



Police and Crime Commissioner West Midlands response to the publication of
West Midlands Police: Crime Data Integrity Inspection 2017¹

by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS)

Overall rating for West Midlands Police	Inadequate
Number of recommendations	4

On 7 September 2017 HMICFRS published the report on their West Midlands Police Crime Data Integrity Inspection which examined crime reports for the period 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2016.

HMICFRS found that:

“West Midlands Police has taken action to improve crime-recording accuracy since HMICFRS’ 2014 Crime Data Integrity inspection report. We found that:

- most officers and staff have made progress in placing the victim at the forefront of their crime-recording decisions;
- it has worked hard to improve the knowledge and understanding of crime-recording requirements for modern slavery crimes among officers and staff;
- it has implemented most of the recommendations set out in our 2014 report; and
- it has made good progress against a national action plan developed to improve crime-recording by police forces.

The report concluded:

“West Midlands Police has made progress in its crime-recording processes since 2014. However, improvements must continue to be made. The strong leadership and positive approach among the majority of officers and staff toward victims is welcome. However, the force needs to improve the crime-recording process, ensuring that its staff and officers fully understand the crime-recording standards expected of them, and that these standards are supervised effectively.”

¹ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/our-work/crime-data-integrity/reports-rolling-programme-crime-data-integrity/>

Under the Policing and Crime Act 2017 PCCs must publish a response to HMICFRS reports, together with any comments submitted by the Chief Constable, within 56 days of the report being published. Where reports include recommendations the response must include an explanation of the action the PCC proposes to take in response. The overall response as well as responses from WMP and the PCC to individual recommendations are set out below.

Overall response

The integrity of police recorded crime data is important. Only last week this importance has been brought into relief with the Home Secretary, Deputy National Statistician, police forces and police and crime commissioners engaged in discussion around the true picture of crime trends in England and Wales and what this means for policing demand and resources.

Accurate crime data are needed to inform the public of issues affecting their areas and by policy makers to guide decision-making and resource allocation at a national and local level. As set out in my Police and Crime Plan, I expect high standards of crime recording. When a crime is committed the public should be able to trust the police to deal with it appropriately and effectively, recording the crime accurately so the right action can follow.

www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/your-commissioner/police-and-crime-plan

Most importantly, behind each recorded crime is a victim. Standing up for victims has always been a priority of mine and I want victims of crime to have confidence in reporting crimes to West Midlands Police. I am therefore pleased that HMICFRS found “strong leadership from senior officers in West Midlands Police in regard to crime-recording expectations” and “an approach among the majority of officers and staff that places the victim at the forefront of their crime-recording decisions”.

While I am encouraged that the culture around crime recording in the West Midlands Police is positive, HMICFRS’ rating of the force as ‘Inadequate’ overall, with 16 per cent of crimes either unrecorded or incorrectly recorded, is a clear concern. I have asked the force to make rapid improvements, ensuring that safeguarding of victims is as robust as possible.

Following the publication of the HMICFRS Crime Data Integrity Inspection report I requested a report from West Midlands Police to my Strategic Policing and Crime Board. The force has also shared with me their CDI Improvement Plan and I will continue to assess the force’s progress with respect to the Improvement Plan, through the Joint Audit Committee, and other avenues including regular progress updates between WMP and members of my Strategic Policing and Crime Board and office.

<http://www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/strategic-policing-and-crime-board/spcb-dates-of-meetings-and-reports/spcb-agendas,-minutes-and-reports/>

However, I think it important to reflect on this issue at a national as well as local level. West Midlands Police is far from the only force to have been rated as 'Inadequate' in the 2016/17 HMICFRS CDI inspection programme and, whilst we appreciate the more robust methodology employed this time around, the 'Inadequate' rating is of particular concern given that, as HMICFRS note in the report, the force has taken action to improve crime-recording accuracy in recent years, including taking on recommendations from the 2014 HMIC report and making good progress against the national action plan.

I will continue to monitor the force's performance with respect to crime recording and stand up for victims, ensuring they are at the heart of the service. I also welcome continued engagement with HMICFRS as well as with the Home Office to ensure that lessons are learnt as they emerge from the full national programme of CDI inspections.

Cause of concern

In West Midlands Police, officers and staff fail to make correct crime-recording decisions at the first opportunity. This is due to deficiencies in the force's crime-recording processes, insufficient understanding of crime-recording requirements and limited supervision to correct decisions and improve standards from the outset. This means that the force is failing many victims of crime.

The force is failing to ensure it adequately records all reports of sexual offences and violence, including domestic abuse crimes and crimes reported directly to its public protection department.

Recommendation 1

Within six months, West Midlands Police should take steps to identify and address gaps in its systems and processes to ensure that when officers have attended incidents all reported crimes are recorded. This should include satisfying itself as to the effectiveness of its arrangements for the recording of crimes by officers through the crime service team. The force also needs to implement a consistent and structured approach to call-handling quality assurance processes that includes checking compliance with the National Crime Recording Standards.

WMP response:

HMIC Inspection findings mirror those identified by our own audit team and are already the focus of determined improvement activity.

Of the 16.2% of crime found not to have been recorded by officers the reasons for this vary; from a limited of knowledge of Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR), a misunderstanding of the rules (*for example; Rape recording one crime for the victim of the Rape rather than a crime for each of the suspects involved*), recording the main crime but not recording the additional crimes contained within the MASH referral (*for example; modern slavery or CSE*), the recording of a N100 rape non-crime instead of a substantive offence and also the recording of a non-crime record instead of a full crime (*for example; Domestic Abuse*) to not negating the crime properly within the incident record or on occasion quite simply a poor crime recording decision being made.

To improve our accuracy around crime recording, WMP has just completed an improvement plan, in response to the CDI recommendations (2017), which has been fully supported and signed off by the Deputy Chief Constable (DCC), on behalf of the Executive Team. It has three core improvement strands; *Training, Audit and Governance* with specific contributions from five core departments; Force Contact, Force Response, Public Protection Unit, Force CID and Initial Investigation Teams.

The WMP CDI improvement plan will be managed through the Strategic Information Management Board (SIMB) chaired by Deputy Chief Constable. Audit findings to feature as part of the departmental QPR discussions with the respective Executive Team lead. A

select number of Chief Inspectors will become crime recording champions for WMP, supported through the Crime Leaders Forum.

PCC response

WMP have shared their CDI improvement plan with me and I am pleased with the attention the FCR, Deputy FCR and Force Executive have given this issue. However it will be important to ensure that efforts to improve crime recording are maintained in the complex and challenging environment of modern policing in which WMP and other forces operate.

I have asked WMP to report back to my office through a variety of means, including the Strategic Policing and Crime Board, bimonthly meetings with representatives from my office and through the Joint Audit Committee, to keep me apprised of the situation with respect to CDI so I can ensure that the improvement plan is implemented.

Recommendation 2

Within three months, the force should review its operating arrangements to ensure that these arrangements secure the recording of all reported crimes at the first point at which sufficient information exists to make a crime-recording decision, and in any event within 24 hours of receipt of the report.

WMP response:

WMP perceive that this Cause for Concern reflects HMICFRS preference for crime recording at the point of first contact. With nearly 900,000 incident records per annum it is not feasible or practical to adopt this approach. To do so would require a change to the current operating model and generate vastly increased work to achieve marginal gains in accuracy, which WMP believe would be better achieved through continual improvement of our current crime recording processes. Therefore, we consider the associated recommendation to be unreasonable and not feasible. We are, however, committed to continual improvement of our current crime recording processes as specified within our improvement plan and it remains as a key objective within the PCC's Police and Crime plan.

PCC response

As previously stated I am committed to ensuring that crime is recorded accurately and promptly; ensuring victims get the support they need, bringing offenders to justice, and accurately understanding the level of threat, risk and harm that the West Midlands faces. The question then is not the shared ambition to ensure accurate and timely crime recording, but how best to achieve this goal. Consideration of Recommendation 2 poses some issues as there is a difference between the professional view of HM Inspector of Constabulary Fire & Rescue Services and the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police. The local policing body must consider both the professional judgement of a Chief

Constable (who is locally and publicly accountable to a PCC) and the statutory authority of the Chief Inspector of Constabulary (who is not). Given the statutory power of HMICFRS to make global, comparative assessments of Force performance, each recommendation must be treated with the utmost thoroughness. Equally, recognising the professionalism and operational independence of the Chief Constable, it would be unreasonable for a local policing body not to have regard to the views of a Chief Constable in these circumstances.

It is important to note at this point that WMP already recognise the benefits of recording at the first point of contact. Since the introduction of a new operating model at the end of 2016 27% of all crime has been recorded at the point of call. HMICFRS assess that the accuracy of recording at point of call (Directly Recorded Crime) in WMP is 97% and I have reassurance from WMP that they are looking to record still more crime at point of call/contact, e.g. theft offences. I have asked my office to monitor their performance in this regard.

To comprehensively review and change the operating model and record substantially more calls at first point of contact, even where “sufficient information” exists to do so, would, given the huge volume of calls WMP receive on a day-to-day basis, require a substantial shift of resources into Force Contact and, therefore a reduction in resource for other parts of the force. While this might affect crime recording data it could also have a significant impact on the overall service provided by West Midlands Police and the risk is this would lead to an overall deterioration rather than improvement in service to victims and communities.

HMICFRS is not concerned with the total resources available to policing, let alone the resources available to an individual Force and how these are allocated to priorities; it is their duty to inspect compliance with standards. The role of a local policing body is wider than that of HMICFRS. It must concern itself with the total available resources and the alignment of these to the priorities set in the Police and Crime Plan. The resources that are made available to West Midlands Police are based on two factors. First, government grant. Unfortunately, we do not receive the share of government grant the national funding formula says we should, losing over £40m last year. Thus we receive about 10% less from government to meet our responsibilities than the national formula says we need to fulfil those responsibilities. HMICFRS makes its recommendations untroubled by this unfair and enduring reality. Second, precept. Again, despite successive PCCs raising precept every year since 2012, West Midlands Police receives the second lowest amount from precept of any Force in England and Wales as a share of its total budget. This is a historic legacy that reaches far back into the days of the Police Authority, and of course also means we feel the effects of central grant cuts – which have totalled £145 million since 2010 - more keenly than our peers. Again, all this is 'out of scope' for HMICFRS. It is no coincidence that West Midlands Police is relying on £18m from reserves to balance its budget this year.

Given these circumstances, the West Midlands PCC must consider carefully and weigh competing operational advice concerning the resource implications of this HMICFRS recommendation and how to deliver the most efficient and effective police service possible

within the bounds of the resources available. On the one hand, HMICFRS is advising a given operational method, based on a contested ideal of 'best practice' without consideration to the resource implications of the recommended approach. On the other hand, the Chief Constable is weighing recommended operational practice against both the wider resource implications to the organisation and the potential benefits both operationally and for the public - which are, in his professional view, limited. This is not an easy calculation, but it would seem evident that the Chief Constable is basing his view both on professional judgement - and there is no reason to question the quality of that judgement - and a wider calculus that includes the resources available to West Midlands Police, operational performance gain and implications for the wider public. In these circumstances, the Chief Constable's view, and response to this recommendation, are self-evidently reasonable.

My office will therefore follow the implementation of the force's CDI improvement plan and monitor accuracy of crime data recording as assessed by ongoing internal audit. Whilst I hope that this will see real improvements to recording, and therefore to victims, if such improvement are not achieved I will revisit this issue, and any other learning that comes from this national programme of inspections, to seek further change.

Recommendation 3

Within three months, the force should develop and implement procedures for the effective supervision of crime-recording decisions throughout the whole force.

WMP response:

The Force will ensure the mandatory completion of the WMP HOCR NCALT training package for all staff, including supervisors up to the rank of Chief Superintendent, and police staff equivalents. There will be additional modules developed to enhance knowledge around N100 Rape non-crime and Common Assault. The FCR will deliver bespoke training to all Chief Inspectors / Dedicated Decision Makers and a crime recording module on new recruit and promotion training courses.

HMICFRS found that the Force Crime Registrar (FCR), supported by a fully accredited deputy and a small team of staff, carries out very regular crime-recording audits. These follow the national guidance provided by the Home Office and viewed as good practice.

The Audit & Compliance Team will broaden the audits regime and listen to calls, as suggested by HMIC. CST supervisors will monitor the recording of N100 Rape non crime reports. The four Service Improvement Teams (*Force Contact, Force Response, PPU and Force CID*), to complete regular monthly crime recording audits of their own staff and to include supervisory checks.

PCC response

My office and members of the Strategic Policing and Crime Board will review progress against the WMP CDI improvement plan actions around training to ensure these actions are fulfilled and will meet with the FCR and Deputy FCR on a bi-monthly basis to review audit findings and ensure improvements are being seen in crime recording practice.

Recommendation 4

Within six months, the force should put in place arrangements to ensure that:

- at the point of report, particularly in domestic abuse cases, greater emphasis is placed on the initial account of the victims;
- where more than one crime is disclosed within an incident record, or identified as part of other recorded crime investigations, these are recorded.

WMP response:

It should be noted that HMICFRS was clear that it found no evidence of any deliberate acts of not recording a crime or any performance pressures to influence this. Whilst the Inspectors found discrepancies between the victims' initial account and the account given to the police officer attending the scene, they commented that there was insufficient evidence recorded within the incident record to negate the crime and therefore the crime should have been recorded. There are clearly some lessons to be learnt around the principles of additional verifiable information (AVI) but the focus on accurate crime recording is still a clear mandate for the PCC and Chief Constable.

This recommendation will be re-enforced through the mandatory completion of the WMP HOCR NCALT training package for officers and staff. At the time of the inspection the WMP NCALT training package had just been signed off by Steve Bond (Home Office National Crime Registrar) and only just rolled out across the Force.

The DCC has also used her blog to reinforce these two key messages around crime recording.

Additionally, the new Domestic Abuse policy includes mandatory completion of DASH for all incidents of domestic abuse, supported by a DASH App on mobile devices. We believe this will improve officers' understanding of victim accounts.

The regular audit of Domestic Abuse incidents will continue.

PCC response

In my Police and Crime Plan I made clear that domestic abuse will not be tolerated and that I expect the force to continue to improve its knowledge of this crime and to work with partners to intervene and protect victims. The force are required to report on a regular basis to my Strategic Policing and Crime Board on their approach to hidden crimes, including domestic abuse, and further to this I will be requesting from the force an in-depth

discussion on our approach to domestic abuse with members of my office and Strategic Policing and Crime Board.