



HM INSPECTORATE OF
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

British Transport Police:
Crime Audit

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To monitor and improve the police service in Scotland



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1. Executive summary

SCRS compliance of internal force audit sample	
	SCRS compliance
Total sample	96.2%
SCRS compliance of crime recording system dip samples	
	SCRS compliance
Domestic Abuse	100%
Minor Assault	96.2%
Vandalism	95.2%

Main findings:-

Internal force audit - on the basis the selection of records we examined, the force achieved a compliance rate of 96.2%. This exceeds the 95% target that ACPOS has set for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS).

Domestic Abuse - of the 5 incidents sampled, all were found to be compliant, resulting in an overall compliance rate of 100%.

Minor Assault - of the 104 minor assault incidents sampled, 4 were found to be non-compliant, resulting in an overall compliance rate of 96.2%.

Vandalism - of the incidents of the 104 sampled, 5 did not comply with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. This resulted in a compliance rate of 95.2%.

Conclusion

We believe that the overall levels of compliance revealed by our audit provides reassurance about the robustness of internal force audit checks and operational crime recording practices in British Transport Police.

Given its strong performance, we make no specific recommendations to British Transport Police.



2. Introduction

When a member of the public reports criminal behaviour to the police, there is an inherent obligation upon the Service to record and investigate properly the circumstances of the incident. Accurate crime recording is also essential in enabling the police to establish the true levels of criminal activity in communities so that forces are able to respond appropriately and proportionately. If the police service fails in this fundamental responsibility, it risks losing the trust and confidence of the public. Ethical crime recording practices allow the police service to strengthen existing relationships with communities further, and in turn encourage members of the public to report crime.

In order to apply consistency to the way that crime is recorded across Scotland, all Scottish police forces adopted the [Scottish Crime Recording Standard](#) in April 2004. It was intended that this standardisation would end the variety of local practices that previously existed, and would incorporate a more victim-orientated approach as the following extract indicates:

Aim: To provide a more victim orientated approach that serves the needs of our communities and ensures uniformity in crime recording standards throughout Scotland.

Principles: All reports of incidents, whether crime related or not will result in the creation of a report, which is auditable.

Following initial registration, an incident will be recorded as a crime in all cases if: the circumstances amount to a crime or offence as defined by Scots Law, and there is no credible evidence to the contrary. Once recorded, a crime will remain recorded unless there is verifiable evidence to disprove that a crime had occurred.

Despite the introduction of these measures, public surveys tell us that gaps remain between what happens in communities, what members of the public choose to report to the police and what the police subsequently record as having occurred. These gaps must be closed if the Service is to improve, and it is our intention that this audit serve as a helpful indicator of where forces' crime recording practices are currently in working towards this aim.

3. Background

When a member of the public contacts the police to tell them about an incident, the information they provide typically results in an entry being created and logged on an electronic incident logging system. Once the incident log is created, officers will examine the circumstances as reported and react accordingly. The Scottish Crime Recording Standard gives guidance to police officers on what circumstances amount to an incident being recorded as a crime and what particular crime it should be recorded as. Should it subsequently be established that a crime has occurred, officers are expected to record the details on a crime report form and then carry out an investigation.

A crime audit is an examination of a sample of incidents reported to the police, to determine where appropriate whether they have been properly recorded as crimes. Errors will include occasions where a crime has been recorded but incorrectly categorised, for example a serious assault being recorded as a minor assault (see below for a definition of these terms). In early 2010, Scottish police forces completed a round of internal crime audits. Our crime audit is intended to complement and support force efforts to achieve full SCRS compliance.



In conducting this audit we have sought to establish links with relevant recommendations made in previous HMICS reports. On a general level, for example, the way in which forces respond to reports of incidents from members of the public is related to the theme of our 2008 report, [Quality of service and feedback to users of the police service in Scotland](#). More specifically, we have used the audit to assess forces' progress in responding to recommendations in two other HMICS reports:

- [A review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the police service in Scotland since 2005 \(2008\)](#), recommendation 5: That, in order to achieve greater transparency and consistency within the audit regime, forces agree to co-ordinate individual force crime audits through the SCRG so that each audit is scrutinised by a crime registrar from a neighbouring force. *On an annual basis HMICS will dip-sample crime audits across all forces, including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police.*
- [Domestic abuse \(2008\)](#), recommendation 5: That forces review and reinforce their quality assurance practices and processes for recording domestic abuse incidents.

4. Methodology

Our audit comprised two distinct phases. First, we assessed the accuracy and robustness of the force's own internal crime audit. In its internal audit the force examined a sample of reported incidents for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. The sample included incidents from all crime categories, including those offences that simply by virtue of being known to have occurred are almost always 'detected', such as possession of drugs. In the first part of our audit we examined a selection of these incidents.

In the second phase we looked at three specific types of crime and offence, namely domestic abuse, vandalism and minor assault. Our reasons for selecting these crime categories are explained in more detail below, but in brief, better recording of these crimes would help the police service to understand and manage the risks associated with violence and anti-social behaviour, both of which have been identified as very high priority areas by the Scottish Strategic Assessment¹. For this part of the audit we drew samples from reported incidents of domestic abuse, vandalism and minor assault that had not been audited by the force.

Domestic abuse is defined by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland as; *“Any form of physical, sexual or mental and emotional abuse [that] might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere”*. This crime type is widely recognised in policing as one of high risk because of the numbers of cases nationally that result in instances of serious injury or death. Studies have also shown that victims of domestic abuse are likely to suffer many occasions of abuse before it is reported to the police. It is therefore essential that the police properly record and investigate these kinds of incident.

Vandalism, described in the Scottish Crime Recording Standard as *“wilfully or recklessly destroy[ing] or damag[ing] the property of another person contrary to Section 52, Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995”*, is a common crime in Scotland. In fact typically it represents the highest single percentage share of all recorded crime and offences, excluding motor vehicle offences such as speeding. It could therefore seriously undermine public confidence in the police were forces found to be consistently under-recording this kind of crime. For this reason we audited over one hundred incidents of vandalism to assess SCRS compliance.

¹ The Scottish Strategic Assessment is an overview of current and long-term matters involving criminality and community safety, compiled through evidential analysis of information and intelligence.



Finally, we examined a similar number of incidents of minor assaults for SCRS compliance. Any assault that involves a serious injury to the victim, such as broken bones or deep cuts, should be categorised as serious while all others should be classed as minor. Minor assault, according to common law, may be defined as, “*directing an attack to take effect physically on the person of another, whether or not actual injury is inflicted*”. It typically accounts for the second highest share of all crimes and offences recorded, excluding motor vehicle offences such as speeding.

We believe that combining the two audit elements described above provides a reasonable ‘snapshot’ of how the force is responding to a range of calls from the public. Our results will help both the force and the public to understand how well the former is performing in terms of recording crime, and should, where necessary, act as a driver for improvement.

In guidance drawn up by and for Scottish Crime Registrars, a standard statistical formula is used to calculate the size of sample to be audited per force in order to give results accurate to +/-3% with a 95% confidence level. The calculation assumes that the proportion of incidents incorrectly recorded is 0.5% of the total. In our 2005 report Meeting the Standard, we observed an average rate across forces of around 3.0% of all incidents recorded incorrectly. If we take the difference between these two estimated proportions, i.e. 2.5%, but apply the same confidence and accuracy levels, this will allow us to audit a sample of 104 incidents per exercise.²

The general principle of data testing is that the greater the number of records tested, the greater confidence we can have that the result is representative of the population as a whole. However, testing large numbers of records is not always possible. For this reason, we used minimum sample sizes on this occasion. Though apparently small, our sample sizes of 104 compare favourably with those used by the Home Office (80 records per crime recording category, 120 for a force-wide single test) and were felt to be sufficient for our purpose of identifying residual weaknesses in recording systems and force processes.

The Scottish guidance also advises that the sample be taken over a specified seven-day period. Because of the larger size of Strathclyde, it is advised that sampling timeframes here also be spread across three consecutive periods over 24 hours. With the exception of Strathclyde Police, we identified a single start date and time for our audits from which we asked all forces to identify consecutive incidents - from 00:01 hours on 4th October 2009. As a result, our spread of audited cases is not comparable across all forces - e.g. it may take one force several days to record 104 incidents of minor assault but another, just several hours. Nor is it necessarily representative of the way in which all such incidents are recorded in individual forces.

5. Findings

All crime - test of force audit

SCRS Compliance 96.2%

Under this element of the audit we re-examined 104 incidents drawn from the force's internal audit sample. We found the force's compliance rate to be 96.2%. This exceeds the 95% target that ACPOS has set for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard.

² For statistical purposes the Scottish Government divides contraventions of Scottish law into two: “crime” is generally used for more serious criminal acts; “offences” is for less serious acts although it may be applied to serious breaches of criminal law. The distinction is made only for working purposes and the “seriousness” of the offence is generally related to the maximum sentence than can be imposed.



On four occasions the force had not complied with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. In one of these cases there was credible evidence that a crime had been committed, but had not been recorded as such. In the remaining cases a crime had been recorded but was incorrectly categorised.

Domestic Abuse

SCRS Compliance 100%

While only five incidents of domestic abuse were examined, all of the incidents audited were found to be compliant, producing an overall compliance rate of 100%. This exceeds the 95% target that ACPOS has set for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS).

Domestic abuse is widely considered to be under-reported by victims and nationally leads to a significant number of serious injuries and deaths. Accordingly police forces will wish to continue to scrutinise carefully any potential under-recording. Furthermore they may consider locally, or in conjunction with ACPOS, that a higher target for SCRS compliance than the 95% target set by ACPOS for all crimes, would be appropriate for this crime.

Of the incidents examined, we found that the victim was properly updated by officers when a crime was recorded.

Minor Assault

SCRS Compliance 96.2%

Of the 104 incidents audited four were found to be non-compliant, resulting in an overall compliance rate of 96.2%. This exceeds the 95% target that ACPOS has set for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS).

Of the 4 non-SCRS compliant incidents, 2 related to instances of minor assault cases not being recorded as crimes despite an initial report indicating that a crime had been committed. In two remaining incidents, recorded crimes were incorrectly categorised.

We found that 'BTP Area Order 06/08 Managing Crime - Supporting Victims' which outlines the divisional contact policy for victims of crime was broadly adhered to by officers with victims updated and offered victim support.

Vandalism

SCRS Compliance 95.2%

Of the 104 incidents audited five were found to be non-compliant, resulting in an overall compliance rate of 95.2%. This exceeds the 95% target that ACPOS has set for compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS).

Vandalism accounts for a high proportion of all recorded crime and is considered to be a significant contributor to what people broadly recognise as anti-social behaviour. For this reason the force will wish to continue to scrutinise its recording performance for this crime closely.



Four of the compliance failures in this area related to not recording incidents as crimes despite initial reports clearly stating that damage had been wilfully caused. The remaining compliance failure related to a report of a crime being received by another police force and upon transfer to BTP failed to be recorded. The divisional victim contact policy does not include crimes of vandalism.