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HM INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY IN SCOTLAND

## **Crime Audit 2016: Terms of Reference**

May 2016

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# HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland

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HM Inspectorate for Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) is established under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012<sup>1</sup> and has wide ranging powers to look into the 'state, effectiveness and efficiency' of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

We have a statutory duty to ensure that the Chief Constable and the SPA meet their obligations in terms of best value and continuous improvement. If necessary, we can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SPA or Police Scotland as they consider appropriate. We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on policing in Scotland.

- Our powers allow us to do anything we consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions.
- The SPA and the Chief Constable must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require to enable us to carry out our functions.
- When we publish a report, the SPA and the Chief Constable must also consider what we have found and take such measures, if any, as they think fit.
- Where our report identifies that the SPA or Police Service is not efficient or effective (or best value not secured), or will, unless remedial measures are taken, cease to be efficient or effective, Scottish Ministers may direct the SPA to take such measures as may be required. The SPA must comply with any direction given.
- Where we make recommendations, we will follow them up and report publicly on progress.
- We will identify good practice that can be applied across Scotland.
- We work with other inspectorates and agencies across the public sector and co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication.
- We aim to add value and strengthen public confidence in Scottish policing and will do this through independent scrutiny and objective, evidence-led reporting about what we find.

Our approach is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.<sup>2</sup>

**This audit will be undertaken by HMICS under section 74(2)(a) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and will be laid before the Scottish Parliament under section 79(3) of the Act.**

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 11, Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

<sup>2</sup> HMICS, [Corporate Strategy 2014-17](#) (2014).

## Our audit

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### Aim


1. The aim of this audit will be **to assess the state, efficiency and effectiveness of crime recording by Police Scotland and the extent to which recording practice complies with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and Counting Rules.**

### Background

2. In 2014-15, recorded crime in Scotland was at its lowest since 1974.<sup>3</sup> Recorded crime statistics are relied on by a wide variety of users to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for research purposes. The public, for example, can use the statistics as a source of information to help assess how safe their local area is and whether crime is decreasing or increasing. The police, as well as other agencies, can use crime statistics to monitor trends and variations, ensuring that services are targeted appropriately and sufficiently resourced. It is therefore essential that crimes are recorded accurately by Police Scotland, and that users have confidence in the crime statistics reported by the Scottish Government.
3. Crime recording practice is governed by the Scottish Crime Recording Standard and Counting Rules (SCRS). The SCRS 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. Crime recording should also be carried out in accordance with the Police Scotland Code of Ethics.
4. In 2013, HMICS carried out a review of incident and crime recording. This was conducted shortly after the creation of Police Scotland. The timing of our review afforded us the opportunity to consider emerging governance arrangements and to assess compliance with the SCRS since 1 April 2013. The review involved qualitative research with a range of people involved in the crime recording process, including interviews and focus groups with officers and staff. We also examined incident records in each of the 14 local policing divisions and sampled up to 30 records relating to four crime types in each division: domestic abuse; sexual offences; assaults; and robberies. The number of records sampled was not sufficiently high to be statistically significant, nor was the sample representative of the incidents recorded by each division. The sample size was chosen so as to be manageable from an HMICS and service perspective and the findings served as an indicator of recording practice across Scotland.
5. Of the 1,501 records examined, 93% complied with the SCRS. Compliance rates varied across crime types and across divisions. We found adherence to the SCRS to be generally good and were impressed by the knowledge and commitment of many officers and staff. We did however identify several areas in which Police Scotland could improve its approach to crime recording and made seven recommendations.
6. In 2014, HMICS again tested the accuracy of crime recording through an audit of incident and crime records. We examined over 8,000 incidents and 4,500 crimes. The number of records examined was more than five times higher than in previous audits. This allowed us to report on statistically significant compliance rates across Scotland and, for the first time, at divisional level. We audited records in six categories: sexual offences; violent crime; housebreaking; hate crime; non-crime related incidents; and no-crimes. The results of our audit were intended to provide the public and key stakeholders with greater information on which to base their assessment of the accuracy of crime statistics, and to highlight to Police Scotland

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<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government, *Recorded crime in Scotland 2014-15* (2015).



areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement. Our audit also sought to address the need for a comprehensive, independent audit of crime data as highlighted by the UK Statistics Authority.

7. We found that the quality of most incident and crime recording decisions by Police Scotland was good. 92% of incidents were closed correctly and 94% of crime was counted and classified correctly. However, we found there to be scope for improvement, particularly in relation to the recording of sexual offences and non-crime related incidents. While a few divisions performed very well, achieving high compliance rates in all or most areas, a few divisions performed poorly. We made eight recommendations to Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority, and suggested 15 improvement actions.
8. HMICS continually assesses progress made against our recommendations. To date, six out of seven recommendations made in our 2013 review have been implemented. Two out of eight recommendations and six out of 15 improvement actions arising from our 2014 review have been implemented. In relation to crime recording by Police Scotland therefore, seven recommendations and nine improvement actions remain outstanding.

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9. Reviews of incident and crime recording have formed a regular part of our scrutiny programme in recent years. In our Scrutiny Plan 2015-16, we stated that we would revisit incident and crime recording in 2016 and continue to provide the public and key stakeholders with information on which to base their assessment of the validity of crime statistics.
10. The aim of our Crime Audit 2016 is to test the accuracy of incident and crime recording by Police Scotland, and to assess arrangements for the management, governance and auditing of crime recording. The results will:
  - provide the public and key stakeholders with information on which to base their assessment of the trustworthiness and validity of crime statistics;
  - highlight to Police Scotland areas of good practice or areas for improvement and/or increased internal audit and scrutiny;
  - assess the extent to which recommendations made in our 2013 and 2014 reviews of incident and crime recording have been implemented; and
  - address the need for comprehensive, independent audits of crime data as highlighted by the UK Statistics Authority.
11. Our Crime Audit 2016 will only assess incident and crime recording by Police Scotland and not any other police service operating in Scotland. We last audited crime recording in Scotland by British Transport Police in 2015 and found compliance with the SCRS to be very good.<sup>4</sup>
12. Similar to crime statistics, clear-up rates (also known as detections) are published by Police Scotland in its regular management information reports and by the Scottish Government as part of its Recorded Crime in Scotland series. There has been no recent independent audit of clear-up rates. Following the publication of our Crime Audit 2016 report, we propose to scope an audit of clear-up data and pilot an audit methodology in 2017, with a view to providing the public and other stakeholders with assurance about the reliability of clear-up rates.

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<sup>4</sup> HMICS, [Crime Audit: British Transport Police, Scotland Division](#) (2015).



## Methodology

13. The Crime Audit 2016 will be carried out in two phases.

### Phase 1

14. Phase 1 will involve HMICS testing the accuracy of crime recording through an audit of records. We will examine around 7,000 records which will allow us to report on statistically significant compliance rates at national and divisional levels, and by category.
15. In deciding what to audit, several factors have been taken into account including areas of high risk or emerging concern, national and local policing priorities, and areas which have not previously been subject to independent audit. We also consulted with members of the Scottish Crime Recording Board as to what types of incidents and crimes we should review.
16. We propose to audit records relating to:
  - sexual offences
  - violent crime
  - damage
  - non-crime related incidents (i.e. incidents that were potentially crime-related but which were eventually closed as being non-crime related)
  - no-crimes (i.e. incidents that were originally thought to be a crime and a crime report was created, but which were later re-designated as not being a crime following additional investigation).
17. All but one category (damage) were also audited in 2014. In relation to the three crime types (sexual offences, violent crime, damage), we will apply Test 1 (whether a crime had been correctly recorded), Test 2 (whether the crimes recorded were correctly classified and counted), and Test 3 (whether a crime was recorded within an appropriate timescale). We will apply only Test 1 to non-crime related incidents. The test for no-crimes involves an assessment of whether the no-crime decision was correct. The incidents and crimes to be audited will be randomly selected from those recorded by Police Scotland between 1 January and 31 March 2016.
18. In assessing compliance with the SCRS, we will only review the incident and crime records. Where the records have been created as a result of a call to the police via the 999 emergency or 101 non-emergency number, we will not listen to the original call. This is because we plan to conduct a separate audit of police call handling (including an assessment of whether incidents arising from audited calls are SCRS-compliant). We anticipate this audit taking place later in 2016-17, although the exact timing is dependent on the completion of key stages in Police Scotland's plan to remodel its C3 (contact, command and control) function.

### Phase 2

19. Phase 2 will involve a qualitative assessment of the arrangements for the management, governance and auditing of crime recording by Police Scotland. This will include a review of relevant documentation, observation of key processes, and interviews and focus groups with police officers and staff. The assessment will be carried out taking into account the six themes of the HMICS Inspection Framework (outcomes, leadership and governance, planning and process, people, resources and partnerships).
20. Phase 2, coupled with the results from Phase 1, will assist us in assessing what progress has been made in implementing our previous recommendations and improvement actions relating to crime recording.



## Publication and reporting timescales

21. For Phase 1, a team of several inspectors will begin examining 7,000 records in June 2016. Fieldwork for Phase 2 will be carried out in July. We anticipate publishing a report of our findings in September 2016. The report will be laid before the Scottish Parliament under section 79(3) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. A copy of our report will be provided to the Scottish Police Authority, the Chief Constable and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. Our report will also be made publicly available on the HMICS website.
22. For further information about the crime audit, please contact Laura Paton, Lead Inspector ([Laura.Paton@gov.scot](mailto:Laura.Paton@gov.scot)).

### **Derek Penman QPM**

HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland  
May 2016