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**Fire and rescue (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/fire-and-rescue-services/>)**

- Home (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs>)
- Publications (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/>)
- Thames Valley Police: Crime Data Integrity re-insp... (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/thames-valley-c>)

## Thames Valley Police: Crime Data Integrity re-inspection 2019

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

We published the [report of this inspection](#) (</hmicfrs/our-work/crime-data-integrity/reports-rolling-programme-crime-data-integrity/>) in February 2018 and concluded that the force's crime recording arrangements were not acceptable. As a result, we gave Thames Valley Police an overall judgment of inadequate.

Our 2018 report gave numerous recommendations and areas for improvement aimed at improving crime recording in Thames Valley Police. This re-inspection, completed in May 2019, assessed the progress made since that report.

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

1. Overall judgment
2. Summary of inspection findings
3. How effective is the force at recording reported crime?
  - 3.1. Overall crime recording rate
  - 3.2. Violence against the person
  - 3.3. Sexual offences
  - 3.4. Rape
4. How efficiently do the systems and processes in the force support accurate crime recording?
  - 4.1. Crime reports held on other systems
  - 4.2. Modern slavery
  - 4.3. Timeliness
  - 4.4. Cancelled crimes
5. How well does the force demonstrate the leadership and culture necessary to meet the national standards for crime recording?
6. Conclusion
7. What next?

## Overall judgment

● ○ ○ ○ **Inadequate**

See previous findings

From its low base Thames Valley Police has improved its crime recording arrangements since our 2017 crime data integrity (CDI) inspection. However, we found it still needs to do more.

The most significant change that it has made is to implement crime recording at the first point of contact in its contact management centre.

It has also:

- improved its overall crime recording, including of violence and sexual offences;
- significantly increased how often it records crime reports at the first point of contact;
- developed and implemented a CDI delivery plan; and
- provided comprehensive crime recording training to call handling staff in its contact management centre.

The force is determined to get crime recording right. But despite its new approach, it needs to achieve higher recording standards. To do this it should make sure it trains all staff in the contact management centre, including dispatchers, in crime recording. Failure to do this is limiting the accuracy of those recording decisions made at the point of contact.

We examined crime reports from 1 October to 31 December 2018. Based on this, we estimate that the force records 87.9 percent of crimes reported to it (with a confidence interval of +/- 1.70 percent). This is a statistically significant improvement of 7.5 percentage points when compared to our 2017 inspection finding of 80.4 percent (confidence interval +/- 1.75 percent).

We estimate that, compared to the findings of our 2017 inspection, this improved accuracy meant that the force recorded an additional 13,800 crimes (</hmicfrs/crime-data-integrity-inspections-explanatory-notes#additionally-recorded-crimes>) for the year covered by our re-inspection audit period. So, more victims will now have their reported crimes recorded. Recording these reports makes sure victims have access to the victim support service Victims First [\(http://www.victims-first.org.uk/\)](http://www.victims-first.org.uk/) when they may otherwise not have been referred to it.

But despite these improvements, the overall recording rate and the recording rate for violent crime are still too low.

Supervision of the crime recording process and decisions remains inconsistent. And there are still not enough safeguards in place to make sure reported crimes are recorded.

Also, since our last inspection the force has got worse at:

- using classification NI100 for rape reports it decides not to record as crimes;
- making decisions when cancelling recorded offences; and
- informing victims of its decision to cancel their crime.

## Summary of inspection findings

See previous findings

The force has made some progress with its crime recording arrangements since our 2017 inspection. It has:

- identified gaps in its systems and processes for recording crime reports arising from domestic incidents and public protection referrals;
- made changes to address these gaps;
- introduced a process where contact management staff review the domestic abuse and vulnerable victim reports from the previous day to make sure all crimes have been recorded;
- implemented a supervisory review process and started to brief frontline supervisors on their crime recording responsibilities; and
- issued operational crime recording guidance for officers and staff responsible for making crime recording decisions.

However, at the time of our inspection these changes had not yet created the improvement required to achieve accurate crime recording.

The force still needs to address various issues.

- Frontline officers, including supervisors, have a poor understanding of the force's crime recording system (NICHE). The force relies on NICHE to record crime and assess demand. But officers and supervisors clearly still do not understand how crime records are created and what entries constitute recorded crimes.
- Officers and supervisors who work outside the contact management centre have a poor understanding of the national crime recording standards (NCRS). They have not received crime recording training.
- Incidents which have been disclosed directly to public protection teams, in particular those reported by professional third parties, and which amount to a crime in law, are not always recorded as such.
- Officers and staff are still failing to correctly identify and record domestic abuse and rape crimes.

The force has failed to make sure officers and staff fully understand and apply changes made in April 2018 to crime recording requirements for stalking, harassment and coercive and controlling behaviour. Together with common assault, these crime types made up the vast majority of missed domestic abuse crimes.

We were encouraged to find that the force has been conducting its own crime recording audits, which have already identified some of the failings described in this report. These include some of the reasons why officers and staff fail to record reported crimes and some of the procedural problems that may affect crime recording accuracy.

The force reports the results of these audits to its CDI strategic and tactical working groups. And it shares them with department leads so that they can give feedback to officers and staff. This is good practice, but the force needs to do more to make sure these feedback processes are working effectively.

The force created a CDI delivery plan to address the recommendations and areas for improvement in our previous inspection report. This plan is comprehensive and the force has started to implement the vast majority of these actions. However, the pace of implementation needs to be accelerated as much remains to be done.

## How effective is the force at recording reported crime?

● ○ ○ ○ Inadequate

Overall crime recording rate

**87.9%** of reported crimes  
were recorded

See previous findings

The force has made some progress with its processes, ensuring it now records more reports of crime in accordance with the [Home Office Counting Rules \(PDF document\)](#) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/534967/count-general-july-2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534967/count-general-july-2016.pdf)) (HOOCR). We examined reports of crime the force received, and for which it had created an auditable record. The force told us that 90.6 percent of crime it records (except fraud) comes through an auditable route. This doesn't mean that 90.6 percent of crimes reported to Thames Valley Police come through these routes, but that 90.6 percent of crime is recorded this way.

We found that the force recorded 87.9 percent of these crimes (with a confidence interval of +/- 1.70 percent). We estimate that this means the force is recording an additional 13,800 reported crimes each year ([/hmicfrs/crime-data-integrity-inspections-explanatory-notes#unrecorded-crimes](#)) compared to our findings in 2017. This is a statistically significant improvement of 7.5 percentage points. But it falls short of what is needed.

Of the 1,419 reports of crime we audited, we assessed 379 as related to [domestic abuse](#) ([/hmicfrs/glossary/domestic-abuse/](#)). Of these, the force had recorded 289. Of the 90 offences not recorded, 80 were violence offences, including:

- common assault;
- stalking;
- harassment;
- malicious communications; and
- coercive and controlling behaviour.

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 occasions where some call handlers didn't record on the incident log full details of the conversation they had with the person reporting a crime. This means the attending officer doesn't always have the full information on which to base a crime recording decision.

## Case study

A report was made of domestic abuse, amounting to an offence of controlling and coercive behaviour. The victim was a repeat victim of domestic abuse. She was reporting that she was being subject to a forced marriage. To facilitate this, relatives were controlling all aspects of her life including travel and access to documents. The victim was extremely distressed by this behaviour and had attempted suicide the previous day. Police did not attend. Nor did they record any offences or provide information to suggest a crime did not occur. The force did not identify safeguarding opportunities or carry out an investigation.

The force considered safeguarding requirements in most of the unrecorded cases. But it carried out a proportionate investigation in only 11 of them.

We are still concerned that the force is under-recording crimes relating to domestic abuse incidents. It is failing to give many of these victims a satisfactory service.

## Violence against the person

**79.4%** of reported violent crimes were recorded

[See previous findings](#)

We found that 79.4 percent of violent crimes reported to the force are recorded (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.17 percent). This is lower than the overall crime recording rate above. We estimate that, compared to the findings of our 2017 inspection, the force is now recording an additional 5,940 reported violence crimes each year. This is a statistically significant improvement of 10.2 percentage points, but the force is still failing many victims of violent crime. As violent crime can be particularly distressing for the victim, and many of these crimes involve injury, the need for improvement in this area is particularly acute and remains a concern.

When the force doesn't record a violent crime, the principal causes are:

- misunderstanding of the crime recording rules about some violence offences such as stalking, harassment, malicious communications, coercive and controlling behaviour and common assault;
- failing to record multiple crimes in accordance with the HOCR;
- failing to record additional crimes disclosed by victims on domestic abuse risk assessment forms; and
- inconsistent supervision of the crime recording process and decisions, with inadequate safeguards to make sure it records most crimes correctly.

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 Victims First. 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 Victims First. This deprives victims of the support they need and deserve.

## Sexual offences

**95.3%** of reported sex offences were recorded

[See previous findings](#)

The force records 95.3 percent of sexual offence crimes (including rape) that are reported to it (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.03 percent). Compared to the findings of our 2017 inspection, we estimate the force has recorded an additional 280 reported sexual offence crimes in the past year. This is a statistically significant improvement of 5.1 percentage points. These crimes may otherwise have gone unrecorded. This improvement is welcome.

The reported sexual offence crimes that were not recorded included two sexual assaults, one exposure and a variety of five sexual offences against children.

The main cause of this under-recording is failure to record multiple crimes in accordance with the [HOCR \(PDF document\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534967/count-general-july-2016.pdf) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/534967/count-general-july-2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534967/count-general-july-2016.pdf)).

Recording sexual offence crimes is particularly important for victims, as many of these crimes are very serious in nature and cause significant harm.

## Rape

## 126 of 138 audited rape reports were accurately recorded

[See previous findings](#)

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.

Since our 2017 inspection, the force has not noticeably changed or improved how it records reports of rape.

We found that 126 of 138 rape crimes had been correctly recorded. Of the 12 unrecorded reports:

- five were misclassified as other offences; and
- seven were not recorded at all.

The force considered safeguarding requirements for all victims. But in three cases, failing to record the rape crimes meant it didn't conduct a full investigation into the reports. This let down those victims.

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

In 2017, we found that the standard of N100 recording was exceptionally good. But in this audit, we found that there was general confusion in making these decisions. Staff in the contact management centre don't understand whether or when to record a rape or a classification N100.

We checked 20 N100 records. Of these:

- three records, containing five rape reports, should have been recorded as rapes at the outset, but were only later recorded as crimes;
- one should not have been recorded as a N100 at all; and
- one record should have had an additional three N100s recorded as well.

The remaining N100 records were recorded correctly.

Separately, we also identified 31 other occasions where the force should have used an N100 classification. But it only did so in 23 of these.

We found that frontline officers and staff still had very little awareness of the N100 classification. Again, this is disappointing as we highlighted this matter as an area for improvement following our 2017 inspection. The force has introduced a review process for N100s. But more needs to be done to improve understanding among officers and staff to make sure it uses this classification correctly.

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 correctly, can have a negative impact on both the victim's recovery and any investigation. It remains a concern that the force is still under-recording rape crimes and failing to give many of these victims a satisfactory service.

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

●●○○ Requires improvement

#### Crime reports held on other systems

## 4 of 7 vulnerable victim crimes were recorded

[See previous findings](#)

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

To make sure it does so, the force has changed its procedures for recording crimes reported in this way. It now records all such reports in the contact management centre, to try to make sure it records every reported crime. It has also introduced a daily system of checking vulnerable victim records for missed crimes. Despite these new arrangements, the force still doesn't record all such crimes.

We examined 22 vulnerable adult victim records. Unusually, there were no crime reports in them. We also examined 25 vulnerable child records in which we found seven crimes that should have been recorded. But the force had only recorded four. The unrecorded offences included:

- sexual activity with a child under 13;
- assault occasioning actual bodily harm; and
- injury caused by a dangerous dog.

All these cases involved professional third-party reports and should have been recorded as soon as they were reported.

Because the assault case was written off as an accident, there was no safeguarding or subsequent investigation. The force still has more to do to make sure it records all vulnerable victim crimes, particularly professional third-party reports received in the contact management centre.

### Modern slavery

See previous findings

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

In 2017 we found that the force was recording all modern slavery offences reported to it and disclosed during investigations.

On this occasion, we checked 20 modern slavery records and found that 18 modern slavery crimes had been correctly identified and recorded. Two crimes were recorded unnecessarily. Also, we found 12 additional crimes which the force should have recorded. It had correctly identified and recorded eight of these. The four crimes that were missed were one each of:

- assault occasioning actual bodily harm;
- common assault;
- sexual assault; and
- theft.

We also looked at 20 modern slavery reports the force received through the national referral mechanism (NRM). We found that it should have recorded 11 modern slavery crimes but had only recorded seven. We found eight additional crimes which should have been recorded and the force had correctly identified and recorded five of these. Three additional common assault crimes were missed. One crime of coercive and controlling behaviour should have been classified as a modern slavery crime.

In 2017, the force was incorrectly over-recording modern slavery crimes that occurred abroad. We are pleased that this is no longer the case.

The force has recently implemented a daily audit of all modern slavery incidents to make sure it correctly identifies and records all crimes. This is welcome.

### Timeliness

See previous findings

The rules require forces to record crimes within 24 hours of the report. We found that, of the crime reports Thames Valley Police had recorded, it did so within 24 hours for:

- 453 out of 479 violent crimes;
- 276 out of 305 sexual offences; and
- 399 out of 408 other offences.

In general, when Thames Valley Police makes correct crime recording decisions, its procedures successfully make sure it does so within 24 hours. This timely recording enables it to make early referrals to Victims First for those victims in need of support. This is a substantial improvement since our 2017 inspection and is very welcome.

### Cancelled crimes

See previous findings

Designated decision makers (DDMs) make all crime cancellations except rape. The force crime registrar (FCR) makes rape cancellation decisions.

We found that the force correctly cancelled:

- 19 out of 20 rape crimes;
- 17 out of 20 violent crimes;
- 16 out of 21 sexual offence crimes; and
- 17 out of 20 robbery offences.

On most occasions when the force's cancellation decisions were not correct, it was because of a lack of additional verifiable information to show the recorded crime didn't take place.

Of the 50 victims the force should have told of its decision to cancel their crime, it had informed only 42.

The force's standards for cancelling recorded crime remain an area for improvement. And it remains a concern that the force does not always inform victims about the cancellation of their recorded crime.

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

### ●●○○ Requires improvement

The force has improved its crime recording in many ways. Recording rates have shown statistically significant improvements and it is recording many more of those crimes within 24 hours. And officers and staff generally place the victim at the forefront of their crime recording decisions.

[See previous findings](#)

After our 2017 inspection, the force developed a CDI delivery plan. The deputy chief constable (DCC) chairs the quarterly CDI strategic gold group which governs it. The plan seeks to address the recommendations and areas for improvement from our 2017 inspection. But the force recognises that its initial efforts to improve crime recording were not as successful as it expected and that it still has a lot of work to do.

The force has left primary responsibility to make the required improvements to the FCR. So the CDI delivery plan has only moved at a pace that the FCR can manage. The force acknowledges that it needs more work at a senior level to support the FCR in his endeavours. The DCC, helped by relevant staff members, is providing support to make sure the delivery plan gains the momentum needed and is successfully completed. This is a welcome development.

The force has fully implemented four out of six recommendations from our 2017 inspection. It still needs to fully implement the following recommendations:

- to develop and implement procedures for effectively supervising crime recording decisions across the whole force; and
- to design and provide training for officers who make crime recording decisions.

Also, the force needs to ensure it makes more progress with the outstanding areas for improvement identified during our 2017 inspection.

## Conclusion

Thames Valley Police has made some progress with improving its crime recording standards since our 2017 inspection. This is welcome. But it now needs to work more quickly to address the outstanding causes of concern and areas for improvement identified in this and our previous report. We are confident the leadership and governance arrangements that it now has will enable it to do so.

## What next?

We expect the force to continue to address the causes for concern and to fully implement the recommendations and areas for improvement from our 2017 inspection. We will continue to monitor this and will re-inspect the force again to assess its progress.

### Publication types:

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### Published on:

25 July 2019

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