

Gloucestershire Constabulary - Crime Data Integrity inspection 2019

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1. Overall judgment

 Inadequate

The crime recording arrangements in Gloucestershire Constabulary are poor. However, there are areas in which the force has made improvements since [our 2014 crime data integrity inspection](#). For example, it has:

- made significant progress in recognising and recording modern slavery offences; and
- introduced an initial investigation team (IIT) in the force control room which conducts preliminary investigations into incidents that don't need police attendance and records associated crime reports.

Nonetheless, there remain several areas on which the force needs to focus. Limited progress has been made on the national action plan which was developed in 2014 to improve crime recording within policing. And more work remains to be done to satisfactorily complete all of the recommendations we made in our 2014 report. The slow rate of advancement seriously undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of existing crime recording arrangements.

We examined crime reports from 1 July to 31 December 2018. Based on this assessment, [we estimate that the force fails to record over 7,900 reported crimes each year](#). This represents a recording rate of 81.6 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 1.88 percent). The 18.4 percent of reported crimes that go unrecorded include serious crimes such as sexual offences, rape and violence. And many of these cases involve domestic abuse. This means that on too many occasions, the force is failing vulnerable victims of crime.

The force must make immediate improvements. Even when it has enough information from which to record a crime following an initial call, there are unnecessary and unacceptable delays. Call handlers obtain the information they need from victims in an empathetic manner and document it on the incident log. But the force doesn't make enough use of it in subsequent crime recording decisions. Too often this means it doesn't record reported crimes at all. And on occasion this can lead to victims disengaging.

When officers and staff attend incidents or re-contact victims, they don't fully understand their crime recording responsibilities. And when a victim doesn't wish to pursue a report, often officers fail to record the crime. These mistakes are compounded by insufficient supervision, which limits the opportunities available to correct these decisions as soon as possible, combined with a lack of effective strategic governance arrangements.

2. Summary of findings

The force has made little progress since our 2014 report. In 2016 it introduced an IIT to conduct initial telephone investigations and record crimes that officers don't attend. But since this team was created there have sometimes been significant incident backlogs. During the summer of 2018, the backlog was such that it took more than a week between initial report and contact with a victim. This is a frequent issue. The force is in the process of creating a more resilient staffing arrangement to deal with future peaks in demand. Current delays mean crime recording is suspended for a period after an initial report. This is despite the existence of sufficient information in the first contact.

The force crime registrar (FCR), who is responsible for overseeing crime recording arrangements, has completed a [national College of Policing course for FCRs](#) and is fully accredited for the role. But he also has other responsibilities which limit his effectiveness as the FCR.

Gloucestershire Constabulary's crime recording performance is unacceptable in the following areas:

- The force currently under-records too many reports of crime, including:
 - violent crimes (in particular assault resulting in actual bodily harm, stalking, harassment, malicious communications and coercive and controlling behaviour);
 - sexual offences (including rape);
 - offences involving vulnerable victims; and

- domestic abuse-related crimes reported at the first point of contact or disclosed through professional third parties.

The force needs to act promptly to improve its accuracy when recording these reports and to give all victims the service they need and deserve.

- With the exception of new recruits, crime recording training is only provided if a supervisor makes a request for it on behalf of officers and staff. This means that some staff have received training, but others have not had any at all. The result is that many officers and staff, including supervisors, don't understand the rules well enough to properly meet their crime recording responsibilities.
- The force doesn't always record crimes that occur during domestic abuse incidents.
- The force doesn't always correctly record incidents disclosed directly to public protection teams, particularly crimes reported by professional third parties.
- Delays in recording reported crimes lead to delays in referring victims to [Victim Support](#), letting down people who need the early support this service can provide.
- The force fails to collect diversity data on many crimes. This limits how well it understands the effects of criminality on identifiable groups within communities.
- Supervisors across the force can cancel crimes, but don't always understand when it is appropriate to do so. Some crimes are cancelled inappropriately and often victims are not informed of the decision to cancel their report. This includes rape crimes which should only be cancelled by the FCR.
- The force has not made sufficient improvement in administering [out-of-court disposals](#). An independent scrutiny panel examined 150 disposals since our 2014 report and found a third of them were inappropriate. And the force has not acted on panel feedback.

Additionally, the force has made limited progress to make sure officers and staff understand their crime recording responsibilities. There is only limited supervision of crime recording decisions, and strategic governance of crime recording standards could be improved.

Cause of concern

In Gloucestershire Constabulary, officers and staff are failing to make correct crime recording decisions at the first opportunity. This is due to deficiencies in its 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 letting down many victims of crime.

The force is failing to make sure it adequately records all reports of rape, sexual and violence offences, domestic abuse crimes and crimes reported directly to its public protection departments.

Recommendations

The force should immediately:

- put in place arrangements to make sure that when more than one crime is disclosed within an incident record, or is identified as part of other recorded crime investigations, these are recorded as soon as possible;
- develop and implement procedures for the effective supervision of crime recording decisions throughout the whole force, including the force control room;
- ensure that the FCR makes all rape no-crime decisions;
- make sure that when reports of crime involving vulnerable adults and children are received from third-party professionals or disclosed during investigation, they are recorded as crimes; and
- introduce effective arrangements for the strategic governance of crime recording with the involvement and support of the FCR.

Within three months, the force should:

- improve its recording practices for reports of rape and ensure it uses classification N100 correctly;
- improve its crime recording arrangements to make sure it records all identified crimes without delay and in any case within 24 hours; and
- review its IIT arrangements and take the necessary action to satisfy itself that these are effective.

Within six months, the force should:

- make sure the FCR has enough resources to carry out an effective and proportionate audit to help the force understand performance and emerging trends;
- make sure it only uses out-of-court disposals when appropriate and in line with the victim's views;
- establish an effective feedback system from the independent scrutiny panel to make sure it uses out-of-court disposals correctly; and
- design and provide training for officers who make crime recording decisions. This should include training about:
 - the information required to make a crime recording decision;
 - the expectation that reported crime is recorded as soon as sufficient information exists to do so, which in most cases will be at the point of report;
 - the importance of believing the first account of the victim;
 - the proper use of classification N100 for reports of rape;
 - how to correctly record rape crimes involving multiple offenders;

- the additional verifiable information required to make crime cancellation decisions;
- the importance of informing the victim of a crime cancellation decision;
- how to correctly record crimes reported by third parties, in particular those reported by professional third parties; and
- offences involving malicious communications, harassment, common assault and coercive and controlling behaviour.

Areas for improvement

The force should immediately:

- improve how it collects diversity information from victims of crime and review how it uses this to inform its compliance with its equality duty;
- put in place arrangements to improve the process for informing victims when their recorded crime has been cancelled; and
- develop and implement an effective feedback process for all officers and staff involved in making crime recording decisions.

3. How effective is the force at recording reported crime?

 Inadequate

Overall crime-recording rate

81.6% of reported crimes were recorded

Over 7,900 reports of crime a year are not recorded

The force has considerable work to do to ensure it records all reports of crime in accordance with the [Home Office Counting Rules \(PDF document\)](#) (HOCR). We examined reports of crime which the force received, and for which it had created an [auditable record](#). The force told us that 93 percent of the crime it records (excluding fraud) came through an auditable route. This doesn't mean that 93 percent of crimes reported to Gloucestershire Constabulary come through these routes, but that 93 percent of crime is recorded this way.

We found that the force recorded 81.6 percent of these crimes (with a confidence interval of 1.88 percent). [We estimate that this means the force is not recording more than 7,900 reports of crime each year](#). These failings are a serious cause of concern and are depriving many victims of the services to which they are entitled.

Of a total of 1,603 audited reports of crime, we assessed 397 as crimes related to [domestic abuse](#). Of these 397 crimes, the force had recorded 252 offences. The 145 offences not recorded included 127 offences of violence, 1 sexual offence and 17 other crimes.

The force's failure to record these domestic abuse crimes meant it didn't investigate many of them. And in many cases, it put no safeguarding measures in place.

Many of the unrecorded crimes were of a serious nature. The potentially harmful situations that some victims were left in without safeguarding from the police are unacceptable.

These failings were compounded by a lack of supervision of crime recording decisions both within the force control room and at a local level. The lack of such supervisory intervention, and the subsequent lack of accountability for crime recording standards, significantly contribute to the force's poor crime recording accuracy.

We have serious concerns about the lack of understanding of the full extent of domestic abuse crime, the under-recording of these crimes and the absence of satisfactory services that should be provided to victims. Domestic abuse often involves victims who are particularly vulnerable to further offences being committed against them.

The force's under-recording of crime reports is partly due to its crime recording processes, its workforce's poor comprehension of crime recording and a lack of supervisory intervention. The lack of senior level leadership and governance of crime recording arrangements has resulted in a lack of focus on improving crime recording.

There are more reasons for the poor performance in crime recording processes, including that:

- officers do not always make correct crime recording decisions, or provide enough information to explain why a crime record isn't required;
- officers sometimes don't believe victims' reports of crime, particularly if the victim is thought to be suffering from mental ill-health;
- frontline officers and staff aren't always sure of basic crime-recording principles or requirements, and often don't understand the crime recording rules about third-party professional reports;
- when victims don't wish to support an investigation, officers sometimes don't record the crime;
- the force doesn't always record additional crimes that are exposed after initial attendance or during subsequent investigation; and
- incident records that contain multiple reports of crime often result incorrectly in only one crime report being recorded.

Violence against the person

69.2% of reported violent crimes were recorded

Over 4,200 reports of violent crime a year are not recorded

We found that 69.2 percent of violent crimes reported to the force are recorded (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.3 percent). This is considerably lower than the overall crime recording rate noted above. [By our estimate, this means the force fails to record over 4,200 violent crimes that are reported to it each year.](#) Special focus is needed in this area of performance because violent crime can be particularly

distressing for the victim. For this reason, the under-recording of reports of violent crime is a significant concern.

In most cases where violent crimes were not recorded, we found the principal causes to be:

- the processes involved in recording a reported crime as described earlier;
- officers and staff don't appropriately understand crime recording rules, particularly for complex offences such as harassment or malicious communications, and the more straightforward offence of common assault; and
- an absence of adequate supervision of crime-recording decisions.

Victims of violence and serious 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. If the force fails to record a violent crime properly, it can mean victims aren't referred to support services. This deprives victims of the support they need and deserve.

Sexual offences

83.3% of reported sex offences were recorded

Over 210 reports of sex offences a year are not recorded

The force's recording of reports of sexual offences (including rape) is a cause of concern. We found that it records 83.3 percent of sexual offence crimes that are reported to it (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.01 percent). [We estimate that this means the force fails to record over 210 reported sexual offence crimes each year.](#)

These failings are significant because of the very serious nature of sexual offences and the harm they cause to their victims. We found that the force failed to record sexual offences committed against adults and children, including:

- sexual assaults;
- inciting a child to commit a sexual act;
- sexual activity with a child; and
- exposure.

The causes of that under-recording are similar to those described earlier:

- the deficiency of the processes for recording a reported crime;
- officers sometimes not believing victims, particularly if the victim is thought to be suffering from mental ill-health;
- officers and staff not properly understanding the crime recording rules, such as how to deal with professional third-party reports of crime; and
- an absence of adequate supervision of crime recording decisions.

Sexual offence victims require significant support from the outset. Failing to record such crimes, to give the victim appropriate support or to attend or investigate promptly will often cause the victim to lack confidence in the police. This can make the victim reluctant to engage in subsequent stages of the criminal justice system. Gloucestershire Constabulary must improve its performance in this respect.

Rape

87 out of 117 audited rape reports were accurately recorded

Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience, so 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. In turn, this allows the police to identify and deal with perpetrators as efficiently as possible.

In Gloucestershire Constabulary we found that, of the 117 reports of rape that should have been recorded, only 87 were recorded. This is a cause of concern.

Of the 30 unrecorded rape reports, 21 came from the force incident system and through reports received directly by specialist officers from third party professionals. Of these:

- six were incorrectly classified as other crimes, such as sexual assault;
- 13 hadn't been recorded at all; and
- the remaining were incorrectly given N100 classifications (see below).

The force didn't provide appropriate safeguarding to the victim in seven of these unrecorded cases and conducted no investigation whatsoever in 14 of them.

The causes of the under-recording of rape crimes are the same as identified above in respect of other sexual offences.

The force must improve its recording and investigation of rape offences to make sure it has a clear picture of demand and offending behaviour. It must be able to satisfy itself that it always provides the service and support that victims of rape have a right to expect.

There are also some problems with the force's use of the Home Office classification N100. The N100 was introduced in April 2015, but Gloucestershire Constabulary didn't use it until 2016. Its purpose is to explain why reported incidents of rape or attempted rape, whether they are reported by victims, witnesses or third parties, haven't immediately been recorded as a confirmed crime. This can include instances where new information confirms the rape didn't take place, or where the rape took place in another force area and was transferred to the relevant force to record and investigate.

We found 17 incident reports for which the force should have recorded an N100 classification. Of these, it had correctly recorded two.

Separately, we examined a sample of 22 N100s that the force had already recorded. Three of these were duplicates of records found during our incident audit. Of the remaining 19 we found:

- six that should have been recorded as a crime of rape from the outset; and
- a further three unrecorded reports of rape which should have been recorded after receiving victim confirmation.

The use of N100s is not well understood by officers and staff. This includes the incorrect use of classification N100 when third party professionals make reports with enough information to record a rape crime from the outset.

As with other sexual offences, the recording of a report of rape is important. Victims will often need a great deal of support from the start. Any delay, or failure to record the crime correctly, can have a negative impact on both the victim's recovery and any investigation. This, in turn, can negatively influence future judicial proceedings.

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

 Inadequate

Crime reports held on other systems

22 of 41 vulnerable victim crimes were recorded

To be confident that vulnerable victims always get the support they need, the force must improve its recording of crimes reported directly to its public protection teams.

We examined 25 adult and 25 child vulnerable victim records and a further 19 reports received directly into the public protection team. We found the force had recorded 22 out of the 41 crimes that should have been recorded.

Of the unrecorded crimes, six related to vulnerable adult victims. These included four violence offences, one sexual offence and a theft. The remaining 13 unrecorded crimes related to vulnerable child victims. They included:

- one rape;
- three other sexual offences;
- seven violence offences;
- one offence of child neglect; and
- one offence of sharing indecent images of a child.

These crime reports all originated from third parties such as health and social services professionals. When they were received, they were reviewed by staff either in the [multi-agency safeguarding hub](#) or child protection team. Appropriate safeguarding was provided in all cases, but none were investigated.

There are serious risks associated with under-recording reports of crime received from third party professionals which involve vulnerable people. So, the extent of under-recording by Gloucestershire Constabulary is a cause of concern.

Modern slavery

Offences relating to modern slavery are an important and recent addition to the crimes that forces must record and investigate. We reviewed how well Gloucestershire Constabulary records reports of modern slavery offences. We also examined its understanding of the origin of such reports. In this respect we were pleased to find that it generally performed well.

We examined 20 modern slavery crime records and found that all had been recorded correctly. Additionally, the force correctly recorded three other crimes and misclassified one.

We also examined a further 16 modern slavery referrals from which 12 crimes of modern slavery should have been recorded. Eight of these were recorded correctly, one was misclassified and three were not recorded.

Officers across the force are aware of the crime recording process and what amounts to an offence of modern slavery. There are helpful prompts on the mobile devices officers use to record crimes which assist them to identify modern slavery offences.

Timeliness

If the information the force gets at the first point of contact satisfies the national crime recording standard, it should record the crime straight away and, in any case, within 24 hours. In this respect the force needs to make significant improvements.

We found that, of the reports of crime Gloucestershire Constabulary had recorded, the following were made within 24 hours of receiving the report:

- 290 out of 467 reports of violent crime;
- 178 out of 254 sexual offences; and
- 205 out of 467 other offences.

Nearly half of all recorded crimes take longer than 24 hours to be recorded. And around one in 20 crimes take longer than a week. These delays are likely to delay the referral of victims to support services and must be addressed.

Cancelled crimes

If additional verifiable information shows that a recorded crime didn't take place, the record can be cancelled. In this respect the force needs to improve.

We reviewed a sample of cancelled recorded crimes of rape, violence, sexual offences and robbery. Of these, we found that the force had correctly cancelled 14 out of 16 crimes of rape. Someone other than the FCR had cancelled two of these 16 cases, which is not permitted in the HOCA, and one of these decisions was incorrect. The remaining case was incorrectly cancelled by the FCR.

Other crime cancellation decisions are the responsibility of frontline supervisors. They had correctly cancelled:

- 11 out of 18 sexual offences (excluding rape);
- 10 out of 20 violence offences; and
- 8 out of 10 robbery offences.

We found that supervisors lack the knowledge required to make correct decisions. This is compounded by an absence of quality assurance processes to monitor the standard of crime cancellation decisions.

If a crime has been cancelled or transferred to another force to investigate, victims should always be informed. If the force decides to cancel a recorded crime, the very least the victim should expect is an explanation of why it decided this. We found that, of the 48 victims who should have been told of the transfer or cancellation, only 30 were advised. This is also an area for improvement.

Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime \(Document\)](#) gives police forces clear guidance about the service they should give crime victims. We have concluded that the force is aware of its responsibilities under this code.

Victim Support is commissioned by the police and crime commissioner to provide general victim services to those affected by crime in the county. Bespoke services are available for victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence. The service also now includes help for those affected by anti-social behaviour.

All victim services comply with the Victims' Code of Practice which tells the public what it can expect from each criminal justice agency, including the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts.

Equality

We found that the force needs to improve the way it collects information about crimes affecting identifiable groups within communities.

Protected characteristics, such as gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion and age, don't necessarily make someone more vulnerable to the risk of crime. However, it is important that the force records information about victims' characteristics. This helps to identify any patterns between different community groups and how vulnerable they are to (or how likely they are to report) different types of crime.

The force can record victim ethnicity on its crime recording system, but often doesn't do so. And it doesn't record religion, sexual orientation or disability. Importantly, so long as it fails to record such information, it won't be able to develop an accurate understanding of the effects of crime on different community groups. This is an area for improvement.

Officer and staff survey

We carried out a survey of officers and staff in Gloucestershire Constabulary about their experience of crime recording. Disappointingly, only 110 respondents took part. But we were pleased that most respondents said they were aware of their responsibility to challenge and report unethical, unacceptable or unprofessional crime recording behaviours. And most confirmed the absence of any pressure to avoid recording crime accurately.

But many respondents said there was a backlog for crimes to be validated. The time it takes to allocate a crime to an investigating officer is causing delays in any meaningful investigation.

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

 Inadequate

Gloucestershire Constabulary needs to improve its strategic governance of crime recording standards.

The deputy chief constable (DCC) is the chief officer lead for crime recording. Over the past two years the force has focused its efforts on addressing areas for improvement from previous inspections. But during this time there has been no senior-level oversight of crime recording standards.

We found that officers and staff have not been told about the importance of crime recording. And, although the force has a crime recording policy, many officers weren't aware of it.

The force's response both to the findings in our 2014 report and to the national action plan has been ineffective. It doesn't have a crime recording action plan and crime recording is not an agenda item in any strategic meeting. The FCR doesn't routinely attend a relevant strategic forum and there is no mechanism for his audits to be reported to chief officers. The force isn't properly studying national crime recording data to identify emerging trends or issues.

The FCR has direct access to the DCC through quarterly meetings and can request more meetings if there is a pressing issue. But the meetings are informal, with no records that could help the force to keep track of progress and obstacles to improvement. The FCR is also responsible for checking Police National Computer and email records. There is no deputy FCR: a staff member does assist with auditing, but this is not their only role. This limits the degree to which the FCR can oversee crime recording standards. Furthermore, it reduces his ability to carry out an effective audit which could help the force to understand performance and compliance.

6. Conclusion

Gloucestershire Constabulary's crime recording arrangements are inadequate. It must now work hard to make the necessary improvements so that victims of crime can be confident their reports will be taken seriously, recorded and investigated.

The force must improve its crime recording processes, make sure that officers and staff fully understand the standards expected of them, and supervise these standards effectively.

7. What next?

We expect the force urgently to make progress with implementing the recommendations made in this report.

The serious causes of concern found during this inspection are such that we will re-visit the force to assess progress.

Publication types:

[Crime recording](#)

Police Forces:

[Gloucestershire](#)

Published on:

25 July 2019