HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

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PRESS RELEASE

HMICS publishes Crime Audit 2016

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Overall, the quality of crime recording in Scotland is good but new and emerging threats are increasing and changing demands on policing, says a report published by HMICS today.

The Crime Audit 2016 is the second major audit of Police Scotland's crime recording carried out by HMICS following a similar audit in 2014. In 2016, HMICS examined over 6,000 incidents and over 5,000 crimes.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Derek Penman, said 'The results of our audit build on the already positive results from our last audit in 2014. They provide assurance to communities across Scotland that they can have confidence in crime figures, with an overall figure of almost 93% of incidents being closed correctly and 95% of crime being counted and classified correctly.'

'There are effective leadership and governance arrangements in place for the management of ethical and accurate crime recording within Police Scotland. External governance arrangements have developed significantly since 2014 with the Scottish Government taking a proactive role through the Scottish Crime Recording Board.'

'While our audit shows that crime recording practice is improving, it also provides evidence that Police Scotland should focus on managing demand, creating capacity and re-investing that capacity into prevention and responding to new and emerging challenges.'

The report highlights the need to further develop the policing response to emerging threats such as online sexual harm and fraud.

HMICS found that 11.4% of sexual incidents audited had a cyber element and a significant proportion of these involved children. Despite preventive and enforcement action being taken by Police Scotland as well as other agencies, the HMICS audit highlights the risk of sexual harm online and the increasing demands placed on the police service.

HMICS also highlighted the need to improve the reporting arrangements for fraud in Scotland.

Mr Penman said, 'Criminals are increasingly exploiting opportunities from the internet to commit crime. As Police Scotland develops its response to these new and emerging threats,

it is likely that crimes including fraud and other cyber-enabled offences will increase significantly and impact on the historic reductions in reported crime.'

To help manage these evolving demands, HMICS has highlighted the importance of developing a sustainable policing service which makes the most effective use of its resources. HMICS notes there is scope for some lower level incidents to be resolved and recorded at the public's first point of contact with the police, sometimes without the need for police attendance. These incidents could be resolved quickly and to the complainer's satisfaction.

Mr Penman said, 'Resolving some cases at first point of contact would improve the quality of service to the public and would reduce demand on the frontline, allowing officers to attend more serious cases and be more visible in their local communities.'

The need to make more effective use of available resources is highlighted by the finding that it is taking longer for the police to record a crime this year than it was in 2014. The audit also found that there remains scope for improvement in relation to recording sexual crime. Referring these cases to specialist investigation units, such as divisional rape investigation units, can have a negative impact on the accurate and timely recording of sexual crime.

HMICS noted improvements in the classification of violent crime and in no-crime decision making. There was also significant progress in keeping complainers updated in cases where a no-crime decision was made.

The report contains 15 recommendations and three improvement actions for Police Scotland and the Scottish Crime Recording Board.

Notes:
1. The Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) was introduced in 2004 and provides 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.

2. Records in five categories were audited for compliance with the SCRS – sexual crime, violence, damage, non-crime related incidents and no-crimes.

3. Non-crime related incidents are those which were potentially crime related when created, but which were eventually closed as non-crime related. No-crimes are incidents which were originally thought to be a crime and a crime report was created, but were later re-designated as not being a crime following additional investigation.

4. An incident is correctly closed when it is either (a) closed as being non-crime related and contains sufficient information to dispel any inference of criminality; or (b) the incident indicated a crime had been committed and a crime record was traced.

5. The Scottish Crime Recording Board is chaired by the Scottish Government and includes representatives of organisations with an interest in crime recording in Scotland. The Board is the guardian of the SCRS.

6. Key findings and recommendations from the report are listed below. The HMICS Crime Audit 2016 report is available to download from the HMICS website www.hmics.org from 1100 hours, September 21, 2016.

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Key findings

The quality of most incident and crime recording decisions by Police Scotland is good. 92.7% of incidents were closed correctly[1] and 95.1% of crime was counted and classified correctly. These compliance rates were a slight improvement on those found in our last audit in 2014.

There are still some significant divisional variations in compliance rates. Dumfries and Galloway Division performed consistently well.

There has been a significant[2] reduction in the number of crimes recorded within 72 hours of being reported to the police, from 96.6% in 2014 to 90.8% in 2016.

There remains scope for improvement in the recording of sexual crime. 90.0% of sexual incidents were closed correctly and 91.4% of sexual crimes were counted and classified correctly. Only 83.9% were recorded within 72 hours of being reported to the police.

The referral of sexual incidents to specialist investigation units makes it more likely that recording will be delayed, and can sometimes result in incidents never being appropriately updated. There was some evidence of an 'investigate-to-record' culture, rather than 'record-to-investigate', among specialist investigation units.

While statistics show crime is falling, there is a risk that some crime is being displaced and is now taking place online where it can be more challenging to identify, record and investigate.

11.4% of the sexual incidents we audited had a cyber element, of which a significant proportion involved children.

Children and young people are increasingly experiencing sexual crime online via commonly used apps on their smartphones and tablets.

Current crime recording practice does not capture the scale of cyber-enabled sexual crime and associated victimisation in Scotland.

93.0% of violent incidents were closed correctly and 96.0% of violent crimes were counted and classified correctly. This was an improvement compared to our audit results in 2014. We noted fewer examples of serious violent crimes being classified as less serious.

Damage incidents reported to the police were closed correctly in 94.9% of cases. 96.0% of the resulting crimes were counted and classified correctly.

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[1] Correct closure means either that (a) the incident was closed as non-crime related and contained sufficient information to dispel any inference of criminality; or (b) the incident indicated a crime had occurred and a crime report was traced.
[2] Where we refer to significant increases or decreases in our audit results, it means the increase or decrease was statistically significant and was not attributed to chance.

There is scope for lower level incidents, such as those involving damage, to be recorded and resolved at first point of contact and to the complainer's satisfaction, without the need for officer attendance. Resolving cases at first point of contact would improve the quality of service to the public and reduce demand on the frontline, allowing officers to attend higher priority cases and engage more with their local communities.

91.0% of non-crime related incidents[3] were closed correctly. This was a statistically significant improvement on our results for the same category in 2014 (87.2%). The improvement has resulted from increased scrutiny of incidents.
There are weaknesses in the reporting arrangements for, and response to, fraud in Scotland. There is a lack of clarity over the role of Action Fraud in Scotland.

No-criming practice is generally good and has improved in several divisions.[4] 96.0% of no-crime decisions were correct. Three divisions achieved 100% – Fife, Lothian and Scottish Borders, and Renfrewshire and Inverclyde.

Complainers are being informed that a no-crime decision has been made in their case, in accordance with a previous HMICS recommendation.

All four divisions which required an improvement plan following our audit in 2014 have improved their compliance rates except in relation to timely recording. However, there is still scope for improvement, particularly for Ayrshire and Renfrewshire and Inverclyde.

Incident records in the East often showed repeated attempts to deploy police officers to initially attend an incident, officers being diverted to attend more urgent calls, and diary appointments being cancelled.

Leadership and internal governance of ethical crime recording is good, although there is a need for an overall strategy for how Police Scotland intends to ensure compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard.

There is no overt evidence of performance targets affecting crime recording decisions.

There has been a significant improvement in external governance arrangements with the Scottish Government taking a more proactive role through the Scottish Crime Recording Board.

The absence of a national crime management system limits the extent to which there can be consistent processes and resources to support accurate crime recording. Until such time as national incident and crime recording systems are available, incident and crime recording cannot be managed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Incident and crime scrutiny processes have developed since our last audit, although there is a risk that scrutiny will become disproportionate and a 'getting it right first time' approach would be more efficient.

There is a good system of internal auditing of crime recording although there is scope for it to be developed further.

The National Crime Registrar has been an effective leader on crime recording issues, while the regional crime registrars have extensive expertise and experience. There are concerns, however, that they lack capacity to perform all aspects of their role.

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[3] Non-crime related incidents are those which were potentially crime related when created, but which were eventually closed as being non-crime related.
[4] No-crimes are incidents which were originally thought to have been a crime and a crime report was created, but were later re-designated as not being a crime following additional investigation.

Changes to the crime manager role and challenges faced by crime management units, such as turnover of staff, risks the service's ability to build on recent progress in relation to crime recording.

HMICS has seen the same errors recurring in our 2013, 2014 and 2016 audits, and the same errors have been identified in internal audits. This suggests there is insufficient learning from audits, and a need for more extensive training.

Police Scotland has taken steps to implement previous recommendations made by HMICS regarding crime recording. While we have been able to close several recommendations made regarding crime recording in previous HMICS audits, several others remain open.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should develop guidance for all officers and staff involved in crime recording decisions which highlights all recurring errors identified in our audits and notes the correct recording practice.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should embed a 'record-to-investigate' approach to all crime recording in support of a victim-centred service. In relation to sexual crime, Police Scotland should ensure that, where there is sufficient information to create a crime record, the crime record is not delayed by awaiting the statement obtained from the victim by the Sexual Offences Liaison Officer.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should ensure that officers update incident and crime recording systems with sufficient information regarding the status and outcome of investigations to ensure compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. Such information should not only be held on the Interim Vulnerable Person's Database.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should develop the ability to tag all incidents and crimes with a marker to show that they have a cyber element and to assess the nature and scale of cyber-crime and its demands on policing in Scotland.

Recommendation 5

The Scottish Crime Recording Board should consider the extent to which current crime recording practice adequately captures the scale of cyber-enabled sexual crime and associated victimisation, particularly for children and young people.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should work with Action Fraud to clarify its role in Scotland, and clear and accurate information should be disseminated to the public.

Recommendation 7

In developing its customer contact strategy, Police Scotland should set out what standards of service the public should expect to receive, an attendance policy, guidance on re-contacting complainers, and guidance on the circumstances in which it is appropriate to make diary appointments.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should review the role and resourcing of the Quality Assurance Unit serving Edinburgh and Lothian and Scottish Borders Divisions with a view to ensuring that crime records are created timeously and accurately. Any unnecessary duplication in assurance processes should be avoided.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland should develop a strategy to support its implementation of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should promote a 'right first time' approach to SCRS compliance throughout the service. Police Scotland should also consider what measures, such as improved training, will be necessary to support such an approach.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should streamline incident scrutiny processes carried out by the Contact, Command and Control Division and local policing divisions to minimise unnecessary duplication.

Recommendation 12

In developing the Contact, Command and Control quality assurance framework, Police Scotland should ensure that calls made to the police and the resulting incidents are checked for SCRS compliance.

Recommendation 13

Police Scotland should assess what scrutiny and/or audit arrangements should be developed in respect of reports of crime made via alternative routes, such as referrals from partner agencies.

Recommendation 14

To support its crime recording strategy, Police Scotland should review the national and regional crime registrar roles and review whether the current resourcing arrangements are sufficient. In particular, Police Scotland should ensure that there is sufficient capacity to undertake all aspects of the registrar role as well as the required audits, and that the crime registrar role in the West is sufficiently resourced.

Recommendation 15

Police Scotland should develop a training plan to support the delivery of its crime recording strategy.

ENDS