



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

Improving Policing across Scotland

12 November 2014

PRESS RELEASE

HMICS publishes Crime Audit 2014

Strictly EMBARGOED until 1100 hrs Wednesday, November 12

The quality of most crime recording in Scotland is good but there is scope for its improvement in relation to some sexual offences and non-crime related incidents, an HMICS report published today reveals.

The Crime Audit 2014 is the largest into crime recording undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and shows that the reform of Scottish policing has provided new opportunities for greater consistency.

HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Derek Penman, said: "It is important that the public can have confidence in crime figures and the scale of this report, which examined five times more records than any previous report, provides that.

"Police Scotland's own auditing of crime recording is good and the fact it broadly mirrors our results should provide assurance as to its accuracy.

"Accurate crime data is also vital for Police Scotland as it can inform planning and allows resources to be allocated where they are most needed.

"It is the first time we have presented figures on a divisional level and this will assist local scrutiny bodies to work with their local commanders improving the quality of crime recording for their communities. On a national level, we feel this audit gives the Scottish Police Authority an opportunity to drive improvement in crime recording in line with their wider scrutiny role.

"Most incident and crime recording decisions by Police Scotland are good. Some police divisions performed very well and show what can be achieved when a

rigorous and victim based approach is taken to attending, investigation and recording crime.

“A few divisions fell below the standard we would expect and Police Scotland should ensure these divisions develop improvement plans to address their crime recording practice.”

The report found there has been good work in relation to recording of hate crime, rape and house-breaking. It identified that one of the areas for progress is in other sexual offences and that their referral to special investigation units, although improving the quality of the inquiry, can be a factor in the delay of their recording. Violent crime and non-crime related incidents could also be better recorded.

The timeliness of crime recording, in general, has improved since the last HMICS audit with the majority taking place within 72 hours of the police being told about the incident.

Eight recommendations for Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority and 15 improvement actions are contained within the report.

Police Scotland have been asked to develop improvement plans for four divisions; to set in place processes to ensure incidents referred to specialist investigation units are regularly updated; to ensure that all incidents are properly closed and that complainers in no-crime cases are kept updated.

The recommendations also encourage closer scrutiny of crime data through the SPA, local authorities and Police Scotland working together on the improvement plans and sharing internal crime recording data.

HMICS also wants there to be discussion between the Police, SPA and the Scottish Government about the relevance of the current crime groupings and clarification on the ownership of the Counting Rules which detail how crimes should be recorded.

Footnotes

1. Records in six categories were audited – sexual offences, violent crime, housebreaking, hate crime, non-crime related incidents and no crimes.
2. No crimes are incidents that were originally thought to have been a crime but were later re-classified, following further additional investigation as not being a crime.
3. An incident is correctly closed when it is classified as non-crime related and the log contains enough information to dispel any inference of criminality or the incident indicated a crime had been committed and a crime record had been traced.
4. This is the first audit in which a timeliness test has been applied. All crimes must be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable and within 72 hours of from first notification.

5. The audit, which aimed to assess the extent to which recording complies with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and the Scottish Government's Counting Rules, examined over 8000 incidents and over 4500 crimes.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Report are listed below.

The HMICS Crime Audit 2014 report is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.org from 11.00hrs, November 12, 2014.

To arrange an interview with HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Derek Penman QPM, or to request a photograph, please contact:

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REPORT KEY FINDINGS:

- The quality of most incident and crime recording decisions by Police Scotland is good. 92% of incidents were closed correctly and 94% of crime was counted and classified correctly. There is however scope for improvement, particularly in relation to areas such as sexual offences and non-crime related incidents.
- A few divisions performed very well, achieving high compliance rates in all or most areas. The performance of these divisions demonstrates that compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and Counting Rules can be achieved when crime recording is well managed locally and appropriately scrutinised. Conversely, a few divisions performed poorly.
- There is scope for improvement in the recording of sexual offences. 89% of sexual offence related incidents were closed correctly and 90% were recorded within a reasonable timescale. The referral of incidents to specialist investigation units makes it more likely that recording will be delayed.
- Violent incidents reported to the police are closed correctly in 92% of cases. 94% of resulting crimes are counted and classified correctly. There remain challenges in the classification of violent crime, particularly around serious assaults, robberies and attempted murders.
- Scrutiny of housebreaking by crime management units resulted in good recording practice. 94% of housebreaking-related incidents were closed correctly and 95% of resulting crimes were counted and classified correctly.
- The recording of hate crime was excellent and achieved the highest compliance rate of 97% in our audit. However, a recurring issue with regards to the classification of some hate crime should be addressed.

■ Only 87% of the non-crime related incidents we examined were closed correctly. Scrutiny of incidents reported to the police is a weakness in most divisions.

■ There remains scope for improvement regarding timely crime recording decisions, particularly in relation to sexual offences. In general however, we felt that timeliness had improved since our previous audit. We found that 97% of crimes were recorded within 72 hours of being reported to the police.

■ No-criming practice is generally good but could be improved in some divisions. No-criming practice is best in those divisions where one person, or a small group of people, are tasked with authorising all no-criming decisions, allowing them to develop expertise and ensuring a consistent approach.

■ The quality of no-crime decisions in relation to rape is very good. These decisions are subject to significant scrutiny at divisional and national levels giving us confidence they are made correctly and consistently across Scotland.

■ Previous recommendations made by HMICS regarding crime recording have been the subject of a Police Scotland action plan. There has been good progress to date and we will follow up on these recommendations in more detail in a future review of crime recording. We have welcomed regular dialogue with Police Scotland about crime recording practice.

■ Day-to-day crime recording decisions are overseen by crime management units and consideration should be given to how best to safeguard the independence of their decision making.

■ There is a good system of internal auditing of crime recording within Police Scotland. The results of the internal audits are broadly similar to our own which should provide assurance to the Scottish Police Authority, local scrutiny and engagement bodies and the Scottish Government as to their accuracy.

■ There is an opportunity for greater external scrutiny of crime recording by the Scottish Police Authority and local authority scrutiny and engagement bodies. This will broaden and strengthen the existing assurance framework around crime data.

■ While there remains variation in crime recording practice across Scotland, Police Scotland is committed to improving consistency and achieving greater compliance with the SCRS. Variations in legacy force practices are being identified and eliminated. We would expect to see steady improvement in compliance rates in internal audits by Police Scotland and in future audits by HMICS.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should develop a mechanism to ensure incidents referred to specialist investigation units are regularly updated as to the status of the investigation and are recorded as crimes as soon as it is appropriate to do so.

Recommendation 2

The Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland should engage the Scottish Government and other stakeholders in exploring whether the crime groupings used for statistical purposes remain relevant taking account of the changing nature of crime. This should include consideration of whether the crime groupings reflect the public's perception of crime.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should introduce processes, including appropriate supervision, to ensure that incidents are closed and disposed of correctly.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should ensure that, where relevant, complainers in cases where there has been a no-crime decision should be kept updated on the status of the investigation and its conclusion.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should develop improvement plans for crime recording practice in four local policing divisions: Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, Ayrshire, Edinburgh and Argyll and West Dunbartonshire. The plans should set out how each division will improve its compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and the Counting Rules.

Recommendation 6

The Scottish Police Authority's Audit and Risk Committee should request from Police Scotland the full results of internal crime recording audits and should monitor the implementation of any resulting improvement actions. The Committee should also monitor improvement plans developed by Police Scotland in response to recommendations made about crime recording by HMICS.

Recommendation 7

Police Scotland should provide local scrutiny and engagement bodies with the findings of internal crime recording audits and any resulting improvement plans. This will facilitate the scrutiny of crime data presented to them by local commanders.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should work with the Scottish Government to clarify ownership of the Counting Rules.

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