

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHUMBRIA**JOINT INDEPENDENT AUDIT COMMITTEE****24 FEBRUARY 2014**

AUDIT OF CRIME RECORDING STANDARDS**Report of the Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioner**

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the routine audit arrangements in place to ensure compliance with crime recording standards, and to provide a summary of the recent ad-hoc audit undertaken.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Police Act 1996 sets out a duty to report on the 'state of crime' to the Home Secretary. The Home Office Counting Rules (HOCRs) defines which crimes are reported, known as 'notifiable offences'. When a notifiable offence is reported to the police by a victim, or comes to police attention through witness reports or proactive investigations, the HOCRs define how it is notified.
- 2.2 To ensure that the Force maintains confidence in crime recording standards it has a routine audit programme in place, overseen by a Force Crime Registrar. In addition, a Force wide ad-hoc audit has been undertaken.

3. Financial Considerations

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising from the report.

4. Legal Considerations

- 4.1 The duty to report crime statistics is established by section 45 of Police Act 1996.

5. Equality Considerations

- 5.1 There are no equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

6. Risk Management Considerations

- 6.1 There is a risk that poor compliance with the HOCRs produces crime statistics that are not fit for purpose. The checks by Sergeants within the Communications Department, the programme of routine audits and the recent Force wide ad-hoc audit mitigate these risks.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

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- 2.1 The Police Act 1996 sets out a duty to report on the 'state of crime' to the Home Secretary. The Home Office Counting Rules (HOCRs) defines which crimes are reported, these are known as 'notifiable offences'. When a notifiable offence is reported to the police by a victim, or comes to police attention through witness reports or proactive investigations, the HOCRs define how it is notified. The rules determine:
- Whether the crime is notified or not
 - When the crime is notified
 - How many crimes are notified
 - The classification of each crime
 - How the outcome of the crime is notified
- 2.2 The HOCRs include the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). The standard was developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Home Office, and introduced in April 2002. The purpose of the NCRS is to promote greater consistency between police forces in the recording of crime and to take a more victim oriented approach to crime recording.
- 2.3 The NCRS also established the role of Force Crime Registrar (FCR). The FCR is the final arbiter for the interpretation of the counting rules, assigning outcomes and overseeing the audit process. The FCR is independent of performance considerations and reports to the Deputy Chief Constable, who holds the portfolio for crime data integrity.
- 2.4 The Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) and Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) are receiving written and oral evidence on police crime recording. The evidence submitted to the PASC includes allegations of deliberate 'manipulation' of police recorded crime statistics. The ACPO lead for crime recording, Chief Constable Farrar of Gwent Police, acknowledged in his evidence that more can be done to improve consistency between forces and compliance with the HOCRs.
- 2.5 In January 2014, the UK Statistics Authority withdrew the National Statistics designation from police recorded crime. Concern about the reliability of the data was a consideration in the decision, but not the sole reason for the decision. Other factors were that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) did not have sufficient information to:
- Provide assurance that the statistics based on these data met users' needs.

- Ensure that users were made fully aware of the limitations of the recorded crime statistics and the impact that these have on their use of the statistics.

2.6 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is to conduct a Crime Data Integrity inspection to test the accuracy of police recorded crime figures; assess how effectively police leaders oversee and govern crime data integrity, and gauge how effectively victims are considered in the crime recording decision. The inspection will be conducted in two phases. HMIC inspection teams will complete the crime data audit in Northumbria during week commencing 28 July 2014, and a three day phase of interviews and focus groups during week commencing 4 August 2014.

Routine Audits

2.7 Northumbria Police has consistently maintained a programme of routine internal audits managed by the FCR. Significant amongst these is the audit of incidents that do not result in the recording of a notifiable crime. A sample of incidents is checked every week to verify that the decision not to record a notifiable crime is the correct decision, and that it is substantiated with a rationale that complies with the requirements of the HOCRs and the principles of NCRS. Approximately 1,800 incidents per month are subject of audit. The sample is a fixed minimum volume of incidents per area command. This minimum is boosted by a risk based sample. The risk based sample is triggered when the incident to crime conversion rate is significantly below the Force average. Force wide compliance levels from the routine audit range from 91% to 94%.

Ad-hoc Audit

2.8 In addition to the routine programme, a substantial Force wide audit was conducted in October 2013. The methodology used was based on similar principles to that used by HMIC, as part of the national crime data integrity review.

- An audit of recent and historical incidents opened with a crime code, but not crimed.
- A victim call-back for a sample of those incidents which were identified as potentially not meeting the HOCRs. These victim call backs checked the account of the victim with the detail recorded on the incident log.

2.9 The sample (approximately 2,500 incidents) was drawn from incidents relating to violence, burglary, theft, vehicle crime and damage for the period between 1st September and 8th October 2013; 83% of the Force's total recorded crime comes from these incident types. The audit assessed compliance across all area commands and sectors. The sample was determined by a number of factors, including the crime to incident conversion rate, variations in crime levels, with a larger sample for incidents of violence and theft.

2.10 Overall compliance levels from the crime data audit were 88%.

2.11 The compliance level for theft and handling was low, at 82%. Due to the sample size taken, it was possible to identify that this low compliance rate was

due to compliance around the theft of personal property in the night time economy; such as phones, bags, cash, wallets and iPads. It was the balance of probability of theft versus loss decision that, in the main, accounted for the compliance level.

- 2.12 Compliance levels for violence were higher, at 87%. Incidents of burglary and vehicle crime had the highest compliance rates, at 90% and 91%, respectively.
- 2.13 Based on the victim call-backs, for those incidents that did not have a crime, 50% of incidents should have had a crime attached. For 40%, the victim's account was not a report of crime, and a better quality update would have made this clear, the remaining 10% were inconclusive because the victim could not say either way if they thought a crime had occurred. The combined data audit and victim call-back assessment provides an estimated compliance rate for crime recording of 94%.
- 2.14 A number of actions have been implemented to ensure confidence in crime recording as a result of this ad-hoc audit.
 - Communications Sergeants check all incidents opened with a crime code, but not crimed, as an initial quality assurance process.
 - A quality assurance process has also been introduced, whereby Communications Sergeants re-contact victims for incidents of theft which relate to personal property and which do not have a crime attached. This will provide additional confidence in our crime recording standards.
 - A further ad-hoc incident audit is underway, using the same methodology and sample size.