

West Midlands Police: Crime Data Integrity re-inspection 2018

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In April 2017, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a crime data integrity inspection of West Midlands Police.

We published the [report of this inspection](#) in September 2017 and concluded that the force's crime-recording arrangements were not acceptable. As a result, we gave West Midlands Police an overall judgment of **inadequate**.

Our 2017 report made a series of recommendations and areas for improvement aimed at improving crime recording in West Midlands Police. This re-inspection assessed the progress made since that report.

This report focuses upon our inspection of reports of violent crime and sexual offences. It does not include the results of our audit of reports of other crime, and consequently it is not possible to report on the force's overall crime-recording accuracy. This is because the current incident and crime-recording systems can only support a minimum number of descriptive opening codes and the interface between them is very limited. These features make it difficult for the force to accurately categorise reports of crime for auditing purposes and to satisfy itself that the apportionment of crimes reported and recorded directly is accurate. In 2019 the force plans to replace a number of legacy systems, after which we expect auditing processes to improve markedly. Our overall judgment reflects the limitations of the current system.

The findings and our judgment resulting from this re-inspection are set out below.

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Overall judgment

 Inadequate

West Midlands Police has improved some elements of its crime-recording arrangements since our 2017 crime data integrity (CDI) inspection report. However, we found more still needs to be done.

We found it has:

- designated the deputy chief constable (DCC) as the lead for the CDI improvement plan;
- developed and begun to implement bespoke crime-recording improvement plans for all relevant departments;
- improved its arrangements for the recording of modern slavery offences; and
- continued to provide crime-recording training to officers and staff responsible for making crime-recording decisions.

We examined crime reports from 1 March 2018 to 31 May 2018. Based on this we estimate that the force now records:

- 78.2 percent of violent crime (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.87 percent); and
- 89.2 percent of sexual offences (with a confidence interval of 2.70%).

Consequently, the recording rates for violent crime and sexual offences remain a cause of concern. Too often the force is still failing victims of crime, including domestic abuse victims.

We also found that the force still doesn't record all crimes committed against vulnerable people which are reported directly to its public protection department.

When it does record crime reports, delays in doing this can result in victims not being referred to support services as soon as possible. This can affect the early support that charities can provide.

The force's supervision of crime-recording processes and crime-recording decisions is also inconsistent. It doesn't yet have proper safeguards in place to make sure it records all reported crimes.

The force must increase the amount of crime reports it records within 24 hours. It also needs to improve how it:

- understands and uses classification N100;
- records crimes reported by third party professionals (such as social services and health professionals);
- cancels recorded sexual, violence and robbery offences; and
- records equality information about crime victims.

Summary of inspection findings

The force has increased how often it records crime reports as soon as enough information exists to do so. However, the pace of improvements with crime recording since our 2017 report has been slower than anticipated.

Following our 2017 inspection, the force sought to improve its crime-recording performance. The DCC approved and leads on a comprehensive crime-recording improvement plan, built around training, audit and governance. This plan contains 63 actions to address the causes of concern, recommendations and areas for improvement from our 2017 report.

The force has increased its audit capacity by providing training to staff working within its service improvement teams in each of its five core operational departments. These staff now complete monthly dip sampling of crime-recording decisions. The results are reported back to the audit and compliance team so that they can be quality assured. Additionally, each department has produced a CDI improvement plan and has a nominated lead for CDI matters. This is good practice.

The force also reviewed its crime-recording governance arrangements, reporting progress against the improvement plan and audit results to the force strategic information management board and the office of the police and crime commissioner.

Unfortunately, despite these changes, the force's own audits between October 2017 and May 2018 showed that crime-recording compliance had not improved. It also found there were clear differences in crime-recording practices across the force.

We found that 25 out of the 63 actions on the crime-recording improvement plan had been completed, with progress on others ongoing or intended to be for future consideration.

We also note that at the time of our 2017 inspection, the force was rolling out an online crime-recording training package for officers and staff. Over a year later, most response and public protection team officers have completed the training. But around one third of officers and staff from across the whole force and who were

required to complete the training are yet to do so. The force has also developed and delivered bespoke crime-recording training for officers and staff working in the public protection units, initial investigation teams and force contact centre. Despite this, some call handlers, response officers and supervisors are still not always sure how they should deal with some types of crime, such as:

- common assault;
- harassment;
- malicious communications; and
- professional third-party reports.

We note that since June 2018, there has been renewed momentum and the force has begun a revised improvement programme intended to address problems with its crime-recording standards. However, we would have expected more progress. It has also updated its bespoke departmental improvement plans, to support the successful implementation of those changes. We have confidence that the plans are sustainable and will lead to improvements.

How effective is the force at recording reported crime?

 Inadequate

Violent crimes

78.2% of reported violent crimes were recorded

We found that 78.2 percent of violent crimes reported to the force are recorded (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.87 percent). In 2017 the force was recording 77.9 percent of these crimes (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.36 percent). By our estimate the force is now [failing to record over 16,600 violent crimes that are reported to it each year](#). As violent crime can be particularly distressing for the victim, and many of these crimes involve injury, the recording rate remains unacceptable and must be urgently addressed.

When the force does not record a reported violent crime, the principal causes are:

- misunderstanding of the crime-recording rules about some violence offences such as harassment, malicious communications and common assault;
- failures to record multiple crimes in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules;
- failures to record additional crimes disclosed during investigations;
- inconsistent supervision of the crime-recording process and crime-recording decisions, with inadequate safeguards in place to ensure crimes are always recorded correctly;

- reporting officers having difficulty contacting the crime-recording team by telephone to report crimes; and
- the limit on the number of crimes that can be recorded within a single phone call, which sometimes requires officers to end a call then call back to record further reports of crime.

These causes remain consistent with those found during our 2017 inspection and continue to impede effective crime recording. This illustrates the lack of progress made by the force in this regard.

Of the 2,176 reports of crime we audited, we assessed 470 as related to domestic abuse. Of these, the force had recorded 354. Of the 116 offences not recorded, 95 were violence offences, including:

- common assaults;
- assaults occasioning actual bodily harm;
- harassment; and
- malicious communications.

Many of these were reported directly to the force. But the force didn't record them as crimes, and we found no clear evidence or explanation as to why. We also found several examples of attending officers letting down victims by simply not believing them. Some incident logs contained closing comments that were completely different to the initial call and recorded no crime, without an adequate explanation.

Call handlers completed an initial risk assessment in all cases. But in nearly half of the cases where officers attended, they carried out no further risk assessment with victims. We also found no record of the force considering safeguarding requirements in 18 of these cases, and in 28 cases it didn't carry out an investigation.

Case study

A victim called to report that her ex-partner was kicking the door of her home, making threats to assault her if she failed to open the door. The caller was clearly distressed on the telephone and sounded fearful. A domestic abuse related public order offence should have been recorded as a crime. The victim was a repeat victim of domestic abuse and the offender is a known domestic violence offender. Officers attended the address but did not record any offences, nor did they provide information to explain why they thought that a crime had not been committed. No investigation took place.

It remains a cause of concern that the force is still under-recording crimes relating to domestic abuse incidents and failing to give many of these victims a satisfactory service.

Victims of violence often need a lot of support. This should come from the reporting and investigating officers, and other appropriate organisations, such as [Victim Support](#). In these circumstances, crime recording is even more important. When the

force accurately records a violent crime it can enable victim referrals to be made to important support services.

Sexual offences

89.2% of reported sex offences were recorded

The force records 89.2 percent of sexual offence crimes (including rape) that are reported to it (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.70 percent). In 2017 the force was recording 91.4 percent of these crimes (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.63 percent). By our estimate the force is now failing to record over 790 sexual offences that are reported to it each year.

These include rapes and sexual assaults committed against adults and children. The recording standard for sexual offences is unacceptable and remains a cause of concern.

The causes of this under-recording are similar to those identified above for violent crime.

It is particularly important for victims of sexual offence crimes that they are recorded because many of these crimes are very serious in nature and cause significant harm to their victims.

Rape

144 of 161 audited rape reports were accurately recorded

Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience. To give victims confidence that the police will believe their report, it is especially important that reports of rape are recorded accurately. It helps to make sure victims receive the service and support they deserve. And it helps the police identify the nature and extent of sexual violence in their local area.

Since our 2017 inspection, the force has not improved its crime recording for reports of rape. This remains a cause of concern.

We found that only 144 of the 161 rape crimes we examined had been correctly recorded. Of the unrecorded rapes:

- eight were not recorded at all;
- one was misclassified as a sexual assault; and
- eight had an N100 recorded instead (see below).

In eight of these unrecorded reports of rape, we couldn't find a record to show that the force had taken safeguarding actions. However in four of these cases, officers had no opportunities to complete any safeguarding with victims because they had

either disengaged from the outset or had refused to speak with officers thereafter. In three of these eight cases the force didn't undertake an investigation.

Case study

A vulnerable female caller, suffering with mental health problems, reported being pressured on several occasions into having sex with a relative. This had been reported to other agencies who had encouraged her to report the offences to the police. Exerting pressure to obtain consent for sex amounts to rape, because true consent has not been obtained. A crime of rape should have been recorded and investigated. No safeguarding measures were put in place for the victim, no crime was recorded, and no investigation was undertaken.

When forces don't record a reported rape as a crime, they must apply a Home Office classification N100.

We checked 19 N100 records. Of these:

- five were later correctly turned into recorded rape crimes after receiving victim confirmation;
- two should have been recorded as rape crimes from the outset but were wrongly recorded as N100s;
- one was incorrectly classified as an N100 as it was not a report of rape; and
- the remaining 11 were correctly recorded.

Separately, we also reviewed 19 sample records where the force should have used an N100 classification, but it only did so in 12 of these. We also identified significant delays in how quickly the force both recorded N100s and, where required, later converted them to a recorded rape crime.

We found that officers, including detectives, knew that a rape crime differs from a rape incident. But they were still unfamiliar with the term N100. We noted this as an area for improvement for the force in our 2017 report and it therefore remains.

The force's approach to recording rape reports and using classification N100 indicates that it doesn't always accept the original report as presented by the victim when recording reports of rape. This is unacceptable, and the force must act immediately to stop this practice where it occurs.

It is essential to record a rape report correctly as a crime as soon as possible. Victims will often need a great deal of support from the start. Any delay, or failure to record the crime, can have a negative impact on both the victim's recovery and any investigation.

How efficiently do the systems and processes in the force support accurate crime recording?

Requires improvement

Crime reports held on other systems

4 of 15 vulnerable victim crimes were recorded

To be confident that vulnerable victims receive the support they need, it is important that crimes reported directly to public protection teams are always recorded.

We examined 50 vulnerable victim records and found that 15 crimes should have been recorded. Of these, only four had been. The unrecorded crimes committed against adult victims included:

- assaults;
- thefts;
- criminal damage;
- possession of a bladed weapon; and
- neglect.

The unrecorded crimes committed against child victims included:

- a sexual assault;
- harassment; and
- inflicting grievous bodily harm.

These results indicate that the force still has more to do to ensure it records crimes reported directly to its public protection teams.

In all cases we found the victim had received sufficient safeguarding, which was positive. Several of these unrecorded crimes related to reports received from professional third parties. We found evidence that some officers and staff still don't understand the crime-recording rules about crime reports made by these parties. The force completed proportionate investigations in all but two cases. In these two cases, multi-agency discussions agreed that social services would be responsible for the investigation. Both have since been correctly recorded as crimes.

Modern slavery

Offences relating to modern slavery are an important and recent addition to the crimes that forces must record and investigate. So, we examined how well the force records reports of modern slavery offences.

We examined 20 modern slavery crimes and found the force correctly recorded 18. It also correctly recorded eight rapes and three other crimes associated with these reports. But we found that it didn't record one rape crime and two assaults. Two modern slavery crimes were recorded unnecessarily.

We also looked at 20 reports of modern slavery received through the national referral mechanism. None of these required a crime record to be created.

The force has therefore made progress since our 2017 report to make sure it correctly records modern slavery crimes, which is worthy of note. It now has a suitable database in which to record referrals about modern slavery reports, and a robust process for dealing with them. The force continues to work locally, regionally, nationally and with partner agencies to address modern slavery. It plans to set up a modern slavery hub where it will work alongside partners.

Timeliness

The rules require forces to record crimes within 24 hours of receiving a report. West Midlands Police now does this less often than it did during our 2017 inspection. Given that it now records more reports of crime at the first point of contact, this is disappointing.

The increased delays in recording are most significant for violent crime. The force recorded just 445 out of 594 violence offences within 24 hours of the report.

The reasons for these delays are the same as those we found in our 2017 inspection. Namely:

- not always recording all crimes reported as part of a single incident;
- delays in reaching the crime service team on the telephone;
- not always recording a reported crime as soon as possible;
- sometimes not recording a reported crime until after an appointment with the victim; and
- some call handlers wrongly recording rape reports as non-crime incidents.

The delay in recording a crime report delays the victim's referral to Victim Support. Prompt recording is therefore important to victim care.

Cancelled crimes

All crime cancellations, except rape, are made by designated decision makers. Rape cancellation decisions are made by the force crime registrar. We found that all rape cancellations were correct. The force also correctly cancelled:

- 15 out of 19 violence offences;
- 17 out of 20 sexual offences; and
- 13 out of 16 robbery offences.

While it manages rape cancellations well, the force should improve crime cancellation decision making in these other categories. We also note that on occasion it wrongly uses a 'crime created in error' classification, known as a C4. This means that substantive crimes that should still be recorded are not, and the

justification for removing the crime record does not meet the standard required for a crime cancellation. Nor are victims always informed of the decision to cancel their crime record in this way. The force needs to ensure that this classification is only used in appropriate circumstances and that the recording standards for crime cancellations are used where cancellation is justified.

Of those crimes cancelled correctly we were pleased to find that the force informed 49 victims about its decision to cancel a crime, out of the 50 it should have told.

Equality

The force doesn't routinely record information about the disability, religion or sexual orientation of victims, unless they are known features of the crime itself. But we found that it did record information on the age, gender and nationality of victims in most cases.

Attempts to obtain and record a wider range of equality information from victims of crime have been introduced. However, these were described as hindering the effective recording of crime, and often victims were reluctant to provide the information requested. Consequently, the force hasn't yet improved its collection of information about the effect of criminality on identifiable groups within communities since our 2017 inspection.

How well does the force demonstrate the leadership and culture necessary to meet the national standards for crime recording?

 Requires improvement

The force recognises that its initial efforts to improve crime recording did not achieve the traction it expected and that it still has a lot of work to do.

The DCC takes the lead for CDI. From September 2017 governance was managed through the Strategic Information Management Board. In May 2018, an updated improvement programme, intended to address the ongoing problems with crime recording, was introduced. And in June 2018, the DCC commissioned a force-wide 'reality testing' exercise. The force used the findings from this to further refresh its improvement plan. This now contains detailed actions for each of the causes of concern, recommendations and areas for improvement we gave in our 2017 report, which is a positive development. But the force's own assessment shows that it hasn't yet made enough progress against each of these recommendations and areas for improvement.

In July 2018 the DCC established a CDI gold group to manage and monitor the introduction of the required improvements. And the DCC has also approved a 12-month audit plan which replicates the approach to audit taken by HMICFRS.

We also note that the force has updated its departmental CDI improvement plans with bespoke actions required to improve crime recording in each department. This is welcome.

In our 2017 report we recommended that the force should review the operating arrangements of its force control centre and ensure that these arrangements secure the recording of all reported crimes at the first point of report when sufficient information exists to do so and in any event within 24 hours of receipt of the report. The force chose not to implement this recommendation. It considered that such a change was not viable, due to the volume of calls for service received and the operational impact on the force contact centre. As crime recording at the point of contact was identified as an effective tool to secure good crime-recording standards in our [2014 thematic report](#) and has been shown to be effective in forces elsewhere, we encourage the force to re-consider this decision.

Conclusion

West Midlands Police has made limited progress with improving its crime-recording standards since our 2017 report, although we have seen evidence of renewed impetus with regard to securing sustainable improvements during our inspection. We welcome these signs and are confident the force will pay urgent attention to address the outstanding causes of concern and areas for improvement, to improve its service to victims of crime.

What next?

We expect the force to fully address the recommendations and areas for improvement given in our 2017 inspection. We will continue to monitor the force and will re-inspect to assess its progress.