and how crimes should be recorded and include guidance on how crimes should be classified and counted. In particular, the Counting Rules state that when a crime is made known to the police, a crime record must be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable. Recording should not be delayed pending further details coming to light or pending detection of the crime. The Counting Rules are subject to constant review to take account of, for example, new statutory offences.

9. The SCRS requires that regular audits of crime recording are carried out to check that incidents are recorded correctly and to check whether recorded crimes have been counted and classified correctly. Audits should be carried out in accordance with an established methodology developed by Police Scotland.[6]

10. While the SCRS aims to standardise crime recording practice across Scotland, there will inevitably be a degree of subjective interpretation when making crime recording decisions. To support consistency in implementing the SCRS and the Counting Rules, a national forum for crime registrars, known as the Scottish Crime Registrars' Group (SCRG), was established under the auspices of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS). This group allowed crime registrars from across Scotland, together with representatives of the Scottish Government, to discuss matters arising from the application of the SCRS and the Counting Rules. The group was also responsible for maintaining and updating the Counting Rules.

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5   Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Crime Recording and Scottish Government Counting Rules* (April 2013).

6   Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for recorded crime compliance check* (September 2013) and Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for divisional crime audit* (August 2013).

3. Methodology

11. Our review of incident and crime recording was conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a desk-top analysis of relevant documents such as policies, procedures, audit schedules, audit reports and a proposal for the future management of SCRS.

12. The second phase involved qualitative research with a range of people involved in the crime recording process. This included interviews with each of the eight crime registrars, as well as interviews with a selection of superintendents with responsibility for performance and crime managers from across Scotland. We also conducted seven focus groups made up of over 50 police staff and officers from a range of business areas including the control room, response policing, crime management, quality assurance, performance, counter services and the criminal investigation department. We also interviewed those with lead responsibility for crime recording, which at the time of the review, fell within the remit of the Criminal Justice Division of Police Scotland.

13. The third phase of the review involved an examination of incident records in each of the 14 local policing divisions in Scotland. We chose to sample incident records relating to four crime types: domestic abuse; sexual offences; assaults; and robberies. These crime types were chosen either because they reflect the police service's current priorities, they are crimes which are of particular concern to the public, or because they are crimes which may be more challenging to record accurately and consistently. In total, 1,501 records were examined.

14. The number of records sampled was not sufficiently high to be statistically significant, nor was the sample representative of the incidents recorded by each division. However, the sample size was chosen so as to be manageable both from an HMICS and service perspective and our findings serve as an indicator of recording practice across Scotland.

15. At the conclusion of our fieldwork but prior to writing up our findings, we provided immediate feedback to both the Assistant Chief Constable and the Criminal Justice Division which, at the time of our review, had lead responsibility for crime recording.

16. Our review was focused on incident and crime recording by Police Scotland. We did not review the crime recording practice in Scotland of the British Transport Police or the Ministry of Defence Police.

17. As in previous reviews, we adopted criteria against which we would assess the police service's performance in managing crime recording. The assessment criteria are based on the SCRS and the Counting Rules, as well as findings of previous crime recording reviews by HMICS. In developing the criteria, we also took into account reviews of crime recording in England and Wales conducted by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Audit Commission which sought to identify the characteristics that result in good crime recording performance.

Assessment criteria[7]

1. Governance and accountability
The service has put in place arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data recorded.

2. Policy and procedure
The service has defined in policy its expectations and requirements in relation to incident and crime data quality, which are supported by a process for improving incident and crime data quality by way of a current set of standard 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/witnesses.

4. People and skills
The service has suitably trained and skilled individuals in place throughout the organisation to secure incident and crime data. They are supported by a quality assurance process through the integrity of crime registrars to ensure good crime and incident data quality recording is maintained.

5. Audit and performance
Quality checking of recorded incidents and crimes takes place to ensure that it is fit for purpose and action is taken to address issues arising. There is an efficient and effective crime and incident audit system in place and action is taken to address audit findings and results.

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7   The full criteria are included at Appendix 1.

4. Are crimes recorded accurately?

18. To gauge whether crimes are being recorded accurately, we chose to sample incident records relating to four crime types: domestic abuse; sexual offences; assaults; and robberies. These crimes were chosen either because they reflect the police service's current priorities, they are crimes which are of particular concern to the public, or because they are crimes which may be more challenging to record accurately and consistently. We sampled up to 30 incidents relating to each crime type in each local policing division. We focused on incidents that were reported prior to 23 June 2013. This gave sufficient time for enquiries to be undertaken, the incident to be closed and a crime report to be created prior to our sampling commencing in late July. Our sample only included incidents that were reported after 1 April 2013. In some divisions, fewer than 30 incidents were recorded relating to a particular crime type. For example, between 1 April and 23 June, only five robberies were reported in Highlands and Islands and so only five incident records were examined. In total, 1,501 records were examined.

19. Auditing incident and crime records typically involves two tests. Test 1 involves checking that crime-related incidents are closed correctly. This involves assessing whether the incident was:

    (i) clearly a non-crime, i.e. the content of the record and/or the disposal correctly indicate that no crime occurred;

    (ii) clearly a crime, i.e. the content of the record and/or the disposal indicates a crime occurred and a crime record exists;

    (iii) unclear (potentially a crime);

    (iv) clearly a crime, i.e. the content of the record and/or the disposal indicates a crime and no crime record exists.

20. Test 1 is a simple pass or fail test. If the auditor is satisfied that (i) or (ii) apply, the incident is recorded as a pass. If (iii) or (iv) apply, the incident is failed. To pass Test 1, it is essential that the incident recording system is updated with sufficient information to allow the auditor to make the correct determination. If the information is not readily available to the auditor, then Test 1 will be recorded as a failure. Where an incident initially suggests that a crime may have occurred and subsequent investigation confirms that no crime took place or there is insufficient information to confirm that a crime took place, it is essential that the incident record is clearly updated with a satisfactory narrative which dispels any inference of criminality and justifies the 'no crime' disposal. According to Police Scotland's audit methodology, compliance is achieved when 95% or more records pass Test 1.

21. Test 2 involves checking that crime records identified during Test 1 are correctly classified and counted according to the Counting Rules.

22. For the purposes of this review, we applied Test 1 only. However, we did consider Test 2 when looking at both assaults and robberies. This was because many people we spoke to said they found classifying these crimes to be more challenging.

Findings

23. Of the 1,501 records examined, 103 did not comply with the SCRS i.e. a crime had not been recorded despite the circumstances amounting to a crime or offence under Scots law. This compliance rate of 93% falls short of the accepted standard of 95%. Compliance rates varied across crime types ranging from 99% for domestic abuse to 89% for sexual offences. While the overall compliance rate (93%) was below the accepted standard of 95%, we were nonetheless impressed by the quality of many of the incident records. We saw records that were thoroughly and frequently updated throughout the lifecycle of the incident, and which were closed with a good summary of the incident and rationale for the disposal.

24. Two divisions achieved 100% compliance rates across all four crime types (Dumfries and Galloway, and Highlands and Islands). These divisions were characterised by a lower volume of incidents which allowed for a greater level of scrutiny, as well as systems and processes which facilitated more accurate and efficient recording.

Table 1: Summary of findings

Type of incident	Number of incidents examined	Number of incidents passed	Number of incidents failed	Compliance rate
Domestic abuse	420	415	5	98.81%
Sexual offences	413	368	45	89.10%
Assaults	420	378	42	90.00%
Robberies	248	237	11	95.56%
Total number of incidents	1,501	1,398	103	93.14%

Domestic abuse

25. Of the 420 domestic abuse incidents examined, we found only five did not comply with the SCRS. This compliance rate of 99% reflects the police service's current focus on tackling domestic abuse. We found good evidence across Scotland of domestic abuse incidents being attended to and robustly investigated. We also found good examples of active listening by call takers in the control room: not only did they record on the incident log what was being said by the caller, but they provided detailed descriptions of what they could hear happening in the background. Active listening by control room staff and recording not only what they are being told by a caller but also what they can hear in the background (such as another person shouting or the sound of breaking glass or doors banging) is an example of effective practice and helps secure evidence in support of subsequent prosecutions.

26. In each of the five incidents which failed to comply with the SCRS, there was insufficient information included on the incident record to determine whether a crime had, or had not, taken place.

27. In almost half of the incidents examined, a crime was recorded. Where a crime was not recorded, it was often the case that a third party had called the police regarding a verbal argument that they had heard but not seen. In more than 10% of incidents, the police were called to provide advice on civil matters such as child custody or property disputes following the breakdown of a relationship. In such incidents, it would be more appropriate for those involved to seek legal advice rather than to contact the police.

Sexual offences

28. We examined 413 incidents relating to sexual offences, of which 45 contained insufficient information from which to make a meaningful judgement as to whether or not a crime had occurred. These incidents did not therefore comply with the SCRS. In 25 of these failed incidents, the investigation was still on-going and was usually being carried out by a specialist team of investigators such as a rape investigation or child protection unit. The incidents were closed pending an update from the units and it is possible that a decision to record a crime may have been made at a later date. However, the Counting Rules state that, '*In all cases, where a crime is made known to the police, by any means, a crime record must be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable. Recording should not be delayed in order to wait for further details of the case, including the likelihood of obtaining a detection.*'[8]

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8   Counting Rules, at page 14.

29. In the cases we examined, the investigations had been on-going for several weeks. We did not consider this to be a reasonable length of time and would have expected a crime to have been recorded. We were particularly concerned given the nature of the incidents and the vulnerability of the victims. In some divisions, including Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray, Dumfries and Galloway, and Highlands and Islands, we found that it was standard practice to record a crime within a matter of days and continue to conduct enquiries. In a number of cases, those enquiries identified that no crime had been committed and the record was closed appropriately.

30. In many cases, enquiries were taking place but because the incident recording systems lacked the ability to 'flag' on-going enquiries or set reminders, there was a risk of further delay, putting already vulnerable victims at risk, minimising opportunities for evidence-gathering and generally reducing the quality of service to the public.

31. Delay in recording a crime was also identified as a problem in our last review. We recommended that the SCRG consider if the term 'reasonably practicable' is appropriate and whether a target timescale might help to ensure victims' needs are met. It is useful to note that the equivalent rules in England and Wales specify a time limit of 72 hours from the time the incident was first logged. Alternatively, a maximum of seven days is permitted where there are circumstances outwith the control of the police, such as where the victim is unavailable, but the delay in recording a crime must be noted and explained on the incident record.

32. We were pleased to note that the SCRG sought to address this recommendation by amending the Counting Rules in April 2013 to include a definition of 'reasonably practicable'.[9] This definition emphasises the need to record a crime at the earliest opportunity and sets out limited circumstances in which a delay may occur. The definition concludes by stating, '*due to individual IT processes delays may occur between the submission and recording process although every effort should be made to ensure a crime record is recorded within 72 hours of submission by the police officer or staff member*'. It is not clear to us whether this statement attempts to introduce a target timescale for recording crime as is the case in England and Wales. It appears instead to suggest that only once an officer or staff member has made the decision to create a crime report, the service must ensure it is created within 72 hours. This does not address the delay that may occur after the incident has been recorded but *before* such a decision is taken.

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9   Counting Rules, at pages 14-15.

33. While we appreciate that this clarification of 'reasonably practicable' had only recently been added to the Counting Rules at the time of our review, it was nevertheless clear that this new approach was not taken in some of the records we sampled. We came across incidents where several weeks had passed and a crime had still not been recorded. Furthermore, awareness of this new definition was limited amongst those we interviewed and who participated in our focus groups. While we welcome efforts by the SCRG to expedite the crime recording process, we remain concerned that those efforts have not yet, and may not, achieve the desired results.

> **Recommendation 1**
> *Police Scotland should clearly define the term 'as soon as reasonably practicable' by introducing timescales for the recording of crime following an initial report. This would facilitate compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and ensure victims' needs are better met.*

34. In the other 20 incidents that did not comply with the crime recording standard, 16 contained insufficient information to make a judgement as to whether a crime had occurred, and four were clearly crimes but no crime record existed.

Assaults

35. Of the 420 assault incidents examined, 42 (10%) did not comply with the SCRS. In four cases, enquiries were still on-going which, as noted above, we did not consider to be reasonable given that several weeks had passed. There were 33 cases where an assault was alleged but there was either insufficient detail on the incident report to assess whether a crime had occurred, or the complainer became uncooperative but no crime was recorded. This was disappointing and is at odds with the Counting Rules which state, '*In circumstances where a person believes that a crime has occurred, but the victim, witness and/or complainer refuses to co-operate with the police, a crime record will be raised and the appropriate 'Non co-operative' aggravator/marker assigned, provided that there is sufficient information to confirm a crime has occurred.*'[10]

36. We found some evidence of the non-cooperative marker being used, but it was the exception rather than the norm. Use of this marker would help the police service establish a more accurate picture of the scale and nature of violent crime across Scotland. Police Scotland should make greater use of non-cooperative markers to ensure that all crimes of violence are recorded appropriately.

> **Recommendation 2**
> *Police Scotland should ensure that it makes full use of the non-cooperative aggravator/marker in the recording of assaults.*

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10 Counting Rules, at page 11.

37. In five cases, at the time of making the complaint to the police the complainer was perceived to be drunk and was told by officers to re-contact the police when sober. The incidents were then closed with no subsequent enquiries taking place. We recognise the difficulties often faced by officers when dealing with those who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which was a factor in many of the incidents reported to the police. It can be difficult for officers to obtain coherent information about the incident and, in many of the cases we examined, the complainer gave a very different account of the incident when sober. However, to dismiss the complainer and place the onus on them to re-contact the police does not provide a good service to the public. Investigative opportunities and vital evidence can be lost and victims can be left feeling isolated, vulnerable and frustrated at the service they have received. This practice should therefore be discouraged.

Robberies

38. While we sought to sample 30 robbery-related incidents in each of the 14 local policing divisions, in some rural divisions only a small number of robbery-related incidents were reported to the police. As a result, there were only 248 robberies in our sample of which 11 did not meet the crime recording standard. This resulted in a compliance rate of 96%, above the accepted standard. The incidents which failed did so because insufficient information was contained in the incident record to determine whether or not a crime had been committed.

39. Although we only applied Test 1 to our sample, we did note that 11 incidents which had been correctly closed as a crime were nonetheless classified incorrectly. These incidents were recorded as assaults and thefts but the circumstances described in the record amounted to robbery. This failure to classify the crime correctly is of concern as, in contrast to robberies, crimes of common assault and theft do not always feature in local performance management information. Such information could therefore result in a misinformed view of serious violent crime in an area. Nonetheless, we were pleased to see crime registrar intervention in these cases and by the end of our review, the majority had been classified correctly.

5. Governance and accountability

40. We would expect that the service has put in place arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data recorded. There should be a clearly identified lead for crime recording who promotes adherence to the SCRS.

41. At the time of our review, responsibility for crime recording at the level of crime registrar and below were much as they were prior to reform. Above crime registrar level, governance of crime recording was in a state of transition. Responsibility had been assumed by the Criminal Justice Division of Police Scotland, led by a Chief Superintendent, with oversight by an Assistant Chief Constable and, ultimately, the Deputy Chief Constable for Territorial Policing, each of whom had a good awareness and understanding of crime recording and its significance. Shortly after our review, however, it was announced that responsibility for crime recording would pass to the Deputy Chief Constable Designate. It was felt by the service that crime recording would fit well with his portfolio which already includes ethics and values.

42. Governance and accountability arrangements are still in a state of transition and this is an area that we will monitor and revisit in future. It already appears that there will be an appropriate separation between those responsible for operational policing and those responsible for crime recording standards. When we consider governance and accountability arrangements in future, we would expect that there is a clearly identified lead for crime recording and that there is a strong framework of accountability for crime recording within the service.

43. While crime registrars continued to operate as before at the time of our review, there was nonetheless a proposal being put forward to rationalise their number in line with the new structures of the service. Previously, each force had its own registrar. This arrangement was unsustainable given the abolition of the eight forces and the creation of a single service with 14 local policing divisions arranged in three regions (North, East and West). It was proposed that there be three crime registrars in future, each with responsibility for ensuring adherence to SCRS in one of the regions. As well as having regional responsibilities, the registrars would each lead on a specific aspect of crime recording: training; audit; and maintaining the Counting Rules. The three registrars would be managed by a national crime registrar, an officer at Chief Inspector rank.

44. There is a clear rationale for this proposal and it has advantages. Having three registrars better reflects the organisation of the single service and fewer registrars means there is scope for efficiency savings. It will also promote consistency in crime recording practice across Scotland. While providing helpful direction and guidance, the SCRS and the Counting Rules are nevertheless subject to interpretation. Each crime registrar is the final arbiter in decisions about crime recording in their area and there has been concern that interpretation of the standards varies across Scotland. In future, it will be easier to achieve consensus on difficult or complex crime recording decisions and, with only three registrars, there should be greater consistency. Within a single structure, it will also be easier to ensure that decisions made collectively by the registrars are implemented across Scotland.

45. The role of the Chief Inspector as the manager of the crime registrars will also be important in promoting consistency in decision making. On the rare occasions when the registrars are unable to reach agreement, the Chief Inspector can act as the final arbiter. The SCRS emphasises that crime registrars must be independent and must not be responsible for reducing crime levels or be answerable to a line manager who has such responsibility. In appointing the Chief Inspector, care must be taken that he or she is removed from operational policing decisions. The Chief Inspector will however be able to provide an operational policing perspective on crime recording.

46. While the proposed structure has advantages, there are also some risks, many of which were articulated by those we interviewed or who participated in our focus groups. There are concerns about the capacity of three registrars to carry out tasks previously performed by eight. In some forces, the registrars also had a deputy or some other form of assistance when conducting audits. There is no provision in the proposal for deputy registrars or, as yet, for registrars to be given additional assistance when carrying out audits. In the absence of deputies or other assistance, there will be less resilience than before in crime recording.

47. There are also practical challenges for the three crime registrars. Each legacy force area has its own incident and crime recording system. Each of the three registrars will have to learn about additional systems and it is likely they will have to be physically present in a legacy force area to be able to access those systems. Thus, the crime registrar for the West who is based in Glasgow must travel to Dumfries and Galloway to audit any incidents or crimes taking place in that division. This logistical issue will be resolved as the legacy forces move to a single IT solution in the coming years.

48. Many of those we spoke to were concerned that registrars would not be as accessible as before. They described responsive and helpful crime registrars who were able to provide guidance whenever needed and with whom they often had day-to-day and face-to-face contact. They were worried that the service provided by the registrars would necessarily be reduced. Registrars will now cover a larger area and will have a greater number of incidents and crimes within their remit. They will have less capacity for scrutiny which may put at risk compliance with the SCRS and consistency in its application. Some of those we spoke to were also concerned that the reduction in crime registrars would mean a loss of visible local champions of SCRS. They felt that there should be divisional SCRS champions in their place.

49. It is intended by the service that many of the concerns outlined above will be addressed by a greater emphasis on the role of the divisional crime manager and crime management units. This approach was previously taken in some legacy forces and enabled routine quality assurance of crime recording at a local level. Indeed, some of those we spoke to considered that the crime manager was effectively a deputy crime registrar, and one crime manager described himself as the 'divisional agent' of the registrar. It would be useful for the three crime registrars to meet regularly with crime managers in their region to provide advice and guidance on crime recording and a forum for discussion of complex cases. Such regular meetings will solidify the relationship between crime registrars and the divisions within their region.

50. While this divisional focus on crime recording by crime management units is to be welcomed, we are concerned that some crime managers have a dual role. In some divisions, crime managers also have some operational or performance-related responsibilities. This raises the possibility of a conflict of interest. Given their central role in the crime recording process and the inability of crime registrars to exercise scrutiny to the same degree as before due to a reduction in capacity, this poses questions about the independence of the crime recording assurance and scrutiny process.

51. While we share many of the concerns raised by those we spoke to during our review, we also acknowledge the need to make efficiency savings and recognise the potential benefits in the proposal. We therefore recommend that the proposed structure for crime registrars, and the governance arrangements for crime recording generally, are reviewed after one year. Feedback should be sought from registrars and divisions, and, in particular, the outcome of crime audits should be closely monitored to assess whether crime recording standards have been maintained.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> *Police Scotland should review the new crime registrar structure and governance arrangements for crime recording one year after their implementation. The review should include consideration of whether sufficient resources are available for auditing incident and crime records, and whether the dual roles held by some crime managers raise a possible conflict of interest with ethical crime recording in contravention of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard.*

52. While crime registrars have performed a similar role up to this point, some have performed specific tasks which legacy force areas have come to expect of them. It is probable that some of these tasks cannot be sustained given the reduction in the number of registrars. We would therefore encourage Police Scotland to provide clear job descriptions for the registrars so that local policing divisions are aware of what to expect of them.

Ethics and performance integrity

53. As part of effective governance and accountability arrangements, we would expect to see that good crime recording practice and adherence to the SCRS is promoted. There should be clear messages about performance integrity which are understood by all staff and which lead to a culture of accurate recording.

54. The majority of the more senior officers and staff that we spoke to during our review said they had heard strong and consistent messages from the Chief Constable and his senior leadership team, or from crime registrars, about the importance of ethical and accurate crime recording and data integrity. These messages had a significant impact on them and clearly shaped their approach. However, some of those who participated in our focus groups said they had not heard such messages and that they felt the service was focused solely on performance, rather than performance with integrity. Key messages about ethical crime recording are not always reaching frontline officers and staff, or such messages are becoming diluted when other issues are taken into consideration.

> **Recommendation 4**
>
> *Messages about ethical crime recording and performance with integrity from senior members of the service should be frequent, consistent, clear and understood by all members of Police Scotland.*

55. We were pleased to hear that the majority of the officers and staff we spoke to said they did not experience overt pressure to change crime recording decisions in a manner which might reflect better in performance data. Some people did however tell us that they were frequently asked to review particular recording decisions (for example, to check whether a particular assault was a common or serious assault). While it is perfectly legitimate for such a review to be requested, some felt these requests amounted to covert pressure and were performance driven: reviews of crimes featured within Police Scotland's national performance framework were more likely to be requested, as were reviews of crimes which remained undetected. A minority of participants in our focus groups felt they had experienced pressure to not record a crime, or to change a crime classification. However, they felt able to resist such pressure and were grateful for the support of their crime registrar in doing so.

56. Crime managers and crime registrars in particular felt confident in resisting any pressure that might be applied regarding crime recording. They were clear that performance came second to ethical crime recording. The ability of registrars to resist any pressure highlights the need for them to be authoritative and credible figures within the service. The possibility of performance-driven pressure undermining ethical crime recording decisions emphasises the importance of consistent, strong messages about performance integrity.

External scrutiny

57. Prior to police reform, the eight Scottish police forces were held to account by their respective police authorities or police boards. At the time of our last review, we were informed that the results of national crime recording audits would be discussed with the eight police authorities, allowing a degree of external scrutiny of crime recording practice to take place. Post-reform, we would expect to see such external scrutiny continue. In particular, we would expect that the Scottish Police Authority, responsible for holding the Chief Constable to account, satisfies itself that the information presented in performance reports is accurate. The SPA should be aware of the results of crime recording audits and any areas of concern. In addition, we would anticipate that local scrutiny and engagement bodies, which regularly receive information about crime rates in their area, be aware of crime recording standards and be provided by police commanders with information about the results of local audits.

58. This external scrutiny of crime recording practice was not an area explored in detail during our review given that it took place in the first months of the new police service and few audits had taken place. This is an area however where we would expect to see further development and one which we will revisit in future.

Scottish Crime Registrars' Group

59. Many of those we interviewed or who participated in our focus groups highlighted the need to maintain the function of the Scottish Crime Registrars' Group. This group was established to support consistency in implementing the SCRS and the Counting Rules. The group brought together crime registrars from across Scotland, together with representatives of the Scottish Government, to discuss matters arising from the application of the SCRS. The group was also responsible for maintaining and updating the Counting Rules.

60. We agree with many of those we spoke to during our review who said that this group should continue, perhaps as a national advisory or steering group on crime recording. Indeed, in anticipation of police reform, our previous review of crime recording recommended that consideration be given to continuing the work of the SCRG.[11] Some of those we spoke to in our current review suggested that its membership should be expanded to include representation from other areas of the police service (such as a crime manager or performance analyst), as well as external stakeholders such as representatives from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and HMICS.

> **Recommendation 5**
> *Police Scotland should ensure the continuation of the Scottish Crime Registrars' Group and the role it performed. Police Scotland should consider the membership and remit of the group taking into account the new structures for crime recording.*

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11 HMICS, *Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report* (2012), recommendation 6.

6. Policy and procedures

61. The crime recording policy and procedures of Police Scotland are set out in two key documents: the Scottish Crime Recording Standard; and the Counting Rules. The SCRS is a short, clear and easy to read document describing the purpose of the crime recording standard, guiding principles and underlying values, crime recording procedures and the role of the crime registrar. It was first published under the auspices of ACPOS in 2004 and was updated in 2007 to take account of recommendations made in a previous HMICS review. The SCRS was incorporated into a Police Scotland standard operating procedure for crime recording in April 2013.

62. The Counting Rules is a 400-page document setting out more detailed guidance on the recording and counting of crime. It includes a definition of each crime, as well as scenarios which help the reader decide which crime should be recorded, and how many crimes should be counted. The Counting Rules are updated every year to take account of changes in law and practice. The latest version was published by Police Scotland in April 2013.

63. In addition, detailed information about conducting audits of crime recording was developed by Police Scotland and was supplemented by a guide to divisional crime audits by crime managers.[12] The service's approach to audit will be discussed further at paragraph 82.

64. We are pleased to see that the documents have been updated to take account of police reform and that there are improved links and cross-referencing between them. All of the documents are available to officers and staff on the Police Scotland intranet, but not yet on its publicly accessible website. In the interests of openness and transparency, there appear to be no reasons why this should not be the case.

65. During our interviews and focus groups, the officers and staff we spoke to said that they refer to the Counting Rules frequently and sometimes on a daily basis. They found the document and its scenarios to be particularly helpful when new in post or when faced with unusual or complex cases. A minority of people we spoke to however did express some concern about the Counting Rules. Because of the document's length, they found it to be unwieldy and inaccessible. They also thought more scenarios could be added, including more complex scenarios which better reflect the cases they deal with. It would be impossible however for the scenarios to cover every eventuality.

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12 Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for recorded crime compliance check* (September 2013) and Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for divisional crime audit* (August 2013).

66. Many of those we spoke to identified recurring difficulties when making crime recording decisions. They felt that service policy and procedures could provide greater clarity and assistance. One such difficulty related to the definition of serious assault contained in the Counting Rules. Currently, the severity of the injury sustained by the victim determines whether an assault is a serious or common assault. The Counting Rules provide guidance as to the types of injuries which are sufficiently severe as to constitute a serious assault. Many people felt however that the guidance fails to take account of the nature of the assault itself. They said this can result in a crime being recorded which does not accurately reflect the circumstances. For example, a person is stamped on the head several times but because he sustains no concussion, lacerations or broken bones, the incident is recorded as a common assault. Another person is grabbed by the hand and sustains a broken finger. Because a bone is broken, the incident is recorded as a serious assault. While the Counting Rules do permit the use of discretion when recording crime, it was apparent during our review that officers and staff felt constrained by the guidance. Almost everyone said the definition of serious assault was unfit for purpose and required updating. Confusion around the definition may lead to inconsistent practice in recording and counting decisions across Scotland and we therefore recommend that it be reviewed.

> *Recommendation 6*
> *Police Scotland, in cooperation with the Scottish Government and other criminal justice partners, such as the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, should seek to review and clarify the definition of serious assault.*

67. Other difficulties identified by those we spoke to included confusion about how historic sexual offences should be recorded, the practice of subsuming[13] and a fear that there is an over-recording of crime. This fear was borne out by our records sampling in some divisions. We found that two crimes were sometimes being recorded when the second crime was essentially a component of the first crime. While updates or clarifications to the Counting Rules may address some of the difficulties experienced by officers and staff when making recording decisions, improved training (discussed below at paragraph 77) would also help.

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13 Subsuming refers to the practice of counting multiple crimes as one crime where there is a continuity of action. For example, where a person shouts and swears in public at another person and then punches the other person, a common assault will be recorded. There is no need to also record a breach of the peace or an offence under section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 (threatening or abusive behaviour). The Counting Rules provide guidance on when it is, and is not, appropriate to subsume crimes.

68. The service also has a National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR) in place which seeks to ensure that all incidents, whether crimes or non-crimes, are recorded consistently and accurately. Good practice in incident recording facilitates accurate crime recording and assists the audit process. Very few people we spoke to were aware of the NSIR. Awareness was greater, but not universal, among the control room staff taking part in our focus groups. Where control room staff were not aware of the NSIR itself, some were nonetheless aware of general standards around incident recording.

7. Systems and processes

69. There are a number of incident and crime recording systems currently in use across Scotland. Pending the introduction of Scotland-wide systems, the systems used by the eight legacy forces remain in place. Each system has its merits and limitations. Most areas use a separate system for recording incidents and for recording crimes. In the areas previously covered by Dumfries and Galloway and Northern Constabularies, a single incident and crime recording system is in place. In those areas, we found that the single system greatly assisted the quality assurance and auditing process. Both areas achieved high rates of compliance against all crime types in our records sampling. Their systems are, however, old, slower and not best suited for a national police service. Most other areas use a version of STORM as their incident recording system but a number of separate crime recording systems remain in operation.

70. The STORM system is used to record information at the first point of contact from the public and allows police control rooms to manage the deployment of resources. However, it was not designed as a records management system. The recording of complete and accurate information at the initial stage of an incident helps the police manage the incident effectively and provides a clear audit trail of activity connected to the incident. Where the incident involves criminality, a crime record is created on a separate system. Some legacy systems allow the crime record to be accessed by a link on the incident record but others do not. In all cases where a crime has been recorded, a unique reference number should be added to the incident record. In our records sampling, we came across several incidents where a crime had been recorded, but the incident and crime records were not linked.

71. Efficient and effective systems would allow information recorded on the incident recording system to transfer automatically to the crime recording system. This would reduce bureaucracy by avoiding the double entering of data and would minimise the risk of errors. During our interviews and focus groups, almost everyone said that better recording systems would facilitate compliance with the SCRS. In particular, they complained of repeatedly entering the same information on different systems, noting this was not an effective use of their time and skills. Crime registrars and crime managers told us they felt let down by poor systems, or poor access to systems. Almost everyone we spoke to noted that the creation of a single service affords the opportunity to have more efficient and consistent recording systems.

72. We understand that Police Scotland intends to roll out a single version of STORM as the national incident recording system. A separate national crime recording system will be introduced as part of the i6 project.[14] Those leading the i6 project told us that data transfer between incident and crime records would be a feature of the new system.

73. During our review, we were pleased to note an improvement in the quality of information contained on incident records compared to previous reviews.[15] In most cases, there was sufficient information included in the incident record to enable an assessment of compliance with the standard. The quality of information included on domestic abuse incidents was particularly commendable. There were, however, still occasions where the incident record lacked sufficient information. In those cases, searches of other systems were necessary to find relevant information on which to make an assessment. In some areas, access to other systems was limited. This was particularly true of systems which held information relating to the investigation of sexual offences, which led to some sexual offence incidents being assessed as failing to comply with the SCRS.

74. Having to search other systems for information does not facilitate efficient audit and does not comply with the SCRS which states that, '*the incident record disposal will clearly depict the circumstances dispelling criminality*'.[16] It is best practice to use the incident recording system as the principal source of information on which the findings of initial investigating officers are recorded. This ensures the service has easy access to information about possible crimes and facilitates scrutiny and audit.

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14 i6 is the proposed national ICT solution which will provide recording systems for crime, vulnerable persons, custody, criminal justice, missing persons, property etc. It will replace the legacy systems currently in use. It is expected that i6 will be introduced in 2015.

15 HMICS, *Crime Audit: National Overview Report* (2010) at paragraph 5; and HMICS, *Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report* (2012) at paragraph 10.

16 Scottish Crime Recording Standard, at paragraph 2.2(g).

8. People and skills

75. Officers and staff involved in crime recording should have an appropriate level of knowledge and competence. They should understand the SCRS and the Counting Rules and why they are important. While awareness of the SCRS was good among those we spoke to during our review, some officers and staff did not feel confident that they were correctly applying rules regarding the classification of crimes.[17] Many of the crime managers, crime registrars and superintendents we spoke to felt that knowledge of the Counting Rules could be improved among frontline personnel. It was reassuring however that all of those we spoke to said they would know where to go for assistance or guidance if needed – some said they would ask a crime registrar or crime manager, while others said they would look for guidance on the intranet.

76. Despite a fear that frontline personnel were not sufficiently knowledgeable about crime recording, some more senior officers said they nonetheless felt reassured that scrutiny and audit arrangements would ensure compliance with the standard. While scrutiny and audit do play a vital role in ethical crime recording, a 'right first time' approach would be more efficient and effective. It is therefore essential that officers and staff receive initial and refresher training and that information is disseminated when changes to law or practice are made.

Training

77. Training varies according to role and area. Probationers receive initial training on crime recording at the Scottish Police College. In most legacy force areas, this was supplemented by training provided by crime registrars on the probationers' return to force. Online training packages were developed and used extensively in some legacy forces. Despite this, concerns remain about the lack of formal training, both initial and refresher, for many officers. For example, there is concern that probationers learn about crime recording too early in their career. This is why crime registrars have often felt it necessary to provide additional training on their return to force. In future however, crime registrars may struggle to deliver supplementary training given their increased workload. Some of those we spoke to were not concerned about the competence of probationers, but about the knowledge and awareness of more experienced officers including supervisors. Given the importance of ethical crime recording, they felt refresher training should be mandatory.

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17 See, for example, paragraph 66 regarding the distinction between common and serious assault.

78. Some people told us that online training was not the most effective method of delivering information and some struggled to find time to complete the training. They felt scenario-based training with opportunities for discussion would be a more effective means of learning. While online packages are certainly a cost-effective method of delivering training, they are simply one delivery mechanism which should be complemented by others. For example, one crime management unit delivered briefings to all shifts in their division explaining ethical crime recording and the unit's approach to its work. They felt this was an effective means of providing information to officers.

79. Even some of those whose roles involve scrutinising crime recording decisions have had limited training. Some of the crime mangers or crime management staff we spoke to said they had received little or no training. They often relied on a short handover period with their predecessor and simply learned on the job. While some felt this was sufficient, most said they would benefit from a training course tailored to crime managers and their staff. A national training course would promote consistency in crime recording across Scotland and would also take account of the increasingly important role that crime managers will play in ensuring compliance with the SCRS and the Counting Rules.

80. It has been suggested by Police Scotland that in the future, one of the three crime registrars will carry responsibility for training. We believe this will be a positive development and will help maintain focus on the training needs of officers and staff.

Dissemination of information
81. When changes are made to law or practice concerning crime recording, information is disseminated to officers and staff, usually by crime registrars. This is done in various ways including bulletins, posting frequently asked questions on the intranet, developing new scenarios and briefings to key personnel such as crime managers. Most of those we spoke to during our review were aware of such updates and found them useful. In our previous review, HMICS had recommended that the SCRG produce yearly updates on crime recording for all officers and staff.[18] This recommendation has been discussed by SCRG but not yet implemented. It is intended that it will be progressed in future by the crime registrar with lead responsibility for training. While yearly updates will be beneficial, we believe that consideration should also now be given more generally to how crime registrars will disseminate information about crime recording in the new structure and what role crime management units could play.

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18 HMICS, *Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report* (2012), recommendation 4.

Recommendation 7

To promote consistency in crime recording, Police Scotland should review the training needs of all those involved in crime recording decisions and develop a strategy to address those needs. The strategy should address initial and refresher training and bespoke training for crime managers and their staff. It should also set out how officers and staff will be kept up to date with changes to crime recording practice.

9. Audit and performance

82. Scrutiny and audit is an essential part of the crime recording process, ensuring compliance with crime recording standards and identifying areas for improvement. Scrutiny and audit should be proportionate, however, and the emphasis should be on a 'right first time' approach.

83. Incidents and crimes are scrutinised for compliance with the SCRS at various levels including by supervisors, crime management units and crime registrars. During our review, we found that scrutiny arrangements varied slightly across Scotland with an emphasis on scrutiny at different stages in the process in different areas. In some areas, such as Fife, sergeants appeared to play a prominent role in scrutinising crime records for SCRS compliance. In other areas, sergeants were more focused on the quality of investigation and seemed content to leave SCRS scrutiny to crime management units. In some areas, such as those previously covered by Grampian Police, the control room plays a crucial role in ensuring incident and crime recording standards are met. Within a single service, it will be helpful to clarify what is expected of control rooms, supervisors and crime management units across Scotland and which of them the service wishes to act as the first line of scrutiny. A right first time approach would envisage a greater role for control rooms and sergeants, as currently happens in some areas.

84. In our review, we found evidence that scrutiny and audit is proportionate and risk-based. For example, scrutiny is appropriately focused on specific types of crime such as rape or crimes where the risk of error is high (as identified, for example, in previous audits).

85. Few formal audits had been carried out since 1 April 2013 by crime registrars pending the agreement and introduction of the revised audit methodology and audit schedule. The revised methodology for reviewing the quality of recorded crime data was being finalised at the time of our review.[19] Police Scotland intends that an audit covering Tests 1 and 2 will be carried out on a quarterly basis by each of the 14 divisions. The audit results will be collated annually to provide a picture of the service's compliance with crime recording standards and will allow comparisons between divisions. The revised methodology recommends that an audit of crime records marked 'no crime' should be carried out annually and suggests other audits are carried out where problem areas are identified or suspected.

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19 Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for recorded crime compliance check* (September 2013).

86. Prior to the creation of Police Scotland, additional assurance regarding compliance with the SCRS was provided by force crime registrars conducting a cross-force scrutiny of audits. This promoted consistency in auditing and implementation of the SCRS, and strengthened the credibility of the audit process by introducing a degree of independence and objectivity through peer review. We are pleased to note that Police Scotland intends to retain the benefits of this approach by introducing divisional crime audits which will involve the crime manager of one division conducting a quarterly audit of another division's records. These audits will also be scrutinised by crime registrars prior to the results being reported.[20]

87. We welcome Police Scotland's intention that the results of annual audits will be discussed and scrutinised by its senior management team. This offers an opportunity for senior management to review the service's performance and to address any problem areas at a strategic level. The revised methodology notes that a report of the annual audit will be made available to the public under freedom of information legislation. We see no reason why the report should not be made public once finalised. We would also expect to see the report being drawn to the attention of the Scottish Police Authority and local scrutiny bodies.

88. A concern identified during the course of our review is the capacity of the three crime registrars to conduct audits. Previously, the eight force crime registrars often had assistance when conducting audits, either from a deputy registrar or another member of staff. Given the importance of audit in ensuring compliance with crime recording standards, it is essential that crime registrars are able to devote sufficient time to this part of their role and provided with additional support if required.

89. It is important that the results of scrutiny and audit are used to drive improvement at all levels of the service and to emphasise the importance of ethical crime recording. Audit results should form part of the service's performance management framework. They should be discussed at an executive level and divisional commanders should be accountable for the application of the SCRS and Counting Rules in their area. During our review, a number of people told us that they had often received feedback about individual cases from their supervisor, crime manager or registrar. Where recurring problems have been identified, crime registrars or crime managers have in the past provided force or division-wide guidance to officers and staff. The results of formal audits should be disseminated to service personnel and the registrars should identify and provide clarification on frequently made mistakes. Audit results should also inform training plans for individual officers and staff members, teams and the service as a whole.

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20 Police Scotland, *Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Methodology for divisional crime audit* (August 2013).

Incident scrutiny

90. There was some confusion among crime managers and participants in our focus groups about the extent to which incidents that do not result in a crime report are scrutinised. They were unsure who has responsibility for scrutinising such incidents. We were told by others that control room supervisors scrutinise incidents and the published audit methodology encourages crime registrars to consider sampling incidents. Some people were concerned that where enquiries into an incident are on-going and no crime report has yet been raised, there is insufficient scrutiny of the incident and a risk of delay and drift. This concern was borne out by some of the incident records we sampled. It can be addressed by supervisors reviewing incidents at daily tasking and coordination meetings, or scrutiny can be facilitated by an effective incident management system which flags open incidents. Incident management falls within the remit of the Contact, Command and Control Division of Police Scotland while investigation of incidents is carried out by others. It may be useful for the service to clarify where responsibility for incidents lies.

10. Conclusion

91. Adherence to the Scottish Crime Recording Standard across Scotland is generally good and we were impressed by the knowledge and commitment of many officers and staff. We have identified several areas in which Police Scotland could improve its approach to crime recording, building on the considerable progress that has already been made since the introduction of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard in 2004. We believe that the single service is in a unique position to quickly implement our recommendations and ensure that crime recording standards are achieved efficiently, consistently and ethically across Scotland. We look forward to receiving an implementation plan from Police Scotland which sets out how it intends to address our recommendations and we will revisit this critical area of policing as part of our on-going inspection programme.

92. It is essential that the public are confident that crimes are recorded accurately and ethically by the police, and that the police service uses reliable crime data to effectively deploy its resources to maximise community safety. Our sampling of records indicates that this is happening in the majority of cases. However, we were disappointed that the proportion of cases which complied with crime recording standards fell below the accepted standard of 95%. The very high (99%) compliance rate for domestic abuse cases illustrates what can be achieved when a focused and robust approach is taken to attending, investigating and recording a particular crime type. The 100% compliance rates in two policing divisions across all four crime types sampled demonstrates that full compliance is achievable when effective systems and thorough scrutiny are in place.

11. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should clearly define the term 'as soon as reasonably practicable' by introducing timescales for the recording of crime following an initial report. This would facilitate compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and ensure victims' needs are better met.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should ensure that it makes full use of the non-cooperative aggravator/marker in the recording of assaults.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should review the new crime registrar structure and governance arrangements for crime recording one year after their implementation. The review should include consideration of whether sufficient resources are available for auditing incident and crime records, and whether the dual roles held by some crime managers raise a possible conflict of interest with ethical crime recording in contravention of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard.

Recommendation 4

Messages about ethical crime recording and performance with integrity from senior members of the service should be frequent, consistent, clear and understood by all members of Police Scotland.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should ensure the continuation of the Scottish Crime Registrars' Group and the role it performed. Police Scotland should consider the membership and remit of the group taking into account the new structures for crime recording.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland, in cooperation with the Scottish Government and other criminal justice partners, such as the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, should seek to review and clarify the definition of serious assault.

Recommendation 7

To promote consistency in crime recording, Police Scotland should review the training needs of all those involved in crime recording decisions and develop a strategy to address those needs. The strategy should address initial and refresher training and bespoke training for crime managers and their staff. It should also set out how officers and staff will be kept up to date with changes to crime recording practice.

Appendix 1 – Assessment criteria

1. Governance and accountability

The service has put in place arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data recorded.

1.1 Leadership
There is a clearly identified lead for crime recording who values high quality data and actively promotes good crime recording practice and adherence to SCRS. There are clear messages about performance integrity which are understood by all staff and which lead to a culture of accurate recording.

1.2 Accountability
There is a strong framework of accountability for crime recording in the service. Leaders hold staff to account for performance (nationally, regionally and locally). Responsibilities are clearly defined.

1.3 Scrutiny
The Scottish Police Authority and local scrutiny and engagement bodies seek assurance as to the accuracy of the data and information presented in performance reports. External scrutiny bodies are aware of and informed of the results of audits.

2. Policy and procedure

The service has defined in policy its expectations and requirements in relation to incident and crime data quality, which are supported by a process for improving incident and crime data quality by way of a current set of standard operational procedures.

2.1 There are clear, succinct and up-to-date policies and standard operating procedures in place for crime recording. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated (e.g. in light of legislative change or improvements to practice). Policies and procedures are communicated to officers and staff. Policies and procedures are easily accessible at all times and officers and staff at all levels understand what they need to do to comply. Policies and procedures clearly set out roles and responsibilities. Policies and procedures are subject to equality impact assessment. Policies and procedures for crime recording must be open and transparent and meet the requirements of the SCRS and the Counting Rules. Policy and procedures outline the audit process.

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/witnesses.

3.1 Capture and recording
There is consistent call handling with staff trained in SCRS and sufficient staffing to manage demand. The service captures all reports of incidents and crimes reported to them. The service correctly records incidents and crimes. Crime records are created as soon as is reasonably practicable. Sufficient information is recorded (and is capable of being recorded) to determine whether or not a crime has been committed and to make classification decisions. There are no delays in recording or closing the record.

3.2 Systems
IT systems and software promote and facilitate recording of quality data. Risks to data quality are managed through robust systems and processes and proportionate auditing. The interface between the incident and crime recording systems reduces unnecessary duplication. Systems are efficient, fast and integrated. Systems are easily interrogated and searched to facilitate audit and gather performance information. There is easy access to a vulnerable persons database and any other systems that may be necessary for the efficient and effective recording of crime. Systems are easily updated to reflect changes in law, policy or operational practice. Systems offer prompts to ensure accurate and timely resolution of incidents.

4. People and skills

The service has suitably trained and skilled individuals in place throughout the organisation to secure incident and crime data. They are supported by a quality assurance process through the integrity of crime registrars to ensure good crime and incident data quality recording is maintained.

4.1 Staff training and resources
All staff involved in crime recording have the appropriate level of knowledge and competence and understand the SCRS and why it is important. They receive initial and regular refresher training. Training is targeted at individuals, teams or areas of underperformance. Roles and responsibilities relating to crime recording are clearly understood by all involved. Staff know where and how to seek help on crime recording issues.

4.2 Crime registrars

Crime registrars have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience of the crime recording process (including SCRS and Counting Rules). Registrars are the final arbiter in crime recording and classification decisions and should never be placed in a position where they are directly responsible for reducing crime levels or are answerable to a line manager who has such responsibility. Registrars have the support of the service lead for SCRS. Registrars are aware of the requirements of their role. They are supported in their role and have sufficient resources at their disposal to carry out audits. Arrangements are in place to ensure resilience for the registrars' role. Registrars should be involved in decisions to no-crime more serious offences.

5. **Audit and performance**

Quality checking of recorded incidents and crimes takes place to ensure that it is fit for purpose and action is taken to address issues arising. There is an efficient and effective crime and incident audit system in place and action is taken to address audit findings and results.

5.1 Audit and quality assurance

The service is aware of data quality risks and acts upon them through a targeted programme of audit and quality assurance. There is a 'right first time' approach with audit being proportionate to risk. Risk is assessed in terms of its likelihood and potential impact. Audits are conducted in accordance with a nationally agreed methodology. Audit and quality assurance is appropriately resourced.

5.2 Learning the lessons

Lessons from audits are effectively incorporated into practice, planning, policy development and training and are used to drive improvement. Any problems identified through audit in respect of an individual or team's understanding or competence in crime recording are addressed.

5.3 Performance

Quality assurance and audit results form part of the performance management framework and are discussed at performance management meetings. Those responsible for crime recording are held to account through performance review. Results from previous audits have demonstrably been addressed.

Customer feedback is routinely sought to ensure that crimes reported are handled properly. Action is taken to address feedback and the results of surveys regarding public satisfaction with policing.

Appendix 2 – Previous HMICS recommendations

The following recommendations were made in our last review of crime recording in Scotland, *Crime Audit 2011: National Overview Report*, published in 2012.

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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HMICS operates independently of Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government. Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, our role is to review the state, effectiveness and efficiency of Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. We support improvement in policing by carrying out inspections, making recommendations and highlighting effective practice.