Office for
Statistics Regulation

Systemic Review Programme

The quality of police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales

May 2024

Executive Summary

Why we did this review

The [police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales](#), published quarterly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), are a measure of the number of crimes reported to and recorded by the police in England and Wales. The Home Office collates recorded crime data from the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police and supplies these data to ONS.

The police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales are published as official statistics, not [accredited official statistics](#). We removed their National Statistics accreditation in 2014 following an assessment which found evidence that the quality and consistency of the underlying data may not be reliable.

This review is the first step towards the statistics being considered for reaccreditation. Accreditation demonstrates that the public can have confidence in the quality of the statistics.

This review looks in depth at the quality of the underlying data used to produce the police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales. It covers the data process from beginning to end – from how police forces record crime, to how data quality is managed and assured by all those involved in their collection and processing, to the production of the final statistics. We identified the key factors that have led to improvements to crime recording by police forces in recent years, and what we see as the main barriers and challenges to ensuring the quality of police recorded crime data.

The police recorded crime statistics are one of two key sets of statistics on crime in England and Wales. The other source is the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), a household survey of individuals' experience of crime.

Understanding and interpreting crime statistics for England and Wales is complex. Both data sources have their individual strengths and limitations. The CSEW statistics are the best source for understanding long-term crime trends across England and Wales in crime covered by the survey. For many crime types, the police recorded crime statistics are a better indicator of police activity than trends in crime itself, but they do provide better insight than the CSEW on some higher-harm but less-common crimes like homicide and knife crime. The police recorded crime statistics also cover a broader range of crimes than the CSEW and are available at the police force area level.

Crime statistics are a priority area for us. Our work on police recorded crime statistics is part of a wider programme of regulatory work on crime statistics for England and Wales. Currently, the CSEW statistics are published as official statistics, not accredited official statistics, due to challenges with response rates that affect the quality of the estimates. We will be reviewing the accreditation status of the CSEW statistics in 2024.

This review did not examine the quality of police recorded fraud and computer misuse data, as the process for recording these crime types is different from other crime types. We will review this subset of police recorded crime statistics separately as part

of a wider review of the quality and value of fraud and computer misuse statistics for England and Wales later in 2024.

What we found

We gathered evidence across the following stakeholder groups and carried out extensive desk research to support the findings from our engagement. This engagement effort included:

- a sample of nine police forces in England and Wales.
- the policing inspectorate (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)).
- the Home Office and Office for National Statistics (ONS) analytical teams.
- wider stakeholders, including national policing coordination groups and bodies.

Police forces have made significant improvements to crime recording, but there are common challenges to ensuring the quality of recorded crime data

We identified several common themes and features of good crime recording by police forces. We also gained insight into the barriers and challenges to recording crime accurately and consistently. Our findings may not be generalisable to all police forces, as they are based on a sample of nine police forces, but we think that they give a good indication of what is working well. This review has given us greater confidence in the quality of the underlying recorded crime data overall.

### Police forces are recording crime more accurately now than in 2014

HMICFRS has carried out regular inspections of the 'crime data integrity' of each police force in England and Wales since 2014. Crime recording accuracy is one aspect of crime data integrity and is a measure of whether the crimes reported to the police are recorded when they should be.

HMICFRS's inspections estimate that crime recording accuracy nationally has improved in the last ten years, from 80.5% (± 2.0%) of all crimes (excluding fraud) in 2014 to 92.4% (± 0.3%) at the end of the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme, a statistically significant change. Most police forces inspected by HMICFRS in its 2021 to 2022 inspection programme (17 out of 23 forces) were found to record crime with an accuracy of over 90% (Figure ES1), although, over time, individual police forces have improved their crime recording accuracy to varying extents.

Given this variation in crime data integrity between forces and over time, HMICFRS has said that it will continue to inspect forces to ensure standards are maintained. HMICFRS plays a vital role in holding forces to account for their crime recording standards, and we consider it is essential that it continues to carry out regular audits of crime data integrity.

The nine police forces that we spoke to confirmed that HMICFRS inspections of crime data integrity had been instrumental in bringing about improvements to their crime recording standards.

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Figure ES1. Crime recording accuracy data from HMICFRS's 2021 to 2022 inspection programme
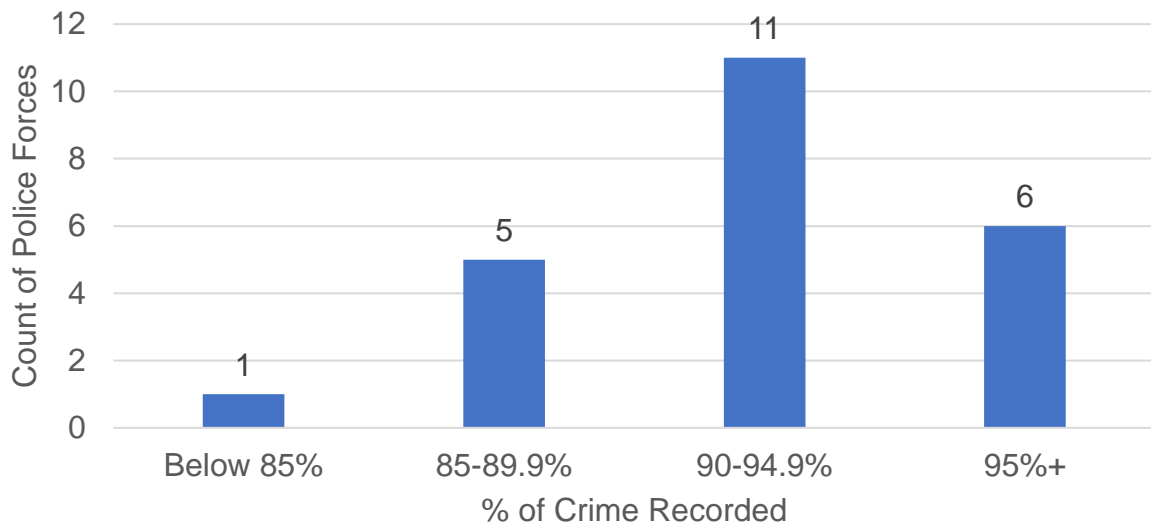
We found that there has been a positive shift in the culture around crime recording in police forces since 2014. Now, forces appear to take crime data integrity very seriously and are more committed to ensuring that they meet the national standards of crime recording.

Key features of good crime recording that we identified include strong data leadership and governance, and investment in people, processes and systems. Clear data governance arrangements, regular training and guidance for police officers and staff on crime recording, and centralisation of crime recording by a dedicated crime management unit all support accurate and consistent recorded crime data. For instance, crime data standards or crime data integrity boards enable oversight and scrutiny of changes to the Counting Rules and data quality issues; and police forces with crime management units have greater control over data quality than police forces that rely on frontline officers to enter data.

There are common challenges to ensuring the quality of recorded crime data

We identified some common challenges to further improving crime recording and the quality of recorded crime data, in particular to achieve consistency of data across police forces. These challenges can be attributed to the complexity of police crime recording in England and Wales – there are 44 police forces that potentially manage their crime recording in different ways. The quality of police recorded crime data is influenced by many factors, including the decisions made by police officers and staff when recording a crime; changes to the Home Office guidance on when a crime should be recorded; the different systems and versions of IT systems used to record crime; and the extent of quality assurance applied to the data.

There remain differences in the interpretation of the Home Office Counting Rules (which set out when and how a crime should be recorded), both within and across police forces. Differences in the interpretation of the Counting Rules can vary by crime type and are often due to a lack of understanding of the offence, for example, of domestic abuse offences. To improve understanding of the Counting Rules and recording of specific crime types police forces have rolled out training. Knowledge sharing between police forces through the national and regional crime registrar groups

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is helping ensure consistency in the application of the Counting Rules across police forces.

The Counting Rules are regularly reviewed and updated. In 2023, they underwent a major review. This led to some changes, including the reversal of a change made in 2017 that required two crimes to be recorded where harassment, stalking or controlling or coercive behaviour was one of the crimes. As a result, there is a now single principal crime rule all offences, except for modern slavery offences and passport application fraud. We found that these changes have been well received by police forces; they are seen as sensible and long overdue. We also identified some concerns about the impact of these changes on data quality, for example, on the understanding of offending patterns of domestic abuse.

Changes to the Counting Rules are an inevitable aspect of crime recording in England and Wales. The Home Office updates the rules to ensure that they remain relevant and fit for purpose. However, one consequence of regular changes to the Counting Rules is that it makes it difficult to determine whether a change in the number of crimes recorded by the police is genuine or whether it is due to a change in crime recording practices. This makes it more challenging for police forces to monitor changes in performance over time and complicates explaining trends in police recorded crime statistics, which reduces the value of the data and statistics for all users. ONS and the Home Office should continue to work together to monitor and explain the impact of the Counting Rules changes on the statistics to users.

Several stakeholders that we spoke to, including some police forces and HMICFRS, explained that the pressure to secure a positive outcome in inspections has led some police forces to adopt an approach of 'better record a crime in case HMICFRS fails us'. This risk-averse behaviour can lead to over-recording of crime. Strict adherence to the Counting Rules can make a force crime registrar reluctant to authorise the cancellation of crimes, and this can also lead to over-recording of crime. HMICFRS told us that it estimates that several forces are currently over-recording crime in some way.

We found that variation in the IT systems used to record crime by police forces in England and Wales is a barrier to standardising crime recording practices and improving data quality across police forces. There are currently seven different crime recording IT systems in use across police forces in England and Wales, with some police forces running different versions of the system. Each system has specific data issues and challenges, and police forces regularly change systems, which can have a negative impact on data quality and sending data to the Home Office.

Some forces have control over their own data systems and can make changes to their crime recording IT system relatively quickly, whereas other forces rely on external suppliers to make the changes for them, which can take longer and be costlier. One way in which forces are minimising this risk is working together to manage the IT supplier. However, we found that the sharing of knowledge about crime recording IT systems between forces could be improved. Greater knowledge sharing would promote more-consistent and more-efficient use of crime recording IT systems.

We are not confident that the Home Office understands the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems used by police forces in England and Wales, or how variation in these systems may be impacting the quality of police recorded crime data. To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with police forces to gain this understanding.

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While we did not review in depth the quality assurance process for recorded crime data of each force that we spoke to, we found that the stages they applied were broadly similar. Police forces are carrying out internal audits of recorded crime in a consistent way and to a high standard, in line with the Home Office's Data Quality Assurance Manual, which sets out a minimum standard framework.

However, the standard of quality assurance that is applied when checking and validating crime records is more variable across police forces. The quality assurance arrangements in individual forces are usually shaped by operational priorities and resourcing. Differences in the crime recording IT system may also influence the level of quality assurance that is applied. To support the consistency of quality assurance arrangements across police forces, we encourage police forces to improve knowledge sharing on quality assurance, to learn from each other and promote best practice.

An increasing number of police forces, including a couple of forces that we spoke to, have introduced 'robotic process automation' tools as part of their quality assurance process to enhance recorded crime data quality. We welcome the use of these automated tools as they can enhance the level of quality assurance that is applied while reducing the burden on police staff, but there is a risk that forces become too reliant on automated tools and fail to identify and address the root causes of the data quality issues.

The Home Office's quality assurance processes are well established, but it should strengthen its oversight of police force data quality

The Home Office's quality assurance processes have been strengthened with the creation of the Home Office Data Hub, a case-level policing and crime database. Almost all police forces now submit record-level data to the Home Office via the Data Hub, which allows the Home Office to carry out more-thorough quality assurance and analysis of the data compared with aggregate data. The police forces that we spoke to were positive about the quarterly 'data reconciliation' process, where the Home Office asks forces to verify aggregate statistics for their force which have been derived from their Data Hub returns.

However, we found that the Home Office has a limited understanding of how police forces quality assure their own data. The Home Office told us it expects police forces to quality assure their own data, but it does not monitor the nature or extent of quality assurance applied. The Home Office, as the organisation that collates and supplies data to ONS, is responsible for understanding how police forces manage the quality of their recorded crime data. This includes forces' quality assurance arrangements.

We expect the Home Office analytical team to work with police forces to build its knowledge of police forces' quality assurance arrangements. Once the Home Office has gained a good understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements, it should develop a plan for how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. To support this work, the Home Office analytical team should consult the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), which is working to introduce more-standard approaches to data quality.

The Home Office needs to engage with the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework, our regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data. We see applying the QAAD framework as essential to the Home Office enhancing oversight of the quality of the police recorded crime data.

The Home Office's quality assurance processes cannot check whether police forces have recorded the right crime. This requires an audit of crime records, and only HMICFRS performs this function. Therefore, the Home Office and ONS are reliant on HMICFRS for monitoring and reporting crime recording accuracy. For most police forces, the inspection reports are the only source of information about crime recording accuracy, and HMICFRS and the Home Office do not know how accurately police forces are recording crime in between inspections. The Home Office, HMICFRS and ONS should work together and use all available data to develop the most complete and up-to-date picture of crime recording accuracy in police forces.

The Home Office has established a National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) to improve the quality and comparability of 'flagged data collections' such as knife crime, domestic abuse and online crime. The computer-assisted classification tool developed for knife crime has increased the accuracy and consistency of the data between police forces, and similar tools have been rolled out, or are being developed, for other flagged collections. To inform users about the programme and its impact on the quality of the police recorded crime statistics, ONS should publish and regularly update information about current and future NDQIS developments. In addition, ONS needs to better document the methods used and the limitations of the tools.

ONS publishes clear information on quality, but it relies on the Home Office to quality assure data

ONS is two steps removed from the police force data and relies on the Home Office to collate and quality assure the recorded crime data from police forces. Because ONS does not have access to the record-level data, the quality assurance it applies to the data is limited to consistency checks. ONS told us receives more information on quality from the Home Office than it used to, and that communications with the Home Office have improved substantially since the Home Office Data Hub was established. To strengthen its oversight of data quality, ONS should work together more closely with the Home Office and share more knowledge about data quality.

As the statistics producer, it is ONS's responsibility to publish information on the quality of the police recorded crime data. ONS's user guide to crime statistics contains clear and detailed information about many aspects of the police recorded crime statistics, and it is updated annually. However, there are gaps in the quality information. In particular, ONS does not provide sufficient assurance for users about police forces' quality assurance arrangements and the strengths and limitations of different crime recording IT systems used by police forces. In addition, ONS needs to explain the specific changes that police forces have made to improve their crime recording standards. ONS should communicate these aspects of the police force data quality to users, to give them a full picture of quality.

The data quality framework that ONS has developed provides an open assessment of the quality of the police recorded crime statistics and informs users about the quality of the different crime types. ONS needs to be better explain the criteria it uses to determine the reliability of the statistics to enhance the value of this information.

ONS evaluates the consistency and comparability of police recorded crime statistics with other crime statistics, including the CSEW statistics. Comparisons between the police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics can reveal disparities in trends in both data sources and data quality issues. A comparative analysis carried out in 2023 identified a divergence between police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics.

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The reasons for the divergence are unclear, and ONS is currently carrying out further work on this. ONS should work closely with HMICFRS, the Home Office and, where necessary, police forces, to establish the drivers of the divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics.

A framework for quality improvements

Our recommendations for improving the quality of the police recorded crime data and statistics for England and Wales are what we deem as critical to address before we undertake a reassessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Our recommendations cover three improvement areas.

ONS and the Home Office should develop an action plan that sets out how they are going to address these recommendations. This should be published by early 2025.

1. **The Home Office needs to strengthen its oversight of police force data quality.** We consider that insufficient oversight by the Home Office poses a significant risk to the quality of the statistics. The Home Office must understand how police forces manage the quality of their recorded crime data and assure itself of the quality of the data collected by forces.

   - As a first step to greater assurance of the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office should gain a better understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements. (Recommendation 4)

   - The Home Office should then develop a detailed plan on how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. The Home Office should use our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework to guide this work and ensure that all the relevant quality areas are covered. Stakeholders, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council, should be consulted as part of this work. (Recommendation 5)

   - To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with police forces to gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems, and how variation in systems impacts data quality. (Recommendation 2)

2. **ONS needs to better communicate the quality of the statistics and data quality improvement initiatives to users.** ONS should provide greater assurance for users of the statistics about all aspects of the quality of police force data.

   - To communicate, and assure users about, all aspects of the quality of police recorded crime data, ONS should expand its published information on quality to cover (Recommendation 8):
     - police forces' quality assurance arrangements.
     - the strengths and limitations of different crime recording IT systems used by police forces.
     - the nature of crime recording improvements made by police forces since 2014.

- To enhance the value of quality information, ONS should explain the data quality framework it uses to assess the reliability of police recorded crime statistics for different offence types. (Recommendation 9)

- To inform users about the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) programme and its impact on the quality of the statistics, ONS should publish and regularly update information about developments and methods, including the strengths and limitations of the tools. (Recommendation 7)

3. **Greater collaboration and knowledge sharing between the organisations involved in collecting and processing police recorded crime data is necessary to strengthen oversight and better communicate quality.**

- To promote more-consistent and more-efficient use of crime recording IT systems, police forces should work more collaboratively and improve knowledge sharing about systems. (Recommendation 1)

- To promote best practice around quality assurance of recorded crime data, police forces should improve knowledge sharing on the checking and validation of crime records. (Recommendation 3)

- To develop the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of crime data integrity in police forces, the Home Office, HMICFRS and ONS should work together and use all available data, including HMICFRS inspection findings, HMICFRS management information and Home Office intelligence. (Recommendation 6)

- ONS should work closely with HMICFRS, the Home Office and, where necessary, police forces, to establish the drivers of the divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics. (Recommendations 10)

We recognise that implementing these recommendations is a significant task. It will require resource and ongoing engagement with police forces. However, we see this work as critical to enhancing the quality of the statistics and public confidence in the quality of the statistics. By demonstrating that they understand, and have confidence in, the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office and ONS promote public trust in the data and crime recording processes.

We will continue to engage with ONS and the Home Office as they develop and implement an action plan. Once we are satisfied that sufficient improvement has been made, we will decide whether the statistics are ready to be reassessed against the Code of Practice for Statistics.

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Introduction

Crime statistics for England and Wales

[Police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales](#) are published quarterly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and are a measure of the number of crimes that are recorded by the police in England and Wales. The Home Office collates recorded crime data from the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police and supplies these data to ONS.

In England and Wales, police recorded crime statistics only cover notifiable offences. These are offences that could possibly be tried by jury, including violence against the person offences, sexual offences, robbery, theft, criminal damage and arson, as well as other crimes against society and the summary-only offence of common assault.

Police recorded crime statistics are one of two key sets of statistics on crime in England and Wales. The other set of statistics is the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) statistics. The CSEW is a statistical household survey that asks individuals about their experiences of crime; their attitudes towards different crime-related issues, such as the police and the criminal justice system; and their perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour. ONS manages and owns the data from the CSEW.

Understanding and interpreting crime statistics for England and Wales is complex. Both sets of crime statistics have their individual strengths and limitations. When used together, they provide a more complete picture of crime.

The CSEW is the best source for understanding long-term trends in crime covered by the survey in England and Wales. The methods have changed little since the survey was first conducted in 1981, and it is not affected by changes to police crime recording practices or in the number of individuals reporting crimes to the police.

The police recorded crime statistics are a better indicator of police activity than trends in crime. Many crimes are not reported to the police, and the extent of under-reporting varies by crime type. For example, many victims of fraud do not report the incident to the police. In contrast, burglary offences are mostly well reported, as a police crime reference number is typically needed for home insurance claims. Because the CSEW includes crimes that respondents did not report to the police but did report in the survey, it provides a better picture of the extent of crime covered by the survey. However, the police recorded crime statistics provide insight on some higher-harm but less-common crimes, such as homicide or knife crime, which the CSEW does not cover or does not capture well.

The police recorded crime statistics cover a broader range of crimes than the CSEW statistics. For instance, the CSEW only captures crimes against individuals resident in households, whereas the police also record crimes against businesses and organisations such as shoplifting, and crimes against society and the state such as drug offences and public order offences. In addition, the police recorded crime statistics are more granular than the CSEW statistics – the number of offences recorded by the police is broken down by police force area.

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ONS publishes information on which sets of statistics are thought to provide the most reliable measure of crime against individuals and households for the main crime types in England and Wales (Table 1). The police recorded crime statistics are the preferred data source for homicide, crimes involving a knife or sharp instrument (knife-enabled crime) and robbery.

Table 1. Overview of ONS's preferred data source for the main crime types

Crime type	Preferred data source
Fraud	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Theft	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Violent crime	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Computer misuse	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Vehicle offences	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Burglary	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Robbery	Police recorded crime statistics
Knife and sharp instruments	Police recorded crime statistics
Homicide	Police recorded crime statistics

Police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics show different long-term trends in crime. The CSEW statistics show a long-term fall in the extent of crime estimated by the survey since the mid-1990s. The latest estimates, for the year ending December 2023, show that the extent of crime estimated by the survey, excluding fraud and computer misuse, has decreased by 17% compared with the pre-coronavirus pandemic year ending March 2020, from 5.6 million offences to 4.3 million offences. If fraud and computer misuse are included, crime estimated by the survey decreased by 18% over the same period, from 10.2 million offences to 8.4 million offences.

In contrast, the total number of crimes recorded by the police, excluding fraud and computer misuse, has increased gradually since 2015, largely due to improvements to police recording processes and practices that we discuss in this report. For the year ending December 2023, the total number of crimes recorded by the police, excluding fraud and computer misuse, was 5.3 million offences, compared with 5.5 million offences in the pre-coronavirus pandemic year ending March 2020, a 4% increase. If fraud and computer misuse are included, the number of crimes recorded by the police increased by 10% over the same period, from 6.1 million offences to 6.7 million offences.

The Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletin is not the only crime statistics output for England and Wales. Subsets of the police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales are also published. ONS publishes statistical bulletins about specific crime types such as homicide, sexual offences and domestic abuse, which include police recorded crime figures. The Home Office publishes a statistical bulletin on the number of hate crimes recorded by the police.

The Home Office is responsible for publishing crime outcomes statistics for England and Wales. These statistics report on the actions police forces have taken in response

to recorded crimes in England and Wales. They are related to the police recorded crime statistics and undergo a similar quality assurance process.

The Home Office also publishes the police recorded crime and crime outcomes open data tables. These provide more-detailed breakdowns of the police recorded crime and crime outcomes statistical series.

Why we did this review

Accreditation demonstrates that the public can have confidence in the quality of official statistics. The police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales are published as official statistics, not accredited official statistics. This review is the first step towards the statistics being considered for reaccreditation.

Accredited official statistics are a subset of official statistics that have been reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation as complying with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

We removed the National Statistics accreditation for the police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales in 2014 following an assessment which found that the quality and consistency of the underlying data may not be reliable. The evidence that supported this conclusion included:

- Inspections of crime data integrity by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS, formerly HMIC), which showed that police forces in England and Wales were under-recording crime (nationally, 19% of all crimes reported to the police were found not to be recorded as crimes).

- Growing disparity between police recorded crime statistics and the Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics, which suggested that crime recording standards were falling.

- Concerns published by the then-Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) and the Home Affairs Select Committee about the reliability of the underlying police data. The 2014 PASC Inquiry into police recorded crime statistics criticised the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory scrutiny of the statistics. PASC concluded that there had a been a "long-standing failure… to address the thoroughness of assessment of Police Recorded Crime".

In our 2014 assessment, we advised that accreditation would only be reinstated when ONS, working with the Home Office or other bodies, was able to demonstrate that the quality of the underlying data and the robustness of the ongoing audit and quality assurance procedures were sufficient to produce statistics at a level of quality that meets users' needs. Specifically, we required ONS to:

- Publish further information on data processing and quality assurance.

- Improve information about all aspects of the quality of crime statistics and the impact on their use.

- Respond appropriately to regular, systematic audits, particularly HMIC's 2014 inspection.

ONS and the Home Office started implementing these requirements. However, due to the scale of crime under-recording being reported by HMIC, ONS requested that any reaccreditation assessment be postponed until the required improvements had been implemented. Thus, we placed on hold our regulatory work for the reaccreditation of the police recorded crime series.

We did restore the accreditation of the homicide statistics based on the Homicide Index in 2016. The Homicide Index is a separate, more-detailed, record-level database that the Home Office continually updates with revised information from the police and the courts. Statistics from the Homicide Index are published separately in ONS's Homicide in England and Wales statistical bulletin. The homicide figures published in the quarterly Crime in England and Wales bulletin are from the main police recorded crime series and are therefore not accredited official statistics.

In the last few years, we have reviewed specific elements of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales, including ONS's knife-enabled crime statistics and the Home Office's hate crime statistics, but we have not reviewed the full police recorded crime series since 2015.

This review revisits our earlier regulatory work on police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales but goes much further. Through extensive engagement and desk research it looks in depth at the quality of the underlying data used to produce the police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales. We cover the data process from beginning to end – from how police forces record crime, to how data quality is managed and assured by all those involved in their collection and processing, to the production of the final statistics.

Our recommendations for improving the quality of police recorded crime data **are what we deem as critical to address before we undertake a reassessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics**.

What do we mean by statistical quality?

A range of complementary tools exist for understanding and assessing the quality of administrative data used to produce official statistics.

The Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code) sets the standards for producers of official statistics. The Code states that quality means that statistics are fit for their intended uses, are based on appropriate data and methods, and are not materially misleading.

The supporting Regulatory Standard for the quality assurance of administrative data is the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework. This provides a toolkit for statistics producers in making judgements about the continued suitability of administrative data for producing statistics. The framework sets out four practice areas associated with data quality:

- Operational context and administrative data collection.

- Communication with data supply partners.

- Quality assurance principles, standards and checks by data suppliers.

- Producers' quality assurance investigations and documentation.

The [Administrative Data Quality Framework (ADQF)](#) was developed by the Analysis Function to be consistent with the Code and the supporting QAAD standard. It provides a framework for statistics producers to assess the quality of administrative data. It describes:

- Quality dimensions for assessing input quality, or quality dimensions for data.

- Output quality, or quality dimensions for statistics.

The framework sets out six input quality dimensions: completeness, uniqueness, timeliness, validity, accuracy and consistency. We found the distinction between input and output quality and the quality dimensions to be particularly helpful for thinking about the quality of police recorded crime statistics.

Wider regulatory work on crime statistics for England and Wales

Our work on police recorded crime statistics is part of a wider programme of work on crime statistics for England and Wales.

At present, no crime statistics for England and Wales are published as accredited official statistics. In July 2022, at ONS's request, we [temporarily suspended the National Statistics accreditation of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) statistics](#), due to concerns about the impact of a shorter data collection period and the lower response rates for face-to-face interviews (compared with the period before the pandemic) on the quality of the estimates. Therefore, users of crime statistics in England and Wales currently do not have a measure of the extent of crime of a suitable quality.

ONS is working hard to improve the response rates and intends to put forward the CSEW statistics for reaccreditation in 2024. Our accreditation review is a top priority; we deem it critical to ensure that users can have confidence in the CSEW statistics.

How police in England and Wales record crime

Police recorded crime data are administrative data that are collected as part of police operations. For a crime to be recorded, the incident must be brought to the attention of the police, and the police must decide to record the incident as a crime.

Though the data are not collected for the sole purpose of producing statistics, police forces are required to share data with the Home Office. The Home Secretary uses its powers in the Police Act 1996 to require chief constables to provide regular data on the number of crimes recorded by their police force. Police recorded crime data are one of many data types that form part of the Home Office's Annual Data Requirement (a list of all requests for data made under the statutory powers).

The Home Office collates and quality assures the recorded crime data received from the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police. It then shares these data with ONS, which carries out further quality assurance and publishes them quarterly as the police recorded crime official statistics. Figure 1 sets out the process for producing police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales.

Figure 1. An overview of the process for producing police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales
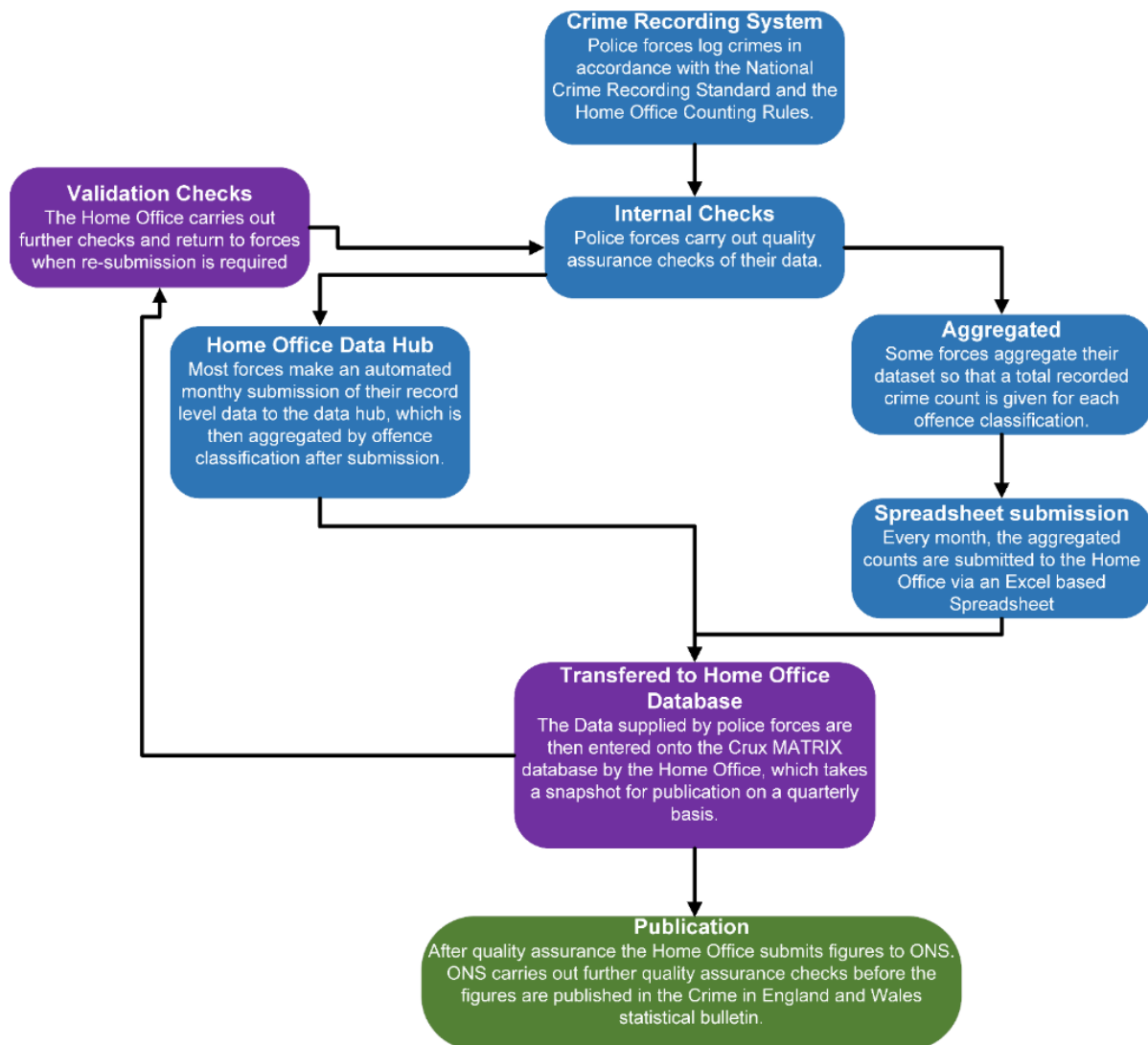
In England and Wales, crimes must be recorded in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules. These rules set out whether an incident should be recorded as a crime, when a crime should be recorded and how many crimes should be recorded for any single incident (as a single incident may involve multiple crimes). The Counting Rules provide a framework for interpreting and classifying crime, and they standardise how crimes are recorded across police forces in England and Wales.

The purpose of the National Crime Recording Standard is to ensure greater consistency in recording crime and a more victim-focused approach to crime recording. The standard sets out requirements for recording crimes; for example, police forces must record a crime within 24 hours of it being reported, and any allegation of crime must be recorded unless there is credible evidence to the contrary.

Each police force has a College of Policing-accredited crime registrar, who makes the final decision on whether a crime should be recorded, how it should be recorded and if it should be 'cancelled' (removed from the police force's crime recording IT system).

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The force crime registrar is responsible for ensuring that their force's crime recording is compliant with the Home Office Counting Rules and National Crime Recording Standard.

HMICFRS has wide-ranging statutory powers that allow it to monitor the performance of all police forces in England and Wales. HMICFRS independently inspects and reports on the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of police forces. This includes how well forces record crime.

Our approach

Our review set out to:

- Identify where quality improvements have been made to police recorded crime statistics and what key factors are important for driving further improvements.

- Identify the nature and extent of quality issues in the underlying police recorded crime data.

- Understand where responsibility for data and statistical quality lies.

- Develop recommendations to support quality improvements.

We focused on three key areas of statistical quality:

1. Crime recording processes and practices – how police forces record crimes, including their interpretation and application of the Home Office Counting Rules.
2. Crime recording IT systems – the systems police forces use to record crimes, and the tools they use to manage data quality.
3. The end-to-end quality assurance process – how police forces, the Home Office and ONS quality assure police recorded crime data.

We gathered evidence across four key stakeholder groups:

- **A sample of police forces in England and Wales**

  We had detailed meetings with nine police forces about their crime recording processes and practices (about one-fifth of all police forces in England and Wales). We were impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the police staff that we spoke to, and we appreciated the openness with which police forces discussed their recording practices and the challenges of recording crime accurately and consistently.

  We selected forces based on a mix of characteristics, which included their geographic location, urban or rural mix and their HMICFRS inspection gradings of crime data integrity. Our aim was to have a reasonably representative group of forces with variations in approaches to crime recording.

  We have chosen not to identify individual forces in this report unless they have agreed to be named or the information is already in the public domain. We did not have access raw police recorded crime data for this review, considering only published data and statistics.

- **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

Our review is not an audit of the crime data integrity of police forces in England and Wales. This activity falls within HMICFRS's remit. We engaged with HMICFRS to understand its process for auditing crime data integrity and the improvements that police forces have made to crime recording since 2014. We thank HMICFRS for its openness about its processes.

- **Home Office and ONS analytical teams**

    We spoke to several teams in the Home Office to understand different aspects of the quality assurance and quality improvement of police recorded crime data. We spoke to:

    - the Home Office Data Hub team, which is responsible for collating and quality assuring recorded crime data from police forces.
    - the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) team, which manages the development and roll-out of tools for improving the data quality of certain crime types.
    - the National Crime Registrar.
    - the Police National Database (PND) team, which produces data quality dashboards for police forces for a range of datasets that are shared with the Home Office, including police recorded crime.

    We also spoke to the ONS crime statistics team to understand how it quality assures the police recorded crime data and the process for producing the final statistics.

- **Wider stakeholders – including national policing coordination bodies and devolved policing bodies**

    To understand the role that national policing bodies and groups play in data quality improvements, we spoke to the National Police Data and Analytics Board, the Centre for Data and Analytics in Policing and the Police Digital Service.

    To understand how crime recording processes and practices and data quality differ across the UK, we spoke to Police Scotland, the Scottish Government and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland; and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

We also carried out extensive desk research to support the findings from our engagement. We reviewed:

- HMICFRS's inspection reports and annual reports.
- Operation Soteria Bluestone Year One report.
- ONS's and the Home Office's statistical bulletins.
- ONS's user guide to crime statistics and the Crime in England and Wales Quality and Methodology Information report.
- ONS and Home Office documentation on internal quality assurance.
- Academic papers.

What this review excludes

ONS also publishes statistics on the number of fraud and computer misuse crimes recorded by police. Our review did not examine the quality of police recorded fraud and computer misuse data as the process for recording these crimes is different from other crime types.

All police forces in England and Wales direct victims of fraud and computer misuse to Action Fraud, the national reporting centre for fraud and cybercrime, run by the City of London Police as the national lead force for fraud. The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, also overseen by the City of London Police, processes these data and shares them with the Home Office. The police recorded fraud statistics published by ONS also include data from two industry sources: Cifas, the UK-wide fraud and financial crime prevention service, and UK Finance, the trade association representing UK finance and banking industry. Data on offences recorded by Cifas and Finance UK are sent directly to the Home Office by these bodies. The Home Office then collates fraud data from all three sources and sends the data to ONS.

We will review this subset of police recorded crime statistics separately as part of a wider review of the quality and value of fraud and computer misuse statistics for England and Wales later in 2024.

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What we found

Police forces have made significant improvements to crime recording, but there are common challenges to ensuring the quality of recorded crime data

Through our discussions with police forces and HMICFRS, we identified several common themes and features of good crime recording. We also gained insight into the barriers and challenges to recording crime accurately and consistently.

Police forces are recording crime more accurately now than in 2014

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has a statutory responsibility to inspect the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of police forces. HMICFRS has carried out regular inspections of the 'crime data integrity' of each police force in England and Wales since 2014. It introduced a rolling programme of crime data integrity inspections following a 2014 inspection of all police forces that found substantial under-reporting of crime.

HMICFRS inspects the crime data integrity of each police force roughly every three to five years. The inspections are widely seen as a measure of the extent to which forces are complying with Home Office Counting Rules.

HMICFRS examines whether the crimes reported to the police are recorded when they should be (the 'crime recording accuracy'). To measure crime recording accuracy, HMICFRS takes a sample of incidents, based on the opening codes where they would expect to find a crime, to check if a crime has been recorded. It does this for three offence groups – violence against the person, sexual offences, and all other offences (excluding fraud, as this is recorded only by the City of London Police). It weights the results and calculates the recording accuracy for each offence group as well as the recording accuracy for all crimes (excluding fraud).

HMICFRS then gives a graded judgement on crime data integrity based on the force's crime recording accuracy data and several other criteria, including other dip samples of crimes, the timeliness of crime recording and how forces manage and oversee crime recording. This is reported under the 'Recording data about crime' area in inspection reports.

HMICFRS's inspections show that crime recording accuracy nationally has improved in the last ten years. In 2014, HMICFRS estimated that 80.5% (± 2.0%) of all crimes (excluding fraud) that were reported to the police in England and Wales were being recorded. As summarised in HMICFRS's 2023 Police performance: Getting a grip report, by the end of its 2021 to 2022 inspection programme, HMICFRS estimated that crime recording accuracy had improved to 92.4% (± 0.3%) for all crime (excluding fraud), a statistically significant change.

The picture is more mixed when it comes to individual police forces, with some forces recording crime more accurately than others. Table 2 shows the crime recording accuracy figures and the integrity grading of crime data for the 23 forces assessed by HMICFRS in their 2021 to 2022 inspection programme (which ran from 2021 to March 2023). Most forces (17 out of 23 forces) were found to record more than 90% of all reported crime, with six forces recording more than 95% of all reported crime.

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HMICFRS's inspections of crime data integrity are the best available source of information on how well forces record crime. However, as they are based on a subset of crimes recorded in the most recent three months and take place every three to five years, they only provide a snapshot of crime recording accuracy at a single point in time.

Table 2. Crime recording accuracy figures from HMICFRS's 2021 to 2022 inspection programme

Police force	Crime recording accuracy (%)	'Reporting data about crime' grading
Avon and Somerset Police	91.4	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	93.2	Good
Cheshire Constabulary	93.1	Adequate
Cleveland Police	96.4	Good
Derbyshire Constabulary	92.5	Requires improvement
Devon and Cornwall Police	84.0	Inadequate
Dyfed-Powys Police	91.6	Adequate
Gloucestershire Constabulary	86.0	Inadequate
Greater Manchester Police	90.6	Adequate
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary	96.7	Good
Humberside Police	92.5	Adequate
Kent Police	96.7	Outstanding
Leicestershire Police	95.5	Outstanding
Lincolnshire Police	88.2	Requires improvement
Merseyside Police	93.8	Good
Metropolitan Police	91.7	Adequate
Northumbria Police	92.6	Adequate
Nottinghamshire Police	86.4	Requires improvement
South Yorkshire Police	96.4	Good
Staffordshire Police	88.4	Requires improvement
Sussex Police	85.6	Inadequate
Thames Valley Police	94.9	Good
West Midlands Police	95.5	Good

Source: HMICFRS inspection reports.
Notes: Not all police forces underwent a crime data integrity inspection in the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme. The 'Reporting data about crime' grading is based on crime recording accuracy data and a range of other criteria, including other dip samples of crimes, the timeliness of crime recording, and how forces manage and oversee crime recording.

Individual police forces have improved their crime recording accuracy to varying extents. Some forces, such as Kent Police and West Yorkshire Police, have maintained high crime recording standards in recent years, whereas other forces have not sustained improvements over time. In certain forces, crime recording standards have declined. For example, Sussex Police and Devon and Cornwall Police had overall crime recording accuracies of 94.6% and 93.4% in 2016 and 2017, respectively, but these dropped to 85.6% and 84% in the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme. Due to changes to the Home Office Counting Rules in 2023, it is not

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possible to compare findings from HMICFRS's 2023-25 inspection programme and later programmes with earlier inspection findings.

Given this variation in crime data integrity between forces and over time, HMICFRS has said, in its [methodology documentation for its crime data integrity inspections](#), that it will continue to inspect forces 'to ensure standards are maintained and victims receive the service they deserve'. HMICFRS plays a vital role in holding forces to account for their crime recording standards, and we consider it is essential that it continues to carry out regular audits of crime data integrity.

The reintroduction of regular external auditing of crime recording in 2014 has been a key driver of improvements to crime data integrity. These improvements contributed to the rise in the number of reported crimes recorded by the police between 2015 and 2020.

The nine police forces that we spoke to confirmed that HMICFRS inspections of crime data integrity had been instrumental in bringing about improvements to their crime recording standards. In some cases, it has led to systemic change; for instance, several forces told us they overhauled their crime recording processes and practices following an inspection. Table 3 shows how crime recording accuracy has changed over time for those nine forces.

Table 3. Crime recording accuracy figures from HMICFRS's inspections for the nine police forces we spoke to

Police force	Crime recording accuracy (%), 2016 to 2020 inspections[1]	Crime recording accuracy (%), 2021 to 2022 inspections	% point change	Statistically significant change[2]
Cleveland Police	83.4 (± 1.9)	96.4 (± 2.0)	13.0	Yes
Dyfed-Powys Police	87.8 (± 1.7)	91.6 (± 2.7)	3.8	No
Essex Police[3]	95.8 (± 1.5)			-
Gloucestershire Constabulary	81.6 (± 1.9)	86.0 (± 2.8)	4.2	No
Greater Manchester Police	85.5 (± 1.9)	90.6 (± 2.8)	5.1	Yes
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary	91.3 (± 1.4)	96.7 (± 1.5)	5.4	Yes
Kent Police	83.6 (± 1.9)	96.7 (± 1.9)	13.1	Yes
Lancashire Constabulary[4]	84.3 (± 1.9)	93.3 (± 1.5)		-
Metropolitan Police	89.5 (± 1.6)	91.7 (± 2.4)	2.2	No

1. 95% confidence intervals from HMICFRS inspections.
2. To determine if a change was statistically significant at the 95% level, we checked for overlapping confidence intervals. If the confidence intervals of the two crime recording accuracy estimates do not overlap, we assumed that the change is statistically significant.
3. HMICFRS did not inspect Essex Police's crime data integrity in the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme.
4. HMICFRS did not inspect Lancashire Constabulary's crime data integrity in the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme. The higher figure comes from a re-inspection in May 2019. It is included to show the force's improvement to crime recording accuracy.

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Key features of good crime recording

In the forces we spoke to, those that have changed their recording standards have significantly improved their crime recording accuracy and other aspects of crime data integrity. Our findings may not be generalisable to all police forces, as they are based on a sample of nine forces, but we think that they give us a good indication of what is working well. This review has given us greater confidence in the quality of the underlying recorded crime data overall.

Strong data leadership and governance

We found that there has been a positive shift in the culture around crime recording in police forces since 2014. Now, forces appear take crime data integrity very seriously and are more committed to ensuring that they meet the national standards of crime recording. The data culture in a police force is set by the senior leadership, in particular, the chief constable, who plays a critical role in driving improvements. Our conversations with chief constables highlighted that many forces are starting to treat their data as a strategic asset. Chief constables, force crime registrars and other police staff that we spoke to strongly emphasised the importance of accurate and reliable recorded crime data for effective police operations and delivering a good service to victims. Police forces use recorded crime data to allocate resources, monitor and improve performance, and analyse patterns of crime.

In general, the police forces that are recording crime well have clear data governance arrangements in place. Most forces we spoke to now have a crime data standards board or crime data integrity board, with a representative deputy chief constable, assistant chief constable or superintendent. The boards enable oversight and scrutiny of changes to the Counting Rules and data quality issues and provide a channel for escalating concerns to senior officers. They have been effective in driving quality improvements, such as changing recording processes to improve the recording of certain crime outcomes. Senior officer representation on the boards supports cultural change; it highlights to officers and staff that accurate crime recording is a priority for the force.

We also found that good data leadership and governance minimises the risk of manipulation or gaming of recorded crime data. Police forces are now much stricter about having a clear separation between crime recording teams and performance teams. One force described this separation as a 'sterile corridor' between the two areas. As highlighted in the PASC Inquiry's report, police forces used to be more target-driven, and crime recording was sometimes linked to performance targets. This created perverse incentives for officers to record fewer crimes. Having an independent force crime registrar who sits outside the performance monitoring process increases the integrity of the recorded crime data.

Investment in people, processes and systems

Police forces told us that investing in the people, processes and systems for recording crime is critical to ensuring compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules and generating high-quality recorded crime data.

One key aspect of this investment is training and guidance. Many forces that we spoke to have strengthened their training programme and developed new guidance on crime recording for police officers and staff to build knowledge and tackle poor recording

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practice. Such training has been effective in addressing issues with the recording of certain crime types, such as burglary, theft from the person and domestic abuse offences. Regular training and clear guidance support more-accurate and more-consistent crime recording.

One impactful way to improve crime recording accuracy is to adopt a 'centralised' model of crime recording. This is where a dedicated crime management unit within the force is responsible for carrying out data quality checks and finalising crime records. This model is seen as best practice by many of the forces that we spoke to. For example, one force told us it recently moved to centralised crime recording because it saw that it was working well in other forces. Several forces explained that they used to record crime centrally but moved away from this model due to budgetary constraints; they have since re-introduced it or would like to re-introduce it.

Centralised crime recording has several advantages. Police forces with crime management units have greater control over data quality than police forces that rely on frontline officers to enter data. There is a strong focus on 'getting the data right the first time', so that fewer data quality checks need to be carried out on the information that is entered on the system. Centralisation minimises differences in the interpretation of the Counting Rules within the force. A team of tens or hundreds (depending on the size of the force) of dedicated, experienced crime recorders is more likely to apply the rules consistently than thousands of frontline officers who are less familiar with the rules and have a range of other responsibilities. Centralisation can also have operational benefits. For instance, it can support forces to provide a better service to victims and conduct investigations to a higher standard.

However, centralisation is not the only model for recording crime, and it is not the only factor that determines whether forces record crime accurately and consistently. For example, the Metropolitan Police has had a crime management unit for many years, but its crime data integrity has not improved recently; it is currently rated as 'Adequate' by HMICFRS. Even with a crime management unit, police forces may not be able to validate all crime records due to the volume of crimes recorded and resource constraints. Some police forces have introduced 'point of call' crime record validation, where a crime is recorded from an incident as close as possible to the call to the force, but they told us that this requires significant resource.

Case studies of improvements to crime recording

The case studies below outline the steps that three forces took to improve their crime recording standards.

Gloucestershire Constabulary

Until recently, Gloucestershire Constabulary had poor crime recording standards. The force was consistently rated as Inadequate by HMICFRS, with a 2021 inspection estimating that crime recording accuracy was 86.0%. A 2023 inspection estimated that the force now has a crime recording accuracy of 97.6%, although the figure is not directly comparable with earlier estimates due to changes to the 2023 changes to the Home Office Counting Rules.

The force told us that it put in place a range of measures to improve its crime recording standards. One of the most effective changes has been the significant increase in the size of its crime management unit. The force developed the unit into a

Crime Standards Bureau, which allows it to record crimes as close as possible to the 'point of call'. The force delivered extensive training to new staff recruited to the Crime Standards Bureau and developed a rolling programme of refresher training events.

The force currently has a team of two auditors, who provide an additional layer of oversight and stress testing, including on crime recording, and is training a further three members of staff to become qualified auditors. The auditors are situated within the force's Governance and Compliance department, which is independent from the rest of the organisation, in line with National Police Chiefs' Council best practice.

Cleveland Police

Cleveland Police is currently rated as Good for crime recording by HMICFRS. The most recent inspection of crime data integrity, carried out for the 2021 to 2022 inspection programme, estimated that crime recording accuracy was 96.4%. This was a significant improvement from a 2018 inspection, which estimated that crime recording accuracy was 83.4%.

To achieve this improvement, the force completely overhauled its crime recording teams, processes, governance and training. It told us that, once it had a process and management structure in place, crime recording standards started to improve substantially.

The force established a 'Gold' governance group that is attended by senior officers. This group evolved into a crime governance group, which meets bimonthly, and a tactical group, which meets monthly. Crime data integrity is addressed at every crime governance group meeting, and there is a clear channel to escalate crime recording issues. The force developed a performance dashboard to monitor inspection compliance and findings from internal crime record audits carried out by the force crime registrar. As part of the organisational restructuring, a new set of standard operating procedures for crime recording was developed by a consultancy. The force has also reintroduced a crime management unit.

Greater Manchester Police

In December 2020, Greater Manchester Police was placed into 'special measures' by HMICFRS, following an inspection that identified a range of concerns, including poor crime recording. The inspection found that crime recording accuracy was just 77.7%. Since then, the force has significantly improved its crime recording standards. An inspection carried out in 2021 to 2022 found that crime recording accuracy had increased to 90.6%. As a result of this and other improvements, HMICFRS removed the force from special measures in October 2022.

HMICFRS found that the force has improved the oversight and scrutiny of its crime recording processes. Strong leadership and governance arrangements played a key role in this.

The force strengthened its governance of crime recording by establishing a crime data integrity board, which is chaired by an assistant chief constable. It meets monthly to discuss all aspects of crime data integrity and compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules and National Crime Recording Standard. The force also set up a data standards board, which is chaired by a superintendent. This board looks holistically at data quality issues across the force, including for recorded crime data.

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The force has invested significant resource in additional data quality checks and has rolled out additional training for staff on crime recording standards and processes. In August 2023, the force established a crime management unit, which will likely further improve crime recording standards.

One of the main barriers to further improvement is the force's crime recording IT system, which the force told us does not currently meet its recording needs.

There are common challenges to ensuring the quality of recorded crime data

Through our engagement and desk research, we identified some common challenges to further improving crime recording and the quality of recorded crime data, in particular to achieve consistency of data across police forces.

These challenges can be attributed to the complexity of police crime recording in England and Wales – there are 44 police forces that potentially manage their crime recording in different ways. The quality of police recorded crime data is influenced by many factors, including the decisions made by police officers and staff when recording a crime; changes to the Home Office guidance on when a crime should be recorded; the different systems and versions of IT systems used to record crime; and the extent of quality assurance applied to the data.

These factors may interact differently across police forces and over time. Police force-level quality issues may, depending on the extent of differences between police forces, impact the overall police recorded crime data across England and Wales. For instance, in the year ending December 2023 the crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police recorded accounted for around one-sixth of all crimes (excluding fraud and computer misuse) recorded by the police in England and Wales. Any quality issues in the Metropolitan Police's data will have a disproportionate influence on the national statistics.

Due to the nature of the police recorded crime data – they are administrative data primarily collected for operational purposes – it is impossible to eliminate all data inaccuracies and inconsistencies across police forces, but there are ways in which they are being minimised. We give some examples below.

Differences in the interpretation of the Counting Rules

As with any set of rules, there can be a degree of subjectivity in interpreting the Counting Rules. The introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in 2002 has led to more-consistent crime recording across police forces, but there remain differences in the interpretation of the Counting Rules both within and across police forces.

Most of the forces that we spoke told us that they see the complexity of the Counting Rules as the main cause of differences in interpretation. HMICFRS said it agreed that there are grey areas in the rules that may affect how crimes are recorded. The Counting Rules are a balancing act – they must be simple enough to be understood by police officers and staff, but not so simple that they reduce the level of quality assurance that forces apply to the data, which affects data quality.

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Differences in the interpretation of the Counting Rules can vary by crime type and are often due to a lack of understanding of the offence. Police forces and other stakeholders gave several examples of this:

- Domestic abuse offences are vulnerable to differences in interpretation. Several forces told us that not all police officers understand how to apply the domestic abuse 'flag' to a crime record. Flags are added manually to a crime record to add context about the crimes. Other flags, such as those for online crime, are also often applied inconsistently within and across police forces.

- There are multiple categories of stalking offences, which have different maximum sentence lengths (six months or ten years). If a police force records the incorrect crime, it is allocated to the wrong officer; for offences with the longer sentence length, the expectation is that a detective investigates. This is the subject of a current super-complaint from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

As highlighted earlier, several police forces have rolled out training to improve the understanding of the Counting Rules and recording of specific crime types, including domestic abuse-related offences. Having centralised crime management can also support more-consistent crime recording, as fewer staff members need to know the rules in depth.

Minimising differences in the interpretation of the rules across police forces can be challenging. One effective approach is to share knowledge and learning. All force crime registrars are part of a regional group, which acts as a forum for discussing interpretations of the Counting Rules. The regional groups are proactive in trying to ensure that the rules are applied consistently. One such discussion we were told about was on malicious communications offences. A regional group discussed the lack of a legal definition of 'grossly offensive' language and agreed on a common approach for all police forces in the group.

Force crime registrars can also ask the National Crime Registrar (a Home Office employee) for advice. All queries and answers about the Counting Rules are posted on an online knowledge sharing platform hosted by the Police Digital Service, and regional force crime registrar representatives are alerted when a query is posted.

Changes to the Counting Rules

The Counting Rules are regularly reviewed and updated. In 2023, they underwent a major review as part of a wider review of police productivity in England and Wales.

The review led to some changes. The main change was a reversal of a previous change made in 2017. Prior to 2018, only the most serious crime was recorded for incidents that involved more than one type of crime. This was called the principal crime rule. The change in 2017 mandated that, in addition to the most serious crime, where a crime of stalking or harassment was disclosed, this would also be recorded. The 2023 change reintroduced the principal crime rule for all offences, except for modern slavery offences and passport application fraud, which are still exempt. The police still investigate all offences involved in the incident, but not all offences are recorded.

The review also led to changes to how burglary offences and public order offences are recorded. In particular, Section 5 (Public Order Act 1986) offences are now no longer

notifiable. The second phase of the review, currently underway, is looking at the framework used to record the outcomes of crime investigations.

We asked police forces how these changes have affected crime recording practices. We found that, overall, the changes have been well received by chief constables, frontline staff and the majority of force crime registrars, who see them as sensible and long overdue. All forces that we spoke to said they had been well informed about the proposed changes and had opportunities to contribute to their development, for example, through attending the regional force crime registrar meetings. The National Crime Registrar is continuing to work with police forces to ensure that the changes have no unintended consequences.

Some police forces that we spoke to did highlight concerns about the impact of the 2023 changes on data quality. For example, one force mentioned that the nuance of domestic abuse offending patterns may be lost, as now only one crime must be recorded per incident. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has expressed similar concerns publicly.

Changes to the Counting Rules are an inevitable aspect of crime recording in England and Wales. The Home Office updates the rules to ensure that they remain relevant and fit for purpose. It told us that many of the changes made in recent years sought to improve the utility of the data or reflect changes in legislation (by incorporating new offences).

Changes do not always support more-accurate crime recording. We were told that the principal crime rule change in 2017 led to over-recording of stalking and harassment offences as the incident rule was difficult to manage, and this distorted the level of offending. The reversal of this change should support more-accurate data on the volume of these offences handled by the police. The Home Office, HMICFRS and police forces told us that the reversal has led to a decrease in the number of malicious communications offences linked to harassment and stalking recorded by police forces.

One consequence of regular changes to the Counting Rules is that it makes it difficult to determine whether a change in the number of crimes recorded by the police is genuine or whether it is due to a change in crime recording practices. This issue affects everyone who uses police recorded crime data: it makes performance monitoring more difficult for police forces; it complicates explaining trends in police recorded crime statistics for ONS and the Home Office; and it hinders HMICFRS's ability to monitor improvements, as it is no longer possible to directly compare the findings from audits under the old rules and those carried out under the 2023 rules. In other words, regular changes to the Counting Rules reduce the value of the police recorded crime data for a range of users.

Continued improvements to crime recording processes and practices since 2014, variation in police activity and increased confidence among victims to report crimes to the police add additional uncertainty to interpretation of police recorded crime trends. The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates are not subject to such changes over time, which is why they are a more reliable measure of long-term trends in crime.

It is good that ONS published a summary of the 2023 changes to the Counting Rules in the Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletin. This information could be expanded to help users understand the full set of changes to police crime recording

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processes. ONS and the Home Office should continue to work together to monitor and explain the impact of the Counting Rules changes on the statistics to users.

Crime over-recording

Several stakeholders that we spoke to, including some police forces and HMICFRS, explained that the pressure to secure a positive outcome in inspections has led some police forces to adopt an approach of 'better record a crime in case HMICFRS fails us'. This risk-averse behaviour can lead to over-recording of crime. For instance, one force said it started 'recording everything' after receiving a poor crime data integrity grading. This substantially increased the force's crime recording accuracy, but also led the force to record crimes that were later disproven and had to be cancelled on the crime recording system. One of the National Crime Recording Standard's basic principles is that, once a crime has been recorded by the police, it will remain as a crime unless there is 'additional verifiable information' that proves it did not happen. We were told that over-recording is more common for some crime types than others, such as stalking and harassment, domestic abuse and malicious communications.

Strict adherence to the Counting Rules can make a force crime registrar reluctant to authorise the cancellation of crimes, and this can also lead to over-recording of crime. This has become more common for rape cases in recent years, as outlined in Operation Soteria Year One Report. Operation Soteria is a collaborative programme bringing together police forces with academics and policy leads to use evidence and new insight to enable forces to transform their response to rape and serious sexual offences.

Operation Soteria examined the quality of police recorded rape data. The Year One report explains that HMICFRS found that police forces were under-recording sexual offences, including rape, and cancelling crimes that should not have been cancelled. Now, police forces are recording rape more accurately and consistently, but they are also more cautious. Police staff members often do not request the cancellation of a rape because the process is perceived to be too onerous. Furthermore, the force crime registrar may not authorise the cancellation because the bar to cancel a crime is so high. Several police forces that we spoke to gave examples of rape offences that they had recorded but that they thought had not occurred and were not cancelled. The 2023 review of the Counting Rules changed the nature of 'additional verifiable information' that is needed for a force crime registrar to cancel rape offences, which should minimise over-recording.

It is difficult to quantify the scale of over-recording. HMICFRS examines over-recording in its crime data integrity inspections and shares its findings with police forces, but these findings do not influence the overall grading. Forces are only penalised for under-recording. HMICFRS told us that it estimates that several forces are currently over-recording crime in some way.

Variation in crime recording IT systems

Police forces are responsible for procuring their own crime recording IT system. We found that variation in crime recording IT systems is a barrier to standardising crime recording practices and improving data quality across police forces in England and Wales.

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There are currently seven different crime recording IT systems in use across police forces in England and Wales, with Niche (26 forces), Athena (nine forces) and Connect (four forces) being the most common. Even if police forces are using the same system, they may be running a different version of the system. We were told that at one point there were over ten different versions of Niche in use. Different crime recording systems may work in different ways, and police forces may have customised their system according to their specific operational needs. For example, police forces have their own set of crime opening codes, which are used to indicate the nature of the incident, and different systems may have different ways of applying flags to crime records.

We found that each system has specific data issues and challenges. Several forces we talked to are, or were, recording crimes in systems that are old and expensive to upgrade. For example, the Metropolitan Police explained that it had been using its CRIS system since the 1990s and only rolled out a new system (Connect) in 2023. The age of the system can affect data quality. Another force told us that its old crime recording IT system was a major factor in its historical inaccurate crime recording.

Police forces highlighted some data challenges with more-modern crime recording systems. For instance, Athena tends to auto-complete certain fields with incorrect information and Connect is not an intuitive system to use. One force that had recently transitioned to Niche said that it had been having issues with mapping data onto the new system.

To add to this complexity, police forces regularly change their crime recording systems. This can have a negative impact on data quality while the staff adjusts to the new system. Occasionally, changing systems can cause significant disruption in sending data to the Home Office. For example, after implementing a new crime recording IT system, Greater Manchester Police was unable to submit police crime data to the Home Office for the period July 2019 to March 2020. To address this problem, the force told us it had to implement costly and labour-intensive workarounds. Similarly, Devon and Cornwall Police was unable to submit data to the Home Office for the period October 2022 to December 2023 because it changed its crime recording IT system. Ultimately, these disruptions impact the value of the statistics – missing data mean that the statistics are not providing a full picture of crime recorded by the police in England and Wales.

Systems can also limit opportunities for data quality improvements. For instance, some forces have not rolled out certain National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) tools for flagged data collections due to challenges of integrating the tools with their crime recording IT system.

Some forces have control over their own data systems and can make changes to their crime recording IT system relatively quickly, whereas other forces rely on external suppliers to make the changes for them, which can take longer and be costlier. One way in which forces are minimising this risk is working together to manage the IT supplier. For instance, the chief constables of all nine forces using Athena are managing the IT supplier as a group. This coordination ensures that the forces receive the same upgrades and supports more-consistent crime recording.

However, we found that the sharing of knowledge about crime recording IT systems between forces could be improved. For example, we were told about one force that was unwilling to share a coding script for extracting data from Niche with another force

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that had recently moved to Niche. This meant the force had to commit resource to developing the script from scratch. This duplication of work could have easily been avoided if the forces involved were more open to sharing and learning from each other.

We are not confident that the Home Office understands the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems in use by police forces in England and Wales, or how variation in those systems may be impacting the quality of police recorded crime data. To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with polices forces to gain this understanding.

Recommendation 1: To promote more-consistent and more-efficient use of crime recording IT systems, police forces should work more collaboratively and improve knowledge sharing about systems.

Recommendation 2: To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with police forces to gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems, and how variation in systems impacts data quality.

Variation in quality assurance arrangements

While we did not review in depth each force's quality assurance process for recorded crime data, we found that the stages are broadly similar. Usually, they include:

- Automated checks of information entered by police officers on mobile data terminals (for forces that use these).

- Manual reviews of crime records carried out by a dedicated crime management unit or data quality team before the crime record is finalised.

- Audits of crime records carried out by the force's crime registrar to monitor crime recording accuracy and compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules and the National Crime Recording Standard.

In general, the internal audits follow a similar format to HMICFRS's inspections of crime data integrity. Forces take separate samples of violence against the person offences, sexual offences and all other offences. Crime registrars also carry out regular thematic audits of specific crime types such as theft against the person offences or audits of flagged data collections, such as domestic abuse-flagged crimes. These audits provide vital information on crime recording accuracy and can highlight areas of poor recording practice.

To ensure that police forces are carrying out internal audits in a consistent way and to a high standard, the Home Office developed a nationally recognised Data Quality Assurance Manual. The manual sets out a minimum standard framework that outlines the processes and activities that forces should have in place, or consider implementing, to improve data quality to be in line with the National Crime Recording Standard and the Home Office Counting Rules.

The Data Quality Assurance Manual recognises that there may not be a 'one size fits all' approach to quality assurance, and that processes may be tailored to forces' different needs and local improvement activity. The manual encourages police forces to take a risk-based, proportionate approach to auditing recorded crime data to ensure

that quality assurance and audit activity are focused on those areas with the greatest concerns or risks to quality. We support this proportionate approach to quality assurance.

The target audience of the Data Quality Assurance Manual is force crime registrars. Most force crime registrars that we spoke to said that they find the manual helpful and consult it regularly, especially for planning their crime record audit programme. The manual is currently being reviewed by the Home Office to ensure the information is up to date and fit for purpose.

We found that the standard of quality assurance applied at the first two stages (automated checks and manual reviews of crime records) is more variable across police forces. It is up to forces to decide the extent to which they check and validate crime data.

The quality assurance arrangements in individual forces are usually shaped by operational priorities and resourcing. One force told us it is not possible to conduct continuous quality assurance on crime data as they are entered onto the system, so it must choose where to focus its efforts. We heard an example of two police forces, using the same crime recording IT system, that have adopted a different approach to quality assuring flagged data collections; one force carries out regular checks on the flags that have been applied, while the other does not. Differences in the crime recording IT system may also influence the level of quality assurance that is applied, for example, if more automated checks can be built in some systems. Often, police forces must pay IT suppliers extra to build in additional checks.

Many police forces are starting to invest in data professionals. For instance, several police forces now have a Chief Data Officer. These individuals have a wider remit than the force crime registrar and focus on wider data quality issues in the force, including those affecting recorded crime data. We welcome the strengthening of data quality capabilities by police forces.

To support the consistency of quality assurance arrangements across police forces, we encourage police forces to improve knowledge sharing on quality assurance, to learn from each other and promote best practice.

Recommendation 3: To promote best practice around quality assurance of recorded crime data, police forces should improve knowledge sharing on the checking and validation of crime records.

Automated data quality checking and data cleaning

An increasing number of police forces, including a couple of forces that we spoke to, have introduced 'robotic process automation' tools as part of their quality assurance process to enhance recorded crime data quality. For example, some forces use a tool which identifies crime records that need to be manually reviewed and checks whether crime outcomes have been applied correctly. These tools can also check for missing information and fill in the gaps if these data are available in other systems. They are being applied to a wide range of policing datasets, including incident data and personnel data.

Although this type of tool is automated, police forces told us that the outputs are regularly monitored and audited by a dedicated analyst and that there are manual

contingency plans in place in case the tool produces unusual results. Some of the forces we spoke to told us they have plans to further develop their automation tools to detect other crime recording issues.

We welcome the use of these automated tools as they can enhance the level of quality assurance that is applied while reducing the burden on police staff. However, there is a risk that forces become too reliant on automated tools and fail to identify and address the root causes of the data quality issues. Where possible, forces should use these tools to identify systemic issues and improve the design of crime recording systems, or to tackle cultural issues linked to crime recording, to ensure that the data are as accurate as possible.

The Home Office's quality assurance processes are well established, but it should strengthen its oversight of police force data quality

The Home Office collates the recorded crime data from the individual police forces in England and Wales, and ONS then publishes these data as the police recorded crime official statistics.

In the next two sections we examine Home Office and ONS oversight of data quality and their communication of the quality of the statistics. We found that both the Home Office and ONS have strengthened their quality assurance arrangements in recent years, and that data quality is explained more clearly to users than it used to be. We also found gaps in the Home Office's and ONS's understanding of police force data quality and in the published information about quality.

Home Office's quality assurance processes have been strengthened with the creation of the Home Office Data Hub

The Home Office has two main quality assurance processes for the police recorded crime data: a monthly process, which involves a series of logic and consistency checks; and a more-detailed quarterly reconciliation process for the data sent to ONS for publication, which involves a series of further checks. If errors are identified during these processes, police forces are asked to resubmit data once the errors have been corrected. These quality assurance processes also check the quality of the crime outcomes data, a related dataset submitted by police forces on the actions they have taken in response the crimes recorded.

Police forces submit data to the Home Office automatically (via the Home Office Data Hub, a case-level policing and crime database, which takes direct extracts from forces' crime recording systems) or manually (via spreadsheets). Currently, 40 out of 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales are on the Data Hub. One of the main reasons a force is unable to submit data via the Data Hub is because it is currently changing or has recently changed its crime recording IT system and it cannot submit the data in the right format.

The creation of the Data Hub has improved police recorded crime data quality in two ways. The provision of record-level data allows the Home Office to carry out more-thorough quality assurance of the data. It also reduces the risk of human error and other errors in manual spreadsheet-based calculations. The Home Office is limited to carrying out trend and consistency checks on aggregate-level data if police forces submit data manually.

The police forces that we spoke to were positive about the quarterly data reconciliation process. They told us that it works well and that they have a good relationship with the Data Hub team. The process is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes to the Counting Rules. For example, the Home Office introduced additional checks for burglary offences, which were changed as part of the recent review of the Counting Rules, to ensure that forces are recording them correctly. This information can help forces identify and address poor recording practice.

In the last few years, the Data Hub team has automated the extraction of data by implementing Reproducible Analytical Pipeline (RAP) principles. This has freed up

time for more quality assurance, further enhancing the quality of the data. We welcome the Home Office's adoption of RAP principles in its work.

The Home Office has a limited understanding of how police forces quality assure their own data

The Home Office told us that it expects police forces to quality assure their recorded crime data, but it does not monitor the nature or extent of the quality assurance applied. The data reconciliation process only asks forces to confirm if the data they submit are accurate and suitable for publication. Because of this knowledge gap, we consider that the Home Office has insufficient oversight of police force data quality, which poses a significant risk to the quality of the statistics.

The Home Office, as the organisation that collates and supplies data to ONS, is responsible for understanding how police forces manage the quality of their recorded crime data. This includes forces' quality assurance arrangements. We expect the Home Office analytical team to work with police forces to build its knowledge of police forces' quality assurance arrangements.

Once the Home Office has gained a good understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements, it should develop a plan for how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. As explained earlier, we found that the standard of checking and validation of crime records varies across police forces. More-consistent quality assurance would enhance the quality of the police recorded crime statistics.

To support this work, the Home Office analytical team should consult the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), which is working to introduce more-standard approaches to data quality, including data validation, across police forces. Annex A gives an overview of the national policing coordination bodies and groups leading this work.

We recognise that this is a significant task. It will require resource and ongoing engagement with police forces. However, we see it as critical to strengthening oversight of police force data quality. By demonstrating that it understands, and has confidence in, the quality of police force data, the Home Office also promotes public trust in the data and crime recording processes. Restoring trustworthiness is particularly important given the concerns about under-recording of crime and manipulation of crime data by police forces in the early 2010s that led to the removal of the accreditation of the police recorded crime statistics.

The Home Office needs to engage with the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework](#), our regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data. The framework provides a toolkit for statistics producers in making judgements about the continued suitability of administrative data for producing statistics. It was developed by the UK Statistics Authority following the Public Affairs Select Committee's 2014 Inquiry into police recorded crime statistics, which found that there was a lack of regulatory oversight of the quality of the police recorded crime statistics and other official statistics based on administrative data. Therefore, we see applying the QAAD framework as essential to enhancing oversight of the quality of the police recorded crime data.

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According to the [QAAD toolkit](#), the police recorded crime statistics require a comprehensive level assurance, due to the high risk of quality concerns and the high public interest in the statistics. At this level of assurance, the toolkit expects the statistics producer to investigate the administrate data quality assurance arrangements, identify the results of independent audit and publish detailed documentation about the assurance and audit. Recommended activities for the 'Quality assurance principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers' practice area include describing data suppliers' principles, standards (quality indicators) and quality checks. For the police recorded crime statistics, that covers both the Home Office's own quality assurance arrangements and police forces' quality assurance arrangements.

Recommendation 4: As a first step to greater assurance of the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office should gain a better understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements.

Recommendation 5: The Home Office should then develop a detailed plan on how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. The Home Office should use our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework to guide this work and ensure that all the relevant quality areas are covered. Stakeholders, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council, should be consulted as part of this work.

The use of information on crime data integrity should be maximised

The Home Office's quality assurance processes check a range of data quality dimensions, including completeness, consistency and validity, but they do not check the accuracy of the recorded crime data. Using the data that are sent to them, the Home Office cannot check whether police forces have recorded the crimes reported to them when they should. This requires an audit of crime records, and only HMICFRS performs this function. Therefore, the Home Office and ONS are reliant on HMICFRS for monitoring and reporting crime recording accuracy.

As explained earlier, HMICFRS's inspections of crime data integrity are based on a sample of crimes recorded in the most recent three months and carried out roughly every three to five years. For most police forces, the inspection reports are the only source of information about crime recording accuracy. Some police forces voluntarily share the findings of their internal crime recording audits with the Home Office. These findings give the Home Office a more-current picture of crime recording accuracy in those forces. However, in general, the Home Office and HMICFRS do not know how accurately police forces are recording crime in between inspections.

Recommendation 6: To develop the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of crime data integrity in police forces, the Home Office, HMICFRS and ONS should work together and use all available data, including HMICFRS inspection findings, HMICFRS management information and Home Office intelligence.

Governance groups support consistency of crime recording

The Home Office coordinates two governance groups that are responsible for ensuring consistency in crime recording in England and Wales.

The National Crime Recording Strategic Steering Group meets regularly to review the Home Office Counting Rules and make recommendations for changes. The group reports directly to ministers. The steering group is attended by the National Crime

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Registrar, the Home Office Crime Statistics Programme Director, the ONS Heads of Centre for Crime and Justice, representatives from police forces (force crime registrars) and the National Police Chiefs Council, and representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The National Crime Recording Technical Working Group is a subgroup of the steering group. The working group considers tactical aspects of crime recording, such as how to implement changes to the Counting Rules. It is attended by Home Office statisticians, ONS statisticians, representatives from police forces (a representative from the regional force crime registrars network) and HMICFRS.

There are several cross-force steering groups for specific data quality initiatives and tools. For instance, there is an NDQIS steering group.

There are also a range of national policing coordination bodies and groups that aim to improve the quality of policing data to meet the operational needs of police forces. These are summarised in Annex A.

The National Data Quality Improvement Service is leading to quality improvements for certain crime types

Police forces had raised concerns with the Home Office about the variable data quality of the flagged data collections, due to the inconsistent application of flags by police officers and staff. Flags are added to crime records to provide context about the crimes. Flagged data collections include knife crime, domestic abuse-related crime, and online crime.

To improve the quality and comparability of knife crime data, in 2020 the Home Office established the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS). NDQIS uses a computer-assisted classification tool to review crime records held by the police. It scans data fields, including free text fields, and examines them using a simple ruleset and dictionary of key words (such as 'knife' and 'stab') to determine whether an offence involved a knife or sharp instrument. Each crime record processed by the tool is then allocated to a category:

- High confidence – if the tool is certain that a knife or sharp instrument was involved, a knife crime flag is automatically added to the record.

- Low confidence – if the tool is unsure if a knife or sharp instrument was involved, the record is marked for manual review.

- Rejected – if the tool is certain that no knife or sharp instrument was involved, the record is rejected.

A similar tool has been rolled out for the domestic abuse and child sexual abuse collections and is in the process of being rolled out for the online crime collection. The Home Office told us that 41 out of 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales are currently using the knife crime tool, 30 forces are using the domestic abuse tool, and 29 forces are using the child sexual abuse tool. The Home Office is also developing a tool for hate crime-flagged offences and has plans for other flagged offences.

We reviewed the new knife crime tool and its impact on the statistics in 2022. We found that the tool is increasing the accuracy, consistency and comparability of flagged

crime data between police forces and therefore has improved the quality of knife crime statistics published by ONS. The Home Office told us that it thinks the tool will be more impactful for some crime types than others. For example, it predicts that the quality of the data on online crimes will benefit most from the tool due to the poor application of this flag by police forces.

The stakeholders we spoke to were positive about the tool's impact on data quality and the reduction in the burden of quality assurance. However, we also received feedback from some police forces and other policing stakeholders on the tool. One of the main limitations of this tool is that these flagged collections make up a relatively small proportion of all crimes, so the quality improvements are narrow in scope for the moment. Another limitation is that the tool is reliant on certain information being recorded by police forces; for example, if a crime record has not been generated when it should have been, it will not be checked by the tool. Developing the NDQIS tool continues to be time consuming and labour intensive, and it can take police forces some time to onboard the tool. Therefore, while the quality improvements can be significant, they are incremental.

Our 2022 review recommended that the Home Office publish an NDQIS development plan to alert users and other stakeholders about current and future developments. It is disappointing that this has not been published.

The future governance of the NDQIS programme is currently under consideration as part of a broader strategy that is looking at the governance of police IT systems. Given this uncertainty around governance, it is more appropriate for ONS to communicate developments. To inform users about the NDQIS programme and its impact on the quality of the police recorded crime statistics, ONS should publish regular updates about current and future developments.

In addition, ONS needs to better document the methods used and the limitations of the tools. ONS has published a [one-off methods article](link) about the knife crime tool, but this contains little information about the strengths and limitations of the tool, and it does not cover the tools developed for the other flagged data collections. Several police forces highlighted the lack of publicly available information about NDQIS.

Recommendation 7: To inform users about the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) programme and its impact on the quality of the statistics, ONS should publish and regularly update information about developments and methods, including the strengths and limitations of the tools.

NDQIS is not the only data quality improvement initiative for recorded crime data. A range of other work aimed at improving data quality is happening within police forces and nationally, focusing on the data about the nature and circumstances of the crime, such as person and location data. Annex B gives a few examples of this work, including the crime data quality assessments carried out by the Home Office's Police National Database team.

ONS publishes clear information on quality, but it relies on the Home Office to quality assure data

ONS's quality assurance process is limited to consistency checks

ONS took over responsibility for producing and publishing the police recorded crime statistics from the Home Office in 2012. Responsibility was transferred by the Home Secretary to promote greater public trust and demonstrate the independence of the statistics.

ONS is two steps removed from the underlying police force data. It relies on the Home Office to collate and quality assure the recorded crime data from police forces.

The Home Office sends ONS aggregate-level data. Because ONS does not have access to the record-level data, the quality assurance it applies to the data is limited to consistency checks. These involve comparisons of data between time periods to look for inconsistencies. Unusual changes, such as large increases or decreases in the volume of certain crimes, are raised with the Home Office, which may in turn query them with police forces. This allows ONS to gather information to contextualise and explain the changes to users of the statistics.

In addition to the data, the Home Office submits a quarterly quality report that sets out the checks and quality assurance that the Home Office has carried out. This report includes information about how many forces are live on the Data Hub, which police forces resubmitted data to correct errors discovered during the reconciliation process, and specific issues with forces' data. Common data issues identified in this report include data provision, undercounts and missing crime outcomes data. ONS told us that the quality report is helpful for writing the quality narrative in the statistical bulletin; for instance, the bulletin highlights which forces were not able to provide data to the Home Office.

The Home Office quality assures the draft statistical bulletin and data tables that ONS produces. It carries out a series of sense checks, format checks and consistency checks to ensure that there are no errors in the data or interpretation of the data. ONS signs off the final statistics for publication.

ONS told us that it receives more information on quality from the Home Office than it used to, and that communications with the Home Office have improved substantially since the Data Hub was established. These are positive changes. But ONS's oversight of the data quality remains limited. For instance, ONS told us that it would like to better understand the Home Office quarterly data reconciliation process. Furthermore, like the Home Office, ONS has a limited understanding of how police forces quality assure their recorded crime data. To strengthen its oversight of data quality, ONS should work together more closely with the Home Office and share more knowledge about data quality.

ONS publishes clear information on quality, but it should be expanded to cover all areas of quality

As the statistics producer, it is ONS's responsibility to publish information on the quality of the police recorded crime data. ONS's user guide to crime statistics contains clear and detailed information about many aspects of the quality of the statistics, including the accreditation status of the statistics; the roles and responsibilities of the

different organisations involved the collection of data and the compilation of the statistics; crime recording standards and practices; and the Home Office's and ONS's own quality assurance arrangements. ONS updates the user guide annually to ensure that the information remains relevant for users.

However, there are gaps in the quality information. In particular, ONS does not provide sufficient assurance for users about police forces' quality assurance arrangements and the strengths and limitations of different crime recording IT systems used by police forces. As explained earlier, we want the Home Office to strengthen its oversight of these areas of police force data quality. As the Home Office builds its understanding of police force quality assurance arrangements and crime recording IT systems, ONS should communicate this understanding to users, to give them a full picture of police force data quality.

ONS should explain the main risks to police force data quality, how these are mitigated by police forces, and any impact on the statistics. ONS may want to consult the Scottish Government's User Guide to Recorded Crime Statistics in Scotland as an example of proportionate information about police force quality assurance arrangements that is structured by the QAAD practice areas. The information about systems should cover the nature of any systems issues, such as those experienced by Greater Manchester Police and Devon and Cornwall Police, and the actions police forces are taking to resolve them.

In addition, ONS needs to explain the specific changes that police forces have made to improve their crime recording standards. While the crime statistics bulletins and user guide contain prominent caveats about crime recording improvements since 2015 and their impact on the number of crimes recorded by the police, these improvements should be contextualised. It is not good enough to say that 'crime recording processes and practices have improved'.

Recommendation 8: To communicate, and assure users about, all aspects of the quality of police recorded crime data, ONS should expand its published information on quality to cover:

- **police forces' quality assurance arrangements.**

- **the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems used by police forces.**

- **the nature of crime recording improvements made by police forces since 2014**.

To further support user understanding, it would be helpful if ONS included up-to-date and more-accessible information about HMICFRS's inspections of crime data integrity in its user guide. The user guide contains a table with the crime recording accuracy of all police forces inspected in the 2016 to 2020 programme of crime data integrity inspections, but if users are not explicitly directed towards it, they are likely to miss it. Also, the table does not contain the latest inspection findings, and therefore does not reflect the current state of crime recording accuracy across police forces.

In the last few years, ONS has developed a new data quality framework to inform users about the quality of the crime statistics for different offence types, and which of the two sources (police recorded crime statistics or the Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics) is thought to provide the most reliable measure. ONS publishes reliability ratings for 30 offence types in its user guide, with police recorded crime

being the preferred source for 20 offence types (see Annex C for a full list). Of those twenty, only three have a 'good' reliability rating – homicide, robbery (crimes against individuals and households) and robbery (crimes against businesses and organisations). The rest are rated 'moderate' (11 offence types) or 'poor' (six offence types).

We welcome this open assessment of quality of the statistics. However, ONS needs to better explain the criteria it uses to determine the reliability ratings and how often it reviews the ratings. In addition, we encourage ONS to make this information more prominent, for instance, by including it in the Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletin, to help users interpret trends in certain crime types. It is good that ONS included the reliability ratings in its [Crime trends in England and Wales article](#).

Recommendation 9: To enhance the value of quality information, ONS should explain the data quality framework it uses to assess the reliability of police recorded crime statistics for different offence types.

ONS evaluates the consistency and comparability of police recorded crime statistics with other crime statistics

Comparisons with Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) statistics

Comparisons between the police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics can reveal disparities in trends in both data sources and data quality issues. To compare trends, ONS creates a comparable subset of crimes recorded by the police and those measured by the CSEW and calculates the ratio between the volume of crimes.

These comparisons have been particularly helpful for interpreting trends following periods of change to police crime recording practices and processes. For instance, a [2013 analysis](#) of trends in comparable crime identified a divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics. ONS found that, between 2006 to 2007 and 2011 to 2012, the ratio of police recorded crimes to CSEW crimes decreased year on year, from 0.87 to 0.70. This suggested that police in England and Wales only recorded around 70% of crimes as those captured in the CSEW. ONS hypothesised that the divergence may have been due to a decline in crime recording standards across police forces. ONS's analysis was a key piece of evidence that supported our decision to remove the National Statistics accreditation for the police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales.

ONS repeated the [comparative analysis](#) in 2023, using data for the year ending March 2023. The analysis again identified a divergence between police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics, but in the opposite direction. ONS found that the ratio of police recorded crimes to CSEW crimes has increased over time – from 0.68 in the year ending March 2013, to 1.32 in the year ending March 2018, to 1.93 in the year ending March 2023. This suggests that police in England and Wales are now recording roughly twice as many crimes as those captured in the CSEW.

ONS has considered several possible reasons for the divergence, such as the impact of third-party reporting of crimes to the police, introduced in 2015, which may not be covered by the CSEW. It concluded that the increased focus on improving crime recording by police forces is likely to have had an effect, but that it is unlikely to fully explain the divergence. ONS is currently carrying out further work on the divergence, which is looking at other factors, such as the potential impact of lower response rates in the CSEW since the return to face-to-face interviewing after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another possible factor is over-recording of crime by police forces, which we discussed earlier in this report.

It is important that ONS determines the nature and drivers of the divergence, as it may provide insight on quality issues with both data sources. HMICFRS should support ONS in this work by carrying out and sharing analysis of the scale of crime over-recording by police forces, as a possible contributor to the divergence.

Recommendation 10: ONS should work closely with HMICFRS, the Home Office and, where necessary, police forces, to establish the drivers of the divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics.

Comparisons with other data sources

For certain crime types, ONS validates trends in the police recorded crime statistics with other data sources. For instance, ONS compares trends in the number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments recorded by police with trends in NHS provisional data on hospital admissions. ONS uses the Hospital Episode Statistics for England, published by NHS Digital, and the Patient Episode Database for Wales, published by Digital Health and Care Wales for this. Short-term trends in the two sets of statistics do not align. For instance, in the year ending December 2023, there was a 7% increase in knife-enabled crime recorded by the police compared with the year ending December 2022, whereas the number of admissions for assault by a sharp object decreased by 2% over the same period.

It would be helpful for users if ONS explained what these discrepancies say about the quality of the police recorded crime statistics. Also, we encourage ONS to be clear about the limitations of the hospital admissions data.

Academic researchers have also used hospital data to validate trends in the police recorded crime statistics and CSEW statistics. For example, Cardiff University's Violence Research Group publishes a very helpful annual Serious violence in England and Wales report that compares emergency departments data on violence-related attendances with ONS's statistics on violent crime. The latest report, using data for 2023, found that short- and long-term trends in violence-related attendances are broadly similar to trends in the CSEW violence estimates. However, trends in violence-related attendances and police recorded violence statistics do not align. Such analyses can provide independent evidence on the quality and value of police recorded crime statistics.

A framework for quality improvements

Our recommendations for improving the quality of the police recorded crime data and statistics for England and Wales are what we deem as critical to address before we undertake a reassessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Our recommendations cover three improvement areas.

ONS and the Home Office should develop an action plan that sets out how they are going to address these recommendations. This should be published by early 2025.

1. **The Home Office needs to strengthen its oversight of police force data quality.** We consider that insufficient oversight by the Home Office poses a significant risk to the quality of the statistics. The Home Office must understand how police forces manage the quality of their recorded crime data and assure itself of the quality of the data collected by forces.

   - As a first step to greater assurance of the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office should gain a better understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements. (Recommendation 4)

   - The Home Office should then develop a detailed plan on how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. The Home Office should use our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework to guide this work and ensure that all the relevant quality areas are covered. Stakeholders, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council, should be consulted as part of this work. (Recommendation 5)

   - To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with police forces to gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems, and how variation in systems impacts data quality. (Recommendation 2)

2. **ONS needs to better communicate the quality of the statistics and data quality improvement initiatives to users.** ONS should provide greater assurance for users of the statistics about all aspects of the quality of police force data.

   - To communicate, and assure users about, all aspects of the quality of police recorded crime data, ONS should expand its published information on quality to cover (Recommendation 8):
     - police forces' quality assurance arrangements.
     - the strengths and limitations of different crime recording IT systems used by police forces.
     - the nature of crime recording improvements made by police forces since 2014.

   - To enhance the value of quality information, ONS should explain the data quality framework it uses to assess the reliability of police recorded crime statistics for different offence types. (Recommendation 9)

   - To inform users about the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) programme and its impact on the quality of the statistics, ONS should publish

and regularly update information about developments and methods, including the strengths and limitations of the tools. (Recommendation 7)

3. **Greater collaboration and knowledge sharing between the organisations involved in collecting and processing police recorded crime data is necessary to strengthen oversight and better communicate quality.**

- To promote more-consistent and more-efficient use of crime recording IT systems, police forces should work more collaboratively and improve knowledge sharing about systems. (Recommendation 1)

- To promote best practice around quality assurance of recorded crime data, police forces should improve knowledge sharing on the checking and validation of crime records. (Recommendation 3)

- To develop the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of crime data integrity in police forces, the Home Office, HMICFRS and ONS should work together and use all available data, including HMICFRS inspection findings, HMICFRS management information and Home Office intelligence. (Recommendation 6)

- ONS should work closely with HMICFRS, the Home Office and, where necessary, police forces, to establish the drivers of the divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics. (Recommendations 10)

We recognise that implementing these recommendations is a significant task. It will require resource and ongoing engagement with police forces. However, we see this work as critical to enhancing the quality of the statistics and public confidence in the quality of the statistics. By demonstrating that they understand, and have confidence in, the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office and ONS promote public trust in the data and crime recording processes.

We will continue to engage with ONS and the Home Office as they develop and implement an action plan. Once we are satisfied that sufficient improvement has been made, we will decide whether the statistics are ready to be reassessed against the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Annex A: National governance groups and policing coordination bodies are supporting data quality improvements in England and Wales

Figure A1 sets out our understanding of the policing crime data landscape. It captures the bodies and groups whose remit covers crime data quality, including:

- Home Office-coordinated governance groups responsible for ensuring consistency in crime recording in England and Wales (explained in the main report).

- National policing coordination bodies and groups that aim to improve the quality of policing data to meet the operational needs of police forces.

- Police force-led coordination groups.

The relationships between the different bodies and groups are complex, and in general, there is little information in the public domain about them. Note that the figure does not include all bodies and groups whose remit covers data.

Figure A1. Governance groups and policing coordination bodies and groups that focus on crime data
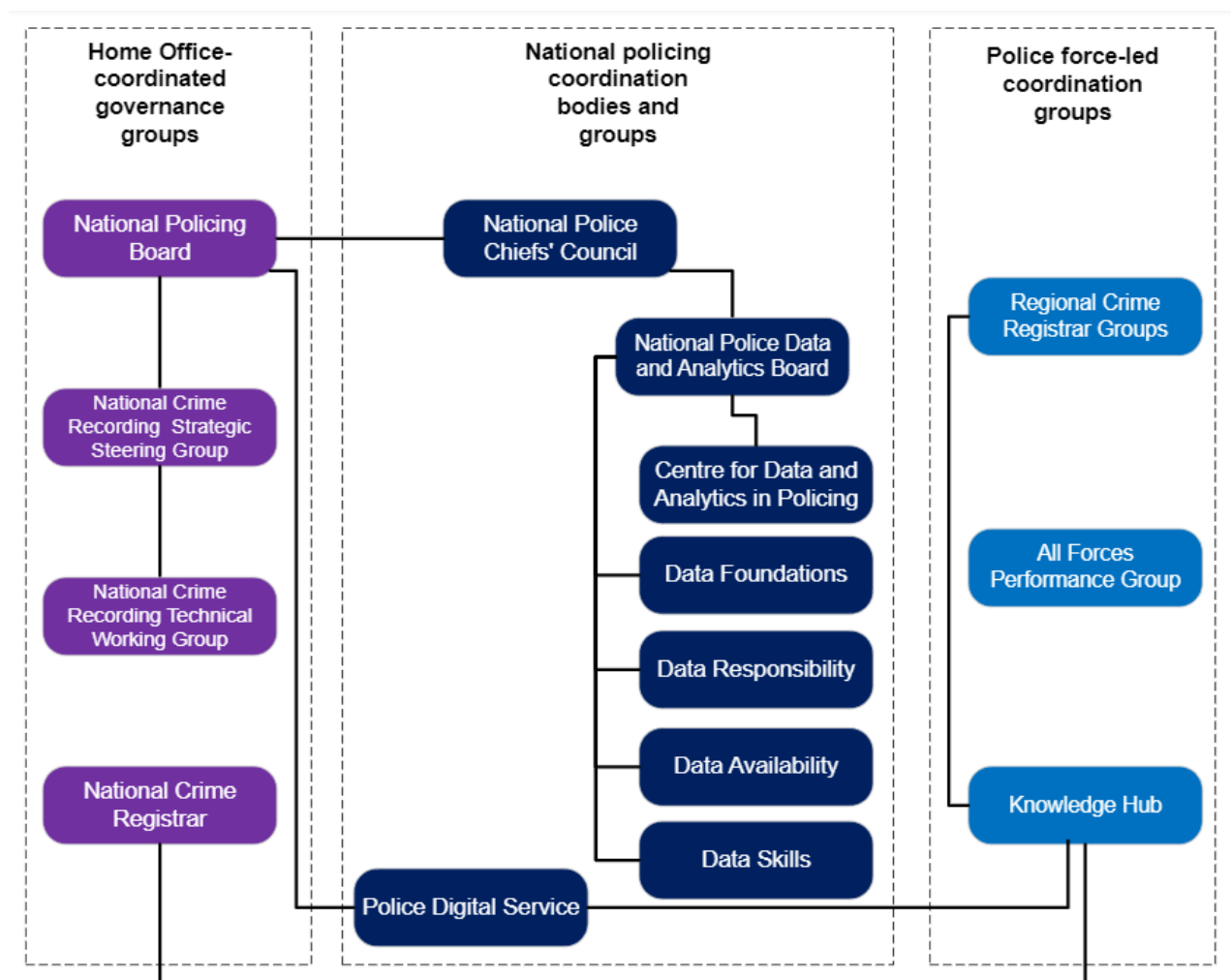
National policing coordination bodies and groups

There are several national policing coordination bodies and groups that are driving improvements to data quality to meet the operational data needs of police forces. Home Office and ONS analysts are not involved in this improvement work.

As these groups focus on operational data quality, their work is likely to have limited direct impact on the quality of police recorded crime statistics. However, it complements improvements to crime recording and recorded crime data quality.

The National Police Data and Analytics Board (NPDAB) was set up by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to provide coordination, collaboration and communication on data across policing in England and Wales. It reports to the NPCC's Digital, Data and Technology Committee.

NPDAB has five workstreams. The most relevant streams for data quality are the Data Foundations stream and the Centre for Data and Analytics in Policing.

The Data Foundations stream aims to improve data quality, data definitions and flows, data ownership and data standards across policing. The stream has been reviewing the current data quality management practices in a subset of police forces to identify gaps and propose steps for enhancing data quality and data governance. It found that data quality is a priority for most forces, that forces had many similar issues and that forces are keen to share and adopt best practice. The stream is making a number of recommendations to address existing problems and improve the consistency of data quality management across forces, including adopting a national data quality framework, maintaining a national data quality register and developing a model for data quality targets.

The Centre for Data and Analytics in Policing (CDAP) aims to improve the quality and use of data and develop national analytical capability in policing. It commissions and coordinates work across the other four streams. CDAP recently carried out a review of the data analytics landscape in policing to understand which platforms and analytics capabilities exist across police forces and the current challenges to data quality.

The Police Digital Service (PDS), a partner body funded by Home Office and police forces, is responsible for coordinating, developing, delivering and managing digital services and solutions in policing across England and Wales. It was set up to deliver the National Policing Digital Strategy. PDS staff is involved in both the Data Foundations stream work and CDAP.

PDS, on behalf of the NPDAB, is currently undertaking a programme of data maturity assessments across police forces, which complements the work carried out by the Data Foundations stream. The assessment asks officers and staff at different levels in the police force, ranging from chief officers to analysts, to rate the maturity of their force's data. This information is then fed back to the forces, with advice and recommendations for the forces about where they should focus improvements.

Police force coordination groups

There are also a couple of coordination groups run by police forces which focus on improving the consistency of crime recording and data quality.

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The regional force crime registrar groups, attended by force crime registrars from geographically co-located forces, act as forums for discussing and agreeing on the interpretation of the Counting Rules. These regional groups ensure consistency in how the rules are applied, which leads to more-consistent recorded crime data.

The All Forces Performance Group is a forum for performance analysts and officers from police forces across the UK. It is used to share good practice in managing data, improving data quality and producing analysis.

The Knowledge Hub is a platform created and managed by the Police Digital Service. It enables police forces and other national bodies and partner agencies to share information, discuss ideas and support closer working between forces. This knowledge sharing and collaboration allows forces to see what works well and how they may improve the quality of their data.

Annex B: Wider initiatives for data quality improvement

Our report focuses on the quality of the data about crimes. We chose this as our focus because the police recorded crime statistics published by ONS and the Home Office mainly consist of breakdowns of the number of crimes by the type of offence and comparisons of the number of crimes over time.

When a crime is reported to the police, the police record a wealth of information about the incident. This includes the name, address and demographic characteristics (including age, sex and ethnicity) of the victim and suspect; where the crime occurred; and any objects involved in the crime. The College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice on the Management of Police Information advises forces to use the people, objects, locations and events (POLE) standards to categorise information.

The collection of good-quality data about the nature and the circumstances of the crime is equally important for effective and efficient policing. For example, police forces must have the correct contact details for a victim if they need to follow up with them. Analysis of these data also helps police forces understand patterns of crime. For instance, it allows them to explore differences in crime by age and sex and to determine geographical areas where crime commonly occurs (crime 'hotspots').

A range of work aimed at improving data quality is happening within police forces and nationally, focusing on data about the nature and the circumstances of the crimes. We give a few examples below.

Reducing duplication of person records

Several police forces told us about data quality projects that aim to reduce the duplication of person records ('nominals'). Duplication can be extensive and cause operational problems for forces. This issue is not unique to one police crime recording system; forces using different systems experience this issue.

The aim of these projects is to create a 'golden nominal' – a single record for every person. The work is often manual and labour-intensive, but forces told us it has been effective in reducing duplication and therefore improving the quality of person record data.

Improving the completeness and consistency of protected characteristics data

As part of all inspections that cover crime data integrity, HMICFRS assesses whether police forces have collected and recorded diversity information (protected characteristics) about victims of crime. It makes recommendations to improve experiences in support of Public Sector Equality Duty.

Inspection reports regularly highlight gaps in police forces' protected characteristics data. HMICFRS's thematic inspections have also commented on this aspect of the data. For instance, both the 2018 police response to hate crime inspection and the 2021 police response to violence against women and girls inspection found that forces frequently fail to record the ethnicity of victims. The Operation Soteria Year One report similarly found gaps in police forces' data on victim and suspect sex and ethnicity in rape cases.

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HMICFRS has called on forces to record protected characteristics information more accurately and consistently to support understanding of the scale and nature of crime and to ensure that forces provide a better service to victims.

In 2021, the Home Office added a requirement for police forces to provide the Home Office with data on the ethnicity of victims of racially or religiously aggravated offences. The Home Office now publishes statistics on the ethnicity of victims as part of its hate crime official statistics, published annually. Although there are issues with the completeness of the data, this requirement is providing insight on racial disparities in this type of crime.

In 2023, the Home Office added a new voluntary requirement to its Annual Data Requirement on cross-cutting demographic data. This requirement asks police forces to capture demographic data in a consistent way by aligning them with ONS's 2021 England and Wales Census. This is expected to lead to more-complete and more-consistent protected characteristics data, but we do not know what impact it has had to date.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has also carried out work to promote more-consistent recording of protected characteristics information across police forces. In 2023, it launched a new protected characteristics operational recording data standard which outlines the set of values that police forces should use to record each protected characteristic.

Monitoring data quality through the Police National Database

The Home Office manages the Police National Database (PND), a national information management system that allows police forces and selected law enforcement agencies to share intelligence and other operational information, including police recorded crime data.

Since 2019, the PND team has been providing police forces with a quarterly assessment of their crime data quality. The team runs a series of over 50 validation and logic checks across a range of quality dimensions, including accuracy, validity, completeness and uniqueness. These checks are then weighted and combined to produce an overall data quality score (out of 100). The PND process is different from the Data Hub's reconciliation process as it focuses largely on person data and location data.

Forces receive a report that breaks down the results and explains the main data quality issues and how these can be addressed. Common errors include invalid postcodes and incomplete mandatory fields.

It is not compulsory for forces to engage with the reports, but the PND team told us that those forces that are actively using the reports and quality advice are seeing improvements in their data quality score. We encourage all police forces to engage with PND data quality reports to maximise data quality improvements.

Because the PND process focuses mostly on the data about the nature and circumstances of the crimes, it will have a limited direct impact on the quality of the police recorded crime statistics. However, it may still indirectly impact quality, for instance, if a force strengthens its entire quality assurance process as a result of engaging with the PND reports.

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Several stakeholders, including police forces and the Home Office, told us that they think it would be helpful if HMICFRS considered the PND data quality reports in their crime data integrity inspections, to give a fuller picture of a force's crime data quality. We support this idea. We consider that it would have additional benefits: it would encourage police forces to engage with the PND reports and support a more joined-up approach to monitoring crime data quality across police forces, HMICFRS and the Home Office.

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Annex C: ONS crime statistics reliability ratings by offence type

Offence type	Reliability rating	Source	Notes
Homicide	Good	PRC	Reliable trend information is available in police recorded crime figures and the Home Office Homicide Index. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Offences involving knives or sharp instruments	Moderate	PRC	There is some uncertainty over drivers, but it is likely that recent trend reflects real changes in crime levels. There is some validation of this trend from NHS data on hospital admissions. Recording improvements may also be a factor. Offences involving knives or sharp instruments are not well covered by the CSEW.
Offences involving firearms	Moderate	PRC	There is some uncertainty over drivers, but it is likely that recent trends reflect real changes in crime levels. Recording improvements may also be a factor. There is some validation of this trend from NHS data on hospital admissions. Offences involving firearms are not well covered by the CSEW.
Other violent crime	Moderate	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends are available from the CSEW. Some validation from hospital episodes data on visits to A&E following an assault is available. Recording improvements in police recorded crime data mean that these do not provide a reliable measure of trends in crime. CSEW estimates for violence do not include stalking and harassment offences, as these are collected separately. Therefore, police recorded violence and CSEW violence are not directly comparable.
Sexual offences	Moderate	CSEW	Trends in the prevalence of sexual assault are available from a separate self-completion module of the CSEW. Limitations of the sample size mean that estimates have large margins of error and can fluctuate. Recording improvements in police recorded crime data, as well as increasing willingness among victims to report to authorities, mean that police recorded crime data do not provide a reliable measure of trends in this crime type.
Criminal damage and arson (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends are available from the CSEW. Recording improvements in police recorded crime data mean that these do not provide a reliable measure of trends in crime.
Criminal damage and arson (crimes	Moderate	PRC	Covered in police recorded crime statistics, but offences against business are not separately identifiable. This offence is not captured by the

against businesses and organisations)			CSEW. We are able to draw on information from Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey.
Criminal damage and arson (crimes against society and the state)	Moderate	PRC	Covered in police recorded crime statistics, but criminal damage offences against public or state-owned property are not separately identifiable. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Vehicle theft offences (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends available from the CSEW. However, police recorded crime data are also thought to offer a good indication of trends. Vehicle theft offences are well reported to the police and not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice.
Vehicle theft offences (crimes against businesses and organisations)	Moderate	PRC	Covered in police recorded crime statistics but offences against business are not separately identifiable. Able to draw on information from Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Burglary (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends available from the CSEW. However, police recorded crime data are also thought to offer a good indication of trends. Burglary offences are well reported to the police and not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice.
Burglary (crimes against businesses and organisations)	Moderate	PRC	Covered in police recorded crime statistics as part of "Burglary – business and community" category. Not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice. Able to draw on information from Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Burglary (crimes against society and the state)	Moderate	PRC	Covered in police recorded crime statistics as part of "Burglary – business and community" category. Not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Other household theft	Good	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends available from the CSEW. Captured in police recorded crime but not separately identifiable from within the "Other theft offences" category.
Theft from the person	Moderate	PRC	Reasonably reliable long term trend information from the CSEW but relatively small numbers of victims means that there can be some volatility in CSEW estimates from year to year. Police recorded crime data are thought to provide a reasonable indication of trends and are not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice.

Other theft of personal property	Good	CSEW	Reliable long-term trends available from the CSEW. Captured in police recorded crime but not separately identifiable from within the "Other theft offences" category.
Bicycle theft	Moderate	CSEW	Reasonably reliable long term trend information from the CSEW but relatively small numbers of victims means that there can be some volatility in CSEW estimates from year to year. Police recorded crime data are thought to provide a reasonable indication of trends and are not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice.
Shoplifting	Moderate	PRC	Trend data are available from police recorded crime data. Shoplifting offences are often not reported to the police, so trends may also reflect changes in reporting rates, as well as real changes in crime. Improvements in recording practice may also be a factor. This offence is not captured by the CSEW. Able to draw on information from Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey, but small sample size can make trends difficult to interpret because of volatility in estimates from year to year.
All other theft offences	Moderate	PRC	Theft of business property is covered in police recorded crime but not separately identifiable from personal or household theft offences.
Robbery (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	PRC	Reasonably reliable long term trend information from the CSEW, but relatively small numbers of victims means that there can be some volatility in CSEW estimates from year to year. Police recorded crime data are thought to provide a reasonable indication of trends and are not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice.
Robbery (crimes against businesses and organisations)	Good	PRC	Police recorded crime data thought to provide a reasonable indication of trends and are not thought to have been subject to extensive changes in recording practice. This offence is not captured by the CSEW.
Fraud (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	CSEW	CSEW provides reliable estimates of the extent of fraud against individuals. CSEW estimates capture high volume lower harm offences well and are not as good at providing reliable figures on more serious forms of fraud. Data from Action Fraud (AF) cover only those crimes that are reported to AF. As such, these figures capture the more serious types of fraud more effectively than the CSEW.
Fraud (crimes against	Poor	PRC and data	Available sources provide only a partial picture. Some reports to AF will be from businesses, but only a small proportion of incidents are

businesses and organisations)		from industry bodies	likely to be reported. Able to draw on additional information from industry body UK Finance on bank account and plastic card fraud
Fraud (crimes against society and the state)	Poor	PRC	Available sources provide only a partial picture. Some reports to Action Fraud will be from organisations and public sector bodies but only a small proportion of incidents are likely to be reported
Computer misuse (crimes against individuals and households)	Good	CSEW	CSEW provides reliable estimates of the extent of computer misuse against individuals. CSEW estimates capture high volume lower harm offences well and are not as good at providing reliable figures on more serious forms of computer misuse. Data from AF cover only those crimes that are reported to AF. As such, these figures capture the more serious types of computer misuse more effectively than the CSEW
Computer misuse (crimes against businesses and organisations)	Poor	PRC and data from industry bodies	Available sources provide only a partial picture. Some reports to AF will be from businesses, but only a small proportion of incidents are likely to be reported.
Computer misuse (crimes against society and the state)	Poor	PRC	Available sources provide only a partial picture. Some reports to AF will be from organisations and public sector bodies, but only a small proportion of incidents are likely to be reported.
Public order offences	Poor	PRC	Trends are available from police recorded crime figures, but these do not currently provide a reliable indication of trends in crime. These figures reflect levels of police activity rather than crime and have also been subject to improvements in recording.
Drug offences	Poor	PRC	Trends are available from police recorded crime figures, but these do not currently provide a reliable indication of trends in crime. These figures reflect levels of police activity rather than crime.
Possession of weapons offences	Moderate	PRC	Trends are available from police recorded crime figures, but these do not currently provide a reliable indication of trends in crime. These figures reflect levels of police activity rather than crime.

Source: ONS's User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023

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