

Northamptonshire Police Crime Data Integrity

Inspection revisit findings – November 2014

July 2015

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-827-1

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Executive summary

During April and May 2014, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) conducted an audit of force crime records and an inspection into how Northamptonshire Police records crime data. This was part of the national review of crime recording in each of the 43 forces in England and Wales.

HMIC had significant concerns about the accuracy of crime recording within the force and a follow-up inspection was carried out to review the progress made against the recommendations from the original inspection. While the force has made some progress there is still more to be done. There remains some concern about the accuracy of crime recording by Northamptonshire Police. This report outlines the findings from the follow-up inspection which took place in November 2014.

Summary and next steps

In the six months which have elapsed since the initial inspection, there have been a number of improvements in Northamptonshire Police's approach to crime recording. The force has returned to recording crimes in accordance with national guidelines and with a sound ethical basis. It is working to secure progress against, or has discharged, the majority of the ten recommendations made in the previous HMIC inspection report. There are, however, areas where concern remains. It is hoped that the new chief officer lead for the action plan will continue the progress achieved so far.

The majority of the frontline staff HMIC spoke to are clear that they would record crime where appropriate. Officers confirmed that the "performance pressures" which had encouraged them not to record crimes in order to help meet force targets, are no longer operating. Similarly the appointment of a new force crime and incident registrar (FCIR) is having a positive effect on helping the organisation change the way crime is recorded and managed.

HMIC audit work indicates that while some progress has been made in recording reports of crime from the public, there is still an unacceptable shortfall in the accuracy of recording crimes reported to the force. It is necessary for the improvements that have been made so far to be continued and developed further.

HMIC will re-assess the force's progress in this area during 2015 as part of the current national programme of force inspections.

Introduction

As part of its 2013/14 inspection programme¹, HMIC carried out an inspection into the way the 43 police forces in England and Wales record crime data. All 43 forces were inspected by mid August 2014, with a full thematic report published in autumn 2014. The central question of this inspection programme was:

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

Northamptonshire Police was inspected in May 2014 as part of this programme and details of the conclusions reached together with a breakdown of the findings can be found in that report². The data sample for the inspection programme was designed to be statistically significant at a national level rather than at individual force level. As a result, the central question of the inspection programme was only fully answered within HMIC final thematic report. However, to give an indication of the force’s ability to secure crime data accuracy individual force data samples within both the original inspection and again in this subsequent re-inspection report have been included. HMIC had significant concerns about the accuracy of crime data in Northamptonshire based on the findings of the May 2014 inspection and conducted a further inspection in November 2014.

Accurate crime recording underlines the police service’s commitment to public accountability, ensures that local policing bodies³ can match resources to the risks identified in communities and enables the police to provide a proper service to victims of crime.

Recent HMIC inspections have revealed weaknesses in police crime recording, particularly the under-recording of crimes. In response to our overall findings, the Home Secretary commented, “there have been utterly unacceptable failings in the way police forces have recorded crime”.⁴ This re-visit of crime recording practice in Northamptonshire has been carried out directly as a result of the way these concerns were revealed in operational practice in the force.

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

² *Crime data integrity: Inspection of Northamptonshire Police*, HMIC, London, August 2014. Available at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

³ Police and crime commissioners for police areas outside London: the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime for the Metropolitan Police Service; and the City of London Corporation for the City of London Police.

⁴ Press release from the Home Secretary in response to the HMIC final report: *Crime recording: making the victim count*, 18 November 2014.

The national final report sets out the full context of this inspection programme including the rules and standards governing crime data integrity: the NCRS and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR)⁵.

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

Part A: Recommendations from the previous inspection

This follow-up inspection paid particular attention to the recommendations from the original inspection and suggested implementation times highlighted by HMIC in its report *Crime data integrity: Inspection of Northamptonshire Police* (2014). The summary below sets out the progress identified against each of these.

Immediately

Recommendation 1

The force should ensure that its crime-recording policy is fully compliant with HOCR and NCRS. References to the practice of 'investigate-to-record' should be removed from all policy documents. In addition there should be clear communication to officers and staff:

- To inform them of the revised crime-recording policy and the expectation that they adhere to it; and
- To reinforce the unequivocal message that ethical crime recording and compliance with the NCRS is required irrespective of the effect this might have on force performance.

This recommendation is discharged. The force has made clear to staff that crimes must be recorded when necessary and that performance concerns should have no place in their decision making about whether or not a crime should be recorded. The term 'investigate to record' has been expunged from force documents. While officers and staff may not know the detail of the newly drafted crime recording policy they have sufficient knowledge to understand when they should record a crime.

Recommendation 2

The force should ensure that the steps it took immediately after HMIC's inspection to address the inaccuracy of its no-criming decisions are effective. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.

While some progress has been made this recommendation requires further action.

While there is clear improvement in the decision making around 'no-crime' particularly in relation to rape cases, there is still some flawed interpretation of additional verifiable information (AVI) both by those making the decision to 'no-crime' and those requesting cases be 'no-crime'. Work to improve the understanding of AVI is ongoing.

Recommendation 3

The force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

While some progress has been made this recommendation requires further action. The FCR has delivered training to staff in specialist units to help them understand their obligations when taking reports of crime. Additional scrutiny is being given to these incidents to ensure that crimes are recorded when necessary. HMIC audit found an improvement in the recording of crimes referred to the child abuse investigation teams but little improvement in the recording of domestic abuse crimes. Over 700 previously recorded incidents from these areas of protecting vulnerable people are being reviewed to ensure that are properly recorded as crimes where appropriate and that victims are receiving necessary support.

Recommendation 4

The force should ensure that officers and staff understand the independence of the FCR and his role as the final arbiter in respect of crime-recording decisions.

This recommendation is discharged. The new FCIR has quickly become established in his role. Officers and staff regard him as the final arbiter for decisions concerning crime recording.

Within three months

Recommendation 5

The force should ensure that there is sufficient capability and capacity within the CMU to enable effective and efficient crime recording.

This recommendation requires further action. While the FCIR is developing his knowledge levels, he is unable to meet his audit regime due to staffing levels in his team. The force has introduced an investigation management unit (IMU). Led by a detective inspector, the IMU has been introduced to improve crime recording by front line officer and educate staff within the control room about crime.

However the staff in the unit report large backlogs of work and insufficient staff to deal with the work coming in.

Recommendation 6

The force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and the apparent under-recording of crime, taking the necessary steps to improve the accuracy of crime recording. Risks should be included in, and monitored through, the force risk register.

This recommendation is partially discharged. Crime data integrity now features on the force risk register and is reviewed regularly. A more dynamic approach which reviews the impact of a changing approach to crime recording would give the force an improved understanding of risk.

Recommendation 7

The force should amend its guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime-recording is to be carried out in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.

This recommendation has been discharged. The force appointed a detective sergeant with responsibility for ensuring the accurate recording of reported cases of rape. Those cases which HMIC had highlighted in the original inspection as being incorrectly dealt with were reopened to ensure proper investigation and victim care. While there has been clear improvement in identifying crimes of rape it was disappointing that two of the crimes HMIC identified during the re-inspection which had not been properly recorded were reports of rape.

Recommendation 8

The force should introduce a structured, regular audit plan and ensure the force crime registrar (FCR) has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime recording.

This recommendation requires further action. While the FCIR reports that he has developed an audit programme for the year, he has insufficient resources to take carry out these planned audits. There is a need to review staffing levels against proposed auditing plans and the level of risk that each carries should no change be introduced.

Recommendation 9

The force should include the FCR in force-level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime-recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

This recommendation has been discharged. The force has made the decision to include the FCIR in all force level performance meetings following renewed comment from HMIC.

Within six months

Recommendation 10

The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime-recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

This recommendation requires further action. The new FCIR and incident auditor have presented to groups of sergeants and experienced constables attending the 'crime skills' course. The intention is that these staff will cascade this information to their colleagues. Reality testing found that while officers understood when to record a crime they did not always understand why they were doing so and there was a lack of understanding about AVI when considering 'no-crime'.

Part B: Inspection findings in relation to the force's response to recommendations from initial CDI inspection

The following section outlines each recommendation from the original inspection in May 2014, including timescales for completion and the detailed findings from the follow-up inspection in November 2014.

Immediately

Crime-recording policy

The force should ensure that its crime-recording policy is fully compliant with HOCR and NCRS. References to the practice of 'investigate-to-record' should be removed from all policy documents. In addition there should be clear communication to officers and staff:

- To inform them of the revised crime-recording policy and the expectation that they adhere to it; and
- To reinforce the unequivocal message that ethical crime recording and compliance with the NCRS is required irrespective of the effect this might have on force performance.

(Recommendation 1 from initial report)

When police staff or officers receive a report that a crime has been committed, the HOCR set out that this crime should be recorded "as soon as the reporting officer is satisfied that it is more likely than not that a crime has been committed." This approach is intended to ensure that officers enter the details of crimes at the earliest time that a police force's recording system allows. Not only does this enable a swift and appropriate response to the crime itself but also often provides access to other important supporting services to any victim involved.

This national guidance about the timing of when a crime should be recorded had been replaced in Northamptonshire Police by local guidance published by the chief officer team. This directed that officers should only record a crime once an investigation had confirmed that a crime had been committed, meaning that there were delays in recording crime and some crimes were not recorded. While that local policy had been withdrawn prior to our initial inspection, HMIC found many officers still drawing on it to guide their actions in recording crime.

When HMIC returned to the force we carried out wide ranging checks with frontline officers, support staff and managers. These reveal that Northamptonshire Police has comprehensively shifted away from the previous local policy of "investigate to

record". Messages from the chief officer team have clearly signalled that the introduction of this policy had been a mistake. In its place, there is a comprehensive endorsement of the need to record crime ethically and in line with national guidance. These communications have been both frequent and in many different forms to try to reach as wide an audience as possible.

While frontline staff are unable to state exactly how they had heard about this new approach, they almost universally are able to provide the details of these messages. Uniform officers now understand that they must record crimes when necessary, but not all understand why this is important. HMIC found no trace of the 'performance pressures' which had influenced staff not to record crimes during our last inspection. There is a need to build on this basic compliance with a developed understanding of why this new approach is important. Indeed some staff we spoke to thought that the new policy was introduced by HMIC, rather than signalling a return to the NCRS.

A number of officers and staff, however, show good levels of understanding and were more comfortable being able to record crime in a way they feel is correct. They describe feeling frustrated by the previous policy. A review of all force documents and policy on crime recording shows the phrase 'investigate to record' and the practice has been completely removed. Officers are now able to record crime more quickly and easily through the roll-out of the officer crime input system (OCIS) across the force. This was being piloted on our previous visit and has reduced delays in officers reporting the details of crimes for entry on the crime system, meaning that victims will be referred to support services more quickly where these are needed.

The force has introduced a new force crime recording policy and this is available on the force network to all operational staff. Again, many staff knew that a new policy was in existence but very few have looked at it or are aware of its content. The policy is drafted drawing on a number of elements of good practice from other forces. It is important, however, that the force is able to demonstrate compliance with all aspects of this policy.

An example of this, is the new requirement for supervisors in the force control room to check certain incidents involving possible reports of crime. These are incidents judged to involve the need to record a crime when they are first entered on force systems. If these incidents are finalised without a crime being reported, policy states that a supervisor should check them for accuracy to see if a crime report is necessary. HMIC audits and inspections reveal that this is not regularly occurring and crimes are being missed.

There have been a number of changes in chief officer leadership for crime data integrity in Northamptonshire Police throughout 2014. This has not assisted in providing clarity about responsibility and reinforcement of important messages with front line officers. The current assistant chief constable (ACC) responsible for crime recording has, however, begun to engage with operational officers and is recognised

by the police and crime commissioner's office in bringing a welcome commitment to improving standards. His insights from his previous role as head of crime in the force are helpful in steering the necessary activity.

The ACC has overseen the creation of an action plan intended to address the recommendations stemming from the inspection which took place earlier in the year. He has also directed the new head of crime to chair a 'task and finish' group to deliver against each area. This reports back to the force National Crime Recording Steering Group on a quarterly basis and updates on progress using a RAG, (red, amber or green) flagging system. Currently the force regards actions in response to all recommendations as either green and on target or amber and requiring more work.

No-crime decisions

The force should ensure that the steps it took immediately after HMIC's inspection to address the inaccuracy of its no-criming decisions are effective. It should provide guidance to all officers and staff who are engaged in requesting or making no-crime decisions which clearly describes the standard of additional verifiable information required in order to authorise a no-crime in accordance with the NCRS. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the standard.

(Recommendation 2 from initial report)

No-crime refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime on the basis of additional verifiable information (AVI) and therefore cancelled. Crimes can also be cancelled for other reasons such as those recorded in error (for instance mistakenly recorded twice by different officers) or if the crime took place in another force area and it is transferred.

As HMIC were looking at records from the relatively short period of 3 months from July to September (when compared to our previous audit), we were unable to examine a comparable range of no crime decisions. We examined 43 no-crime records and found 37 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. The no-crime records we reviewed related to offences of rape, robbery and violence, of which the latter category contained the most errors (5 cases). Violence no-crimes also contained a high proportion of cases in which there is no record of the victim being told of this decision. The force should ensure such victims are routinely made aware of these outcomes to their crime reports.

The force has introduced a number of positive new initiatives to rectify poor practices in deciding to no-crime records. The new force crime policy clearly sets out responsibilities for assessing and then deciding to no-crime a record in varying types of crime category. The most careful scrutiny is rightly given to rape crimes where the new FCIR alone is the decision maker.

The FCIR is making good use of regional links to broaden his expertise in this area and to check his interpretation of national guidance. He also conducts dip sampling of the decisions made by the small group of staff in the CMB authorised to make no-crime decisions.

During the last inspection HMIC found that CMB staff decision making was influenced by a victim's lifestyle or actions; during this inspection HMIC did not find this to be the case. The new FCIR has brought a clear and balanced approach particularly to rape no-crime applications. As the number of no-crimes reviewed was relatively small, we also looked at a small number of crimes, which were put forward by officers for a no-crime decision, but which the FCIR decided should remain as crimes. HMIC did this also because all the rape crimes examined were marked as no-crime on the basis of being duplicate crimes or occurring in another force area. Although only a small sample, all applications for no-criming that were rejected by the FCIR were correct judgements.

Correct decisions on marking a crime as a no-crime frequently rely on a correct interpretation of what constitutes AVI. While the term AVI is widely recognised by the front line following numerous force level messages and circulations, it is not fully understood. The force has made the guidance on no-crimes (drawn up by the national crime registrar) widely available. It has not tested the degree to which officers, staff and managers have grasped this concept and guidance. Evidenced by some of the rejected applications for no-crime decisions, this still gives some cause for concern.

Other force systems

The force should ensure that reports recorded separately on other force systems (e.g., those used by the public protection teams) are recorded as crimes. The force should put in place proportionate and effective audit arrangements, through the FCR, to assure itself that reports held on these systems are properly recorded as crimes.

(Recommendation 3 from initial report)

One of the most worrying aspects of our last inspection, was the way in which crimes were not being recorded in cases held on 'other systems' within the crime computer records. The configuration of records in Northamptonshire Police causes these to fall into two distinct groups. One section includes the records of specialist investigations such as child abuse and dealing with vulnerable people.

These are locally named as PO1 records. The other group is the records of domestic incidents where the attending officer does not believe a crime has been committed. These are termed DO1s.

As before, HMIC examined 105 reports which were recorded separately on other force systems. We found that of those 105 reports, 27 crimes should have been recorded, of which 15 were. Within each of the two categories of these records, however, there was a distinct difference in crime recording accuracy. In the case of PO1s, the force had recorded 13 of the 16 crimes HMIC thought should have been recorded. This is a marked improvement on previous findings. The same cannot be said of DO1 records where 2 crimes were recorded of the 11 HMIC judged to be crimes.

Problems with DO1 domestic incident based records will be described in a subsequent section, but progress in the records of specialist investigations are due to heightened awareness about NCRS and HOCR. In line with our recommendation, the FCIR has personally engaged with staff in these specialist areas to build more understanding of the need to record crimes. One of the force auditors has also been assigned to help make sure that all reports coming into the force from third parties such as health or social services are checked for details of potential crimes.

The force is embarking on a process of checking previous reports in this area of specialised investigation which is positive. Approximately 700 case records will be checked to ensure all the crimes which should have been recorded, are recorded and dealt with. Any victims who are identified will be referred to appropriate support services.

Though not highlighted as a specific recommendation in the initial CDI inspection, the accuracy of the force's incident to crime conversion rate was held to be a cause for concern. This directly relates to the creation of incidents on the command and control computer following a call from the public. Such incidents necessitate an assessment by a police officer, who will usually attend the scene. The initial pre-inspection audit reviewed 106 incidents and judged that 82 should have been recorded as crimes, whereas 65 had been recorded.

In the six months which passed before our re-inspection it is clear that Northamptonshire Police have made determined efforts to improve on the standard of incident to crime recording. This was evident through both the action plan and the efforts of the FCIR to build awareness and understanding of NCRS and HOCR in a range of managers. In our new audit HMIC examined only those incidents recorded since our last inspection. Auditors noted that force records and the quality of crime data have improved during this period. On this occasion, we examined 132 incidents. From these we were of the opinion that 116 crimes should have been recorded of which 99 were.

These findings represent an improvement in the accuracy with which the force records the majority of its crime, but there is still considerable progress required to reach acceptable levels.

An element of these shortfalls lies in supervision of crime within the force control room. In one incident, auditors identified that when an officer was sent to deal with a complaint of assault following a fight between 13-year-old boys, his update to the control room stated that no crime was needed in this case. The officer went on to quote the “investigate to record” approach as justifying the decision. The inspector in the control room quickly overturned this approach, advised the officer of the new force policy and directed that a crime should be recorded. This is clearly effective supervision, but our audit revealed that in 12 incidents of the 132 HMIC reviewed, was there evidence of this style of oversight. The new force crime policy sets out that this level of review should be routine in such cases.

Within the control room a particular group of incidents known as the ‘pending’ queue gives some concern. This grouping of incidents involves cases where most but not all the information needed to close an incident and progress a crime report has been obtained. In most cases a crime has been recorded but has not been checked for accuracy or assessed for any further necessary investigation. Some control room supervisors appear to give scant regard to this pending queue and crimes can be held for several days and in some cases over a week without being progressed. While this is going on there is frequently no victim contact or update. There is also a very real possibility that repeat and vulnerable victims may not be identified as quickly as they should be and safeguarding opportunities missed.

In the incidents HMIC checked, we found that of the 17 crimes missed, 5 crimes of violence were not recorded, 3 sexual offences (including 2 of rape where the crime occurred some time ago), 4 robberies as well as one theft and a criminal damage crime. When we looked at reasons why crimes were not recorded, we found that in five cases there was no discernible reason why this did not happen, but in a further five cases, records indicate that the decision was made as the victim was not believed by the officer. It is the role of supervision to ensure incident logs are fully written up to explain why crimes are not recorded. Supervisors should also challenge officers’ judgements and ensure that correct interpretations of when a crime should be recorded are made.

The force has made progress towards plans for continual training for control room staff and has identified individuals who routinely make incorrect crime recording decisions. Considerable shortfalls in staffing the force control room and changing staff, however, have made the necessary training extremely difficult given the need to maintain emergency response services.

Independence of the FCIR

The force should ensure that officers and staff understand the independence of the FCR and his role as the final arbiter in respect of crime-recording decisions.

(Recommendation 4 from initial report)

The new FCIR now meets regularly with, and reports directly to, the ACC responsible for crime data integrity and a positive exchange of views and ideas clearly flow from these meetings. The FCIR also believes he has an 'open door' invitation from the ACC in case unforeseen or sudden events need bringing to his attention. He also discusses progress towards better crime recording with the chief constable as evidenced during our re-inspection.

Even though he has been in post only a relatively short time, the FCIR has become well known by a large number of supervisors and staff. They stated they have either made contact to check on crime recording issues or would have no hesitation in doing so.

Despite the enthusiasm to improve crime-recording standards in the force displayed by the new FCIR, senior managers in Northamptonshire Police must make careful decisions about the initiatives on which his time is spent to achieve the best use of this energy and drive. There is an emerging issue that the FCIR is being constantly drawn on to assist with training to the detriment of his ability to complete his FCIR office duties. This is a tricky balance between maintaining visibility and training and his day-to-day workload.

Within three months

The investigation management unit

The force should ensure that there is sufficient capability and capacity within the CMU to enable effective and efficient crime recording.

(Recommendation 5 from initial report)

In October 2014 the force introduced the Investigation Management Unit (IMU) as part of the co-ordinated response to HMIC findings and the on-going crime process review within the force. This latter initiative is led by a chief inspector and is intended to both drive down demand within the crime investigation processes and look for efficiencies and improvements within operational practice.

A detective inspector has been selected to head the IMU and form a more dynamic link between those attending and recording crime at the front line and those managing and processing the resulting records. He is also seen as having a role in working with the force control room where it is openly acknowledged that crime recording has become far less of a priority than managing the "threat, harm and risk" attached to incidents.

To assist him in this task he has been given the collected staff of the former crime management unit (CMU). In addition two members of experienced control room staff with a sound knowledge of crime recording practice have been selected to join the IMU with a view to training their former colleagues on ensuring crime features more prominently in the work of the control room staff. The IMU was also re-located from its previous offices to immediately adjacent to the force control room to enable better communication.

These plans appear to be a strong response to improving both the fragile staffing arrangements in the CMU and enhancing skills in an area where accuracy involving crime needs to be improved. Our reality checks, however, revealed this was far from the situation on both counts. HMIC found that the staffing levels in the former CMU had been made significantly worse by the very long term absence of two of its most experienced staff. The two control room staff joining the unit did not have the skills and experience to backfill for these absences in checking and filing crime recorded by officers. Following considerable feedback from the highly motivated staff in the unit to managers, a former detective sergeant had been given a temporary role but he openly admitted to be still acquiring all the skills necessary for the work.

The unit appeared very close to being unable to function. There are real concerns that there is a lack of recognition of the potential imminent collapse of the IMU. Significant and worrying backlogs of crimes have built up in several areas, including some 1,675 crimes awaiting filing. These backlogs and the workloads due to staff absences are having a substantial impact on the welfare of the staff that remain. One manager commented on these numbers stating “they have never been as high as this before.”

Similarly, the force control room has seen significant turnover in the people employed coupled with unexpected resignations. At least one intake of new recruits saw multiple resignations rather than going on to complete their training. This has meant that managers will not release operators from duties to receive the crime training they need from the IMU staff. Instead the IMU trainers have been used to train groups of new recruits to control room positions. This series of events is not detailed in the force risk on crime data integrity.

There is a surprising absence of publicity within the force about this new unit. HMIC were told that a sign for the IMU office was only installed days before the inspection. Staff in the control room are unaware of the IMU, their location and function.

Crime recording risks

The force should review its assessment of the risks associated with crime data integrity and the apparent under-recording of crime, taking the necessary steps to improve the accuracy of crime recording. Risks should be included in, and monitored through, the force risk register.

(Recommendation 6 from initial report)

When HMIC visited the force earlier in the year there was little evidence that it was aware and responding to the many risks that stem from inaccurate crime recording data. Far greater focus was given to the way crime recording affected performance in reducing or detecting crime.

Northamptonshire Police has now established a mechanism for monitoring this risk though an entry on the force risk register which is regularly reviewed by the force senior management. This risk is owned by the ACC and is assessed for both likelihood and possible impact. Progress in addressing this risk, relies primarily on periodic updates on progress in meeting the recommendations previously set by HMIC.

The risk is properly documented and contains the detailed updates stemming from each area of activity. It is not, however, a dynamic risk addressing the current issues and developments occurring within the force and the impact of more accurate crime data integrity. For example the force is currently seeing significant rises in assault crimes and needs to understand whether this is due to changes in crime recording or a more concerning issue.

Rape crime recording

The force should amend its guidance so as clearly to specify the point at which, and conditions in which, a report of rape should be recorded as a crime. The guidance should also specify how crime recording is to be carried out in the case of a rape reported to the force but which has been committed outside the force area.

(Recommendation 7 from initial report)

Following the conclusions HMIC reached in May and our subsequent recommendation, the force responded by appointing a detective sergeant with a single focus on this subject. This officer was swift in reviewing the crimes HMIC had judged to be incorrectly handled and the cases reopened to be certain that everything had been done to assist the victims involved. These cases were used as scenarios for organisational learning and once made anonymous, were circulated to officers to study. HMIC found that there has also been some in depth reviews of how detectives should conduct rape investigations by drawing on these examples.

The process of recording and managing rape crime is covered within the general crime recording policy, supplemented by force guidance and assistance to reporting officers available in a crime skills booklet. There are very good processes in place to transfer rape cases to other force areas. Officers understand what they need to do in these cases and the reference number from the other force is routinely added to the Northamptonshire Police crime records.

Alongside the new provisions for managing rape no-crimes, the FCIR is also responsible for a fortnightly 'word search' on the command and control system to identify any incident with the word "rape" contained within it. This could identify cases where rape has been reported but not recorded as such.

Arrangements for identifying rape crimes have been considerably improved since our previous inspection, but it was disappointing that two of the crimes the force failed to record involved crimes of rape. These improvements must extend to incidents where crimes of rape are disclosed, which may have occurred some time ago, but are only now being reported. These can be overlooked if sufficient care is not given to checking the detail of specialist investigations and domestic abuse incidents.

Audit checks

The force should introduce a structured, regular audit plan and ensure the force crime registrar (FCR) has sufficient resources and skills necessary to carry out a proportionate and effective audit programme that balances the cost of the checking process with the need to improve the accuracy of crime recording.

(Recommendation 8 from initial report)

In May 2014, HMIC reviewed the way in which Northamptonshire Police used audit to assess crime recording accuracy and to provide confidence that internal force processes were operating effectively. There had been recent re-investment in the appointment of an auditor for the control room to examine the thoroughness with which individual incidents were managed.

This individual, however, was working in isolation to improve standards and quality audit checks had become extremely basic in nature. It was our view that given the real concerns over the numbers of crimes being routinely missed, the force needed to take urgent action to improve. It was only by identifying and correcting common errors that progress could be made.

It was disappointing, therefore, to find that very little progress has been made against this recommendation. The FCIR clearly understands the value of audit and has worked with colleagues in the crime management bureau (CMB) to draw up an audit schedule to meet force needs. Unfortunately, he describes this as merely 'aspirational' as there are insufficient resources available to him to do anything other than rudimentary daily checks of crimes and incidents. The head of crime has

considered the use of temporary groups of non-specialist auditors to complete this work. All the staff in force, who have expertise in this area, expressed strong doubts that such ad hoc responses would be sufficient to properly identify complex problems in force systems which require both training and experience.

As a result, an options paper is to be put before the chief officer team clearly setting out what is achievable against different levels of resourcing in both the CMB and audit functions.

An example of why this audit function is essential can be found in the way the force manages its records of domestic incidents, where attending officers determine that no crime has been committed. These cases are classed as 'domestics non crime' or DO1s. In our audit HMIC reviewed a dip sample of 50 of these records. Within them we found that 11 crimes should have been recorded, but 2 were. (On the previous audit, we found 13 crimes should have been recorded and none were). CMB staff commented that while they tried to spot unrecorded crimes in these records, it was not their job to finalise these cases as this fell to front line sergeants.

HMIC were told that many sergeants do not consider it their role to check these records thoroughly or the domestic assault, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessments which are frequently part of the investigation. Consequently we found many domestic assaults and harassment crimes which had not been recorded. Without regular audit, these errors remain unseen and permanently filed. Sergeants failing to supervise these cases are not identified and given developmental feedback. In the aspirational audit schedule these cases would be reviewed every week, given adequate resourcing.

Performance review meetings

The force should include the FCR in force-level performance and policy meetings to ensure that crime-recording standards are considered when scrutinising performance and developing policy.

(Recommendation 9 from initial report)

The force action plan indicates that the need to strengthen the focus on integrity of crime recording data in its performance meeting structures has been completed. HMIC had previously recommended that the new FCIR should attend force performance meetings where reviews of crime outcomes occurred. The FCIR role was set up in each force to be the 'conscience of the force' and able to operate with a degree of independence from operational delivery of policing. Nationally, the College of Policing is introducing some standards and training to enhance the standing and professional capacity of this role even further.

While the FCIR has been attending some of the new performance meetings, this was only by invitation of the chair of the meeting. The force view was that his perspectives could be 'fed into' this meeting by the ACC with whom he held regular

meetings. It remains vital that the force has a complete view of the factors affecting crime recording in the county, especially in the wake of the widespread changes following the last inspection. The need to involve the FCIR more in these areas of force business is demonstrated by the way the new force policy on crime recording was introduced without including him in consultation on its content. It was encouraging, therefore, to find that the force now intends to invite the FCIR to all such meetings following renewed comment from HMIC inspectors.

Within six months

Training of front line staff

The force should establish and begin operation of an adequate system of training in crime-recording for all police officers and police staff who are responsible for making crime recording decisions, and ensure those who require such training receive it as soon as reasonably practicable.

(Recommendation 10 from initial report)

Since his appointment, the FCIR together with the incident auditor, have presented to groups of sergeants and tutor constables on the crime skills courses being run by Northamptonshire Police. This was originally planned as a short 20-minute overview but has become extended in some cases to a 2-hour explanation of NCRS and HOCR. This presentation has been well received and demonstrates the appetite of front line officers to get a better understanding of crime recording.

The force view is that these first line supervisors will be the “ambassadors” for a better and more consistent style of crime recording. There are no plans to conduct any awareness raising training of officers and staff on the front line until the force crime system is changed. There are plans for a regional adoption of the Niche product as the crime system for a number of forces to promote better inter-force co-operation and intelligence sharing. This is currently planned for September 2015.

During reality testing visits to operational areas, HMIC met officers who knew they had to raise crimes in certain situations, but did not always understand why. This coupled with the need for a broader understanding of AVI, indicates that officer and staff awareness training is necessary. HMIC is concerned that the pressures to train staff in a new crime computer system may work to the detriment of the planned crime recording training. Even if successfully combined, such training is some nine months distant.

The force should, therefore, review this approach in the light of recommendation 7 in the final national report on crime data integrity. This has highlighted the national training need in regard to crime recording and recommended a six-month timescale for the College of Policing to make a training solution available to all forces.

Part C: Audit findings in numbers

HMIC examination of records was used to qualitatively compare current performance by the force with our previous audit findings. The original audit was used as part of a statistically robust national audit allowing HMIC to report a figure for national crime recording accuracy across the 43 Home Office forces. This was reported on within the final report published in autumn 2014.

The audit undertaken at a force level is not of a sufficient size to be statistically robust and is therefore used alongside fieldwork interviews to form qualitative judgments only. Current findings are shown in black with the previous audit findings alongside (in brackets) for comparative purposes.

Crimes reported as part of an incident record		
Incidents reviewed	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of incident records in Northamptonshire Police. These include reported incidents of burglary, violence, robbery, criminal damage and sexual offences.	From these incidents HMIC identified the following number of crimes.	From these identified crimes Northamptonshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
132 (106)	116 (82)	99 (65)
Crime reports held on other systems		
Referrals	Crimes identified	Crimes recorded
HMIC reviewed the following number of referrals reported directly to Northamptonshire Police and held on other systems which contained reports of crime. (PO1s and DO1s)	From these referrals HMIC identified the following number of crimes that Northamptonshire Police should have recorded.	From these identified crimes Northamptonshire Police recorded the following number of crimes.
105 (105)	27 (28)	15 (1)

No-crimes	
HMIC reviewed the following number of recorded crimes of rape, violence and robbery which Northamptonshire Police had subsequently recorded as no-crime.	From these HMIC assessed the following number of no-crime decisions as being correct.
43 (90)	37 (55)

Annex A: Methodology

Scope of report

The data samples in this report broadly replicated the nature and scope of the data samples used in the force inspection in May 2014. These were used as part of a statistically robust national audit. This allowed HMIC to report a figure of national crime recording accuracy in our final report published in autumn 2014.

The data samples in this report cannot be used to assess the crime recording accuracy of the force. The sample sizes are too small for us to be able to make judgments about individual forces. This report allows us to make a qualitative assessment of the force's crime recording arrangements and to make judgements about the degree of improvement and progress in meeting the recommendations set out in the previous inspection report.

The force inspection involved:

- an examination of crime records for the period 15 July 2014 to 14 October 2014;
- a dip-sample of no-crime decisions for rape, robbery and violence;
- a visit to the force where inspectors assessed local crime recording arrangements under three headings: leadership and governance; systems and processes; and people and skills; and
- the facility to have a peer review of our audit findings by an NCRS expert from outside HMIC.

HMIC reviewed the following documents during the inspection:

- force policy on crime recording;
- force guidance/procedure document(s) on crime recording;
- Northamptonshire Police Crime Data Integrity Action Plan;
- Northamptonshire Police document pack, supplied October 2014.

HMIC interviewed the following staff during the inspection:

- Assistant Chief Constable responsible for crime data integrity
- Detective Superintendent Head of Crime
- Head of Information Services Department
- Chief Inspector, Force Crime Review Process
- Force Crime and Incident Registrar
- Uniform and Investigation staff in operational roles across the force during reality checks at numerous stations.
- Force Incident Audit Officer
- Two Detective Chief Inspectors, Area Crime Managers
- Crime Bureau Manager
- Detective Inspector, Investigation Management Unit Manager
- Superintendent, Head of Control Room and Call Handling
- Managers and Staff, Protecting Vulnerable People Team